

Delia Bentley  
The University of Manchester  
School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures  
delia.bentley@manchester.ac.uk

### Focus fronting in the layered structure of the clause.\*

#### 1. Focus fronting (FF) in Nuorese Sardinian: a description.

##### (i) **Focused constituent precedes the finite verb (defining property of fronting).**

- (1a) SU DUTTORE appo vistu, Lit. THE DOCTOR I-have seen (Jones 1993: 332).  
(1b) SU DUTTORE as vistu?, Lit. THE DOCTOR you-have seen?  
(1c) ISTRACCU est?, Lit. TIRE D is? ~ ISTRACCU est(!), Lit. TIRE D is(!)  
(1d) INOCHE ses?, Lit. HERE you-are? (Mensching/Remberger in press)  
(1e) FRITTU META b'at?, Lit. COLD MUCH there has? ~ FRITTU META b'at(!)  
(1f) MANDA(T)U SA LÍTTERA appo, Lit. SENT THE LETTER I-have (Jones 1993: 338).  
(1g) MANDICA(T)U IN SU RISTORANTE as?, Lit. EATEN IN THE RESTAURANT you-have?  
(1h) SU SARDU CHI BOLEUS PO SU TEMPUS BENNIDORI est? , Lit. THE SARDINIAN THAT WE- WANT FOR THE FUTURE it-is? (Mensching/Remberger in press)

##### (ii) **Incompatibility with other types of fronting.**

- (2a) SU DUTTORE (\*chie) at vistu?, Lit. THE DOCTOR (\*who) has seen?  
(2b) Chie (\*SU DUTTORE) at vistu?, Lit. Who (\*THE DOCTOR) has seen?  
(2c) A chie (\*SU IOCÀTULU) as datu?, Lit. To whom (\*THE TOY) you-have given?

##### (iii) **Incompatibility with negation.**

- (3) ISTRACCU (\*no) est?, Lit. TIRE D (\*not) he-is?

##### (iv) **Incompatibility with question marker *a*.<sup>1</sup>**

- (4) SU DUTTORE (\*a) as vistu?, Lit. THE DOCTOR (\*Q) you-have seen?

##### (v) **Restriction to one syntactic constituent (to be revised).**

- (5) A JUANNE (\*UNU IOCÀTULU) appo da(t)u, Lit. TO JOHN (\*A TOY) I-have given.

##### (vi) **Clause internal.**

- (6) \*?CUSSU LIBRU appo narau ch'appo lighidu, Lit. \*?THAT BOOK I-have said that I-have read.

##### (vii) **Adjacency.**

- (7a) A: Petru bos at manda(t)u una littera. – B: UNA CARTOLINA (\*Petru) nos at manda(t)u, Lit. A: Peter to-you has sent a letter – B: A CARD (\*Peter) to-us has sent.  
(7b) ISTRACCU (\*Juanne) est?, Lit. TIRE D (\*John) is?

But see:

- (8) PRO CUSTU Juanne at isticchitu su dinari, Lit. FOR THIS John has hidden the money.

---

\* This research was financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx> - research grant AH/E506011/1) whose support is gratefully acknowledged. I am also indebted to my native-speaker informants of Nuorese Sardinian and to my helpers in the field, Gianfranco and Carminu Pintore.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *A b'est sa sorre 'e Luchia?* 'Is there Lucy's sister?', *A bi venit Carminu?* 'Is Carminu coming?'

## 2. The problem.

**Which position does FF target in the clause?**

**Is FF comparable to Wh-F(ronting) and in what sense?**

- (i), (ii), (iv), (v) and (vii) are also properties of Wh-F.
- (iii) and (vi) do not hold true for Wh-F (see (9a-b)).

(9a) Chie no est beitu?, Lit. Who not is come?

(9b) Cale libru as narau ch'as lighidu?, Lit. Which book you-said that you read?'

**Does FF target a single position in the clause? Which position?**

- The comparability of FF and Wh-F suggests that FF targets the Pre-Core Slot (see also V2 in German, Van Valin/Diedrichsen 2006, Diedrichsen 2008).
- How do we capture the differences regarding (iii) and (vi)?

## 3. Discourse, not pure syntax.

**Fronting is restricted to one information unit**

(5) A JUANNE (\*UNU IOCÀTULU) appo da(t)u, Lit. TO JOHN (\*A TOY) I-have given.

vs.

(1f) MANDA(T)U SA LÍTTERA appo, Lit. SENT THE LETTER I-have.

See Van Valin's 2005: 80-81 account of VP.

It will be argued that there are theory-independent advantages of this analysis.

**Question *a* is incompatible with brand-new information, hence the mutual incompatibility with FF.**

(4) SU DUTTORE (\*a) as vistu?, Lit. THE DOCTOR Q you-have seen?

See

(10a) A b'est sa sorre 'e Luchia?, Lit. Q there-is the sister of Lucy?

(10b) (\*A) b'at chistiones?, Lit. (\*Q) there-has problems?

(10c) A binn'at chistiones?, Lit. Q there-has-of-them, problems?

✎ Could (iii) be explained in discourse terms?

## 4. Interim conclusion: two possible analyses.

- FF in the Pre-Core Slot. How do we capture ((iii), (vi), and (vii))?
- FF in the initial position of the relevant layer of the LSC. How do we capture ((iii) and) data such as (1f, g)?

## 5. The cross-dialectal perspective.

**Italian**

(Predicate and narrow) focus in Italian is restricted to the Nucleus and the following portion of the clause with the exception of Wh-F and contrastive FF in the Pre-Core Slot (cf. (11c-d)). Type (iii) of Van Valin's (1999) typology.

Contrastive focus: selects the value of a variable from a closed set.

Completive focus: selects the value of a variable from an open set.

- (11a) Maria HA COMPRATO UNA MACCHINA, Lit. Mary HAS BOUGHT A CAR.  
 (11b) Maria ha comprato UNA MACCHINA, Lit. Mary has bought A CAR.  
 (11c) UNA MACCHINA Maria ha comprato (non una bicicletta), Lit. A CAR Mary has bought a car (not a bike).  
 (11d) CHI ha comprato una macchina?, Lit. WHO has bought a car?

- (11a') [<sub>Core</sub> Maria [<sub>Nuc</sub> HA COMPRATO] UNA MACCHINA.]  
 (11b') [<sub>Core</sub> Maria [<sub>Nuc</sub> ha comprato] UNA MACCHINA.]  
 (11c') [<sub>PrCS</sub> UNA MACCHINA] [<sub>Core</sub> Maria [<sub>Nuc</sub> ha comprato,]] [<sub>RDP</sub> non una bicicletta.]  
 (11d') [<sub>PrCS</sub> CHI] [<sub>Core</sub> [<sub>Nuc</sub> ha comprato] una macchina?]

Contrastive focus can also be post-nuclear:

- (12) Ha vinto il premio QUELLO STUDENTE, non questo, Lit. Has won the prize THAT STUDENT, not this one.  
 (12') [<sub>Core</sub> [<sub>Nuc</sub> Ha vinto] il premio] [<sub>PrCS</sub> QUELLO STUDENTE,] [<sub>RDP</sub> non questo].

↪ Strong tendency for focus to be post-nuclear, in accordance with SVO order, but discontinuous Potential Focus Domain (Bentley 2007, 2008).

### Sicilian

Focus in Sicilian is not restricted to any particular portion of the clause. Type (iv) of Van Valin's (1999) typology. Whilst it has an affective value, pre-nuclear focus is not necessarily contrastive (Cruschina 2006, 2008, Leone 1995, Sornicola 1983).

- (13a) Maria s'accattau A MACHINA. Lit. Mary bought THE CAR for herself.  
 (13b) A MACHINA s'accattau Maria, Lit. THE CAR bought for herself Mary.

- (13a') [<sub>Core</sub> Maria [<sub>Nuc</sub> s'accattau] A MACHINA].  
 (13b') [<sub>Core</sub> A MACHINA [<sub>Nuc</sub> s'accattau]] [<sub>RDP</sub> Maria]

Evidence that pre-nuclear contrastive and completive focus take different positions in syntax (Bentley 2008, Cruschina 2008).

- (14a) A: Chi ci accattasti a tò niputi? - B: NA MACHINA (\*a mè niputi) (ci accattai).  
 Lit. A: What to-him you-bought to your nephew? – B: A CAR (\*to my nephew) (to-him I bought).  
 (14b) A: Chi ci accattasti a tò niputi? A bicicletta? B:- NA MACHINA (a mè niputi) (ci accattai), Lit. A: What to-him you-bought to your nephew? The bike? – B: A CAR (to my nephew) (to-him I bought).

Proposal: Contrastive FF in Pre-Core Slot vs. Completive FF within the Core.

- (14a') [<sub>Core</sub> NA MACHINA (\*a mè niputi) ci accattai].  
 (14b') [<sub>PrCS</sub> NA MACHINA] [<sub>Core</sub> a mè niputi] [<sub>RDP</sub> ci accattai].

The following evidence suggests that completive FF occurs within the constraints provided by the Layered Structure of the Clause rather than targeting a single position (e.g., the Pre-Core Slot).

SOV or OV within the Core? Focus is leftmost in the Core.

(15a) Iu TUTTI COSI sacciu fari, Lit. I ALL THINGS can do.	(15a') [ <sub>PrCS</sub> Iu] [ <sub>Core</sub> TUTTI COSI [ <sub>Nuc</sub> [ <sub>Nuc</sub> sacciu] [ <sub>Nuc</sub> fari]]]
(15b) Iddu A TIA circava, Lit. He TO-YOU looked-for.	(15b') [ <sub>PrCS</sub> Iddu] [ <sub>Core</sub> A TIA [ <sub>Nuc</sub> circava]]

Focus is leftmost in the Nucleus.

(16a) TINTU (*Pippinu) eni, Lit. BAD (*Joseph) is.	(16a') [ <sub>Nuc</sub> TINTU eni]
(16b) A FREVI (*u picciridru) avi, Lit. THE TEMPERATURE (*the kid) has.	(15b') [ <sub>Nuc</sub> [ <sub>Nuc</sub> A FREVI] [ <sub>Nuc</sub> avi]]

Sicilian cannot front information units coming from more than one syntactic layer.

(17a) MANCIARI fai?, Lit. EAT you-do?	(17a') [ <sub>Nuc</sub> MANCIARI fai?]
(17b) MANCIARI (*Ò BAR / *A PASTA) fai?, Lit. EAT AT THE CAFÉ / THE PASTA you-do?	(17b') [ <sub>PrCS</sub> *MANCIARI A PASTA / Ò BAR] [ <sub>Core</sub> [ <sub>Nuc</sub> fai?]]

(18a) Sicilian MORTU (\*Ò 'SPITALI) eni?, Lit. DEAD (\*AT THE HOSPITAL) he-is?

(18b) Sardinian MORTU (IN S'ISPIDALE) est?, Lit. DEAD (AT THE HOSPITAL) he-is?, DIED (AT THE HOSPITAL) he-has?

(18c) Sicilian \*MANCIARI A PASTA voli?, LIT. \*EAT THE PASTA s/he wants?

↪ Unmarked focus is post-nuclear, in accordance with SVO order, but both Contrastive FF and Completive FF are admitted. No adjacency constraint on Contrastive FF, but strict adjacency condition on Completive FF. In addition, Completive FF appears to be constrained to information units that come from a single syntactic layer.

### Sardinian

Sardinian FF contrasts with Sicilian FF in the following ways:

- It is hard to distinguish Contrastive FF and Completive FF (with the exception of embedded domains).
- Sardinian FF does not necessarily have an affective value.
- As long as it concerns one information unit, Sardinian FF can derive from several syntactic layers of the clause (cf. (1f), (1g), (18b)). Strength of RRG analysis: If you have a VP in your syntax it is difficult to understand this contrast between Sicilian and Sardinian. If you do not have a VP, the contrast reduces to the ease of focalization of heavy information units in the Pre-Core Slot (Sardinian), a type of focalization that is less natural in Sicilian.

↪ SVO order, but focus can be pre- or post-nuclear. Pre-nuclear focus is not necessarily marked. FF can exploit the boundaries provided by the Layered Structure of the Clause (see, e.g., (7b)), but it can also target the Pre-Core Slot (see, e.g., (1f,g), (18b)). See also the tendency towards yes/no question formation with a Wh-word:

- (19a) [<sub>PrCS</sub> ITTE] [<sub>Core</sub> [<sub>Nuc</sub> ses,]] [<sub>RDP</sub> imbreacu?], Lit. What you-are, drunk?  
 (19b) [<sub>PrCS</sub> ITTE] [<sub>Core</sub> [<sub>Nuc</sub> l'as,]] [<sub>RDP</sub> comporatu?], Lit. What it-you-have, bought?

## 6. Towards a cross-dialectal account of FF: Italian, Sicilian, Sardinian.

- (i) Predominant word order in Medieval Romance is V2 (Benincà 2004, Ledgeway 2008).
- (ii) Medieval Sardinian (chancery language of 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries) has been claimed to exhibit V1 (VSO) order (Lombardi 2007).
- (iii) V2 in RRG = finite Nuc in 1<sup>st</sup> position in the Core (Van Valin / Diedrichsen 2006, Diedrichsen 2008) plus a filled Pre-Core Slot.
- (iv) Medieval Sardinian fits this definition of V2, i.e., it is a V2 language or, better, variety. Cruschina (2008) notes, in accordance with Lombardi (2007) that there is little fronting in Medieval Sardinian. This could be stylistic convention of the chancery language (evidence is very formulaic) or the sign that V2 is emerging at that stage. The former hypothesis is more plausible.
- (v) Modern Italian has lost V2, is entirely SVO, with post-nuclear focus. Only vestige of V2: WhF and contrastive FF.
- (vi) Modern Sicilian has lost V2, is SVO, with unmarked post-nuclear focus but marked completive FF in the leftmost position of the relevant syntactic layer as well as WhF and contrastive FF in the Pre-Core Slot.
- (vii) Modern Nuorese Sardinian has lost V2, is almost entirely SVO, but allows unmarked pre-nuclear focus BOTH in the leftmost position of the relevant syntactic layer AND in the Pre-Core Slot of the clause to which the information unit belongs ((19a-b), (1f,g), (18b) vs. (6)), hence the difficulty of distinguishing completive FF and contrastive FF.

## 7. What exactly is the adjacency condition then?

Contrastive FF differs from completive FF and Wh-F in being separable from the finite verb (no adjacency condition). In the Chomskyan literature (e.g., Cruschina 2008) this evidence is said to suggest that Wh-F takes the same position as completive FF, not contrastive FF, i.e., in RRG terms, a position that is closer to the Nucleus than the Pre-Core Slot.

We could decide to analyse Wh-F along the same lines in RRG.

Alternative account: Adjacency to be captured in terms of semantic restrictions on a fading syntactic constraint (V2): Nuc (or Aux or nuc Operator?) in 1<sup>st</sup> position of Core when the fronted information unit is - or includes - an argument variable / value from an open set.

- In Sardinian, the adjacency condition appears to be stronger, and may hold for argument variables / values from closed sets ((7a) if FF in the Pre-Core Slot). See Romanian and Zubizarreta (1998: 103) for Spanish (*LAS ESPINACAS (\*Pedro) detesta Pedro y no...*).
- Wh-F in Pre-Core Slot as is the case with other languages.
- Captures an apparent inconsistency in the adjacency condition: it does not hold true for fronted units that are not arguments of the predicate in the Nucleus.

- (20a) Italian Perché Luca (non) è qui?, Lit. Why Luke (not) is here?  
 (20b) Sardinian PRO CUSTU Petru at isticchitu su dinari, Lit. FOR THIS P. hid the money.

**8. Select references.**

- Benincà, P. 2004. The left periphery of medieval Romance. *Studi Linguistici e Filologici Online* 2/2: 243-297.
- Bentley, D. 2007. Relazioni grammaticali e ruoli pragmatici: siciliano e italiano a confronto. In D. Bentley and A. Ledgeway (eds), 48-62.
- Bentley, D. 2008. The interplay of focus structure and syntax: evidence from two sister languages. In R. Van Valin Jr. (ed.), 263-284.
- Bentley, D. and Ledgeway, A. (eds). 2007. *Sui Dialetti Italo-Romanzi. Saggi in Onore di Nigel B. Vincent* [The Italianist 27, Special Supplement 1]. Norfolk: Biddles.
- Cruschina, S. 2006. Informational focus in Sicilian and the left periphery. In *Phases of Interpretation* [Studies in Generative Grammar 91], M. Frascarelli (ed.), 363-385. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Cruschina, S. 2008. *Discourse-related Features and the Syntax of Peripheral Positions. A Comparative Study of Sicilian and Other Romance Languages*. Phd Dissertation, The University of Cambridge.
- Diedrichsen, E. 2008. Where is the precore slot? Mapping the layered structure of the clause and German sentence topology. In R. Van Valin Jr. (ed.), 203-224.
- Jones, M. A. 1993. *Sardinian Syntax*. London / New York: Routledge.
- Ledgeway, Adam. 2008. Satisfying V2 in early Romance: Merge vs. move. *Journal of Linguistics* 44: 437-470.
- Leone, A. 1995. *Profilo di Sintassi Siciliana*, Palermo: Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani.
- Lombardi, A. 2007. Posizione dei clitici e ordine dei costituenti nella lingua sarda medievale. In D. Bentley and A. Ledgeway (eds), 133-147.
- Mensching, G. and Remberger, E. In press. The left periphery in Sardinian. In *Syntactic Variation. The Dialects of Italy*, R. D'Alessandro, A. Ledgeway and I. Roberts (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sornicola, R. 1983. Relazioni d'ordine e segmentazione della frase in italiano. Per una teoria della sintassi affettiva. In *Scritti Linguistici in Onore di Giovan Battista Pellegrini*, P. Benincà, M. Cortelazzo, A. Prodocimi, L. Vanelli and A. Zamboni (eds), 561-577. Pisa: Pacini.
- Van Valin, R. Jr. 1999. A typology of the interaction of focus structure and syntax. In *Typology and Linguistic Theory: From Description to Explanation*, E. Raxilina and J. Testelec (eds), 511-524. Moscow: Languages of Russian Culture.
- Van Valin, R. Jr. 2005. *Exploring the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Valin, R. Jr. (ed.). 2008. *Investigations of the Syntax-Semantics-Pragmatics Interface*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Van Valin, R. Jr and Diedrichsen, E. 2006. *Bonsai Grammar of German*. Available at: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/linguistics/research/rrg/BonsaiGrammarGerman.pdf>.
- Virdis, M. 1988. Sardisch: Areallinguistik. In *Lexikon der romanistischen Linguistik. Band 4: Italienisch, Korsisch, Sardisch*, G. Holtus, M. Metzeltin, C. Schmitt (eds), 897-913. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Zubizarreta, M. L. 1998. *Prosody, focus, and word order*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.