

SUBJECT POSITIONS IN ENGLISH VS. ITALIAN: THREE ASYMMETRIES

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(i) Belletti (2009) discusses a contrast between English and Italian concerning the preverbal subject position: with intransitive verbs, Italian disallows a preverbal subject under narrow or broad information focus (1B), whereas English requires it (2B):

- (1) A: Chi è partito/ ha parlato? (*narrow focus*)/ Che cosa è successo? (*broad focus*)
B: # Gianni è partito/ ha parlato.
B1: E' partito / ha parlato Gianni.
- (3) A: Who came/spoke? (*narrow focus*) / What happened? (*broad focus*)
B: *John* came / spoke.

In this talk I will relate this contrast to two further asymmetries concerning the preverbal subject position:

(ii) English preverbal subjects allow for reconstruction for quantifier scope interactions, whereas Italian preverbal subjects tend to disallow it (Bianchi & Chesi, forthcoming; English data from McCloskey 1997):

- (3) a. Every player didn't score. (\checkmark not > \forall)
b. Ogni giocatore non ha segnato. (* not > \forall)
- (4) a. A unicorn seems [*t* to be in the garden]. (\checkmark seem > \exists)
b. Un unicorno sembra [*t* essere nel giardino]. (?* seem > \exists)
- (5) a. Most guests might be late. (\checkmark might > most)
b. La maggior parte degli ospiti potrebbe essere in ritardo. (?* might > most)

(iii) English allows for the extraposition of restrictive relative clauses from preverbal subjects, whereas Italian only allows it from postverbal (unaccusative) subjects (cf. also Cardoso 2010 on Portuguese):

- (22) a. ?*[Una lettera] è arrivata ieri [che era indirizzata a Maria].
b. A letter arrived yesterday [that was addressed to Mary].

These asymmetries will be reduced to the idea (Bianchi & Chesi, forthcoming) that in Italian intransitive clauses, a preverbal subject is necessarily interpreted as *categorical* in the sense of Ladusaw (1994), Cardinaletti (2004), i.e. as a criterial subject which necessarily falls outside the focus and cannot be reconstructed within the predicative nucleus of the clause (cf. also Lambrecht 1994); in English, instead, a preverbal subject is not necessarily categorical, so that it is compatible with focus, and it can undergo reconstruction. This asymmetry can in turn be related to the availability of a non-

categorical postverbal position in Italian, but not in English (with the restricted exception of unaccusative subjects, Bianchi & Belletti 2014).

As for relative clause extraposition, I will argue that Italian differs from English in only allowing a very restricted case of extraposition from indefinite unaccusative subjects; this possibility will be related to the idea that such unaccusative subjects undergo Predicate Restriction (Bianchi & Belletti 2014), i.e. an interpretive rule which allows the composition of the “head” with a relative clause sitting outside the c-command domain of the determiner.

Essential References

Belletti, A. 2009. Answering strategies: New information subjects and the nature of clefts. In: *Structures and Strategies*, ch. 10. Routledge.

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Cardinaletti, A. 2004. Toward a cartography of subject positions. In L. Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP*, 115-165. Oxford University Press.

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