

The syntax-discourse interface: a comparative analysis of VS order in Catalan and Spanish

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In Romance languages, different word order configurations may constrain the information structure of a sentence, i.e., limit the the scope of focus. VS order in Catalan is more restrictive than in Spanish (Leonetti 2017). For example, the Spanish sentences in (1) can be interpreted as a sentence-focus structure, where the entire proposition receives a broad focus interpretation and it can be uttered in an ‘out-of-the-blue’ context (Lambrecht 1994). On the other hand, in Catalan, (2a) can receive a sentence-focus interpretation, whereas (2b) can only be interpreted with narrow focus on the subject.

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| (1) Spanish: | (2) Catalan: |
| a. <i>Llega María.</i>
arrive.3SG Mary
‘Mary arrives.’ | a. <i>Arriba la Maria.</i>
arrive.3SG the.FSG Mary
‘Mary arrives.’ |
| b. <i>Se va María.</i>
REFL go.3SG Mary
‘Mary leaves.’ | b. <i>Se’n va la Maria.</i>
REFL=CL go.3SG the.FSG Mary
‘Mary leaves.’ |

According to Leonetti (2018), unaccusative sentences form the core group of constructions which give rise to a sentence-focus interpretation in Spanish. However, as (2) illustrates, this is not the case for Catalan, as not all unaccusatives are licensed in a sentence-focus structure. Beninc`a (1988), who studies this variation amongst verbs in Italian, notes that arrive has a different interpretation in SV and VS order, since VS presupposes a locative goal. Building on Erteschik-Shir’s (1997) notion of stage-topic, i.e., a spatio-temporal expression which plays the role of the aboutness topic of a sentence in the absence of an overt canonical one, Bentley & Cruschina (2018) propose the notion that some languages, such as Italian, only allow bare VS order inthetic broad focus, that is a broad focus VS structure with no overt or presupposed sentence-initial locative or temporal phrase. Under this analysis, bare VS broad focus is a structure with a Subject of Predication which can either be the locative argument of a verb (such as would be the case of arrive) or an argument inferred from the discourse context which arises with eventive verbs (i.e., those expressing a result state such as die). The example below (adapted from Bentley & Cruschina 2018:19) formally illustrates this:

(3) *Sono arrivati i ragazzi.*
are arrived the kids

‘The kids have arrived’.

[_{subj} (\exists loc)][_{pred} sono arrivati i ragazzi]

Given that Catalan and Italian are both restrictive languages, I assume that Catalan imposes the same constraints on bare VS order as Italian, but Spanish does not. I test this hypothesis by analysing Catalan and Spanish corpora, focusing on the analysis of six verbs, chosen to represent different verb classes. The study will test whether there is a correlation between VS order and verb class, definiteness of the subject, and the presence of an overt sentence-initial locative or temporal adverbial (since Leonetti (2018) suggests that locative inversion favours a broad focus interpretation of the sentence). Preliminary results of the study show that there is in fact a correlation between these factors and VS order ($P < .001$). However, the results are not statistically significant with regards to the correlation between VS order and Catalan as opposed to Spanish ($P = 0.47$).

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