

The greater the contrast, the greater the potential: On the effects of contrastive focus in syntax

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The most debated syntactic reflex that is typically associated with contrast is the movement of a contrastive constituent to a dedicated, left-peripheral position. For Italian and Spanish, it has been claimed that focus fronting (FF) must be sanctioned by a contrastive interpretation of the focus, while non-contrastive focus generally occurs postverbally (see, e.g., Rizzi 1997, Zubizarreta 1998, Belletti 2004). Only sentences with a postverbal focus are thus judged as pragmatically felicitous answers to the corresponding wh-questions:

- (1) Q: 'Who bought the records?' (Spanish)
A: (# **Una muchacha**) los compró **una muchacha**.
a girl them.ACC bought a girl
- (2) Q: 'Who spoke?'
A: (# **Gianni**) ha parlato **Gianni**. (Italian)
Gianni has spoken Gianni

Some scholars have however recently reported different views and experimental data, showing that non-contrastive preverbal foci are indeed accepted by native speakers in answers to wh-questions.

In this paper, I argue that a solution to this problem can be found if the binary distinction between contrastive and non-contrastive focus is abandoned, and other types of focus are identified. The different interpretations of focus arise from the way the set of alternatives is pragmatically exploited (Krifka 2007, Cruschina 2012), giving rise to a contextually open set (*information focus*), unexpectedness with respect to more likely alternatives (*mirative focus*) or a correction of given alternatives (*corrective focus*). In Italian and Spanish, FF is possible not only with 'greatest' and most explicit case of contrast (i.e. corrective focus), but also with contrast against expectations (i.e. mirative focus), while it is not accepted in the absence of contrast (i.e. information focus). Mirative foci can be fronted in answers to wh-questions, thus explaining the empirical controversies observed above. Following Bianchi et al. (2016), I then argue that FF is in fact triggered not by contrast *per se*, but by the conventional implicature that is associated with certain types of focus.

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