Omar Beas -- Arizona State

A Verb Raising Analysis of Interrogatives: The
Preverbal Subject Constraint in Spanish

A major observation in the literature on Spanish interrogatives is that preverbal lexical subjects in interrogatives cannot cooccur with certain types of *wh-*. Two prevalent analyses in the field have been proposed by Torrego (1984) and by Suñer (1994). Accordingly, they consider the phenomenon to be related to an argument/adjunct distinction. If an argumental *wh*-word is fronted, the subject must be postverbal (1)a, but this effect does not occur if the *wh*-word corresponds to an adjunct -(1)b. Crucially, these analyses claim that the inflected verb never reaches left peripheral nodes and that the lexical subject occupies a position within the TP layer or within the VP layer.

This paper proposes that subject-verb inversion in interrogative clauses in Spanish is in no way related to the argument/adjunct distinction. Instead, I argue that the inversion effects and their absence follow from the licensing requirements of FinP, which is a phase. Subject-verb inversion is analyzed as involving verb-raising to the left periphery with the subject staying in [Spec, TP] and the *wh*-word targeting the [Spec, FinP]. When subject-verb inversion does not happen, it is because the lexical subject in [Spec, TP] has been attracted by dislocation to the lower portion of left periphery, again, to the [Spec, FinP].

Consider first the cases where subject inversion is obligatory. The asymmetry argument/adjunct related to inversion vanishes if the displaced constituent is inherently nonspecific or can hardly be taken as specific. This is illustrated by *wh*-adjuncts which force inversion -(2)a and (2)b and by aggressively non D-linked *wh*-words -(2)c-(2)d. This obligatory inversion pattern is consistent with focus fronting which requires strict adjacency between the fronted DP and the verb -(3). Even more revealing cases are found when *wh*-fronting of an argument is expected to trigger inversion but this does not occur. Thus, preverbal lexical subjects can cooccur if the *wh-* is specific or D-linked -(4)a-(4)b, and interestingly, if an assertion marker is present (Inclán Nichol 1997) -(4)c.

The data discussed in this paper challenges the existence of a lower TopP position between FocP and FinP in Rizzi (1997). If focus fronting of a DP and *wh*-fronting with obligatory inversion are analyzed as movement to the [Spec, FocP], the same explanation fails to account for the patterns of absence of inversion. This is because the crucial property in non-inversion cases is the obligatory specificity of both the *wh*-word and the lexical subject. Thus, although multiple dislocations are possible (5)a, Rizzi's system predicts no contrast with non-inversion environments, which is not the case -cfr. (4)c with (5)b.

This puzzle can be solved if FinP is taken as a phase as in López (2009), which I assume to encode Ø-features and edge features. Movement can be triggered by Agree (Chomsky 2001) but also movement can be caused by the uninterpretable features of the goal (Bošković 2007). At the point where the Fin° phase is constructed, the lexical subject in [Spec, TP] as well as any CLLD constituent or *wh-* in [Spec, *v*P] (i.e. the edge of the previous phase) are active and contain uninterpretable features. This triggers massive displacement to the [Spec, FinP]. Obligatory inversion as observed in (1)a and (2) and in focus fronting constructions -(3) obtains after the *wh*-word moves to the [Spec, FinP] and the verb moves to Fin° to check the uninterpretable Ø-features, licensing indirectly the lexical subject in [Spec, TP] (see (6)a). When subject-verb inversion apparently fails to occur, however, it is the lexical subject which moves to [Spec, FinP] to delete Fin's Ø-features and receive Case (see (6)b). The specificity effect of (5)b is derived precisely as a consequence of this mechanism: non D-linked/nonspecific require Agree to be attracted, but this operation is not active anymore if the lexical subject has been already attracted. In contrast, D-linked and specific *wh*-phrases when not triggering subject-inversion are not moved to the left periphery by Agree but they just make an intermediate stop at the edge of the Fin phase before finally checking their uninterpretable edge feature in the higher [Spec, TopP].