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On Non-Focal Fronting in Italian and Spanish

Abstract: Non-Focal Fronting represents a non-canonical word order pattern which is syntactically almost identical to Romance Focus Fronting, but is associated to a different interpretation, usually emphatic and marked. This construction is widespread and productive in Spanish, but scarce and severely constrained in Italian, as confirmed by an informal search in the oral corpus C-ORAL-ROM. The contrast between the two languages can be explained as a particular manifestation of a more general difference in the mapping from syntax to Information Structure, which is related to the (im)possibility of having marked orders interpreted as single informational chunks. Old Italian seems to exhibit the same tolerance for Non-Focal Fronting that can be observed in Modern Spanish.

1 Introduction

This paper intends to analyse a contrast in word order patterns between Spanish and Italian that has received little attention until now. It focuses on so-called *Quantifier Fronting* or *Non-Focal Fronting*, a construction that is widespread and productive in Spanish but quite limited in Italian. The contrast had already been mentioned in Leonetti (2009), (2010) and (2014), but it had never been addressed on the basis of Italian data from an oral corpus. Here I pursue two main goals. The first one is descriptive: I present the results of an informal search in the oral corpus C-ORAL-ROM, in order to check which quantifiers may appear fronted in contemporary spoken Italian. This should provide us with an estimation of the productivity of the construction in the language. My second goal is more ambitious: I intend to account for the contrast between Spanish and Italian on the basis of an asymmetry between the two languages that concerns the mapping from syntax to Information Structure. If this is on the right track, the contrast in Non-Focal Fronting becomes a particular case of a more general difference in the expression of Information Structure. Ultimately, this could contribute to the growing body of research on cross-linguistic variation in the domain of Information Structure.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 I present the major features of Non-Focal Fronting in Spanish, following the analysis put forward in Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal (2009). Here the core properties, i.e. the non-focal nature of the fronted constituent and the absence of informational partitions, are singled out as the basis for an account of the cross-linguistic distribution of the construction. A special case that may in principle be treated as an instance of Non-Focal Fronting, the construction called *Resumptive Preposing*, is excluded from the discussion. Section 3 deals with fronting in Italian.[2] First, data from a corpus of contemporary spoken Italian are examined. The results show that Non-Focal Fronting is possible only with a highly restricted series of DPs, which gives rise to a clear contrast with respect to Spanish. Then, data from Old Italian are taken into account, in order to show that Old Italian fronting was much closer to the pattern observed in Modern Spanish. Once the contrastive data have been presented, section 4 offers an account of the facts based on the way each language constrains the mapping from syntax to Information Structure. Finally, section 5 aims to provide a sketch of the advantages of my approach.

2 *Quantifier Fronting* in Spanish is Non-Focal Fronting

Quantifier Fronting is a theoretically neutral way to refer to a specific grammatical construction characterized by fronting of a quantified expression, but different from other kinds of well-known fronting operations in Romance, such as Clitic Left Dislocation and Focus Fronting (or Focalization). In the literature it has been discussed under the labels *Quantificational QP Fronting* (in Quer 2002), *Verum Focus Inducing Fronting* (in Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal 2009, Leonetti 2009 and Escandell-Vidal / Leonetti 2014), and '*Mild Focus*' (in Gallego 2007 and Batllori / Hernanz 2015). For reasons that will become immediately clear, in this paper I will use another denomination, the more general *Non-Focal Fronting*.

The two basic kinds of non-interrogative fronting in Romance languages, Clitic Left Dislocation and Focus Fronting, are illustrated for Spanish in (1) and (2), respectively:

(1)   [_T_ La casa], Juan la vendió.
      The house, Juan it sell.PST.3SG
      'The house, Juan sold it.'

2   The contrast between Spanish and Italian shows basically the same situation we find when Spanish is compared to Catalan (cf. Gallego 2007, Leonetti 2010, 2014). Here I will not consider data from Catalan.

(2)   [_F_ La CASA] vendió   Juan.
      The house sell.PST.3SG Juan
      'The HOUSE (is what) Juan sold.'

In clitic left dislocation constructions, the fronted constituent is phonologically deaccented, is co-referential with a resumptive clitic and is interpreted as a topic. If it is the object that is dislocated, the subject can occupy its canonical position before the verb. Clitic dislocation can be iterated and can occur in both root and embedded sentences.

Contrastive focalization, on the other hand, is characterized by emphatic stress (indicated in (2) by small capitals) on the fronted constituent, which is interpreted as a highlighted element selected from a contextually given set; consequently, the remaining alternative members of the set are excluded. Focalization differs from clitic dislocation in a number of syntactic properties: there are no resumptive clitics, there is only one contrastive focus slot, and the construction shows all the typical features of operator-variable configurations, such as subject-verb inversion and sensitivity to island contexts.

The third kind of fronting, *Quantifier Fronting* or *Non-Focal Fronting*, is quite common in Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian (cf. Vallduví 1993, Zubizarreta 1998, Hernanz 2001, 2006, 2010, Costa 2004, Barbosa 2009), and – to a certain extent – attested in all Romance languages. The examples in (3), from Leonetti (2009), represent prototypical instances of the construction in Spanish:

(3)   a. Nada   tengo   que añadir.
         Nothing   have.PRS.1SG to   add
         'I have nothing to add.'
      b. Algo   debe   saber.
         Something must.PRS.3SG know
         '(S)he must know something.'
      c. Poco más   te   puedo   decir.
         Little more you.OBL can.PRS.1SG say
         'Little more can I say to you.'
      d. Bastante trabajo tienen   ya   tus padres.
         Enough work   have.PRS.3.PL already your parents
         'Enough work your parents have already.'
      e. A alguien   encontrarás   que te   pueda   ayudar.
         To someone find.FUT.2.SG that you.OBL can.PRS.3.SG help
         'You'll find someone that can help you.'
      f. Mucho dinero debe   tener ese señor.
         Much money must.PRS.3SG own that man
         'That man must have a lot of money.'
      g. Demasiadas concesiones hemos   hecho ya.
         Too many   concessions have.PRS.1.PL done already
         'We have already made too many concessions.'

h. Menos estudiantes teníamos   el   año pasado.
   Fewer students   have.PST.1.PL the year past
   'We had fewer students last year.'
i. Tantas   quejas   hubo   que tuvieron   que suspenderlo.
   So many complaints there-be.PST.3.SG that have.PST.3.PL to   suspend-it
   'There were so many complaints that they had to suspend it.'

The construction shows the following cluster of grammatical properties, which make it clearly distinct from Dislocation and Focus Fronting:

- there is no emphatic stress on the fronted constituent, which can be interpreted neither as a contrastive focus nor as a narrow informative focus; there is no intonational break between the fronted constituent and the rest of the sentence;
- there is no resumptive clitic, except in cases where it is independently licensed (this is the most salient difference with respect to Clitic Left Dislocation);
- the subject is postverbal, by virtue of an adjacency requirement between the finite verb and the fronted constituent, as in Spanish *wh*-interrogatives and contrastive focalization;
- the fronted constituent has been extracted from the clause and moved to some position in the left periphery:[3] thus, the construction displays the typical behaviour of operator-variable structures (for instance, sensitivity to island constraints);
- despite the fact that all the examples in (3) contain fronted quantifiers,[4] almost any category can be fronted: DPs, APs, PPs, bare nominals (cf. Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal 2009);
- fronting does not affect truth conditions, but has some notable effects: the resulting interpretation is usually emphatic, affective, argumentatively oriented, i.e., in some sense marked with respect to the alternative version with canonical order.

The problem raised by this special type of fronting is that, from a strictly syntactic point of view, it is essentially identical to Romance Focus Fronting, but its intonational properties, its interpretation and its discourse value are completely different. The relevant question is, thus, how to give an account of the distinctive properties of the construction, in particular the relation between syntax and interpretation. The answer presented in Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal (2009) is based on Information Structure, and goes along the following lines. Since the fronted con-

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3 I do not intend to discuss the nature of the position hosting the fronted constituent. See Escandell-Vidal / Leonetti (2014: § 3.1) for some comments on this issue.

4 Quantifier Fronting is simply the core, central case of Non-Focal Fronting.

stituent can be interpreted neither as a topic, nor as a contrastive focus, fronting forces an interpretation of the sentence with no informational partition: the whole sentence is taken as a single informational chunk, and even the usual interpretation of postverbal subjects as informative foci – with the corresponding Focus / Background partition – is precluded. This is a crucial feature of the construction. Since a thetic, all-focus reading is also excluded (presumably for economy reasons; see Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal 2009: 176), and every sentence must have a focus, the only remaining possibility is to force a 'verum focus' interpretation, i.e. one with the focus falling on the positive polarity, which in this case is a non-overt constituent. This is why the construction illustrated in (3) was called 'Verum Focus-Inducing Fronting' (VFF) in Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal (2009). When focus affects the polarity and the polarity is not overtly expressed, all the visible constituents of the sentence are the background. This means that the sentence itself HAS a Focus / Background partition where narrow focus falls on the polarity, but there is no informational partition among its overt components. The emphatic value and the argumentative orientation that characterize the construction in (3) should all be treated as effects of Verum Focus.

From this perspective, the fronting operation in (3) simply blocks the possibility of getting a Topic / Comment split, or a Focus / Background split, and thus induces a Verum Focus reading as a last resort interpretive mechanism – the only way to assign any Focus structure to the sentence. Fronting acts as the syntactic trigger for the Verum Focus reading.

I will assume that this is the most reasonable way to deal with the fronting construction in (3). However, the notion of Verum Focus does not play any special role in what follows, and there will be no need to invoke it when looking at the differences between Spanish and Italian. The two ideas that will be crucial from now on are (a) the non-focal nature of the fronted constituent, and (b) the absence of overt informational partitions in the sentence, as a result of fronting. Now it should be clear why I choose the term *Non-Focal Fronting* (from now on, NFF) to refer to the pattern in (3): on the one hand, it captures the essential property of the construction as far as Information Structure is concerned; on the other hand, it is purely descriptive and independent from our hypothesis about Verum Focus.[5]

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5 The reviewers note that this terminological choice is possibly misleading, since *Non-Focal Fronting* could perfectly be applied to cases of Left Dislocation, i.e. to cases of topic fronting. Thus, *Verum Focus-Inducing Fronting* would be a much clearer choice. Nonetheless, I would like to keep using *Non-Focal Fronting* both because of the reasons I mention in the text, and because the possibility of confusions with topic fronting

Before proceeding to a review of Italian data, it is worth to indicate that I will not consider examples of so-called *Resumptive Preposing* (or *anteposizione anaforica* 'anaphoric fronting'; cf. Benincà / Salvi / Frison 1988, Cinque 1990, Cardinaletti 2009). This kind of fronting involves an anaphoric item that creates a textual connection between the fronted expression and a discourse antecedent. Resumptive Preposing is illustrated in (4) for Italian – examples from Cinque (1990) – and in (5) for Spanish: it is perfectly grammatical in both languages, although it is perhaps restricted to a high register in Italian.

(4) a. Allo stesso modo   si comportò   suo figlio.
       at-the same manner CL behave.PST.3SG his son
       'His son behaved the same way.'
    b. e questo disse   anche il Sottosegretario.
       and this say.PST.3SG also the Vice Minister
       '…and this said the Vice Minister too.'

(5) a. De la misma forma   se comportó   su hijo.
       of the same manner CL behave.PST.3SG his son
    b. y eso dijo   también el Subsecretario.
       and that say.PST.3SG also   the Vice Minister

I assume that Resumptive Preposing is in fact a particular instance of NFF (cf. Leonetti / Escandell-Vidal 2009: 167, and Leonetti forthcoming: § 3.2). However, this is not uncontroversial.[6] As the real nature of the construction is still to be ascertained, and an in depth discussion of this point cannot be included here, I prefer to exclude Resumptive Preposing from the analysis and leave the issue for

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constructions seems to me rather unlikely, given the widely accepted use of the term *Dislocation* for this kind of marked orders.

6   This point requires some clarification, as a reviewer rightly notes. The reason why Resumptive Preposing is often seen as something different from NFF lies in the anaphoric nature of fronted expressions: this feature – givenness – has led some authors (cf. Cardinaletti 2009) to consider such expressions as topics. However, here givenness depends exclusively on the anaphoric properties of fronted elements, and not on the informational articulation of the clause; thus, it does not imply that fronted phrases behave as aboutness topics. On the other hand, there are obvious differences between Resumptive Preposing and the main strategy for topic marking in Romance, Clitic Dislocation. In fact, Resumptive Preposing displays all the characteristic features of NFF: no intonational break and no emphatic stress on the fronted element, subject inversion, a marked status with respect to the canonical order without fronting, and, crucially, a non-focal reading of the initial constituent. This justifies its analysis as a particular instance of NFF. A comparative analysis of Resumptive Preposing in Spanish and Italian would, in any case, confirm that the construction is less productive in Italian (Leonetti forthcoming: § 3.2), as expected for NFF in general.

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future research. Once this has been established, it is possible to set up a comparison of Spanish and Italian.

3 Fronting in Italian

3.1 Restrictions on NFF in Modern Italian

Some cases of NFF in Italian had already been signalled in Cinque (1986, 1990: 74) and Benincà / Salvi / Frison (1988: 143), under the label *anteposizione dei quantificatori* 'quantifier fronting' (cf. also Cruschina 2011a: 112–116 and Floricic 2013). I reproduce them in (6) and (7): the fronted elements belong to a reduced set of indefinite quantifiers (*qualcosa* 'something', *qualcuno* 'someone', *niente* 'nothing', *nessuno* 'no one', *poco* 'few').

(6) a. Qualcosa farò   (non preoccuparti).
       something do.FUT.1SG NEG worry.IMPER.2SG
       'I'll do something about that, don't worry.'
    b. Qualcuno troverò   di sicuro, per questo compito.
       someone find.FUT.1SG of sure   for this   task
       'Someone (or other) I will surely find, for this task.'
    c. Di qualcosa   avrete   parlato.
       of something have.FUT.2PL talked
       'You surely talked about something.'

(7) a. Niente concludi,   stando in questo buco.
       nothing conclude.PRS.2SG staying in this hole
       'You will not gain anything, staying inside this place.'
    b. A nessuno nuoce,   col   suo comportamento.
       to noone harm.PRS.3SG with-the his behaviour
       '(S)he will not harm anyone, with his/her behaviour.'

Benincà and Cinque point out that resumption by a clitic is excluded in examples like these. Moreover, the small set of quantifiers involved is essentially the same set of elements that cannot appear as left-dislocated topics (cf. Benincà / Salvi / Frison 1988: 157–160), which suggests that fronting without resumption and left dislocation are in some sense complementary processes. This fact has interesting consequences, as we will see later.

   Cinque (1990: 74) states that Italian bare quantifiers like *qualcosa* ('something') and *qualcuno* ('someone') in sentence-initial positions qualify as proper operators that are able to bind an empty category as a variable in argument position (the object position in most of the examples). As a consequence, bare quantifiers do not require that a clitic be inserted to identify the empty category. In contrast, according to Cinque, quantified DPs fail to qualify as operators when they appear in left-dislocated positions, and thus require resumptive clitics. Therefore,

the distinction between bare quantifiers and quantified DPs correlates with the distinction between fronting without resumption and clitic dislocation: when the clitic is inserted, the fronted phrase is a topic, as usually assumed, but without it the information structure must be a different one, since the fronted phrase cannot be interpreted as a topic (nor as a focus). Moreover, when there is no clitic the fronted phrase has a non-specific interpretation: this is quite evident in (6) and (7), as in the Spanish examples in (3).

As already pointed out in Leonetti (2009: 87–90), Cinque's remarks raise a number of questions: which bare quantifiers are actually allowed in fronting without resumption?; why should there be a contrast between bare quantifiers and quantified DPs?;[7] how are fronted constituents interpreted? I will suggest some answers to these questions below. Notice that answering the first question requires an analysis of natural data from some corpus of spoken Italian.

To sum up, so far we can confirm that (a) NFF is possible in Italian, at least with a small group of quantifiers, and essentially with the same Verum Focus reading as in Spanish; (b) it seems to require bare quantifiers, instead of quantified DPs; and (c) it is associated with a non-specific interpretation of the fronted expression.

At this point, Spanish and Italian seem to display a very similar behaviour, as far as NFF is concerned. However, there are significant differences between them. First of all, most Spanish examples in (3) do not have acceptable Italian translations with NFF, basically because in Italian the construction is odd with quantified DPs headed by *abbastanza* 'enough', *molto* 'much', *troppo* 'too much', *meno* 'less', *tanto* 'so much', as shown in (8)–(12) (it is crucial to assign a flat intonational contour, with no breaks, to the examples[8]):

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7   In some cases quantified DPs may appear in fronting without resumption, though it is true that they tend to be excluded; a representative example with *qualche* 'some' is reproduced in (i). In addition, bare quantifiers are compatible with resumptive clitics in left dislocation, as shown in (ii). This suggests that perhaps the distinction between bare quantifiers and quantified DPs is not the most adequate way to capture the facts.

   (i)   Qualche rimedio troverai.
         some   solution find.FUT.2SG
         'You will find some solution (or other).'
   (ii) Tre, li avevo   già   ascoltati.
         three them have.PST.1SG already listened to
         'Three of them, I had already listened to.'

8   One reviewer points out that in (8)–(12) different degrees of (un)acceptability may be observed: examples with *troppi* or *tanti* seem to be slightly better than examples with *abbastanza* and *meno*. I agree with this observation, but I suspect that variation in acceptability emerges when some kind of intonational break is inserted between the

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(8)   #Abbastanza lavoro ho   già.
      Enough   work   have.PRS.1.SG   already

(9)   #Molti soldi   deve   avere.
      Much   money   must.PRS.3SG   own

(10) #Troppe   concessioni abbiamo   già   fatto.
      Too many concessions have.PRS.1.PL   already done

(11) #Meno   studenti avevamo   l'anno scorso.
      Fewer   students have.PST.1.PL the year past

(12) #Tante   proteste   ci furono   che…
      So many   complaints CL be.PST.3.PL that…

This means that the constraints operating on the construction are stronger in Italian, both with respect to the set of quantifiers that may be fronted and with respect to the possibility of preposing DPs with a nominal element – much more natural in Spanish. Notice that I do not claim that the examples in (8)–(12) are syntactically ill-formed: the syntactic rule of fronting seems to be a grammatical option in Italian, but for some reason the examples are anomalous.

Second, most acceptable cases of NFF involving non-quantified phrases in Spanish are again odd in Italian: the examples in (13)–(15) contain fronted APs and PPs, and those in (16)–(18) reproduce common ironical formulas in Spanish with their corresponding equivalents in Italian – once more, many of them contain quantifiers or expressions denoting a value on an ordered scale, as one of the reviewers notices. The contrast is quite systematic, and independent from the more or less formulaic nature of the examples (again, a flat intonational contour must be assigned to the sentences).

(13) a. Muy harto debe   estar para contestar así…
          very fed.up must.PRS.3SG   be   to   answer   that way
          'Very fed up indeed he must be to answer you that way.'
      b. #Molto stufo deve   essere, per rispondere così…
          very   fed.up must.PRS.3SG   be   to answer   that way

(14) a. Hasta aquí podíamos   llegar.
          till here can.PST.1PL   arrive
          'Up to here could we get!'
      b. #Fin qui potevamo   arrivare.
          till here can.PST.1PL arrive

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fronted phrase and the rest of the sentence. If a flat contour equivalent to the Spanish one is maintained, the examples should all be excluded. Even those that may sound more natural or idiomatic retain a characteristic literary, old-fashioned flavour.

(15) a. Por algo   será.
     for something   be.FUT.3SG
     'There must be some reason for it.'
  b. #Per qualcosa   sarà.
     for   something be.FUT.3SG

(16) a. Mucho interés tienes   tú   en la conferencia...
     Much interest have.PRS.2SG you in the talk...
     'A great interest you have in the talk...'
  b. #Molta attenzione hai   fatto alla conferenza.
     Much   attention have.PRS.2SG done at-the talk

(17) a. ¡Contenta me   tienes!
     happy   me.OBJ have.PRS.2SG
     'You have me happy!/ Very happy I am with you!'
  b. #Ben contenta mi   fai!
     well happy   me.OBJ make.PRS.2SG

(18) a. ¡A ti   te   voy   a dejar el coche!
     to you.OBL you.OBJ go.PRS.1SG to lend the car
     'To you I'll be lending my car!'
  b. #A te la   lascio,   la macchina!
     to you it.OBJ   lend.PRS.1SG the car

The crucial fact in the contrast is that all anomalous Italian sentences, from (13) to (18), are fully acceptable if pronounced with a prominent pitch accent, or emphatic stress, on the fronted constituent, i.e. with the prosodic pattern of Focus Fronting (cf. '*MOLTO STUFO deve essere*', '*MOLTA ATTENZIONE hai fatto*', '*CONTENTA mi fai!*', '*A TE la lascio, la macchina!*'[9]). Thus, most of the examples are fine in Spanish both as Focus Fronting and as NFF, but in Italian they are only natural as Focus Fronting. This is a systematic feature of the Spanish / Italian contrast: fronting is allowed in Italian if associated with a Focus / Background partition – except in the few acceptable cases in (6)–(7).

In my opinion, some of the examples mentioned in Cruschina (2011a: 112–113) as cases of 'QP-Fronting' in Italian, reproduced in (19)–(21), should actually be taken as instances of Focus Fronting: they are acceptable only if the fronted constituent is pronounced with an emphatic pitch accent, which is not required in genuine cases of NFF like (6) and (7) (see also Cruschina 2011a: 115, fn. 21 for a brief remark on different intonational contours for fronted QPs and bare quantifiers).

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9 A reviewer points out that DP-fronting is perfectly acceptable in Italian in ironic utterances like *{Bella sorpresa / bel lavoro} (mi) hai fatto!* '{Nice surprise / Nice job} you've done for me!', very similar to the examples in (16)–(18). This is true, but the fronted phrase must be pronounced with emphatic stress.

(19) Pochi parenti ha   invitato al   matrimonio.
     few   relatives have.PRS.3SG invited to-the wedding
     '(S)he invited few relatives to the wedding.'

(20) Tutto   ha   mangiato a cena.
     Everything have.PRS.3SG eaten   at dinner
     '(S)he ate everything at dinner.'

(21) Molti tifosi   hanno   arrestato allo stadio.
     many supporters have.PRS.3PL arrested at-the stadium
     'They arrested many supporters at the stadium.'

This suggests that in Italian, if the fronted element is not among the members of the small set mentioned above (cf. (6) and (7)), a Focus / Background informational partition is needed for fronting to be natural, with the fronted constituent interpreted as contrastive focus, mirative focus, or informative focus, depending on regional varieties and on the context (see Cruschina 2011a for dialectal variation). In Spanish, on the other hand, NFF is free from such strict constraints.

These observations are confirmed by a survey of data from spoken Italian. A quick, informal look at the examples of quantifier fronting contained in the C-ORAL-ROM corpus (Cresti / Moneglia eds. 2005) shows that (a) it is not a productive pattern in spoken Italian, and (b) it seems to be limited to negative quantifiers like *nulla* 'nothing', as in (22),[10] and indefinite elements like *poco* 'few / little', as in (23), apart from the well-known cases with *qualche / qualcosa / qualcuno.*[11]

(22) a. nulla c' è   nell' intelletto / che prima non ci sia
     nothing LOC be.PRS.3SG in-the intellect that before not LOC be.3SG
     stato... [inatco01]
     been
     'There is nothing in the intellect that was not before in...'

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10 I assume that these examples can be pronounced without an emphatic pitch accent on the initial constituent.

11 I would add some additional possibilities with bare quantifiers and degree quantifiers, as in (i) and (ii) (but the examples were not found in C-ORAL-ROM):
  (i) Abbastanza ha   fatto,   di   non addormentarsi.
      enough   have.PRS.3SG   done   of   not falling-asleep
      'It is enough if he didn't fall asleep.'
  (ii) E tanto   meglio   ti   riesce   quanto più
      And   so-much better you.OBL come.PRS.3SG much more
      stai   attento
      be.PRS.2SG careful
      'And the more careful you are, the better you manage to do it.'

b.   le olimpiadi /   nulla   porteranno   di meglio   a / le zone
      the Olympic Games nothing bring.FUT.3PL of better   to the areas
      della Cina   che sono   ancora... [imedts07]
      of-the China that be.PRS.3PL   still
      'the Olympic Games will bring nothing positive to the areas of China that still are...'

(23)   poco importa //   in questi giorni [inatpd03]
        little matter.PRS.3SG in these days
        'it matters little in these days'.

It is not an easy task to find examples that can be considered as genuine and un-controversial cases of NFF in a corpus of spoken Italian. C-ORAL-ROM contains only a few examples, which confirms the original observations in Cinque (1986, 1990) and Benincà / Salvi / Frison (1988), and reinforces the idea that Italian and Spanish exhibit a significant difference in this particular syntactic pattern. Bare quantifiers may be fronted in Italian, but not all of them (*tutto, ciascuno, ognuno, parecchio, molto, troppo* and cardinal numerals are excluded from the construction, for reasons that are not entirely clear to me); expressions pertaining to other categories are hardly acceptable when fronted if there is no informational partition. Given this situation, a comparative analysis of Italian and Spanish raises the following questions:

1. Why is NFF widespread in one language, but severely limited in the other?
2. Why does it seem to be sensitive to the notion of 'bare quantifier' in Italian? Why does the small set of 'preposable' items in Italian correspond to the quantifiers that do not allow Dislocation?
3. Why is the interpretation of the fronted item typically non-specific?
4. Why is the presence of an informational partition strongly needed in most cases of fronting in Italian?

In section 4 I will suggest a unified answer for this set of questions. Now I would like to add some diachronic data to the synchronic view adopted so far. Old Romance languages shared, among other syntactic features, a degree of flexibility in word order patterns that is no longer observable nowadays. Old Italian is not an exception, as it allowed for scrambling and fronting operations that make it look closer to Spanish than Modern Italian may look. Thus, a brief comment on fronting in Old Italian is in order to complete an overview of comparative data. The next section is devoted to this issue.

3.2 Fronting in Old Italian

The lack of prosodic clues in ancient texts makes the establishment of the topical or focal nature of the fronted constituents a rather difficult task. However, the

discourse context is often sufficient to distinguish between topicalization and focalization in fronting operations, so that a comparison with conditions on fronting in modern Romance languages is feasible. A thorough analysis of Florentine texts from XIII and XIV centuries leads Poletto to claim that

> In OI [Old Italian] virtually any type of constituent can be found in front of the inflected verb, even those that in MI [Modern Italian] can only occupy this position if contrastively marked or cannot be fronted at all... OI also allows for fronting of the direct object of the verb (or part of it) which is clearly not contrasted with any other element, and not resumed by a clitic, as it should be in Modern Italian in order for these cases to be grammatical. (Poletto 2014: 18–19)

Examples of this kind of non-contrastive fronting in Old Italian texts are shown in (24), where the fronted quantifier is *molto* 'much / many', (25), where negative quantifiers like *nulla* and *niente* 'nothing' are in initial position, and (26), where a bare nominal and a prepositional phrase are fronted (the examples are all from Poletto 2014 and Cruschina 2011b).

(24)   a.   Molte cose dissero   di che   non mostrano   niente la veritade
              many things say.PST.3PL of which not show.PRS.3PL nothing the truth
              (*Tesoro* b53)
              'They said many things about which they did not show the truth at all.'
        b.   Molto m' hai   consolato delle   mie tribolazioni (*VeV* 24)
              much me have.PRS.2SG comforted from-the my tribulations
              'You have comforted me a lot in my tribulations.'
        c.   Molte impromesse m'   avete   fatte... (*Novellino* LIV, 13)
              many promises   me.OBL have.PRS.2PL done
              'You have made me many promises...'

(25)   a.   Nulla cosa ti   vale...   (*Tesoretto* 237)
              No   thing you.OBL serve.PRS.3SG
              'It is worth nothing...'
        b.   E niente   poteva   acquistare contro a quel populo
              and nothing can.PST.3SG gain   against to that people
              (*Nov.* XXXVI, 210)
              'And he could not gain anything against those people.'
        c.   E nullo peccato èy   a lo mundo [...], (*Destr. di Troya*, 252: 19)
              and no sin   be.PRS.3SG in the world
              'And there is no sin in the world [...]'

(26)   a.   Lieve cosa ti   parrà   ad rispondere bene (*Albertano* 182)
              light thing you.OBL seem.FUT.3SG to answer   well
              'It will be easy to you to answer appropriately...'
        b.   Maestro, di grande scienza ti   credo. (*Novellino* II, 45)
              master of great   science you.OBL believe.PRES.1SG
              'Master, I consider you of great knowledge.'

These instances of 'Complement – Verb' order in Old Italian, traditionally explained as effects of Latin influence on the written use of Romance languages, are analysed in Poletto (2014), Cruschina (2011b) and most studies in the formal paradigm as resulting from the movement of a constituent to the left peripheral positions of different phase domains in clause structure. According to these authors, fronting, together with the associated V2 patterns, is conditioned by Information Structure. More precisely, in the examples above, it represents the same kind of focalization strategy that is nowadays active in certain southern Italian dialects, with Sicilian and Sardinian as the clearest cases. Sicilian and Sardinian exhibit Focus Fronting both with contrastive and informational foci, whereas Modern Italian accepts it only with a contrastive or mirative reading: thus, in Modern Italian, fronting is subject to more restrictive interpretive conditions. In Cruschina's (2011a, b) view, Sicilian and Sardinian share the property of allowing for a generalized rule of Focus Fronting with Old Italian, and with most medieval Romance varieties. This is the dominant view of fronting in examples like (24)–(26) in the literature: they are considered as evidence that fronting of informative, non-contrastive foci was allowed in Old Italian, which allegedly explains why fronting was much more frequent in old varieties than in Modern Italian. Moreover, Cruschina (2011b: 111–115) notes that fronting in Old Italian is typically found with the same type of sentences – mainly copular and existential constructions – and the same kind of constituents – quantifiers and predicative categories – that characterize non-contrastive Focus Fronting in Sicilian and Sardinian, which reveals "a significant parallelism between modern and medieval Italo-Romance varieties". To sum up, Cruschina and Poletto, in line with previous observations by Benincà, assume that, when there is no resumption and a topic interpretation of the fronted constituent is to be excluded for contextual reasons, fronting in Old Italian is Focus Fronting. Notice that, from this viewpoint, NFF did not exist in Old Italian (and possibly in other medieval Romance varieties). Thus, the pattern displayed in (6)–(7) must be an innovation in Modern Italian.

Here I would like to argue for a different view of the facts. It is out of discussion that there is a neat asymmetry in the conditions on fronting between Old Italian and Modern Italian, as well as between Modern Italian and Spanish. But the analysis of fronting in Old Italian could be reconsidered. On the one hand, I think that there is no clear evidence in favour of a treatment of fronting as focalization. Even accepting that fronting of informative focus were a grammatical option, at least in certain Old Romance varieties, nothing forces us to assume that the fronted constituent is a focus in (24)–(26), and not being topical does not necessarily imply being focal, as I tried to show in section 2 on the basis of

Spanish data. On the other hand, there is a striking analogy between the Old Italian examples in (24)–(26) and the Spanish examples in (3), both in the properties of the fronted expressions – indefinite and negative quantifiers, predicative phrases – and in the emphatic flavour of the construction; in fact, all Old Italian examples have acceptable counterparts in Spanish. This makes me think that the relevant parallelism actually holds between Old Italian and Spanish: what Old Italian displays in (24)–(26) is NFF, with the same properties that can be observed in Modern Spanish. I accept that here fronting is triggered by conditions related to Information Structure, but, against standard assumptions, not by the need to check a Focus feature in some dedicated position in the left periphery. Movement is rather motivated by the possibility to modify Focus structure configurations through losing or downgrading the informational prominence of certain constituents (cf. Martins 2011 for a similar view of scrambling in Portuguese). In a few words, Old Italian was much closer to Modern Spanish than Modern Italian, because medieval Italo-Romance allowed for NFF without the strict limitations that characterize Modern Italian. I believe this is a general property of old Romance languages (Leonetti forthcoming).

If this is correct, the question should be why Modern Italian and Modern Spanish ended up diverging in this point. Something happened at the end of the Middle Ages that turned Italian as it is today, with NFF reduced to a minimum, i.e. to its core cases, as seen in section 3.1, while Spanish retained at least a significant part of its fronting patterns. The change affected the mapping of syntax to Information Structure, and I believe it is reasonable to assume that the same factor determines cross-linguistic variation synchronically – Italian vs Spanish – and diachronically – Modern Italian vs Old Italian. The next section deals with the precise nature of such factor.

4 Information Structure in Spanish and Italian

The proposal I intend to put forward, already formulated in Leonetti (2010) and (2014), places the *locus* of cross-linguistic variation in the mapping of syntax into Information Structure, and crucially, not in syntactic structure. I assume that the syntactic configuration of fronting is essentially the same in the languages under discussion; the differences stem from the conditions imposed by Information Structure on the interpretation – and the resulting discourse values – of fronting.

My claim is that the acceptability of NFF is dependent on the possibility that a language allows for complex strings without any informational articulation. The crucial point is having marked orders (for instance, OVS or VSO) without an informational partition. This is a typical feature of Spanish, and it is responsible

for the wide variety of fronted phrases that may occur in Spanish. Spanish shares this property, to a certain extent, with Portuguese and Romanian, where NFF is also common. The central Romance languages, on the other hand, show the opposite tendency: French, Catalan and Italian need to be maximally transparent in the phonological or syntactic expression of partitions, and tend to avoid unpartitioned marked orders, by resorting to devices like dislocation, focalization and clefts. A wide focus reading is allowed in the unmarked SVO order, but is not common in inversion patterns: VSO is ruled out, VOS is only possible with narrow focus on the postverbal subject – i.e. with a Focus / Background partition –, and OVS is subject to severe restrictions. This feature of Central Romance is also responsible for the massive use of left and right dislocations to mark topics – in contrast to Spanish – , and for the extended use of cleft constructions to mark the focus in interrogative clauses – again, not widespread in Spanish. The general rule for Central Romance seems to be that a marked order requires splitting the clause by means of Topic / Comment or Focus / Background partitions, in order to reduce the complexity of the background or focal domain (thus establishing explicit instructions for processing).

If Spanish and Italian belong to two groups of Romance languages that differ in the way syntactic structure is coupled with Information Structure, the consequences for the availability of NFF are clear: as the construction is defined by the absence of informational partitions in a marked order, it is expected to be quite productive in a language like Spanish, but not productive at all in a language like Italian. This is exactly what grammatical description shows. With this situation in mind, adequate answers can be provided for the set of questions in section 3.1. Let's review such questions now.

1. Why is NFF widespread in Spanish, but severely limited in Italian?

Italian tends to assign some informational partition to marked orders, usually making it perceptible by means of the intonational contour. This entails that fronting would be acceptable either when the initial constituent is interpreted as a Topic – but in such case there would appear a different construction, namely Clitic Left Dislocation – or when the initial constituent is interpreted as a (marked) Focus – but in that case it would be Focus Fronting, typically with a contrastive or mirative reading. Briefly, if an informational partition has to be associated with the sentence, and fronting can only be a way to single out a Topic or a Focus, then NFF becomes excluded: Italian strives to avoid a marked order processed as a unitary informational chunk. Spanish being more permissive with the mapping from syntax to Information Structure, NFF is allowed to survive.

2. Why does NFF seem to be sensitive to the notion of 'bare quantifier' in Italian? Why does the small set of 'preposable' items in Italian correspond to the quantifiers that do not allow Dislocation?

The crucial factor for NFF to exist in a language like Italian is avoiding the interpretation of the initial constituent as a Topic or as a contrastive Focus. The possibility of having a Focus interpretation is entirely dependent on intonation: If there is no emphatic stress on the fronted expression, and no intonational break is inserted between it and the rest of the sentence, a focal reading is excluded. The problem is how to exclude a topical reading. Such reading is obviously impossible when the fronted constituent is incompatible with it: this is the case of the quantifiers that cannot be dislocated, namely the only ones that can undergo NFF (negative quantifiers, *poco* 'little / few', *qualcosa* 'something'). Thus, the generalization is that the construction is licensed only when any informational partition is precluded, and Italian limits this situation quite drastically. As for bare quantifiers, they are the prototypical case of incompatibility with dislocation (the absence of resumptive clitics is obviously related to this): this is the reason why they also represent the core instances of NFF. Their 'light', non-complex nature, in addition, conspires to make them fit in a construction that lacks informational partitions; heavier constituents, in contrast, would tend to trigger some kind of Topic / Comment articulation. The key factor in the acceptability of fronting with negative and weak quantifiers is, thus, Information Structure: these quantifiers cannot be interpreted as topics when fronted.

3. Why is the interpretation of the fronted item typically non-specific?

Non-specificity is again related to conditions on Information Structure (Leonetti 2009: 89–90). If fronting is not associated to a Topic / Comment split, then in a language like Italian the fronted element can hardly receive a specific reading: this reading would typically trigger an informational partition, with the fronted expression processed as a topic. The fact that specific fronted indefinites are usually interpreted as topics forces a correlation between NFF and non-specificity, since a non-specific reading is a basic condition for banning a topical interpretation of the fronted constituent. This explains another significant property of the core cases of NFF both in Spanish and Italian: the frequent occurrence of elements that create an intensional context, like future tense, modals and negation, as seen in (6)–(7). Intensionality plays a major role in the acceptability of fronting because it favours non-specific readings of indefinite DPs, which in turn ensure that, given the appropriate conditions, a topical reading of the initial constituent may be excluded. Non-specific indefinites are the best candidates for fronting, if the fronted

constituent has to be integrated into a single informational chunk (presumably by means of semantic incorporation).

4. Why is the presence of an informational partition strongly needed in most cases of fronting in Italian?

Italian is a language that requires assigning an informational split (Topic / Comment, Focus / Background) to a syntactic string whenever a marked order is used or some factor intervenes that hinders integration into a single informational chunk. Thus, Italian places heavy constraints on the possibility of having sentences processed without an informational partition: this is limited to unmarked SVX sentences and VS sentences with unaccusative predicates, i.e. contexts that give rise to thetic interpretations. Spanish displays the opposite tendency: it easily allows for the absence of informational partitions – for instance, thetic readings – in different word order patterns (SVX, VXS, VSX, XVS). In a few words, Spanish word order is less transparent than Italian word order, as far as Focus structure is concerned. An immediate consequence of the contrast is that in Italian fronting operations will show a clear tendency to be coupled with some informational partition – typically, Focus / Background – except in the few cases where the fronted constituent is neither a Focus – because there is no emphatic pitch accent – nor a Topic – because it is incompatible with a topical interpretation. As shown above, these cases are severely limited. This is why the Italian examples in (13)–(18) are only acceptable if fronting is interpreted as Focus Fronting: a focal reading of the fronted constituent is the natural way to comply with the requirement on informational partitions, and thus the interpretive justification of the choice for a marked order.

5 Conclusions

In the previous sections I have reviewed data that show that a productive construction in Spanish, NFF, is much less productive in Italian, despite the similarities in the basic word order patterns between the two languages. The construction is not completely excluded in Italian: it is rather limited to a small set of quantifiers. The account I have put forward to explain the contrast is based on Information Structure – more precisely, on the restrictions operating on the mapping from syntax to Information Structure. From this point of view, the cross-linguistic contrast is due to the ban against marked orders interpreted as single information chunks that is operating in Italian but not in Spanish: since NFF is a marked pattern devoid of informational splits, it is expected to be quite productive in a language like Spanish, and minimally productive in a language like Italian. In fact,

in Italian it is possible only with a few negative and weak indefinite quantifiers, not by chance the core cases of quantifiers that cannot be dislocated as topics. Just because a topical reading is excluded with them – and a focal reading is precluded by the flat intonational contour –, there cannot be an informational partition, and the fronted quantifier is integrated into a single informational unit. The above mentioned ban concerning Information Structure is thus circumvented. Briefly, NFF is possible in Italian only when the general requirement for informational splits can be eschewed, due to the anti-topical nature of the fronted quantifier, which can be integrated into a single informational chunk – an option that is precluded for other kinds of fronted expressions. When these conditions are not fulfilled, NFF is judged anomalous and non-idiomatic in Italian. Spanish, on the contrary, makes an extensive use of the construction.

As for Old Italian data, it is reasonable to assume that, in the Middle Ages, Romance languages were at least as permissive as Modern Spanish in the mapping from syntax to Information Structure, and thus fronting was not necessarily associated with an informational split in all uses. Word order patterns were more flexible than in modern varieties, and NFF was not only a grammatical option, but a common resource. Later on, word order became more rigid, and consequently the mapping from syntax to Information Structure was modelled in a more restrictive way. Some languages reduced NFF to its minimal domain – this is the case of Italian and the central Romance languages; others kept the construction alive, with a higher level of productivity – and this is the case of Spanish. The difference lies in the way Focus structure is coupled to syntactic strings.

This kind of approach can be justified on different grounds. First, as it is based on Information Structure, it is flexible enough to capture the cross-linguistic facts in terms of productivity, deriving them from the interaction between the syntax of fronting and the informational requirements that languages place on the processing of marked orders. The construction is itself syntactically well-formed in both languages, but it obeys the particular informational constraints operating in Italian only in few well-defined cases. It seems to me undesirable for theoretical reasons to deal with the contrast in purely syntactic terms, by assuming that NFF is sometimes grammatical (with certain quantifiers) and sometimes ungrammatical (with the rest of them) in Italian.

Second, in this approach the same principles are responsible for synchronic variation and for diachronic variation, if data from Old Romance are taken into account. This is obviously a welcome result. Although the hypothesis about historical changes in informational constraints in Romance is still far from being

empirically confirmed, I believe it is reasonable and fits in well with what we know about fronting and scrambling in Old Romance.

Third, invoking notions from Information Structure makes it possible to treat the facts of NFF as a particular case of a more general parameter of variation in the Romance domain. As suggested in Leonetti (2010), (2014) and (forthcoming), Central Romance languages require explicit and systematic informational partitions in marked orders, whereas Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian show a more relaxed mapping of syntax into informational partitions. This factor controls differences in the frequency of Clitic Dislocation, the use of cleft constructions in interrogative clauses, the availability of a VSX order, and the interpretation and discourse values of inversion patterns (VS, VXS). NFF finds a natural accommodation among these phenomena, and is thus harmonically inserted in a comprehensive view of variation in Information Structure in Romance. A different approach would probably miss the generalization that connects the distribution of NFF with the remaining facts.

To conclude, this kind of approach seems to be promising, and could reveal productive in future research, if its basic idea is taken seriously: at least in Romance, fronting without resumption is not necessarily Focus Fronting.

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Obliques and the initial syntactic position

Abstract: This article discusses the informative function of obliques in first position within the sentence showing that in addition to being Topic, they can also be Focus constituents. We present data from a corpus of spoken Italian and examine the different types of focused obliques in initial position. An analysis of the prosodic characteristics of these constituents in different syntactic positions enables us to present a new principle governing the relation between the syntactic sequence and the information value of elements within the sentence.

1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the behavior of obliques in Italian in contexts where they occur in the initial position of the sentence. This means that they are found in marked syntactic contexts in cases of left dislocation or preposing, that is, as extra-nuclear constituents (or in the *left periphery* according to Rizzi 1997). Our specific interest will be to show that the initial position of obliques in discourse is not only a case of left dislocation due to their Topic function, as has often been stated since Chafe (1976), but that this position can also be due to their Focus function, that is, to the fronting or preposing of the oblique constituent. We will mainly deal with data from spoken language drawn from a corpus of semi-spontaneous conversations.

The paper is structured in the following way: in section 2 we point out what we mean by obliques in initial position and show that the construction under discussion involves the interaction between syntax and pragmatics. In section 3 we summarize the kind of pragmatic functions we will be considering, while in section 4 we describe marked syntactic constructions in Italian and discuss problems of terminology caused by different interpretations of the terms *left-dislocation*, *preposing*, *topicalization* and *anaphoric preposing* in the literature; we then link the various syntactic contexts to their information structure (IS) functions and show the pragmatic principle which holds in marked syntactic sentences in Italian. In particular, we introduce a new principle of IS with regard to how it governs the syntactic order of marked syntactic constituents. In section 5 we examine obliques both from the syntactic and the semantic point of view. In section 6, we illustrate the different types of fronted obliques found in a corpus of spoken Italian; we then present the intonation characteristics of the sentences with prepositional phrases (PPs) in initial position in order to verify the presence of a pitch accent within