Separating focus and contrast in Romance: insights from Camuno

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Main claim. The novel data presented here suggest that focus structures in Camuno, a Gallo-Italic language, are better analyzed as resulting from the interaction of two interrelated but independent operations: focus movement and focal-stress assignment. While an XP can only be interpreted as focus when in the immediately-postverbal position, non-canonical stress specifically marks contrast, an information structure primitive interacting with focus, in focus and non-focus structures alike.

Pattern. Focalized constituents in Camuno appear in the immediately after the verb (IAV) position (1-a) and cannot undergo fronting (1-b), except, in some cases, if clefted (1-c):

(1) a. l'   a   fat   ho [**al ho om**]$_{\text{FOC}}$ la hopa
         CL.3SG have.3SG.PRS make.PRT up the her husband the soup
         'It is her husband that made the soup.'

     b. *[**al ho om**]$_{\text{FOC}}$ l'   a   fat   ho la   hopa
         the her husband CL.3SG have.3SG.PRS make.PRT up the soup

     c. l'   è   [**al ho om**]$_{\text{FOC}}$ ke l'   a   fat   tcha
         CL.3SG be.3SG.PRS the her husband that CL.3SG have.3SG.PRS make.PRT here
         la   hopa
         the soup
         'It was her husband who made the soup.'

Analysis. Focus in Camuno generally occupies the "immediately after verb" (IAV) position, which I identify, structurally, as the low focus position at the edge of vP (Belletti, 2004, *i.a.*). The position aligns with the main sentence stress which, differently from other approaches, I consider resulting from a contextually-dependent, post-syntactic operation interacting with, but independent from, focus marking (cf. Kratzer & Selkirk, 2007; Samek-Lodovici, 2015).

In particular, I propose that in narrow focus structures, stress aligns with the right edge of a phonological phrase Φ rather than with the larger prosodic phrase ι (Féry, 2013), i.e., the default pattern of Camuno. I argue that phonological phrases are parsed by phases (Chomsky 2001; Kahnemuyipour 2009; Dobashi 2019), and I thus claim that at each Spell-Out cycle, a potential stress (Reinhart 1995) is assigned to the most embedded node of the Spell-Out domain by an adapted Nuclear Stress Rule (NSR: Zubizarreta 2014 for an overview). Following Szendrői (2017), I suggest that PF selects the stress at the edge of the phonological phrase containing the lexical verb.

Stress marks contrast (Kratzer & Selkirk 2020), rather than focus per se. The lexical verb can thus adjoin to projections higher than FocP, which then can align with stress.

Consider, for instance, (2), where the negative marker *mica* appears in post-participial position and not, as default, after the inflected verb. The distribution in (2) introduces a counterfactual reading due to stress-selection merely marking contrast, a primitive of information structure, (Neeleman & Vermeulen, 2009), rather than focus.

(2) [la htceta l'   a   {**mia**} majat   {**mia**}]$_\Phi$ [la carne]
      the girl   CL.3SG have.3SG.PRS NEG   eat.PRT mia   the meat
      '(No,) the girl didn't eat meat.'

Further evidence for the independence of stress as a contrast-marking operation comes from (3), where the post-participial adverb *amò* 'again' has a counterfactual interpretation that can be translated as 'before (unspecified)' when aligning with stress:

(3)   [(al' a   fat   ho **amò**)]ι al kunitch.
      cl.3sg have.3sg.prs make.prt up already the rabbit

      '(Of course,) he has made rabbit before.'

These elements cannot be interpreted in the scope of focus-associate particles like *even* or *only* and they are compatible with another focus in the clause, i.e., they are not foci themselves.

When focus is involve, however, PF also ensures that the stress has the appropriate contextually-defined quality if contrast (with a previous assertion or belief) is involved (4):

(4)   a.   Context: ["Piero waited for his mum on the curb at the airport"]
           Al   l'   a   hpetat de-deter a la ho mama
           cl.3sg cl.3sg have.3sg.prs wait.prt inside   at the his mom

           'He waited for his mom inside (not on the curb)'
      b.   Context: [with the new law, 52 years old Paola can retired at 53.]
           la Paola la   andarà   l' an ke e   en penu
           the P.   cl.3sg go.3sg.fut the year that come in retirement

           'Paola will retire next year (can you believe it?!).'

Conclusion. The analysis captures the observed pattern and accounts for occasional variations like (1-c). In these cases, foci can align with stress, which falls on the right of the phonological phrase (the CP spelled out phase) containing the inflected verb, i.e., the copula.

Furthermore, no *ad hoc* operation needs to be proposed to explain the ordering variation conveying counterfactual values (cf., e.g., Bonan, 2021) of elements not in focus.

Finally, different levels of contrast are associated to different interpretations (Cruschina 2022), and the presence of an independent contrast-marking operation at the interface level offers new insights for the study of focus typology (4) crosslinguistically.

Future studies will investigate the details of the syntactic derivation and further counterfactual interpretation of non-focalized elements.

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