0. **Discourse topic and pronominal structures**

The definition of a topic at the sentential level has typically been linked to a dichotomical distinction involving pairs of concepts such as given versus new information, theme versus rheme or presupposition versus focus.\(^1\) Topics have traditionally been analyzed as the first member of these dichotomies, that is, as given or presupposed information or as themes. The following examples taken from Contreras (1976) illustrate the dichotomy:

(1) \(¿\text{Cómo resultó el experimento?}\)
How result-p-3p the experiment
"How did the experiment result?"

(2) \(\text{El experimento FRACASÓ}\)
The experiment failed
"The experiment failed."

In this example the stressed part of the sentence (in capital letters) corresponds to new information or focus whereas it can be safely assumed that the non-stressed part of the sentence corresponds to given information or topic. The relevance of this dichotomy to understand some of the main syntactic properties of Spanish syntax such as flexible word order and

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\(^1\) There is a vast literature on the subject of topic/focus, theme/rheme distinctions. For a review of topic definitions related to the analysis of Spanish see Casielles (1997). For a discussion of topic as a possible functional feature in Spanish see Zagona (2000). In this paper, I will concentrate on the role that discourse topics have on the spell out of interpretable features in subject and object positions.
intonational patterns has been analyzed since the early work of Contreras (1976). Its study has continued in comparative analyses of complex structures involving null subjects, null objects, clitics and object-fronting structures (topicalization and clitic left dislocation structures) in Romance languages (Rivero 1980, Cinque 1990, Rizzi 1990, 1997, Zubizarreta 1998, among others).

In Spanish, presuposed information or topics are encoded differently in structures containing only pronominal features such as subject agreement markers and object clitics and in structures containing these features and overt subject or object DPs in fronted positions. This difference is related to the organization of given or presupposed information at the discourse level. The following pair of sentences exemplifies how presuposed or given information can be encoded as agreement marking in Spanish:

(3) Un día una viejita estaba en el campo y se encontró un pajarito
One day an old lady was in the field and CL found a little bird
"One day an old lady was in the countryside and found a little bird"

(4) Lo llevó a su casa
CL took-3P PAST to her house
"She took it to her house"

In the conjoined sentences in (3), at the discourse level, two DPs are introduced in argument positions and both constitute new information, but in (4) they are presuposed and each is encoded as morphological agreement. The first DP "una viejita" is encoded as the subject agreement morpheme "-ó" and the second DP "un pajarito" as the object clitic "lo". The availability of interpretable features that can be spelled-out as subject agreement or as clitics or object agreement markers (Suñer 1988, Franco 1993) and can be interpreted as presuposed information poses the question of when overt DPs are required as topics at the sentential level in Spanish. Notice that in (4) the whole sentence can be interpreted as non-presuposed information or focus in spite of the fact that the agreement markers on the verb refer to the two arguments previously introduced in (3). One could speculate that overt topicalized DPs are required to solve potential ambiguities at the discourse level or to allow some form of ranking of main and secondary topics in discourse.

Both requirements could be thought of as discourse-level or pragmatic constraints that do not need to be formalized. Nevertheless, there is a contrast
in discourse between overt subject DPs and null subjects on the one hand and overt object DPs in Clitic Left Dislocation Structures (CLLD) on the other. Along with (4), a sentence such as (5) involving an overt subject DP and strong agreement is possible as a continuation of sentence (3), but sentence (6) involving a CLLD structure, if not ungrammatical, is extremely awkward.

(5)  *La viejita* lo llevó a su casa
    The old lady CL took it to her house
    "The old lady warmed it and gave it food"

(6)  *?Al pajarito* lo llevó a su casa²
    To the little bird CL took to her house
    "The little bird, she took it to her house"

This asymmetry is puzzling. Especially since it has been argued in the recent literature that overt DPs in subject position in Spanish are not in Spec of IP but are either IP adjuncts (Contreras 1991) or specifiers of higher functional projections related to topic positions (Zubizarreta 1998, Zubizarreta 1999b, Ordoñez and Treviño 1999). At the same time, in the traditional analyses given to CLLD structures it has been argued that the fronted object shares some properties with topicalized objects (Cinque 1990, Rizzi 1997). If overt subject DPs and fronted object DPs in CLLD structures are both topic-related, what prevents a CLLD construction from being the continuation of (3)? Both topics have been introduced in discourse by (3). A basic answer to this question would be to propose that the object 'al pajarito' in (6) cannot be topicalized because the subject 'la viejita' remains as the main discourse topic encoded as subject agreement. The fronted object may not co-occur with an overt pre-verbal subject either:

(7)  *?Al pajarito* la viejita lo llevó a su casa
    To the little bird CL took to her house
    "The little bird, she took it to her house"

Curiously, if we introduce a different subject the CLLD construction becomes possible as a continuation of (3):

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² There is always the possibility of stressing *Al pajarito*. Then it becomes the focus of the sentence and the sentence improves considerably. In this paper, I refer to the interpretation of the sentence in which *Al pajarito* is not stressed or focalized.
Notice however that this newly introduced subject must be in post-verbal position, a position associated with new information or focus in Spanish (Zubizarreta 1998). This is shown by the fact that (9) which contains a pre-verbal subject and a fronted object is less preferred when contrasted with (8):

(9) "Al pajarito un cazador lo había herido"
To the little bird a hunter had hurt
"The little bird, a hunter had hurt it"

This sentence shows that it is not enough to introduce a new subject for the object to be allowed in a fronted topic position. The new subject must be in a focused position and only in this case can the fronted object be interpreted as the main topic in the sentence.

Thus, the presence of subject agreement morphology with or without an overt subject as a main discourse topic disallows a CLLD structure as a continuation of (3). Additionally, example (7) shows that it is not possible to have two overt fronted argumental topics in Spanish. This fact is also puzzling given proposals such as Rizzi's (1997) according to which topic positions are recursive and more than one per clause is available in Romance languages. This asymmetry in the distribution of overt DPs in topicalized subject positions and CLLD structures at the discourse level opens the question of what formal constraints operate in the selection of overt DPs at this level.

1. The position of overt DP subjects and objects and their relationship to agreement morphology

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3 I assume that the continuation of topics in discourse can be formalized in the syntax of sentences. This position is based on the existence of morphological markers for topics in pro-drop languages such as Quechua (Wölck 1969). In those languages there is correlation between syntactic position and the use of these markers in discourse. Given that Spanish is also a pro-drop language, I assume that, although topic markers are not overt, they affect the syntactic distribution of subjects and other constituents as topics.

4 (7) does not involve a pause between topics. I take the pause as an indication of a possible hanging topic and not as a CLLD topic (cf. Zagona 2000).

5 It is necessary to note that Rizzi's examples involve an argumental topic and an adverbial topic and not two argumental topics.
Before an answer can be given to the question posed in the previous section, a very important issue regarding current analyses of the syntax of Spanish needs to be addressed: the position of overt pre-verbal subjects and objects. It has been argued in the literature on Spanish syntax that overt subjects are in a position other than the Spec of IP. Contreras (1991) analyzes overt DP subjects as IP adjuncts based on evidence coming from the impossibility of fronting an object if an overt subject is present as in:

(10) *Esta lección María sabe muy bien
This lesson Mary knows very well
"This lesson, Mary knows very well"

This impossibility is accounted for in terms of a revised version of relativized minimality. As an adjunct governor "María" blocks antecedent government of the trace left by "esta lección". In recent analyses, the notion that overt pre-verbal subjects in Spanish are not in Spec of IP has been related to the idea that overt subjects are in a topic-related position. In Romance languages left topic positions are distinguished from left focussed positions with respect to a series of syntactic tests. Unlike focus fronted elements, topics allow for resumptive pronouns or clitics (in CLLD structures) and are recursive. They also lack quantificational force, do not give rise to weak cross over effects, disallow quantificational elements and are compatible with WH operators (Rizzi 1997). If pre-verbal subjects are in a left-fronted position related to topics, they should share some common properties with other argumental left-fronted topics such as indirect (IO) and direct objects (OD). In this section, I will present three recent syntactic analyses that treat pre-verbal subjects and fronted objects in a similar fashion.

The first analysis is Ordoñez and Treviño’s (1999) based on Taraldsen (1992). They propose to treat subject agreement as a clitic. They also point out that structures containing overt subject DPs and fronted IO and DOs exhibit a similar behavior with respect to ellipsis and quantifier and wh-extraction. These similarities lead them to propose that pre-verbal subject DPs can be treated as left topicalized constituents in A'-positions. They also show that the parallelism in behavior disappears in constructions with null subjects. On the basis of this difference they propose an alternative account to the traditional analysis according to which pro occupies Spec of IP. In their

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6 Olarrea (1996) and Zagona (2000) also propose to treat pre-verbal subjects as CLLD structures. Ordoñez and Treviño's (1999) proposal differs from those analyses in their treatment of pro.
view, subject agreement should be analyzed as an argument of the verb bearing case and a th-role. Left-dislocated subjects and objects move to a Topic projection in the higher layer of the clause as proposed by Rizzi (1997) and null subject structures lack a Topic projection. Thus, overt subject and null subject structures have different representations, as shown in:

(11) \[ V + T + CL\ agr_i [VP DP t_i] \ldots \]

(12) \[ TopP [SU_j/DO/IO Top] V + T + CL\ agr_i [t_j t_i] \]

In their analysis, a sentence such as (4) with a null subject has the representation in (11) and sentence (5) with an overt DP has the representation in (12). Both are possible continuations to (3), but (6), with a fronted DO and a structural representation as the one in (12), is not possible. If their analysis is correct the fact that (4), a null subject sentence, and (5), a DO CLLD construction, in their distribution in discourse needs to be explained.

In a different type of analysis, Zubizarreta (1999a) has also proposed a parallel treatment of pre-verbal subject DPs and preposed IOs and DOs. Zubizarreta distinguishes between object preposing and left-dislocation. Whereas object preposing is a strictly local phenomenon, left-dislocation is non-local in Spanish. The following examples from Zubizarreta (1999a: 240) illustrate the contrast:

(13) \[ * La\ carta_i piensa\ María\ que la_i escribió\ Pedro \]
    The letter thinks Maria that CL wrote Pedro
    "The letter, Maria thinks that Pedro wrote it"

(14) \[ La\ carta_i, piensa\ María\ que la_i escribió\ Pedro \]
    The letter thinks Maria that CL wrote Pedro
    "The letter, Maria thinks that Pedro wrote it"

The crucial difference between the two sentences is that (13) does not involve an intonational break or a pause whereas (14) does. (13) is a case of

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7 Due to space limitations the complexity of their analysis cannot be reproduced in this section. They also propose that the relation between subject agreement and the DP is one of clitic doubling. Subject agreement is the head of a complex DP projection, the overt subject DP merges with this head and occupies a specifier position.
object preposing and as such it is ungrammatical because object preposing must be local. (14) is an instance of left-dislocation. It is grammatical because the pause or intonational break indicates that the fronted object is the result of non-local movement. Zubizarreta proposes that in Spanish preposed objects and overt pre-verbal subjects may occupy the same position. This position is Spec of TP_V, a position available to left preposed topics that result from local movement. In this analysis Tense as a functional projection is divided into two projections, a higher projection associated to the V features of the verb (TP_V) and a lower one associated to the N features of the verb (TP_N). Subjects check their Case features in Spec of TP_N leaving Spec of TP_V available for topics. Thus, pre-verbal subject DPs and preposed DOs and IOs may occupy Spec of TP_V. From this analysis it follows that no recursivity of argumental topics is to be expected in Spanish. Zubizarreta illustrates her proposal with the following ungrammatical example (no intonational break or pause between the subject and the object must be made):

(15) *La carta Juan la escribió
   The letter Juan CL wrote
   "The letter, Juan wrote it"

This example clearly parallels our examples in (7) and (9) and Zubizarreta's analysis could account for the unavailability of (6). Still one question remains. Why does the subject have preference over the object with respect to access to Spec of TP_V? In Zubizarreta's analysis the subject has already received case in the lower Spec of TP_N position and therefore it competes for Spec of TP_V with the object as a topic and not for case reasons. Zubizarreta assumes that subjects are the unmarked topic in Spanish. This assumption still leaves open the question of how to formalize the fact that a switch to an object topic may take place in our discourse fragment only in the cases in which a focused subject is introduced.

Additionally, another fact that needs to be accounted for is that (6) does not improve as a continuation of (3) even if it is followed by an intonational break or pause:

(16) ?Al pajaro, lo llevó a su casa
    To the little bird CL took to her house
    "The little bird, she took it to her house"
A third analysis that proposes a parallelism between pre-verbal subjects and CLLD structures in Spanish is the one proposed by Zubizarreta (1999b) based on Zubizarreta (1998). This analysis provides an account for the ungrammaticality of pre-verbal subjects in questions such as (17):

(17) *¿Qué Pedro compró?
    What Pedro bought
    What did Pedro buy?

Zubizarreta (1999b), based on a previous observation (Zubizarreta 1993, 1998), notes that in Spanish object topics do not reconstruct inside VP. On the basis of binding facts that show that fronted objects do not reconstruct to a VP-internal position, she proposes that fronted arguments are located in the Spec position of a functional projection above TP. The head of this projection is an abstract operator that binds an argument variable inside VP. The variable may be either a clitic in the case of fronted objects or strong agreement in the case of pre-verbal subjects. Given that this projection typically binds a clitic, Zubizarreta labels it Clitic Phrase (ClP). The head of this projection should not be confused with morphological clitics or with subject agreement. It is an abstract operator "whose function is to <<externalize>> an argument of a verb v with respect to the tense associated with v." (Zubizarreta 1999b: 256). The structure proposed by Zubizarreta is the following:

(18) [DP₁ [Cl₁ [T [VP...[V e₁...]] ] ] ]

Under this proposal, the ungrammaticality of (17) follows from minimality effects. If pre-verbal subjects are externalized outside the VP via merge with ClP, then the binding relationship between the Cl operator and the subject argument variable inside VP blocks binding of the variable in object position by the Q-operator projected in questions. The blocking effect is shown in (19) taken from Zubizarreta (1999b: 266):

(19) [wh qué] [Wh₁ [e₁ [Q₁ [Pedro₁ [ [Cl₁ [T [VP e₁...]]]]]] ]]

In (19) the Cl operator binding the subject argument variable is closer to the object variable than the Q operator that binds it in an interrogative sentence. I believe that this line analysis could help us understand why (6) is not
available or is deviant in discourse. I will present its advantages in the next section.

2. *Minimality effects at the discourse level*

The analyses presented in the previous section have raised questions about the distribution of preverbal subjects and IO and DO CLLD structures. If they have a similar representation as proposed by Ordoñez and Treviño (1999) then why is there a parallelism between (4) and (5) versus (6)? If overt subjects and objects may compete for the Spec of TP_V position, as proposed by Zubizarreta (1999a) why does the subject prevail over the object in accessing that position? Another question that has emerged by looking at the distribution of CLLD in discourse is why is it the case that a fronted object in a CLLD is only compatible with a post verbal subject? Finally, the distribution of sentences such as (7) and (9) shows that pre-verbal subjects may not co-occur with a DO CLLD construction.

In order to answer the first question, I propose that the parallelism between (4) and (5) in discourse comes from the presence of an abstract operator that binds subject agreement whether there is an overt pre-verbal subject DP or not. In this respect, this proposal differs from Ordoñez and Treviño's (1999). It also differs from Zubizarreta's (1999a) in that it involves an additional element in (4), an operator that determines, by virtue of binding the subject agreement, the default nature of subjects as topics in discourse. This operator may be the head of a Topic Phrase or the head of ClP. However, given that there would be no need to project a ClP in a sentence with a null subject, I would like to propose that the null subject sentence in (4) can be represented as in (20). The preverbal subject sentence in (5) is compatible with a ClP analysis as in (21) or with TP_V analysis as in (22):

(20) $[\text{TopP OP}_1 [\text{TP}_\ldots [\text{VP obj agr}_j V \text{ subj agr}_i ]$]

(21) $[\text{TopP OP}_1 [\text{ClP [DP}_i ] \ldots [\text{obj agr}_j V \text{ subj agr}_i ]$]

(22) $[\text{TopP OP}_1 [\text{TP}_V [\text{DP}_i ] \ldots [\text{obj agr}_j V \text{ subj agr}_i ]$]

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This analysis also accounts for the cases in which a sentence with a non-subject fronted topic follows a sentence with a topic that is also a non-subject. In that case, the operator in the second sentence already has the same index as the fronted non-subject and no minimality effects arise.
Structure in (21) is more adequate because it allows us to explain why a fronted object in a CLLD is blocked by a pre-verbal subject irrespectively of whether there is an intonational break or pause between the fronted object and the pre-verbal subject or not. When an object is fronted, the topic operator cannot bind subject agreement. The chain formed by the fronted DO, the abstract operator Cl and the object clitic blocks this binding. This is a minimality violation similar to the one proposed by Zubizarreta (1999b) for questions with pre-verbal subjects:

\[
(23) \quad *_{\text{TopP}} \text{OP}_1 [\text{CI} \text{P} \text{DP}_j] \text{Cl}_j \ldots [\text{obj agr}_j \text{V subj agr}_i]
\]

When the subject is a post verbal subject, as in (7), it is never interpreted as a topic. It is interpreted as a focused element (Zubizarreta 1998) but it is not required to undergo leftward movement in syntax. Post-verbal subjects in Spanish have been proposed to either right-adjoin to VP (Suñer 1994) or in an alternative analysis to remain in Spec of VP (Koopman and Sportiche 1991) in object scrambling structures (Ordoñez (1998)\textsuperscript{9}). Both the overt post-verbal subject and subject agreement are marked for a [+Focus] feature but are not bound by an operator. This VP-internal subject checks its [+Focus] feature only at LF by Spec-Head agreement. I would like to propose, that in discourse (8) has the following structure:

\[
(23) \quad \text{FocP} \text{Foc} [\text{CI} \text{P} \text{DP}_j \text{Cl}_j] [\text{TP} [\text{obj agr}_j \text{V subj agr}_i] [\text{VP} \text{DP}_1 \ldots]
\]

No minimality effects arise in this structure. There is however an interesting fact that needs to be accounted for under the analysis of discourse constraints presented in this paper. A conjoined or quantified DP in object position restores the possibility of having a CLLD construction as a continuation of (3) as shown by sentences (24) through (27):

\[
(24) \quad \text{Un día una viejita estaba en el campo y se encontró un pajarito y una ardilla}
\]

One day an old lady was in the countryside and CL found a little bird and a squirrel

"One day an old lady was in the countryside and she found a little bird and a squirrel"

\textsuperscript{9} See Ordoñez (1998) for a discussion of right adjunction analyses of post-verbal subjects versus an object scrambling analysis.
(25) *Al pajarito lo abrigó y a la ardilla le dio de comer*
   To the little bird CL ACC warmed and to the squirrel CL DAT gave to eat
   "She warmed the little bird and fed the squirrel"

(26) *Un día una viejita estaba en el campo y se encontró dos pajaritos*
   One day an old lady was in the countryside and found two little birds
   "One day an old lady was in the countryside and she found two little birds"

(27) *A uno lo abrigo y al otro le dio de comer*
   To one CL ACC warmed and to the other CL DAT
   "She warmed one and fed the other"

Coordination and quantification force a contrastive interpretation between topics previously introduced in the discourse. I would like to propose that in these cases the reason why no minimality violation arises is because, as in the case of the post-verbal subject, there is a Focus feature specification involved. Movement of the object to a Contrastive Focus fronted position, presumably Spec of Focus Phrase, takes place in syntax in this case. Although there is a topic operator binding subject agreement, it is not blocked by a CIP projection. In other words, sentences (25) and (27) differ in syntactic structure from the CLLD structures in (6), (7), (9) and (16) discussed before and have a representation similar to (23) with the overt DP in Spec of Focus Phrase but no CIP projection as shown in:

(28) $[\text{FocP} [\text{DP}_j] \text{Foc} [\text{TP} [\text{obj agr}_j \text{ V subj agr}_i] \ldots$

3. **Conclusions**

In this paper, I have proposed that in order to formalize discourse constraints on pre-verbal subject and CLLD structures it is necessary to project a higher Topic Phrase layer. This projection must not be identified with projections such as CIP or TPv which account for the pre-verbal occurrence of argumental DPs in languages with strong subject agreement and clitics but are not enough to account for the fact that subjects are treated as default or unmarked topics in discourse. I have also proposed that the impossibility of CLLD structures as a continuation of an SVO sentence in
discourse is due to a minimality effect. The Cl operator that binds object agreement blocks binding of subject agreement by the higher topic operator. No minimality effects arise with post-verbal subjects or conjoined DPs due to their focused nature.

REFERENCES


