

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

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In Romance languages, different word order configurations can constraint the information partition of a sentence, i.e. limit the scope of the focus. VS constructions are more restrictive in Catalan than they are in Spanish (Leonetti 2017). The sentences in (1) can be interpreted as sentence-focus structures, where the entire proposition receives broad focus, and can be uttered in ‘out-of-the-blue’ contexts (Lambrecht 1994). Contrastively, in Catalan, (2a) receives a sentence-focus interpretation, but (2b) can only be interpreted with narrow focus on the subject:

1) Spanish:

- a) *Llega María.*
arrive3SG Mary
'Mary arrives.'
- b) *Se va María.*
RFL leave3SG Mary
'Mary leaves.'

2) Catalan:

- a) *Arriba la Maria.*
arrive3SG the Mary
'Mary arrives.'
- b) *Se'n va la Maria.*
RFL=CL leave the Mary
'Mary leaves.'

This study investigates which verb classes occur in sentence-focus VS order in Catalan and Spanish and whether the variation between them depends on broader properties of the language.

According to Leonetti (2018), unaccusative and unergative sentences form the core group of constructions which give rise to a sentence-focus interpretation. However, as (2) illustrates, not all sentences are equally suitable for a sentence-focus interpretation of VS constructions. Benincà (1988), who studies this variation amongst verbs in Italian, notes that *arrive* has a different interpretation in SV and VS, since VS order presupposes a locative goal. Corr (2016) distinguishes verbs with a locative goal and with a result state in VS order. A verb such as *arrive* selects a goal locative argument that licenses broad focus in VS order, whereas *leave* does not. 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) put forward the notion that some languages, such as Italian, only allow bare VS order inthetic broad focus, that is, a structure with a Subject of Predication which can be either a locative argument of the verb (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*).

Based on this analysis for the variation in Italian, I propose that a similar analysis should account for the Catalan data, whereas Spanish is more permissive and does not require the same Subject of Predication. The study will use quantitative and qualitative data from Spanish and Catalan corpora and interview analysis to attest this.

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