

Two types of postverbal subject

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Two types of subject inversion must be distinguished in Spanish. The first one is syntactically induced, obligatory inversion, mostly related to fronting of non-topical constituents. The second one is free, optional inversion in declarative sentences, characterized by the presence of an initial stage / locative topic, either explicit or implicit. In type 1 inversion the postverbal subject is not in focus, whereas in type 2 inversion it is typically focal. The robust correlation that holds between (non-)optionality of inversion and the (non-)focal status of the subject can be derived from general interface economy principles: subject inversion gives rise to interpretive effects only when it is optional, i.e. when it alternates with non-inversion. Two predictions follow from this. The first one is that inverted subjects of type 1 maintain the characteristic properties of preverbal subjects. The second one states that so-called ‘non-canonical’ subjects must be instances of type 2 inversion.

1. Aims

Postverbal subjects – typically, in SVO languages – are a major subclass of so-called ‘non-canonical subjects’, since they often fail to exhibit some of the characteristic features of preverbal subjects (in particular, so-called ‘autonomy properties’ in Keenan 1976, such as independent existence, autonomous reference, topicality and high referentiality, and ‘coding properties’ like control of agreement). However, an analysis of the grammar of postverbal subjects cannot be based on the simplistic assumption that they always exhibit a non-canonical behaviour. In this paper I intend to show that two basic types of postverbal subject must be distinguished, and only one of them actually gives rise to non-canonicity. Briefly, the idea is that postverbal subjects in constructions that disallow preverbal subjects exhibit properties that clearly differ from the typical properties of the rest of postverbal subjects. In my view, the distinction is needed as a basic ingredient of any approach to the correlation between postverbal subjects and non-canonicity. Although the proposal is meant to be valid for all languages that have preverbal subjects as the unmarked option, here I will only consider SVO languages, in particular (standard) Spanish, French and Italian;¹ I simply assume that, *mutatis mutandis*, the idea could be easily applied to other languages with similar features.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 the distinction between two types of postverbal subjects is put forward, on the basis of data from Spanish. Section 3 is devoted to explaining what is behind this distinction and how it integrates in the grammatical system. Finally, section 4 presents some conclusions.

2. Two types of postverbal subject in Spanish

2.1. Type 1: Syntactically induced inversion

Our starting point is a couple of well-known features of Spanish syntax. In this language, the canonical position for subjects is usually assumed to be the preverbal one, but subject inversion is also allowed, giving rise to a variety of patterns (VS, VOS, VSO). Subject inversion is considered to be a means for the expression of informational focus, so that postverbal subjects carry new information and belong to the focal domain (Lobo & Martins 2017 and Leonetti 2017 for an overview of Romance inversion). This description holds for most Romance SVO languages, though in some of them inversion is constrained by stricter conditions than in others. The Romance languages also display a small set of constructions that ban preverbal subjects: in such cases, the subject is obligatorily postverbal, and the possibility of choosing between the two usual options – preverbal *vs* postverbal – is precluded. For Spanish, the list of syntactic contexts that force subject inversion is illustrated in the following examples:

WH-INTERROGATIVES

- (1) *¿Qué libros ha comprado ella?*
what books have.PRS.3SG bought she
'What books has she bought?'

FOCUS FRONTING

- (2) *LIBROS DE CINE ha comprado ella*
books on cinema have.PRS.3SG bought she
'BOOKS ON CINEMA, she bought.'

NON-FOCAL FRONTING / QUANTIFIER FRONTING

- (3) *Muchos libros se ha comprado ella.*
 many books REF have.PRS.3SG bought she
 ‘Plenty of books, she bought.’

RESUMPTIVE PREPOSING

- (4) *Eso dijo ella.*
 that say.PST.3SG she
 ‘That’s what she said.’

NEGATIVE PREPOSING

- (5) *Nada les debe ella.*
 nothing to-them owe.PRS.3SG she
 ‘She owes them nothing.’

Example (1) illustrates a well-established constraint: the subject must be postverbal in *wh*-interrogatives and *wh*-exclamatives (Torrego 1984, Zagana 2002, RAE 2009: §42.9c), with a few exceptions that are not relevant to the following discussion. It is not among my goals to discuss the formal motivation of this constraint. The crucial point here is that, whatever the hypothesis we choose to account for it, it happens to be a strong, grammatical constraint. It holds also for Focus Fronting, or contrastive focalization, as in (2): this is a construction that shares many important features with *wh*-movement (Zagana 2002: §6.3, Cruschina & Remberger 2017) and is usually treated as a particular case of phrasal movement to a dedicated position in the left periphery of the clause (but see Samek-Lodovici 2015 for an alternative proposal based on evidence from Italian).²

Another instance of the same constraint against preverbal subjects is found in (3), (4) and (5), with Non-Focal Fronting (Leonetti 2016, 2017), also called Verum Focus Inducing Fronting in Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal (2009). For a number of linguists, these examples represent one more special case of Focus Fronting (cf. RAE 2009: §40.4j-k, 42.15b, 48.3j-m; Cruschina & Remberger 2017). For us, Non-Focal Fronting displays the same formal properties of Focus Fronting, but crucially differs from it in the interpretation both of the fronted phrase, which is not focal and is pronounced with no emphasis, and of the whole sentence, which receives a typical marked, affective, emphatic reading. In any case, since the syntax of Focus Fronting and Non-Focal

Fronting seems to be exactly the same, it is reasonable to assume that the nature of the ban against preverbal subjects is also the same. Non-Focal Fronting is quite productive in Spanish: the term covers a group of specific constructions, among which we can mention Quantifier Fronting (see example (3); cf. Quer 2002, Cinque 1990), Resumptive Preposing (see example (4); cf. Cinque 1990, Cardinaletti 2009) and Negative Fronting (see example (5); cf. Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal 2009).

Up to this point, the list of syntactic environments where the constraint against preverbal subjects holds is a set of instantiations of the same general pattern, i.e. overt A-bar movement of a phrasal category to an initial position – a position that in Spanish must be obligatorily adjacent to the verb, thus blocking the raising of the subject to a preverbal slot. However, not all instances of the constraint correspond to this syntactic pattern. There is a second group of constructions where preverbal subjects are excluded but there is no phrasal movement to the left periphery. It includes gerunds, adjunct infinitival clauses and absolute constructions, exemplified in (6), (7) and (8) respectively – examples from Zagona (2002: §3.1):

- (6) [*Habiendo llegado ella*], *empezó la fiesta.*
have.GER arrive.PPT *she* start.PST.3SG the party
'Once she arrived, the party started.'
(cf. **Ella habiendo llegado*, ...)
- (7) [*Después de haber ganado ellos*], *los felicitamos.*
after of have.INF win.PPT *they* them congratulate.PST.1PL
'After they won, we congratulated them.'
(cf. **Después de ellos haber ganado*, ...)
- (8) [*Llegada ella*], *empezó la fiesta.*
arrive.PPT *she* start.PST.3SG the party
'Once she arrived, the party started.'
(cf. **Ella llegada*, ...)

As confirmed in RAE (2009: §27.3, 26.7g, 38.11p-q), preverbal subjects are ungrammatical with non-personal forms of the verb. I will not be concerned with the thorny problem of how postverbal overt subjects are formally licensed in these contexts; for the purpose of this paper, it is enough to be aware that there is a second group of environments where the subject is obligatorily postverbal, though for reasons that do not seem to be related to the ones that give rise to the constraint in the first group of examples.³ The ban on preverbal subjects is, again, due to some syntactic principle.

All the contexts where subject inversion is forced share a salient property: their postverbal subjects are not focal, against the usual assumption that inversion is associated with informational focus. This is not a novel observation. Some remarks are worth here to describe the facts adequately. If postverbal subjects in syntactically induced inversion are not in focus, what is their informational status? They are not (parts of) foci, but this does not mean that they must be interpreted as topics; in fact, they are simply included in the background, i.e. in the non-focal part of the informational articulation, without being singled out as aboutness topics. A part of the syntactic literature that deals with this issue assumes that, not being foci, such subjects must unavoidably be taken as postverbal topics (see, for instance, Ambar & Pollock 2002). In my opinion, that stance is based on a wrong assumption: being part of the background does not imply being an aboutness topic; I simply adhere to the common assumption that the ‘topic / comment’ and the ‘focus / background’ distinctions are independent from each other. In any case, it is perfectly possible to find postverbal subjects in type 1 inversion that occur as right-dislocated topics; it is, in fact, quite common in Italian and Catalan.

In *wh*-clauses and Focus Fronting, the condition on the non-focal status of subjects can be easily accounted for by observing that it is the fronted constituent that is in focus, so that the subject must be interpreted as a part of the background (but see 3.1 below for some exceptions in *wh*-clauses). However, such account cannot work for Non-Focal Fronting, where no overt constituent is assigned a focal interpretation: in this case, I assume that focus falls on polarity and all overt syntactic material, including the subject, constitutes a single informational domain, the background (Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal 2009). With gerunds, infinitives and absolute constructions – all of them dependent, subordinate predications –, the crucial question is whether some informational articulation is available in subordinate domains, i.e. whether informational partitions belong to the class of ‘root phenomena’ or ‘main clause phenomena’. If a focus-background articulation is possible both in main clauses and in subordinates, then the postverbal subjects in (6)-(8) should be in focus, but for some reason they are not, and it is not due to the competition with another focal position. Assuming instead that subordinate clauses lack any proper informational articulation, there is no point in raising the question of why the postverbal subjects in (6)-(8) are not foci. As the question about the existence of information structure in subordinates has no clear answer at the moment, I leave the issue for future research. I will simply assume that the non-focal interpretation of subjects in (6)-(8) has nothing to do with fronting or A-bar movement. Basic evidence in favour of the non-focal status of the subject in

all the examples up to now is provided by the impossibility of inserting contrastive tags, as shown in (9), where the same examples in (1)-(8) are used⁴ (the strings are odd, except for echoic uses with emphatic stress, discussed below):

- (9) a. *¿Qué libros ha comprado ella (*, no él)?*
b. *LIBROS DE CINE ha comprado ella (*, no él).*
c. *Muchos libros ha comprado ella (*, no él).*
d. *Eso dijo ella (*, no él).*
e. *Nada les debe ella (*, no él).*
f. *Habiendo llegado ella (#, no él)...*
g. *Después de haber ganado ellos (#, no ellas)...*
h. *Llegada ella (#, no él)...*

The claim that postverbal subjects are not focal in all of these contexts may seem to be too strong, in view of certain facts: on the one hand, a contrastive focal interpretation of the subject can be obtained by means of emphatic stress in any of the examples (for instance, in (4), *Eso dijo ELLA* ‘That’s what SHE said’); on the other hand, the subject in (7) seems to also have, in addition to a non-focal interpretation, a narrow focus interpretation that is not present in the remaining examples, equivalent to ‘After THEY won...’. However, these facts do not invalidate the said claim.

With respect to focus marking by emphatic stress, it should be noted that it must be distinguished from the default strategy for focus assignment in Spanish, by which unmarked informational focus corresponds to the rightmost constituent – the prosodically prominent position where nuclear stress is assigned. Emphatic stress can affect any constituent, and it works as a last resort strategy to mark just those constituents that would not be in focus otherwise (for instance, a preverbal subject, as in *JUAN llamó por teléfono* ‘JUAN phoned / It was JUAN who phoned’, from Zubizarreta 1998: 76): this is why it may override syntactic marking of focus by word order. Thus, if the speaker needs to resort to emphatic stress to mark focus, a common motivation for such operation is that the focalized phrase occupies a position that otherwise would not be under narrow focus. This confirms that focus marking of a constituent by phonological means is perfectly compatible with such constituent being non-focal by word order, which is what happens in the examples above. Given this, emphatic stress as a phonological strategy for narrow focus marking should be kept apart from the overall discussion in what follows.

As for the second fact, the possible narrow focus reading of the postverbal subject in (7), it is important to keep focus distinct from con-

trast: strong pronouns may receive contrastive readings also when they are not narrow foci (cf. Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal 2018 for an informal discussion), and maybe what speakers perceive in (7) is simply the relevance of contextual alternatives in the interpretation of the subject pronoun – briefly, a contrastive reading that is not necessarily an effect of narrow focus.

The generalization obtained from the previous examples, then, states that syntactically induced inversion is not associated to focus. There could be different ways to account for this. In section 3 I will explore an approach based on the idea that the lack of informational relevance of inversion in these cases is precisely related to its being syntactically induced.

2.2. Type 2: ‘Free’ inversion

The second group of constructions that must appear in a description of subject inversion in Spanish is the one covered by the term ‘free inversion’. In these cases inversion is not compulsory, is not triggered by a syntactic constraint, and the opposite pattern – SV, with a preverbal subject – is a well-formed option. Free inversion is, then, an exploitation of word order possibilities that depend on the speaker’s choice. Crucially, free inversion is optional. As a reviewer rightly pointed out, so-called free inversion does not entirely look like a matter of free choice when the SV pattern is available but clearly marked with respect to the alternative VS pattern. In fact, in examples like the Italian ones in (10), brought to my attention by a reviewer, and their Spanish counterpart in (11), VS is perfectly natural (cf. 10a), whereas SV is only acceptable either with the preverbal subject as a contrastive topic, in response to a previous utterance like *Non è capitato nessun incidente* ‘No accident happened’ (cf. 10b), or when some extra constituent is added in postverbal position (cf. 10c).

- (10) a. È capitato un incidente.
 be.PRS.3SG happen.PPT an accident
 ‘An accident happened.’
- b. #Un incidente è capitato.
 an accident be.PRS.3SG happen.PPT
- c. Un incidente è capitato {ieri / a Gianni}.
 an accident be.PRS.3SG happen.PPT yesterday to Gianni
 ‘An accident happened {yesterday / to Gianni}.’

These facts suggest that certain prototypical instances of free

inversion might not correspond to an unconstrained choice by the speaker; similar facts can be observed in sentences with SV / VS alternations after preposing of locative phrases (cf. 13, 14c). Some clarification is due in order to explain more precisely how I use the term ‘free inversion’. In my view, inversion in (10) is free, from a strictly syntactic point of view, since it is a legitimate syntactic operation that the grammatical system tolerates. The constraints that severely limit the acceptability of SV in (10), on the other hand, are not a part of the grammatical system. (10b) requires a very specific context to be felicitously uttered because a verb like *capitare* ‘happen’ is not particularly informative with respect to a subject like *un incidente* ‘an accident’; when SV is chosen, either the subject is processed as a topic and a very restrictive context is needed to obtain an appropriate predication relation, or an all-focus reading must be available, which is hardly possible, given that such reading is already obtained with VS at no cost, in a natural way. As for the effects of added complements and modifiers in (10c), they can be again derived from the non-informative status of the verb with respect to the subject: the extra constituents provide content which makes the predication more informative. Thus, the constraints result from the combination of SV / VS with non-syntactic factors, which blurs our intuitions about the possibility of resorting to subject inversion. I can still maintain that the alternation in (10a)-(10b) can be described as an instance of free inversion because the syntax of Italian – and Spanish – allows for both orders, and this core property is not affected by the consequences that extra-grammatical factors may have on acceptability and contextualization.

Once this point has been clarified, I turn to a presentation of the varieties of free inversion in Spanish:

UNACCUSATIVE INVERSION

- (11) *Ha ocurrido una desgracia.*
Have.PRS.3SG happened a *misfortune*
‘Something tragic has happened.’

INVERSION WITH UNERGATIVES AND TRANSITIVES (VS, VOS, VSO)

- (12) *Ha ganado la plaza ella.*
have.PRS.3SG won the post *she*
‘SHE won the post. / She’s the one who got the post.’

LOCATIVE INVERSION

- (13) *Sobre la colina se alzaba una fortaleza.*
 on the hill REF stand.PST.3SG a fortress
 ‘A fortress stood on the hilltop.’

A combination of different factors makes unaccusative inversion (as in (11)) the core case of subject inversion. The lexical properties of unaccusative verbs favour inversion with an informational ‘integration’ of the subject into the predicate, i.e. athetic, wide focus interpretation: the subject is an internal argument, with a low degree of thematic prominence (usually, interpreted as theme) and the predicate is aspectually eventive. In fact, VS is the unmarked order with unaccusatives and so-called ‘presentative’ constructions. This kind of inversion is attested even in those languages in the Romance domain in which inversion is subject to heavy restrictions, like French. Postverbal subjects with unergative and transitive verbs (as in (12)) are perfectly grammatical in Spanish in VS, VSO and VOS orders, but other languages are more restrictive, as the factors involved in these cases – thematically prominent subjects, two postverbal arguments – do not favour inversion with ‘integration’ of the subject. With unergatives and transitives, VS is not the unmarked order, in the absence of other factors.

A third variety of free inversion is locative inversion, illustrated in (13). A non-subject constituent appears in preverbal position, whereas in (11) and (12) the order is verb-initial. In all three contexts VS is in competition with SV: a preverbal subject is always an option, as shown by the acceptability of the examples in (14).

- (14) a. *La desgracia ocurrió ayer.*
 the misfortune happen.PST.3SG yesterday
 ‘The tragic event happened yesterday.’
- b. *Ella ha ganado la plaza.*
 she have.PRS.3SG win.PPT the post
 ‘She has won the post.’
- c. *Sobre la colina una fortaleza se alzaba majestuosa.*
 on the hill a fortress REF stand.PST.3SG magnificent
 ‘On the hilltop a fortress stood magnificent.’

As the literature has repeatedly pointed out, free inversion is systematically associated with a focal interpretation of the subject. In unaccusative inversion the subject is in most cases a part of wide focus,

as in VSO in Spanish; in VS with unergatives a narrow focus reading is usually preferred – though wide focus is possible too, depending on the context – and in VOS it is clearly predominant, if not obligatory (cf. Leonetti 2017: §2 for the cross-linguistic distribution of wide focus inversion in Romance). Locative inversion favours a wide focus reading, with informational integration of the postverbal subject into the predicate. Thus, the generalization concerning free inversion simply states that the postverbal subject is interpreted as focus – or, if one prefers to choose the opposite perspective, that the subject must be non-topical (Giurgea 2017). The distinction between wide focus and narrow focus depends on the complex interaction of different factors (word order and discourse context, but also lexical aspect, thematic prominence, definiteness, among others) and is not relevant at this point; in what follows I will specify the kind of focus involved in the data only if it is strictly necessary to avoid confusion (cf. 3.2 for some remarks).

It is important to add some clarification concerning two points: one is the status of existential constructions, and the other is the use of the term ‘locative inversion’.

Existential constructions are clearly related to unaccusative inversion and presentative contexts, since the postverbal DP in existentials is always in focus – usually wide focus, but also narrow focus – and introduces new referents in discourse. This suggests that they belong to the same group of unaccusative inversion, but the postverbal DP in Standard Spanish existentials with *haber* ‘have’ behaves as a direct object, and not as a subject; this is enough to exclude existentials from the list of data considered here, which is built on Standard Spanish. However, in certain non-standard varieties of Spanish, as well as in many Romance languages, the postverbal DP actually is the subject and shows agreement with the existential verb (see Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina 2015 for an analysis of the DP – the pivot – as a predicate in the underlying representation of the clause, although in a group of languages and dialects it behaves as a subject). If these cases are taken into account, existential contexts should have a place among other representatives of free inversion. Nevertheless, their categorization is problematic: on the one hand, the postverbal subject – if it really is an argument, which is dubious – is always focal, as in free inversion; on the other, inversion seems to be compulsory, because there is no possibility of still having an existential sentence with a canonical SV order – such option may well be grammatical, but is no longer existential, which means that subject inversion is not optional (Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina 2015: 129-130). Thus, existential contexts represent an apparent counterexample for the distinction between two types of postverbal subjects, since inversion is not free,

and at the same time is associated to focus. In my view, the distinction can be maintained, with existential contexts in the same group as unaccusative inversion, at least in certain languages, if we accept that existentials are specialized constructions with idiosyncratic properties and a designated function – indicating the presence of something in a contextual domain (Francez 2007): their marked status overrides the general principles that underlie the distinction between two types of inversion. More precisely, the focal nature of the postverbal DP is encoded in the construction, instead of being derived by means of general principles. As a result, the construction occupies a marginal position in the distinction. I exclude existential constructions from the analysis in what follows.

With regards to locative inversion in the sense in which I am using the term, it is important to take into account that the fronted locative phrase must be interpreted as an initial topic. Some cases of what at first sight looks like locative inversion actually belong to Non-Focal Fronting, with a fronted locative that is neither topic nor narrow focus, and in such cases the postverbal subject is not interpreted as focus. This might give rise to some confusion. The examples in (15) and (16) will hopefully offer a clearer view of the consequences of the topical or non-topical status of the fronted constituent.

- (15) *Aquí me crié yo.*
 Here REF grow.PST.1SG I
 ‘It was here I grew up.’ / ‘Here, it was me who grew up.’
- (16) *En la mesa está el dinero.* (from RAE 2009: §40.4c)
 In the table be.PRS.2SG the money
 ‘It’s on the table where the money is.’ / ‘On the table, you’ll find the money.’

As shown by the translations, the examples can receive two readings, correlated to two slightly different intonational contours: in one of them, the locative is not a topic, the sentence represents a single informational unit (Non-Focal Fronting), and the postverbal subject is not in focus, so that we have an instance of type 1 inversion; in the other, the locative is a topic, the sentence is thus informationally split into topic and comment, and the postverbal subject is in focus, so that we have an instance of type 2 inversion. Only in the second case is there an intonational break after the locative. When the locative is a topic, the subject can be preverbal, provided the predicate is informative enough (for instance, in *Aquí yo me crié rodeado de naturaleza* ‘Here I grew up surrounded by nature’), and the word order pattern fits in the same group of free inversion. In fact, although the representative examples of

free inversion are verb-initial sentences, it is usual to assume that they are not topic-less: an often implicit stage topic (Erteschik-Shir 1997, Lahousse 2011), usually a locative or temporal expression, plays the role of sentence topic in the absence of a canonical ‘aboutness topic’ and specifies the frame within which the predication holds. Therefore, in sentences like (11) (*Ha ocurrido una desgracia* ‘Something tragic has happened’), for instance, an implicit stage topic introduces the place where the event is supposed to occur. Once stage topics are taken into account, all cases of free inversion reproduce a topic-comment split, either with an implicit topic, as in (11) and (12), or with an overt locative topic, as in (13). This is relevant for the distinction between the two types of inversion, and I will deal with this issue again in section 3.3.

Going back to the data in (11)-(13), the generalization on free inversion is, then, just the opposite of the generalization on syntactically induced inversion: in free inversion, the subject is always in focus. The two generalizations lay the bases for a simple distinction between two types of postverbal subject. Among the questions that such distinction may raise, I would like to address two in what follows: (a) as the generalizations correlate the focal / non-focal status of subjects with the optionality / obligatoriness of inversion, how are optionality and focus related (if they are)?; (b) can the correlation have consequences for other grammatical phenomena? Section 3 aims at sketching informal answers to questions (a) and (b).

3. *Effects of competition*

3.1. *Economy and competition*

Question (a) invites us to determine whether focus and optionality are correlated in subject inversion. If the generalizations presented in section 2 are sound, they should indeed be correlated. I believe that in fact they are, in virtue of some basic economy principles. The core intuition can be traced back to classic structuralist linguistics, and has revived in recent discussions on economy principles in generative grammar (Adger 1996, Reinhart 2006). If an element or a construction A is used in a context C, its presence may be either obligatory, due to some grammatical rule, or optional, if it results from the speaker’s choice (optionality implies that the speaker has to have a choice). Only in the second case does A compete with its absence and possibly with other options, and only in the second case its presence has some interpretive import. In other words, only when the speaker makes a choice, the cho-

sen item / construction is significant. What is optional makes available an interpretation which would otherwise not arise.⁵

The behaviour of strong pronouns in null-subject languages provides us with a nice example of the effects of this principle. In null-subject languages, speakers can choose between overt items (strong pronouns or lexical DPs) and ellipsis for the expression of subjects; strong pronouns are in competition with their null counterpart – ellipsis – when they are used as subjects, but not in other contexts in which ellipsis is not licensed (for instance, inside prepositional phrases). Descriptive grammars rely on notions like contrast and emphasis to represent the meaning conveyed by strong pronouns, but these pronouns are not emphatic or contrastive in all their uses: it is crucial to note that they can be so characterized only in the contexts in which they compete with ellipsis – i.e. as subjects. This suggests that contrast and emphasis are not inherent, encoded features of the meaning of pronouns, but are rather pragmatically inferred as a result of the choice of the pronoun in a context in which ellipsis is also an acceptable option; in other words, contrast and emphasis arise as a result of the competition between the two options in the expression of subjects (overt vs null). More precisely, when pronouns compete with the null option (the unmarked one), their presence must be significant, because it must be justified, typically by conveying some kind of meaning that the unmarked option is unable to convey, such as emphatic or contrastive meaning (see Mayol 2010 and Leonetti 2014); when pronouns do not alternate with ellipsis, for some grammatical reason, there is no choice, and they do not trigger emphatic or contrastive readings. Thus, competition with alternative options makes speaker's choices significant.

The core idea of economy as interface principle that underlies this view of the interpretation of pronouns, as well as several recent treatments of phenomena like scope, binding, *wh*-movement and focus, is that to establish the properties of a given linguistic construction, other constructions that can alternate with it must be considered. Optional operations are activated when alternative possibilities are discarded, and they must be rewarded by significant interpretive effects. The main goal of approaches inspired by economy principles is simplifying the grammatical system by removing certain features and elements that need not be encoded in lexical items or in syntactic nodes; in the case of strong pronouns, emphasis and contrast should not be encoded, since they can be derived from competition with null subjects. With this in mind, it is worth reviewing the facts concerning subject inversion.

Spanish allows both preverbal and postverbal subjects. In certain contexts (type 1 inversion), subject inversion is compulsory, so that alternation

with the opposite option – preverbal subject – is excluded. As there is no competition with any other alternative, this kind of inversion is devoid of interpretive import, i.e. it is not significant, and the subject is not in focus. In a second group of contexts (type 2 inversion), inversion alternates with non-inversion, and is thus optional; therefore, it must have interpretive effects at some level, in order to justify the existence of the two options, and it works as a device for marking the subject as focal information. This rule is what underlies the observed correlation between the optionality of inversion and the focal status of the subject. I assume that the expected interpretive payoff when inversion is significant is focus. One could wonder why. It is because in languages like Spanish the grammatical subsystem associated with variation in word order is Information Structure: the speaker's choice activates the application of the principles governing informational articulation (topic-comment, focus-background), with information focus aligned with the rightmost constituent. If inversion is not optional, the default principles of Information Structure do not apply to the resulting string. Notice that the approach implies a view of Information Structure as a post-syntactic component of grammar, and an indirect mapping from syntax to such level, instead of a strict encoding of discourse features in syntactic structure (Erteschik-Shir 1997, Reinhart 2006, Costa 2004, Neeleman & Vermeulen (eds.) 2012, Espinal & Villalba 2015).

An interesting piece of evidence in favour of the correlation between optionality and focus can be found in the position of subjects in Italian *wh*-interrogatives. In Italian, subjects of *wh*-interrogatives are typically postverbal, like in Spanish (cf. Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal 2018 for some comparative remarks). However, certain interrogatives admit preverbal subjects: *why*-questions are a good example. The alternation between preverbal and postverbal subjects is perfectly acceptable in (17), from Bocci & Pozzan (2014: 34):

- (17) a. *Perché* Gianni *telefona?*
 why Gianni call.PRS.3SG
 b. *Perché telefona* Gianni?
 why call.PRS.3SG Gianni
 ‘Why is John calling?’

As Belletti (2004) and others have pointed out, if the interrogative sentence disallows preverbal subjects, the subject cannot be focal, be it *in situ*, marginalized or right-dislocated. Crucially, Bocci & Pozzan (2014) show that in *why*-questions like the ones in (17) the postverbal subject, if it is not right-dislocated or prosodically marginalized, is interpreted as narrow focus (see also Rizzi 2011 and Bianchi, Bocci &

Cruschina 2017). The same effect can be observed in Spanish *why*-questions. This looks like a clear effect of competition between options: if the postverbal position is the only possibility licensed by syntax, the subject cannot be in focus, but when it alternates with the preverbal position, the subject has a narrow focus interpretation. It is a consequence of the correlation between optionality of inversion and focus.

At this point, once the distinction between two types of postverbal subjects has been established and a way to account for it has been informally put forward in terms of economy, we can discuss two predictions that follow from this perspective:

1. Postverbal subjects of type 1 behave like preverbal subjects. When inversion is syntactically induced and has no consequences for interpretation, a postverbal subject should not display distinctive properties that make it different from a preverbal one. Therefore, it is expected to behave as a canonical subject.
2. Non-canonical subjects belong to type 2 inversion. This is a trivial consequence of prediction 1: if type 1 inversion cannot produce non-canonical subjects, then all phenomena involving non-canonical behaviour of subjects must belong to type 2. More precisely, non-canonicity should be systematically related to focus.

I believe that both predictions are borne out. Some evidence is presented in the following section.

3.2. Consequences of the distinction

Since a basic property of Spanish is being a null-subject language, we expect that, whenever an adequate antecedent can be recovered from the context that ensures that the referent of the null subject is identifiable, an overt subject should be able to undergo ellipsis, without significant changes in the overall interpretation. This is in general true of preverbal subjects. Interestingly, type 1 postverbal subjects satisfy this expectation, as shown in (18), where the inverted subjects of the previous examples in (1)-(5) have been dropped, and the grammatical properties of the context remain unchanged.

- (18) a. *¿Qué libros ha comprado?*
b. *LIBROS DE CINE ha comprado.*
c. *Muchos libros se ha comprado.*
d. *Eso dijo.*
e. *Nada les debe.*

Type 2 inversion, on the other hand, bans subject ellipsis, for a simple reason: type 2 postverbal subjects are focal, and null subjects cannot be focal (they cannot introduce new information or be contrastive; cf. RAE 2009: §40.1ñ). Apparently, subject ellipsis in examples like (11)-(13) is perfectly acceptable, but the resulting strings in (19)-(21) all correspond to sentences with preverbal subjects, which means that ellipsis yields a significant change in the interpretation.

- (19) *Ha ocurrido.*
 have.PRS.3SG happen.PPT
 'It has happened.'
- (20) *Ha ganado la plaza.*
 have.PRS.3SG win.PPT the post
 '(S)he won the post.'
- (21) *#Sobre la colina se alzaba.*
 On the hill REF stand.PST.3SG
 'On the hill it stood.'

Thus, null subjects are possible in type 1 inversion, but are incompatible with type 2. Only type 1 postverbal subjects behave like preverbal subjects with respect to this property, which is in accordance with prediction 1.

Another salient property of preverbal subjects in Spanish is their tendency to exclude bare nouns, in particular if they are not modified. Bare nouns as postverbal subjects, especially with unaccusative verbs, are perfectly acceptable. Though the distribution of bare nouns is heavily dependent on lexical features of the verbal predicate, it can be safely assumed that subject inversion and focus are major factors in the licensing of bare nominals, even with unergative and transitive verbs (cf. Laca 1999 for a comprehensive view). A look at the two series of examples illustrating type 1 and type 2 inversion confirms that only type 2 allows for bare nouns as subjects: the examples in (22), corresponding to type 1, are all ungrammatical, whereas the examples in (23), corresponding to type 2, are acceptable, due to the effects of focus.

- (22) a. *¿Qué libros han comprado estudiantes?⁶
 what books have.PRS.3PL buy.PPT students
 b. *LIBROS DE CINE han comprado estudiantes.
 books on cinema have.PRS.3PL buy.PPT students
 c. *Muchos libros han comprado estudiantes.
 many books have.PRS.3PL buy.PPT students

- d. **Eso* *dijeron* *estudiantes*.
 that say.PST.3PL *students*
- e. **Nada* *les* *deben* *estudiantes*.
 nothing to-them owe.PRS.3PL *students*
- (23) a. *Han* *ocurrido* *desgracias*.
 have.PRS.3PL happen.PPT *misfortunes*
 ‘Some tragic events have happened.’
- b. *Han* *ganado* *las plazas* *extranjeros*.
 have.PRS.3PL win.PPT the posts *foreigners*
 ‘Foreigners won the posts.’
- c. *Sobre las colinas* *se alzaban* *fortalezas*.
 on the hills REF stand.PST.3PL *fortresses*
 ‘On the hills stood fortresses.’

Again, only type 1 subjects display the typical features of preverbal subjects, thus behaving like canonical subjects, as pointed out in prediction 1.

The facts about bare nouns as subjects find their counterpart in the distribution of definite and indefinite DPs, and the well-known Definiteness Effect. Only type 2 inversion – more precisely, only existential constructions and unaccusative inversion in certain languages – places constraints against the insertion of definite DPs. Such constraints are never observed in type 1 inversion. This is a salient asymmetry between the two types of inversion, and I assume that it is – once again – an effect of the different informational value of the subject in the two paradigms. More surprising is the fact that the reverse constraint, the ban against indefinite DPs – what Drijkoningen & Kampers-Mahne (2001, 2008) call “the counter-indefiniteness effect” –, is only found in some instances of type 1 inversion, as shown in (24) with French Stylistic Inversion (example from Drijkoningen & Kampers-Mahne 2001):

- (24) a. *Quel gâteau a mangé Jean?*
 which cookie have.PRS.3SG eat.PPT Jean
 ‘Which cookie has John eaten?’
- b. **Quel gâteau a mangé quelqu’un?*
 which cookie have.PRS.3SG eat.PPT someone
 ‘Which cookie has someone eaten?’

In (24), Stylistic Inversion is possible with a definite DP – a name –, but odd with a non-specific indefinite like *quelqu’un* ‘someone’. Drijkoningen & Kampers-Mahne (2001) account for the contrast in pragmatic terms: (24b) is infelicitous because of the clash between posing a

question about an entity and introducing such entity as new information in the same question. I agree with this proposal; the unacceptability of *quelqu'un* also seems to be due to the fact that the indefinite must have a weak, purely existential reading, and this is hard to obtain in a non-focal position like the kind of position where the subject occurs in (24b). Weak indefinites are obviously felicitous as postverbal subjects in type 2 inversion. Therefore, on the one hand, the two types of inversion tend to obey contrary constraints as far as definite and indefinite DPs are concerned; on the other hand, postverbal subjects in type 1 share some features with canonical preverbal subjects, such as the preference for definite DPs and the tendency to exclude weak indefinites (except inthetic contexts). Information-structural notions play a major role in this contrast, and prediction 1 is again confirmed.

So far, I have gathered evidence for prediction 1 and for the overall relevance of the distinction from three empirical domains: null subjects, bare nouns and (in)definiteness. Additional evidence can be found in disparate areas of Romance syntax. One interesting case concerns Weak Cross-Over (WCO) effects: as Belletti (2004) observed for Italian and Ortega-Santos (2016) confirmed for Spanish, focused subjects in free inversion (VOS) trigger WCO effects, but postverbal subjects in interrogatives do not. The contrast in (25), from Ortega-Santos (2016: 132), shows that the two types of inversion produce different results in reference assignment, and (26) demonstrates that Focus Fronting patterns with *wh*-interrogatives, as expected.

- (25) a. **Ahora mismo, en su_i apartamento vive PEDRO_j, no Juan.*
 now right in his apartment live.PRS.3SG Pedro not Juan
 'At this point, PEDRO lives in his apartment, not Juan.'
- b. *Ahora mismo, ¿en cuál de sus_i apartamentos vive Pedro_i?*
 now right in which of his apartments live.PRS.3SG Pedro
 'At this point, in which of his apartments does Pedro live?'
- (26) *No, EN SU_i APARTAMENTO vive Pedro_i.*
 no in his apartment live.PRS.3SG Pedro
 'No, it's IN HIS APARTMENT where Pedro lives.'

Ortega-Santos (2016) concludes that the contrast derives from the postverbal subject occupying two different positions in (25a) – type 2 inversion – and (25b) – type 1 inversion. This may be true, but it seems that the crucial condition for WCO is, in any case, the focal / non-focal status of the antecedent DP – *Pedro*, in this case (see Erteschik-Shir 1997: 84 for discussion). I will stay neutral with respect to the possible

structural representation of the two classes of inversion. I am rather interested in exploring the array of phenomena that depend on the distinction and accounting for them in terms of Information Structure, without relying on any particular claim on structure. Thus, I leave this issue open.

As prediction 1 seems to be borne out, now I turn to prediction 2: non-canonical subjects belong to type 2 inversion. Postverbal subjects are described as non-canonical when they display properties like the following ones: not controlling agreement with the verb; being indefinite or non-referential; not having autonomous reference; not being interpreted as agents or external arguments; being focal instead of topical. Three of these properties are indisputably connected to type 2 inversion, and are not found in type 1: one is the preference for indefiniteness or non-referentiality, with the typical Definiteness Effect; a closely related property is lacking autonomous reference; the third one is, obviously, being in focus. Notice that the first two are actually found in a subset of the contexts of type 2 inversion, namely unaccusative inversion – with existential constructions as a special case (cf. 2.2). As for lack of control of agreement on the verb, it is usually connected with type 2 as well, in particular – again – with unaccusative inversion (see Lobo & Martins 2017 for Romance data, and Bentley 2013, Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina 2015: §4.3 for a study of the patterns of number agreement control in existentials and inversion with intransitives); the complexities of agreement impoverishment with postverbal subjects certainly deserve a more detailed comparative study, but it is a striking fact that some of the central properties of non-canonical subjects are systematically found in type 2 inversion, and, more specifically, in contexts that favour an informational integration of the subject into wide focus. This suggests that a basic condition for non-canonical subjects could be not just being in focus, but being included in wide focus. Finally, the condition on thematic roles –having a prominent thematic role or not – again points towards unaccusative and locative inversion, where subjects are non-agentive, as the prototypical locus of non-canonicity. The conclusion is that prediction 2 seems to be on the right track but needs to be refined: it is true that most representative cases of non-canonical postverbal subjects are found in the domain of free inversion, but it seems that they are related to a subset of the contexts of free inversion, i.e. unaccusative inversion, which cannot be coincidental, since unaccusative inversion is the core case of type 2 inversion, the least marked and the kind of inversion that is most easily found in all Romance languages.⁷

3.3. *The fronted element*

Up to now, the basic typology of inversion that I have discussed has been built on the correlation between optionality and focus. There is another aspect of the distinction between type 1 and type 2 that deserves a brief commentary: it is the nature of the fronted or initial element. If we exclude subject inversion with gerunds, infinitives and absolute constructions, where there is no fronting operation, the central cases of syntactically induced inversion (type 1) show a consistent pattern: inversion is triggered by the fronting of a ‘non-topic’ phrase – a narrow focus, in *wh*-constructions and Focus Fronting; a ‘neither topic nor focus’ phrase, in Non-Focal Fronting. Conversely, in free inversion (type 2) a single pattern is not so evident, but if verb-initial sentences (VS, VSO, VOS) are analysed as sentences that include a covert stage topic, along the lines of Erteschik-Shir (1997), then a consistent schema emerges too: it is a simple topic-comment schema, either with an overt topic – in Locative Inversion – or with an implicit stage topic that provides a spatio-temporal frame for the predication. As the topic is a locative, the subject argument cannot be the aboutness topic in the informational articulation. I am assuming that both initial overt locative topics and implicit stage topics occupy a clause-internal position – basically, the preverbal subject position – and are not dislocated. It is immaterial for the purposes of this discussion whether such position is Spec, TP or some other slot; the crucial point is that the preverbal subject position is a structurally low position for topics, inside the TP or IP layer, that has different properties from the peripheral, clause-external, structurally higher position of Left Dislocation (cf. Laca 2013: 204-210 for the relevance of the distinction between internal and external topics for the distribution of bare plurals in Spanish). Left-dislocated topics – in Romance, with Clitic Left Dislocation – are all clause-external elements, and these external topics have no effects on the informational organization of the remaining constituents. They are simply irrelevant for subject inversion. Only clause-internal topics count for type 2 inversion.⁸ The relevance of the initial topic for inversion is particularly salient in the complex typology of inversion constructions of Bantu languages: according to Marten & van der Wal (2014), most types of Bantu inversion include the presence of a focal postverbal subject argument, as their defining feature, and the differences between constructions relate to the nature of the topic phrase (its categorial status, the possibility of agreement with the verb, the thematic constraints on possible topics).

The question is how this distinction concerning initial elements integrates into an economy-based approach, where optionality and competition are the crucial pieces of the system. Why is obligatory inversion

triggered by fronting of a non-topic? Intuitively, this operation blocks any possibility of assigning a topic-comment partition and, as a consequence, deactivates the default mechanisms of Information Structure (information focus is no longer aligned with the rightmost constituent, for instance). Only marked operations are still possible: it is the case of narrow focus marking by fronting plus emphatic stress in Focus Fronting. Free inversion, on the other hand, represents the opposite strategy: the initial stage / locative topic gives rise to a topic-comment partition, and the default machinery of Information Structure is at work. Where does competition with alternative options fit? The two natural options are (a) having a potentially topical subject, in preverbal position, or (b) having a non-topical subject, and turning a non-subject (with a strong preference for a locative) into topic. The second option results in type 2 inversion.

These are speculative ideas, and more research is certainly needed to understand the role of the fronted element in inversion schemas. However, in my view the correlation between fronted non-topics and induced inversion, on one side, and fronted topics and free inversion, on the other, is worth analysing, and offers a useful descriptive tool.

4. Conclusions

The central claim in this paper is that two types of subject inversion should be distinguished in Spanish and possibly in Romance languages. The starting point is the observation that in certain contexts subject inversion is obligatory, and in other contexts it is optional. The first group (type 1) includes *wh*-interrogatives, Focus Fronting, Non-Focal Fronting and constructions with gerunds, infinitives and participles: in these constructions the postverbal subject is not in focus. The second group (type 2) corresponds to free inversion, and includes various verb-initial patterns – VS, VSO, VOS – and locative inversion: in these cases the postverbal subject is always in focus. Since a robust correlation emerges between (non-)optionality of inversion and the (non-)focal status of the subject, I derive the informational value of the subject from the (non-)optionality of inversion by means of general economy principles. Two predictions are put forward. The first one is that inverted subjects of type 1 maintain the characteristic properties of preverbal subjects, contrary to inverted subjects of type 2, and in fact in the first type of inversion subjects can be null, bare nouns are mostly rejected, and there are no definiteness effects, like with preverbal, canonical subjects; in the second type of inversion, subjects exhibit the opposite behaviour.

These results show that the distinction, as it is established, contributes to a simple and elegant account of several aspects of Romance inversion. The second prediction states that so-called ‘non-canonical’ subjects must be instances of free inversion (type 2): this is partially confirmed. Finally, another correlation is proposed between the two types of inversion and the informational status of the initial element: it must be a ‘non-topic’ phrase in type 1, but it is a stage / locative topic – often implicit – in type 2.

The proposal can be a useful contribution from two points of view. On the one hand, it offers a descriptive tool that permits us to organize a set of data in a simple way. On the other, it provides an account of the facts that avoids unnecessary complications in the syntax and resorts to general interface strategies.

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Notes

¹ I assume the traditional characterization of Spanish and Italian as SVO languages, in the sense that SVO is the unmarked word order pattern for both of them, i.e. the pattern that is compatible with the largest variety of informational articulations and, thus, with the largest variety of discourse environments (cf. Leonetti 2017 for some remarks). However, in what follows nothing particularly significant hinges on this assumption. Subject inversion in French has been extensively studied (Lahousse 2011, Marandin 2011); unfortunately, here I cannot do justice to all the findings in the recent literature on inversion in French, which would deserve a lengthy, detailed discussion.

² In Italian, Focus Fronting is actually more permissive with preverbal subjects than in Spanish. This is an issue I cannot discuss in this paper.

³ Imperatives could be included in this group, if we accept that all alleged cases of

preverbal subjects of imperatives (cf. *Tú quédate ahí* ‘You stay there’, from RAE 2009: §42.4b) are actually to be analysed as left-dislocated topics or even vocatives, as often claimed. However, it is not completely clear that imperatives in Spanish obligatorily require postverbal subjects. As the issue is not definitely settled, I exclude imperatives from the discussion.

⁴ The test only excludes narrow focus readings.

⁵ It is worth noting that even in cases where two alternating grammatical constructions look like truly equivalent options some subtle difference in interpretation can usually be found between them. A nice example is provided by the possibility of expressing narrow focus in Italian either by focus fronting or *in situ*: Bianchi (2013) shows that the two options are subject to different constraints and have different interpretive consequences.

⁶ It is true that bare nouns are acceptable as postverbal subjects in *wh*-interrogatives if they are licensed by an unaccusative verb, as in *¿Cuándo han aparecido manchas?* ‘When did stains appear?’, which means that they are not banned from the subject position in an absolute way. But it is also true that the postverbal subject position in interrogatives, being non-focal, cannot license bare nouns as subjects of unergative and transitive verbs, which the postverbal subject position in free inversion actually does, with narrow focus on the subject. Thus, the distribution of bare nouns is relevant for the distinction between the two inversion types.

⁷ As a reviewer pointed out, the central, prominent position of unaccusative inversion inside the domain of type 2 inversion brings to the forefront the important role of lexical / semantic restrictions on free inversion and, as a consequence, raises the suspicion that this kind of subject inversion is actually not as free as it might look (see a brief discussion on this point in section 2.2 above). One could in fact wonder why unaccusative inversion should be the prototypical case of free inversion, or why other types of subject inversion are less common. I believe that such questions do not pose a real challenge to my view of free inversion. This issue cannot be discussed here (see Leonetti 2017 for a proposal), but the idea, very briefly, is that free inversion is a part of core syntax in Spanish and Italian, while the semantic restrictions are not, and the cross-linguistic distribution of free inversion is a result of additional constraints on the mapping between syntax and Information Structure that may differ from language to language. This implies keeping the syntax of free inversion separated from the factors that determine its acceptability: such factors pertain to other linguistic components.

⁸ Sentences like (14c), *Sobre la colina una fortaleza se alzaba majestuosa* ‘On the hill a fortress stood magnificent’ might look like counterexamples to the generalization that type-2 inversion is linked to the presence of initial locative topics, since they display an initial locative topic followed by a preverbal subject, without inversion. However, they are not a challenge for my claim: if the preverbal subject is supposed to be topical – an internal topic – and the locative is treated as an external, dislocated topic, then the locative has no effects on the word order pattern inside the clause and is perfectly compatible both with SV and with VS (cf. *Sobre la colina se alzaba majestuosa una fortaleza*). In this case, the locative topic does not compete with the subject for the ‘internal topic’ slot.

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