

## “Should I stay or should I go?” Optional focus movement in Italian

1. A well known problem for the syntax–semantics interface is optional movement of focussed constituents. There is no consensus on whether this movement is necessary to yield a legible LF, and if it is, the next question is whether it is feature-driven in the same way as, e.g., *wh*-movement. (See a.o. [4],[6]). A clear instance of the problem is found in Italian (cf. [3],[2],[1],[7]):

- (1) A: So che Gianni ha invitato Lucia ... [I know John invited Lucy]  
 B: No, ha invitato [MaRIIna]<sub>F</sub>. [no, (he) invited Marina]  
 B': No, [MaRIIna]<sub>F</sub> ha invitato \_ . [no, Marina (he) invited]

In (1), focus *in situ* (1B) and *ex situ* (1B') seem to be equivalent, and our previous research shows that they associate with the same pitch accent: L+H\*. In this talk we prove that the two focus positions are not equivalent, supporting our previous conclusion that the focus phrase in (1B) cannot have raised to the same position as in (1B') modulo inversion by remnant IP movement.

We restrict our discussion to the *corrective* use of contrastive focus, already exemplified in (1), whereby a speaker corrects an ‘antecedent’ proposition. In such contexts, focus *ex situ* is subject to four restrictions that do not apply to focus *in situ*.

i. In the answer to a genuine yes-no question, focus *ex situ* is inappropriate:

- (2) A: Gianni è andato a Londra? [Did Gianni go to London?]  
 B: No, è andato a BerLIno (non a Londra). [No, (he) went to Berlin (not to London)]  
 B': # No, a BerLIno è andato (non a Londra). [No, to Berlin (he) went (not to London)]

ii. Focus *ex situ*, unlike focus *in situ*, cannot be in the scope of a matrix clause negation (4):

- (3) Non ho detto [che lo darò a TE], ma a Lucia! [I didn't say that I'll give it to you, but to L.]  
 (4) ?\*Non ho detto [che a TE lo darò], ma a Lucia! [I didn't say that to you I'll give it, but to L.]

iii. When the set of focus alternatives does not coincide with that of the previous assertion, but is linked to it by an inferential relation, focus *ex situ* is inappropriate:

- (5) A: Gianni adora i sushi. [Gianni adores sushi]  
 B: No, lui adora la cucina ciNEse, non quella giapponese.  
 [No, he adores Chinese cooking, not Japanese cooking]  
 B': # No, la cucina ciNEse adora, non quella giapponese.  
 [No, Chinese cooking he adores, not Japanese cooking]

iv. The background of focus *ex situ* cannot contain additional material (*classical dance* in (6C')) w.r.t. the corrected assertion (6B):

- (6) A: Dove studia Gianni ora? [Where does Gianni study now?]  
 B: Studia all'SOAS di Londra. [(He) studies at the SOAS in London]  
 C: No, studia danza classica alla Royal Ballet SCHOOL. [No, he studies class. dance at the RBS]  
 C': #No, alla Royal Ballet SCHOOL studia danza classica. [No, at the RBS he studies class. dance]

2. In approaching these contrasts, we build on van Leusen's [8] analysis of correction: a specific conversational move triggering a non-monotonic update of the discourse context. Crucially, for a correction to be felicitous, there must be an ‘antecedent’ proposition (e.g. (1A)) such that the corrective claim (e.g. (1B')) is inconsistent with it in the context of interpretation (*incompatibility condition*); correction then triggers a) the retraction of the antecedent proposition from the context, in order to guarantee consistency, and b) the insertion of the corrective claim.

We can explain restrictions (i)-(ii) by the hypothesis that in the relevant contexts, focus *ex situ* expresses corrective focus, directly implementing a correction. (i) follows from the fact that the antecedent proposition that is the target of correction must be already entailed by the discourse context, and not under question; (ii) follows from the fact that the corrective update is semantically active at the root, and cannot be interpreted in the scope of a matrix clause negation.

But what is the role of focus? Restrictions (iii)-(iv) show that focus *ex situ* requires a strict focus-background parallelism w.r.t. the antecedent proposition.

In the alternative semantics framework, corrective focus can be analysed as a contrastive use of focus carrying an incompatibility presupposition. A corrective claim Z in context C presupposes:  $\exists p \in \llbracket Z \rrbracket^f \text{incomp}(p, \llbracket Z \rrbracket^0, C)$ , where:  $\text{incomp}(p, p', C) \leftrightarrow C \models p \wedge C \oplus p' \models \neg p$ ; we then equate p (the incompatible alternative) with the ordinary value of the corrected statement. In (1), given  $\llbracket (1A) \rrbracket^f = \text{invite}(\mathbf{1})(\mathbf{g})$  and  $\llbracket (1B) \rrbracket^f = \{\text{invite}(x)(\mathbf{g}) \mid x \in D_c\}$ , the presupposition is satisfied –  $\llbracket (1A) \rrbracket^f \in \llbracket (1B) \rrbracket^f$ ; but it is not satisfied by (5A-B') – John's liking sushi does not correspond to the incompatible alternative denied in the negative tag of (5B') – nor in (6B-C') (as the alternatives in  $\llbracket (6C) \rrbracket^f$  contain additional material w.r.t.  $\llbracket (6B) \rrbracket^0$ ,  $\llbracket (6B) \rrbracket^0 \notin \llbracket (6C) \rrbracket^f$ ). (We also discuss an alternative formulation in the structured meaning approach, and compare the two with respect to the problem of under-focussed and over-focussed corrective claims.)

Notice that corrective focus *ex situ* defines the set of alternatives at the propositional level. Focus *in situ* is appropriate in (2)-(6) because the alternatives can be defined at a lower compositional level, so that there is no direct contrast with an incompatible antecedent proposition; in other terms, focus *in situ* is merely contrastive here, and only indirectly achieves a 'corrective effect'.

**3.** In order to test this distinction, we performed a forced-choice experiment (fully counter-balanced) in which 20 native speakers of Italian were asked to choose between minimal pairs of sentences with focus *in situ* and *ex situ*. The target sentences (e.g. (9)B-B') were presented within dialogues designed to elicit a merely contrastive vs. corrective focus interpretation (e.g. (7) vs. (8)). The results, analyzed with a mixed logit model, show that the probability to prefer the alternative with focus *ex situ* significantly differs across focus types: focus *ex situ* is almost never preferred (3.5% of times) in contexts eliciting a contrastive interpretation, while it is a fully available possibility (25% of times) in contexts eliciting a corrective interpretation.

(7) A: Maria era molto elegante l'altra sera a teatro [M. was really elegant yesterday at the theatre]

(8) A: L'altra sera a teatro, Maria s'era messa uno stracceto di H&M.

[Yesterday at the theatre, Maria was wearing a lousy dress from H&M.]

(9) B: Si era messa un Armani, non uno stracceto di H&M. (focus *in situ*)

[(She) was wearing an Armani (dress), not a lousy dress from H&M.]

B': Un Armani s'era messa, non uno stracceto di H&M. (focus *ex situ*)

[An Armani [dress] (she) was wearing, not a lousy dress from H&M.]

These findings indicate that, contrary to common wisdom, contrast by itself is not compatible with the *ex situ* position in Italian; in the relevant contexts, this position conveys only a corrective interpretation. (See [2b] for other uses of focus *ex situ* in different contexts). However, the corrective interpretation also appears to be available for the *in situ* position (75% of times). Taken at face value, these results suggest that overt movement is not needed to license one specific interpretation; however, it is not a 'stylistic' PF phenomenon either, because it *restricts* the available interpretations w.r.t. the *in situ* position. As far as we can see, this tentative conclusion fits neither with a last resort view of optional movement *à la* Reinhart, nor with a rigid 'one position—one interpretation' view of the syntax–semantics interface.

**Essential References:** [1] Belletti, A. 2004. In Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP*, 16-51. OUP. [2a] Brunetti, L. 2003. *A Unification of Focus*. Unipress. [2b] Brunetti, L. 2009. In Dufter & Jacob (eds.), *Focus and Background in Romance Languages*, 43–82. John Benjamins. [3] Frascarelli, M. 2000. *The Syntax-Phonology Interface in Focus and Topic Constructions in Italian*. Kluwer. [4] Horvath, J. 2010. *Lingua* 120, 1346-1369. [5] Krifka, M. 2004. In Molnar & Winkler (eds.), *The Architecture of Focus*, 105–136. Mouton de Gruyter. [6] Neeleman, A. & van de Koot, H. 2008. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 11.2, 137-189. [7] Samek-Lodovici, V. 2005. *NLLT* 23, 687-755. [8] vanLeusen, N. 2004. *J. Semantics* 21, 415-442.