

On some properties of subjects and topics

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1. Introduction

Subjects bear certain interpretive similarities to topics, and yet the two notions are clearly distinct, both in their formal status, position, and interface properties. In this article I would like to identify some analogies and differences between subject and topic in the context of the general issue of the causes of phrasal movement. After a brief discussion of the “movement as last resort” guidelines, I would like to address the question of the interface effects related to movement to subject position. This will lead to a discussion of some interpretive similarities and differences between subject and topic, and to the possible restatement of the EPP as a Subject Criterion. The consequences of this approach for the analysis of subject-object asymmetries induced by movement will be briefly mentioned. The article will be concluded by an analysis of the discourse conditions which must be met for a felicitous use of Clitic Left Dislocation topics in Italian.

2. The EPP and Movement as Last Resort

In its traditional form, the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), or, more precisely, the extended clause of the Projection Principle, is the statement that the subject position is an obligatory component of the form of clauses, regardless of whether the thematic grid of the verb contains a role for the filler of this position (Chomsky 1981).

- (1) EPP: Clauses must have subjects.

Under this classical view, the EPP position is a potential thematic position, the site where external arguments receive their thematic role, and in this sense it directly falls under the Projection Principle; but the proviso is added (the extended clause (1)) that the position is formally obligatory even if no theta role is available for the external argument in the theta grid of the verb. In this case, the position is filled by an expletive, a non-referential pronominal element.

- (2) a. There came a man
 b. It seems that John left

Under the VP-internal Subject Hypothesis (Koopman and Sportiche 1991 and many related references) things change: the subject position ceases to be a potential thematic position, and becomes a target of movement in all clauses, a position which the thematic subject moves to after receiving its theta role in the verb phrase:

- (3) John has [t seen Mary]

The link to the Projection Principle was severed under this approach, but the label EPP somehow survived to designate the obligatoriness of the position. The semantic drift of the label became more extreme in Minimalism, where EPP came to designate the property that any head may have of c-selecting a specifier, which may be targeted by movement (Chomsky 2000). We will not be concerned with this interpretation here (the EPP feature in this sense was replaced by the more perspicuous OCC (urrence) feature in Chomsky (2004)).

Once the EPP position, in the sense of (1), is seen as a systematic landing site for movement, last resort guidelines raise the question of the functional motivation associated to this kind of movement: why does movement to subject position take place? It is instructive in this respect to compare movement to subject to another much discussed type of plausible A-movement, the movement of the object to a position in the lower IP space to trigger participial agreement in French (Kayne 1989):

- (4) a. La chaise que nous avons t repeinte t
 the chair that we have repainted+Agr
 ‘The chair that we have repainted’
 b.*Nous avons la chaise repeinte t
 we have the chair repainted+Agr
 ‘We have repainted the chair’

An object moved to a higher position (to the relative complementizer system in (4a)) may trigger participial agreement in passing, but cannot stop in the participial agreement position (see (4b)). What precluded (4b)? It has been proposed that movement is a “last resort” operation, there is no “free” or truly optional movement (Chomsky 1986 and much subsequent work), a movement chain must be motivated by the fact that it satisfies some need which could not be satisfied otherwise. Reinhart (1995) and Fox (1997) identify such motivating factor in a requirement of the interface systems:

- (5) Movement as last resort: A movement chain must determine some interface effect.

So, movement of the object in (4a) determines the interface effect of displacing the object to the relative clause complementizer system, where it can be interpreted as a relative operator (the chair *x* such that [...*x*...]). On the other hand, the movement chain in (4b) determines no interface effect (apart from the triggering of morphological agreement on the participle; but evidently this morphological “effect” does not suffice, presumably because it does not satisfy a requirement of the moved element: we have here a residue of the notion “greed” of early versions of Minimalism). So, while the movement of the object through the participial agreement position on its way to the position of the relative operator is legitimate, the movement chain cannot legitimately terminate in a position unrelated to an interface effect in the intended sense, and (4b) is ruled out.

In the approach of Rizzi (2003), interpretively relevant positions like the left peripheral positions of relative and interrogative operators, topic and focus, etc. are criterial positions, positions defined by special, interpretively relevant features *Q*, *R*(elative), *TOP*, *FOC*, notated with capital labels (on the system of Criteria, see Rizzi 1991, 1997). These dedicated positions, and the features associated to them, signal to the interface systems that their specifiers must receive special interpretive properties, properties which Chomsky (2004) refers to as “properties of scope-discourse semantics”: a relative or interrogative operator in its scope position, a topic, a focus, etc. Movement chains can involve intermediate steps, from the *s*-selection to the criterial position, as a consequence of the inherently local nature of movement. Again in the formalism of Rizzi (2003), intermediate movement is triggered by purely formal featural counterparts of the criterial features, notated with low case labels *q*, *r*, *top*, *loc*; in other systems, intermediate movement may be triggered by an unspecific peripheral feature (Chomsky 2005), or may be untriggered; all these systems have in common that the positions targeted by intermediate movement and the criterial positions are

formally distinct in a clear manner, and this is the property we need for a simple checking of the “movement as last resort” requirement. So, the movement of the relative operator to the left peripheral criterial position may involve an intermediate step to the Spec of a lower inflectional head, plausibly Asp, and the passage through this position is morphologically marked by participial agreement. Under a view adopting some version of principle (5), a movement chain (at least for certain phrasal movements) must terminate in a criterial position. This happens in (6), but not in (7), which is therefore excluded by the movement as last resort requirement, a conclusion which can be reached by local inspection. Whatever formal way one adopts to differentiate criterial and non-criterial positions, movement must terminate in a criterial position:

(6) La chaise Op CR nous avons t Asp_r repeinte t

(7) *Nous avons la chaise Asp_r repeinte t

Object shift languages, involving movement of the object to a position akin to the one in (7), assign special interface properties to this position (specificity, and possibly other scope-discourse properties), so that the process complies with the last resort requirement. A process akin to object shift is possible in French when the object is a bare quantifier, as in (8a):

- (8) a. Il a tout acheté t
 he has all bought
 ‘He has bought everything’
 b. Il a acheté tout le terrain
 he has bought all the land
 ‘He has bought all the land’

Presumably here movement is motivated by the requirements of the bare quantifier as a “weak element”, in the sense of Cardinaletti and Starke (1999), a requirement which, whatever its exact status (be it a PF, morphological, or LF requirement), suffices to comply with (5).

3. Movement to Subject Position and Last Resort.

Going back to subject movement, the comparison between (3) and (4b) leads to the conclusion that the subject position must be associated to some interface effect which makes it possible to terminate the chain there. What kind of interface effect?

A standard answer to this question involves the internal interface with morphology: subjects move in order to acquire/check nominative Case, and, more generally, to satisfy the properties of the Case-agreement system. So, the classical story goes, if in a SVO language nominative is assigned / checked in a Spec-head configuration, the subject must move to the Spec of Agr (or of whatever functional head bears the Phi features involved in this system) to have its Case assigned/checked, and at the same time to value the agreement features on the clausal head.

This classical approach may well be correct in part, but it could hardly be the whole story. A simple argument that the Case-agreement approach is not sufficient to cover all the cases of subject movement is provided by the existence of the quirky subject phenomenon, as Cardinaletti (2004) points out: in some languages, the canonical subject position can be filled by a nominal which bears an inherent (often dative) Case, and which does not trigger verbal agreement. For instance, with the so-called *piacere* class of psych-verbs in Italian, the unmarked order is Dative Experiencer - V - Nominative Theme (Belletti and Rizzi 1988), as in (9a), with the possibility of the marked order variant Nominative Theme - V - Dative Experiencer, as in (9b). Whatever order is chosen, the inflected verb agrees with the nominative argument:

- (9) a. A Gianni piacciono queste idee
 to Gianni please these ideas
 b. Queste idee piacciono a Gianni
 these ideas please to Gianni
 ‘Gianni likes these ideas’

One type of evidence put forth by Belletti and Rizzi (op.cit.) for the conclusion that the dative experiencer is indeed in subject position in (9a), and not in topic, is that it does not interfere with movement, while a preposed (dative) topic determines at least a weak degradation on a movement chain which crosses it:

- (10) a. Le idee che a Gianni piacciono di più sono queste
 the ideas that to Gianni please most are these
 ‘The ideas that Gianni likes most are these’
 b.?(?) Le idee che a Gianni Maria raccomanda sono queste
 the ideas that to Gianni Maria recommends are these
 ‘The ideas that Gianni recommends to Maria are these’

The rich literature on the Icelandic equivalent of this construction provides a very varied array of evidence pointing to the same conclusion. See, e.g., Sigurdsson (2000).

Here, movement of the dative experiencer to subject position is not linked to any visible Case-agreement effect. It is sometimes assumed that the quirky subject bears an invisible structural Case, on top of the morphologically overt inherent Case, which motivates movement to subject position. This assumption is particularly implausible in languages like Italian, in which the Dative argument is prepositional, and a PP never is the bearer of any Case specification. Analogous difficulties for a Case approach to subject movement are raised by other cases in which the filler of the subject position is non involved in the Case-agreement system: locative inversion, and the inverse copular construction (Moro 1997), see Cardinaletti, *op. cit.*, for detailed discussion.

For these reasons I will assume that reference to the requirements of the Case-agreement system is insufficiently general to motivate movement to subject position. This leads us to look into the possibility that some kind of interpretive requirement linked to the subject position may be the factor motivating movement to subject.

4. Subject interpretation

A salient interpretive property of preverbal subjects is that they can correspond to given information, while VP internal arguments, a direct object or a *by* phrase in passive, normally are focal, or in any event don't easily convey given information. Consider question-answer pairs like the following, in which the question introduces a referent which is taken up in the answer. The introduced referent can be the subject in an active (11A) or passive (12B) sentence, while it cannot be a direct object (12A) or a *by* phrase in passive (11B):

- (11) Q: Che cosa è successo al camion?
 'What happened to the truck?'
 A: Il camion ha tamponato l'autobus
 'The truck bumped into the bus'
 B: # L'autobus è stato tamponato dal camion
 'The bus was bumped into by the truck'
- (12) Q: Che cosa è successo all'autobus?
 'What happened to the bus?'
 A: # Il camion ha tamponato l'autobus
 'The truck bumped into the bus'

- B: L'autobus è stato tamponato dal camion
 'The bus was bumped into by the truck'

The unmarked answers would have the introduced referent taken up by a null pronominal subject in these cases, i.e., *___ è stato tamponato dal camion* (*___* was bumped into by the truck) is the unmarked answer to question (12)Q. Still it is possible to reiterate the DP in subject position in the answer, as in (12B), etc., which sounds slightly redundant, and gives rise to a stylistic effect of insistence or reiteration of the discourse topic. The contrast with the reiteration in VP final position (yielding a non-felicitous result, as in (12A)) is clear.

The distinction also holds, though somewhat weakened, between subjects and other elements which are not VP final, as the object in a ditransitive construction:

- (13) Q: A chi hanno dato il mio libro?
 'To whom did they give my book?'
 A: #Hanno dato il tuo libro a Gianni (OK Lo hanno dato a Gianni)
 'They gave your book to Gianni' (OK They gave it to Gianni)
- (14) Q: A chi è stato dato il mio libro?
 'To whom was your book given?'
 A: Il tuo libro è stato dato a Gianni
 'Your book was given to Gianni'

Reiteration of the direct object does not sound felicitous in (13A) (the felicitous answer being the one which involves cliticization of the object), even though the deviance is less marked here than in the cases in which the relevant DP is in VP final position, as in (11B), (12A), the stronger deviance of the latter examples being presumably related to fact that a focal interpretation is necessarily associated with the VP-final element. Still, the contrast between (13A) and (14A) is clearly detectable: (14A) is felicitous, with the special stylistic effect induced by reiteration, as in (12B).

These facts could suggest the hypothesis that the EPP position is specialized for the expression of contextually given information. In this sense, its discourse function would be analogous to the discourse function of the topic, as has often been proposed. Notice, in fact, that the equivalents of (11A), (13A) are felicitous if the object becomes a topic in the Clitic Left Dislocation (see Cinque 1990), the typical topic construction used in the Romance languages:

- (15) Q: Che cosa è successo all'autobus?
 'What happened to the bus?'
 A: L'autobus, il camion lo ha tamponato
 'The bus, the truck bumped into it'
- (16) Q: A chi hanno dato il mio libro?
 'To whom did they give my book?'
 A: Il tuo libro, lo hanno dato a Gianni
 'Your book, they gave it to Gianni'

Here too, as in (11), (12), (14) for the subject, the overt expression of the CI Left Dislocated element makes the structure slightly redundant, involving a special stylistic effect of reiteration.

In spite of this analogy, there is clear evidence that a full functional unification of subject and topic is not possible. First of all, preverbal subjects are fully felicitous when they express new information in out of the blue ("What happened?") contexts, contexts in which a (CILD) topic is not felicitous:

- (17) Q: Che cosa è successo?
 'What happened?'
 A: Un camion ha tamponato un autobus
 'A truck bumped into a bus'
 A': Un autobus è stato tamponato da un camion
 'A bus was bumped into by a truck'
 A'': #Un autobus/l'autobus per Roma, un camion lo ha tamponato
 'A bus/the bus for Rome, a truck bumped into it'
 A''': #Un autobus/l'autobus per Roma, lo ha tamponato un camion
 'A bus/the bus to Rome, bumped into it a truck'

An indefinite (new information) initial subject is fine in this context both in an active and a passive sentence, while a topic, whether definite or not (indefinite topics are possible in Italian in particular discourse contexts, on which see below) is not felicitous, whether the clause has an initial or final subject, as in A'', A'''.

These simple differences in appropriateness corroborate much well-known distributional evidence supporting the distinction between subject and topic position also in Null Subject Languages, for instance the fact that certain quantified DP's cannot occur as (CILD) topics, whereas they are fully acceptable as subjects (Rizzi 1982, 1986, Cardinaletti 2004):

- (18) a. *Nessuno, Piero lo ha visto
 no one, Piero him has seen
 b. Nessuno ha visto Piero
 no one has seen Piero
 ‘No one saw Piero’

This sharp fact is usually interpreted as showing that the CILD position and the subject position should be kept distinct even in a Null Subject Language like Italian; it also shows that subjects and topics are not functionally equivalent, the former permitting a larger class of elements to fill the position than the latter.

Going back to subject interpretation, it should be noticed that selection of a single subject argument also takes place in cases in which the event involves two (or more) arguments which are both contextually given. In the following case, both arguments are introduced in the previous request of information, and the discourse may naturally continue by selecting either one as the starting point in the description of the event, in an active or a passive structure:

- (19) Q: So che il camion e l’autobus hanno avuto un incidente, ma dimmi
 esattamente che cosa è successo.
 ‘I know that the truck and the bus had an accident, but tell me
 exactly what happened’
 A: Il camion ha tamponato l’autobus
 ‘The truck bumped into the bus’
 A’: L’autobus è stato tamponato dal camion
 ‘The bus was bumped into by the truck’

Examples (17) and (19) show that, quite independently from the articulation of the informational structure, one argument (which may be given information or not) is selected as the point of departure in the description of the event, which is described as being “about” that argument.

The choice of one particular argument as subject has the effect of making it prominent, in a sense which affects the following discourse: for instance, a *pro* subject in a following sentence can only pick up the previous subject (the “thema” in Calabrese’s 1986 sense). So, consider a continuation like (20):

- (20) ... poi *pro* è ripartito
 then *pro* is left
 ‘...then he left’

If (20) is uttered after (19A), *pro* necessarily refers to the truck, while after (19A') it can only refer to the bus. The same selective effect is found if we consider (20) as a discourse continuation following (17A) and (17A'): *pro* always picks up the surface subject, the vehicle that left is, respectively, the truck and the bus. So, active and passive are not interchangeable in discourse, even in cases in which the interplay between new and given information seems irrelevant (because both arguments are new information, as in (17), or given information, as in (19)).

5. The Subject Criterion

A subject shares with a topic the prominence related to the fact that the described event is presented as being about that argument ("aboutness"); it differs from a topic (at least, a topic of the CILD kind) in that it does not require the discourse-related property (expressed as Discourse-linking here, as in Pesetsky (1987), but see below for a more detailed analysis) which makes such topics infelicitous in out of the blue contexts. So, a topic involves aboutness and D-linking, while a subject involves pure aboutness:

(21) Top: [+ aboutness]
 [+ D-linking]

(22) Subj: [+ aboutness]

We are now ready to restate the EPP as a Subject Criterion. Following in essence Cardinaletti (2004), I assume a Subj head in the high part of the IP system, higher than the head carrying Phi features and responsible for the Case-Agreement system (Cardinaletti in fact argues for a further distinction between a Subj and an EPP head, both distinct from the head which carries the agreement features: see below for discussion).

(23) ... Subj ... Phi ...

Subj is endowed with nominal features which make it attract a nominal expression to its Spec. Such a featural characterisation must be broader than one merely involving a reference to Phi features, as the capacity of attraction that this position has extends beyond the capacity of the head responsible for the Case-agreement system: not only nominative subjects triggering verbal agreement may be attracted to Spec Subj, but also other elements, with a certain amount of cross-linguistic variability: quirky subjects, possibly locatives in the locative inversion construction, possibly nominal predicates in the inverse copular construction (Moro 1997, Cardinaletti 2004), as suggested in the previous discussion. I will just state the selective attraction of different kinds of nominal expressions by assuming a [+N] specification,

keeping in mind that a finer identification of the relevant nominal features may be needed.

So, the Subj head determines the subject-predicate articulation, much as Top determines the topic-comments articulation, and Focus determines the Focus-Presupposition articulation.

(24) [XP [Top YP]]

(25) [XP [Foc YP]]

(26) [XP [Subj YP]]

Under the criterial view, movement to the subject position is movement to a position dedicated to a special interpretive property of the scope-discourse kind (“aboutness”), which has reflexes on the organisation of discourse (as shown, e.g., by the interpretation of (20)); as such, it is akin to the other cases of criterial movement to the left periphery of the clause, and complies with the “movement as last resort” guidelines.

But how can the existence of expletives be reconciled with the criterial view? Clearly, in such cases it cannot be said that the event is presented as being about the expletive, which has no argumental status: in fact, no argument is chosen as the subject of predication in that case; this straightforward observation is often taken as a stumbling block against attempts to identify special interpretive properties of the subject position, and as arguing in favor of a purely formal approach to the EPP. Nevertheless, the interpretive peculiarities of the subject, supporting an interface role of the position, remain. How can these conflicting considerations be reconciled?

I would like to suggest that the Subj layer, at the junction of the CP and IP systems, shares certain properties of both. It shares with CP positions functioning as landing sites of movement the dedicated character to scope-discourse types of properties, hence the criterial character. On the other hand, Subj is an obligatory position, obligatoriness being a property that it shares with the backbone of the IP structure (Cinque 1999). So, while the left peripheral criterial heads of topic and focus are formally optional, and present in the structure only when discourse conditions and communicative intentions require them, Subj is always there, much as T and related functional heads. Expletives can then be seen as a way to reconcile these conflicting requirements. When communicative intentions, discourse conditions and the thematic properties of the predicate require a non-predicational sentence, an expletive formally complies with the requirements

of Subj, thus conveying the interpretation that the event is not presented as being about a particular argument.

That expletives may not be inconsistent with criterial configurations is also suggested by unquestionably criterial constructions of the A' type. Consider the so-called "partial wh movement" constructions, under an analysis like the one presented in McDaniel (1989) for German and other languages: in the following example, the substantive wh operator *welchen Mantel* sits in a lower C system, and the criterial position, the main C system in a direct question, is filled by the expletive-like wh element *was*:

- (27) Was glaubst du welchen Mantel Jakob heute angezogen hat?
 what believe you which coat Jakob today put-on has?
 'Which coat do you believe that Jakob put on today?'

The use of expletives is more conspicuous and cross-linguistically stable in Spec-Subj, due to the obligatoriness of the position, but it is important to observe that the possibility of an expletive fulfilling a criterion is attested elsewhere (see also Benincà's (2005) discussion of the distribution of *sì* in Old Italian, which she interprets as an expletive filler of the focus position in the V-2 construction). Pursuing the parallel with T, the vacuous satisfaction of the Subject Criterion in presentational structures may be akin to the use of the unmarked tense, present, in statements expressing logical or mathematical truths: such truths are atemporal, but the obligatoriness of the T position enforces the choice of a tense form, the unmarked present form, rather than permitting the expression of an untensed structure.

A salient additional difference between movement to subject and to topic is the highly local character of the former. Movement to subject is basically constrained to affect the closest nominal, the fundamental locality property of A-chain, while movement to topic is much freer, basically the freest form of A'-chain. If Subj attracts a [+N] element, it will always involve the closest nominal, and strict locality is expected (both the dative and nominative arguments should therefore count as "the closest nominal" in cases like (9a-b), whence the possible word-order alternation; I leave open here how this "equidistance" effect can be captured, but see Rizzi (2003) for discussion). As for topics, the special freedom of this construction can be made to follow from the typology of A' features and the cartographic assumptions introduced in Rizzi (2004).

A final comment concerns the relation between the proposed criterial interpretation of the EPP and the cartography of the IP. Recent cartographic studies show that more IP-initial subject positions must be postulated than (23) suggests. Cardinaletti (2004) argues that at least an additional EPP

position must be assumed, where expletives, *pro* and (certain) weak pronouns stop, whereas lexical subjects may move to a distinct and higher Subject-of-predication position; Shlonsky (2000) provides a very refined typology of subject positions in Semitic, etc. I will not be able to address the refinements required by these results here, but I would like to note that a finer cartography can be made compatible with the current approach if it is assumed that the EPP head (our Subj) involves criterial satisfaction of “pure aboutness”, while other positions may be specialized for particular kinds of subjects (with lexical content, etc.). This can be made compatible with Criterial Freezing through the mechanism of head movement, which can create a complex head composed of distinct criterial heads, giving rise to a Spec-head configuration in which different criteria can be satisfied simultaneously, a mechanism which is independently required for multiple satisfaction of A'-criteria (Rizzi 2003, fn. 8).

6. Subject Criterion, Criterial Freezing and ECP Effects

The criterial analysis of the EPP has implications for the subject-object asymmetries traditionally ascribed to the ECP. These implications are explored in detail elsewhere (Rizzi 2003, Rizzi and Shlonsky in prep.), and will only be touched upon here. Rizzi (2003) argues for a principle, dubbed “Criterial Freezing”, which has the effect of freezing in place an element meeting a criterion: for instance, the *wh* element meeting the Q Criterion in an embedded C system in an indirect question (28a) is unavailable to further syntactic movement, e.g., cannot be moved to a higher focus/clefting position (28c), while focalization in situ is fine (28b), and also pied piping of the whole indirect question (28d):

- (28) a. Mi domando [per chi C votare]
 ‘I wonder for whom to vote’
 b. Mi domando [PER CHI C votare], non contro chi
 ‘I wonder for whom to vote, not against whom’
 c.*E’ per chi che mi domando [___ C votare], non contro chi
 ‘It is for whom that I wonder ___ to vote, not against whom’
 d. E’ [per chi C votare] che mi domando ___, non contro chi
 ‘It is for whom to vote that I wonder ___, not against whom’

It should be noted that (28c) is not trivially excluded by the violation of the selectional requirement of the verb *domandarsi* (wonder), which selects an indirect question: under the copy theory of traces, the embedded C system contains a silent occurrence of the *wh* phrase *per chi*, which should be

sufficient to satisfy the verb's selectional requirement. A formal principle like Criterial Freezing thus seems to be needed.

So, criterial satisfaction appears to terminate a chain, much as s-selection normally initiates a chain. Apparently, as soon as a scope-discourse criterion is satisfied, the chain is sent to the interface systems, and the element satisfying the criterion is unavailable to further syntactic computation.

If the subject position is criterial, we expect subjects to be unmovable in the normal case, as a consequence of Criterial Freezing. This immediately derives the familiar subject-object asymmetry of the kind illustrated by the following pair in French, the major empirical effect of the Empty Category Principle (ECP) of Chomsky (1981):

- (29) a. *Qui crois-tu que t viendra?
 'Who do you believe that will come?'
 b. Qui crois-tu que Marie va rencontrer t?
 'Who do you believe that Marie will meet?'

The thematic subject *qui* must fulfil the Subject Criterion in (29a), but then it cannot be moved further under Criterial Freezing. The object in (29b) remains freely movable, as there is no Object Criterion (no EPP for objects, in the classical sense). The asymmetry is thus explained.

From the viewpoint of this approach, the strategies of subject extraction that languages use typically amount to finding a device to fulfil the Subject Criterion without requiring the thematic subject to move to that position, so that the thematic subject remains available for further movement. Consider for instance the absence of that-trace effects in a Null Subject Language like Italian:

- (30) Chi credi che verrà?
 'Who do you think that will come?'

As argued for in Rizzi (1982) and much subsequent work, there is evidence that the *wh* element *chi* is not extracted from the clause-initial subject position (the criterial position, in our current terms), but from a lower position, while the initial position is filled by expletive *pro*:

- (31) Chi credi che [*pro* verrà t]?

In the current terms, *pro* formally satisfies the Subject Criterion, thus permitting the thematic subject to remain available for further syntactic movement (but not necessarily from the "inverted" position, which is

dedicated to the focus interpretation, see Belletti 2001, 2004 and related references). Different languages use variants of this strategy, or other devices finalized to make the thematic subject available to movement and extraction. See Rizzi and Shlonsky (in prep.) for the discussion of many cases.

7. Indefinite topics, specificity and partitivity

In the previous sections we have characterized topics as necessarily involving a connection to the discourse, or D(iscourse)-linking. This accounts for the fact that topics cannot felicitously occur in out of the blue contexts. A problem for this characterization is raised by the fact that Italian permits indefinite topics. In particular discourse conditions, the following examples are fully natural:

- (32) a. Un libro così interessante, non lo avevo mai letto
 a book so interesting, not it had never read
 ‘Such an interesting book, I had never read’
 b. Una soluzione, la dobbiamo trovare anche stavolta
 a solution, it must find also this time
 ‘A solution, we must find this time as well’
 c. Un articolo ben scritto, tutti lo leggono sempre volentieri
 an article well written, everybody it read always willingly
 ‘A well-written article, everybody reads it always willingly’

Not only does Italian allow indefinite left-dislocated elements: even in cases in which the indefinite element is clearly non-specific, the construction remains felicitous (in particular contexts, on which see below). For instance, a non-specific indefinite modified by a relative clause is formally marked by the subjunctive mood in the relative clause, and clitic left dislocation of such a phrase remains possible:

- (33) Una segretaria che sappia tenere la contabilità del dipartimento, non
 a secretary who can keep the budget of the department, not
 riesco proprio a trovarla
 manage really to find-her
 ‘A secretary who could keep the department budget, I really can’t find
 her’

And of course, Clitic Left Dislocation may involve specific indefinites, as in the following example, in which the specific interpretation is enforced by the tag:

- (34) Una buona cosa, Gianni l'ha fatta: ha smesso di fumare
 one good thing, Gianni it has done: has given-up of smoking
 'A good thing, Gianni did it: he quit smoking'

The possibility of indefinite (specific and non-specific) topics seems to question the assumption that topicality is linked to contextually given information: a DP already introduced in discourse may be reiterated, but it typically is introduced by the definite determiner ("A man came to my house. The man carried a heavy suitcase,..."). So, a sharper characterisation of the notion of discourse-linking involved is necessary (a similar conclusion is reached in Starke (2001) in connection with the selective sensitivity of different kinds of D-linked wh phrases to island phenomena).

Notice that a closely related language, French, which also possesses a kind of Clitic Left Dislocation construction, seems to disallow indefinite topics, whatever their status with respect to specificity (native speakers' judgments on examples like the following range from marginal to impossible; I have reported here the most restrictive set of judgments):

- (35) a.*Un livre si intéressant, je ne l'avais jamais lu
 'Such an interesting book, I had never read (it)'
 b.*Une solution, il faudra la trouver cette fois aussi
 'A solution, we must find (it) this time as well'
 c.*Une secrétaire qui sache tenir la comptabilité du département, je
 n'arrive pas à la trouver
 'A secretary who could keep the department budget, I really can't
 find (her)'
 d.*Une bonne chose, Jean l'a faite: il a arrêté de fumer
 'A good thing, Gianni did (it): he quit smoking'

So, the discourse conditions licensing CILD in French are more restrictive, and transparent: the referent of the topic must have been introduced in previous discourse, so that it is taken up by a definite DP. Dominique Sportiche points out that some of these examples improve if the genitive-partitive clitic *en* (of it, of this kind) is used instead of the definite accusative clitic *la/le*:

- (36) ? Une secrétaire qui sache tenir la comptabilité du département, je
 n'arrive pas à en trouver
 'A secretary who could keep the department budget, I really can't
 find '

This suggests that the definiteness restriction may be a function of the clitic doubler, rather than an inherent property of the topic position in French.

In Italian things are more complex, but the construction is not unconstrained: we have already seen that CILD cannot be used felicitously in out of the blue context, and this extends to the cases of an indefinite topic. Some kind of connection to the discourse background is needed, but the link is more subtle.

Let us consider the issue in more detail, starting with the discussion of a “real” example taken from a magazine. The article starts with the following text:

- (37) a. Quanto costa all’ambiente un telefono cellulare?
 ‘How much does a cell phone cost to the environment?’
 b. ... domande ... cruciali per ecologisti, economisti, e politici...
 ‘...questions ... crucial for ecologists, economists, and politicians’
 c. Una risposta la fornisce la Life cycle impact assessment (LCIA),...
 ‘An answer, the LCIA provides it,...’
 (Internazionale, 18-24/02/05, p. 79)

Sentence (37c) involves an indefinite CILD topic *Una risposta* (“An answer”). Clearly, the felicity of this text crucially depends on the fact that certain questions have been introduced in the b sentence, which makes the set of possible answers contextually salient. In fact, the text could not have started with an indefinite CILD (actually, with a CILD *tout court*): an article could start with sentence (38a), but not with (38b):

- (38) a. La LCIA fornisce una risposta a domande cruciali
 ‘The LCIA provides an answer to crucial questions’
 b.#Una/la risposta a domande cruciali la fornisce la LCIA
 ‘An/the answer to crucial questions the LCIA provides it (as initial sentence of a text)’

The connection to the previous discourse context is necessary for a felicitous CILD, but it can be very subtle and indirect. Consider the following two dialogues (e.g., say, between a father and his son preparing a university exam):

- (39) A: Mi sembra che ieri non hai fatto granché per preparare l’esame...
 ‘It seems to me that yesterday you did not much to prepare the exam...’

B: Beh, un libro, l'ho letto...
 'Well, a book, I read it...'

- (40) A: Mi sembra che ieri non hai fatto granché per preparare l'esame...
 B: Beh, ho letto un libro...
 'Well, I read a book...'

The two dialogues are identical, except that the indefinite direct object is in situ in (40B), and clitic left dislocated in (39B). Now, while (40B) implies nothing about the connections between the book and the exam (there could be no connection at all, the answer could be explicitly paraphrased as "It's true that yesterday I did nothing for the preparation of the exam, but I was engaged in some other activity, I read a book..."), (39B) strongly invites an interpretation in which the book is part of the exam's program, so that a full paraphrase would be "it's not true that I didn't do much for the preparation of the exam yesterday, I read one of the books in the exam's program". So, in order to be licit the indefinite topic must be interpreted as involving a sort of implicit partitive form picking out an element from a set established in discourse, the set of readings for the preparation of the exam.

Consider now the following two dialogues, involving a non-specific indefinite DP "Una brava segretaria" ("A good secretary"):

- (41) Q: Come mai Gianni è così nervoso?
 'Why is Gianni so nervous?'
 A: Cerca da molto tempo una brava segretaria, ma non la trova
 'He's been looking for a good secretary for a while, but he can't find her'
 A': # Una brava segretaria, la cerca da molto tempo, ma non la trova
 'A good secretary, he has been looking for her for a while, but he can't find her'
- (42) Q: Gianni ha poi trovato qualcuno che tenga la contabilità del dipartimento?
 'Did Gianni find somebody for the departmental bookkeeping in the end?'
 A: Macché! Una brava segretaria, la cerca da molto tempo, ma non la trova
 'Not at all! A good secretary, he's been looking for her for a long time, but he can't find her'

In (42Q), the role of taking care of the department budget is introduced, so that in the following sentence (42A) this functional role can be referred to through an indefinite non specific topic “una brava segretaria”. No such contextual justification is provided by (41Q), so the indefinite non specific object can be introduced clause-internally, as in (41A), but not in topic position, as in (41A’).

These examples clearly show that specificity, in the usual interpretation of the term, is not involved in the licensing of topics in Italian. Rather, the relevant notion appears to be partitivity, defined by Ionin (2003) as follows:

- (43) If a DP is [+partitive], it denotes an individual which is a member of a set introduced by previous discourse (cf. Enç 1991, Diesing 1992)

This notion should be carefully distinguished, Ionin argues, from the notion of specificity, which she defines as follows:

- (44) If a DP is [+specific], the speaker intends to refer to a unique individual in the set denoted by the NP, and considers this individual to possess some noteworthy property.

This terminology is not used consistently in the literature (for instance, Enç uses the term “specific” in a broader way including Ionin’s definition of “partitive” (43), Diesing refers to the “presuppositional” vs. non-presuppositional” distinction, partitivity being an overt case of presuppositionality, etc.; also related to these distinctions is Starke’s (2001) distinction between “range-based” and “specificity-based” presuppositionality, introduced to capture certain selective effects in weak island sensitivity, with range-based presuppositionality essentially corresponding to partitivity), but the conceptual distinction is quite clear: in Ionin’s terms, partitivity expresses set membership, while specificity expresses the speaker’s intent to refer. Only the former appears to be relevant for the licensing of topics in Italian, as the discussed examples suggest.

8. Conclusion

The subject position is a target of movement and, under “movement as last resort” guidelines, movement to subject must be motivated by the satisfaction of some interface requirement. Morpho-syntactic properties of the Case-agreement system are a plausible candidate, but there are cases of movement to subject, primarily the quirky subject phenomenon, which involve elements not involved in the functioning of the Case-agreement system. These phenomena cast doubts on the generality of an approach to

subject movement based on this system. As an alternative, the possibility is worth exploring that the motivating interface effect may be of an interpretive nature. This has led us to consider the interpretive properties linked to the subject position. Subjects share with topics the fact that they are arguments selected as the point of departure in the description of the event, which is presented as “being about” the subject argument. In addition to that, topics also require some connection to the discourse background, a requirement that subjects are exempted from. The identification of an interpretive element of the scope-discourse kind connected to the subject position makes it possible to state a Subject Criterion, which the moved argument satisfies. Under Criterion Freezing, this approach can derive the unmovability of subjects in certain environments, hence offer an alternative to the classical ECP analysis of subject-object asymmetries. As for topics, Italian allows indefinite, and also non-specific indefinite topics, provided that they satisfy a subtle condition of connection to the discourse background, which we have assimilated to Ionin’s partitivity condition.

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