

**Optionality in Contrast**  
*Mara Frascarelli & Francesca Ramaglia*  
University of Roma Tre

**Keywords:** Contrast, covert/overt movement, Interface interpretation.

In the cartographic approach (Rizzi 1997 and related work), pragmatic categories like Focus, Topic and Contrast are assumed to be encoded in the syntax in the form of features that are assigned to a constituent via movement to a dedicated functional projection in the left periphery. In this framework of analysis, Focus fronting is feature-driven and targets a well-defined position (cf., a.o., Kiss 1998, Frascarelli 2000), while different types of Topics are located in specific positions in the left periphery, according to their particular discourse function (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007). One crucial consequence of this approach is that the Focus-Background and the Topic-Comment partitions apply at specific structural layers.

However, comparative analysis shows that Focus and Topic constituents can be apparently realized *in situ* (cf. Neeleman & van de Koot 2008) and that fronted/dislocated elements might correspond to different interface interpretations cross-linguistically. Focus fronting, for instance, is generally associated to a contrastive interpretation in English (1), while it obtains an exhaustive reading in Hungarian so that (2B) is not felicitous if, for instance, I also brought some bread (Brody & Szendrői 2010). Finally, in languages like Somali fronting realizes Information Focus, so that (3) is a proper answer to a wh-question like “what did you eat?”:

- (1) *A BOOK John read (not a paper)*  
(2) A: *What did you bring to the party?*  
B: *BORT ÈS SAJTOT hoztam.*  
    *wine.ACC and cheese.ACC brought-I*  
    ‘I brought WINE AND CHEESE’  
(3) *HILIB buu Cali cunay*  
    *meat FM.SCL3SGM Cali eat.PST.3SGM*  
    ‘Cali ate MEAT’

As for Topics, languages crucially differ w.r.t. their syntactic properties (clitic resumption, multiple realizations, etc.), as well as in the number and types of dislocated constituents allowed. Familiar (Given) Topics, for instance, are available in either peripheries in Italian (cf. (4)), while English seems to exclude dislocated G-Topics (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010):

- (4) a. *Gianni, il libro lo leggerà più tardi*  
    \*As for Gianni, the book he will read it tomorrow  
    b. *Gianni, lo leggerà più tardi, il libro*  
    \*As for Gianni, he will read it tomorrow, the book

What explanation can be plausibly provided to this variation? Should we assume that the interpretation of features is parametrized (Move vs. Agree) across languages or, rather, a finer distinction is needed within discourse categories that ‘look the same’, but are in fact distinguished for their formal and interpretive (interface) properties (which thus depend on different features)? A third option is furthermore represented by the possibility that features can be valued in either way (covert/overt movement) and that a division of labour operates between levels of grammar in that case (e.g., requiring prosodic markedness for *in situ* constructions).

In this line of research, Frascarelli & Ramaglia (2012) have recently proposed that different phases are dedicated to the merge and interpretation of distinct features. This means that discourse features are not iterated in the structure, as they are located either in the C- or in the D-domain, interface interpretation thus depending on their combination and structural visibility (according to the Phase Impenetrability Condition).

Following this suggestion, this paper concentrates on the notion of ‘Contrast’, focusing on different questions. A major issue concerns the apparent variation characterizing its realization: in languages like Italian (and English) it is often assumed that contrastive Focus is equally available *in situ*, through fronting or by means of a cleft construction (cf. (5)).

- (5) a. *Leo ha letto UN LIBRO (non un articolo)* ‘Leo read A BOOK (not a paper)’  
 b. *UN LIBRO Leo ha letto (non un articolo)* ‘A BOOK Leo read (not a paper)’  
 c. *È UN LIBRO che Leo ha letto (non un articolo)* ‘It is A BOOK that Leo read (not...)’

A closer investigation of the syntactic and interpretive properties of these constructions, however, shows that they cannot be treated on a par. Embedding contexts can provide a major case study: while *in situ* Focus is allowed in all embedded contexts, fronted and clefted Foci seem to show different degrees of acceptability depending on the type of selecting verb:

- (6) a. *Ho detto<sup>2</sup>\*Mi dispiace che UN LIBRO Leo ha letto (non un articolo)*  
 ‘I said/regret that A BOOK Leo read (not a paper)’  
 b. *Ho detto<sup>2</sup>?Mi dispiace che è UN LIBRO che Leo ha letto (non un articolo)*  
 ‘I said/regret that it is A BOOK that Leo read (not a paper)’

These considerations show the need for a discourse-semantic distinction, which will be investigated in the light of Bianchi & Frascarelli’s (2010) Interface Root Restriction (i.e., the impact of IS-phenomena on conversational dynamics).

A second important issue to be addressed is whether Contrast is to be regarded as an independent category of Information Structure (as in Molnár 2006) or only as a feature which serves to parametrize Focus and Topic (Rochemont 1986, Rooth 1992, Lambrecht 1994). Comparative interface analysis will be therefore crucial in this respect to verify whether a contrastive interpretation requires the use of specific phonological and syntactic devices (as it appears to be the case in Finnish, cf. Vilkuna 1995). Intonational properties will be therefore analyzed to evaluate the validity of a modular interpretation of IS-phenomena.

Different types of Contrast will be considered, in combination with both new and given information, with a corrective import (as in (5)), but not necessarily (as in (7) below). ‘Parallel structures’ will also be examined (8), in which Contrast seems to apply within the Comment, and specifically in the DP phase (cf. Frascarelli & Ramaglia 2012).

- (7) *Easy to be smart when you are rich. Look at Leo: an ARMANI SUIT he is wearing tonight!*  
 (8) *An AMERICAN farmer was talking to a CANADIAN farmer.*

**References:** Bianchi, V. & M. Frascarelli (2010), Is topic a root phenomenon?, *Iberia* 2, 43-88. Brody, M. & K. Szendrői (2010), Exhaustive focus is an answer, *lingbuzz/001113*. Frascarelli, M. (2000), *The Syntax-Phonology Interface in Focus and Topic Constructions in Italian*. Kluwer. Frascarelli, M. & R. Hinterhölzl (2007), Types of Topics in German and Italian, K. Schwabe & S. Winkler (eds.), *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form*, Benjamins, 87-116. Frascarelli, M. & F. Ramaglia (2012), ‘Phasing’ contrast at the interfaces, in V. Camacho-Taboada et al. (eds.), *Information Structure and Agreement*, Benjamins, 55-82. Kiss, K. (1998), Identificational Focus versus Information Focus, *Language* 74, 245-273. Lambrecht, K. (1994), *Information structure and sentence form*, CUP. Molnár, V. (2006), On Different Kinds of Contrast, V. Molnár & S. Winkler (eds.), *Architecture of Focus*, De Gruyter, 197-233. Neeleman, A. & H. van de Koot (2008), Dutch scrambling and the nature of discourse templates, *The Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 11, 137-189. Rizzi, L. (1997), The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery, L. Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar*, Kluwer, 281-337. Rochemont, M. (1986), *Focus in Generative Grammar*, Benjamins. Rooth, M. (1992), A theory of focus interpretation, *Natural Language Semantics* 1, 75-116. Vilkuna, M. (1995), Discourse configurationality in Finnish, K. Kiss (ed.), *Discourse-configurational languages*, OUP, 244-268.