

## IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONTRASTIVE FOCUS AND INFORMATION FOCUS?<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper challenges the current assumption that there are two different types of focus in Italian: a ‘contrastive’ focus and an ‘information’ focus. I claim that the distinction does not hold at any level of the grammar. From an interpretive point of view, I show that there isn’t a focus expressing non-presupposed information and one expressing exhaustive identification, but only one focus expressing non-presupposed information. From a prosodic point of view, I argue that the rules of accent placement and the relation between accent and the focus domain are always the same. From a syntactic point of view, I show that a focus can always move to the left and that it always displays operator-like properties.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Many studies (É. Kiss 1998, Zubizarreta 1998, Donati and Nespor 2001, Benincà and Poletto 1999, Belletti 2001b, etc.) assume that two different grammatical categories of focus exist in Italian and in natural languages in general. The two foci, according to these works, differ from a interpretive, prosodic, and syntactic point of view. They are usually called ‘contrastive’ focus and ‘information’ focus (from now on, CF and IF).

The main arguments that are given in favor of a distinction between two foci are the following:

- A CF expresses contrast and exhaustive identification, an IF merely expresses new, non-presupposed information.
- While the accent carried by the IF always falls in a specific position, the accent carried by the CF can fall anywhere in the clause. This difference is related to the possibility for focus to ‘project’, that is to spread from the accented word to larger constituents containing that word. While an IF can project, a CF cannot.
- Finally, a CF moves to a syntactic position (either overtly or covertly) to the left and has operator-like properties; an IF stays in situ and does not have operator-like properties.

Examples of the two foci in Italian are given below:

- (1) a. Che cosa ha vinto Gianni?  
‘What did Gianni win?’  
b. Gianni ha vinto [la medaglia]<sub>F</sub>.  
Gianni has won the medal  
‘Gianni won the medal’  
c. ?? [La medaglia]<sub>F</sub> ha vinto Gianni.  
the medal has won Gianni  
‘It was the medal that Gianni won’
- (2) a. La coppa, l’ha vinta Gianni.  
‘As for the cup, Gianni won it’

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Daniel Büring, Aniko Csirmaz, Rita Manzini, Luigi Rizzi, Kriszta Szendrői, Maria Luísa Zubizarreta, and the audience of Sinn und Bedeutung 7 for helpful comments.

- b. No, Gianni ha vinto [la medaglia]<sub>F</sub>.  
'No, Gianni won the medal'
- c. No, [la medaglia]<sub>F</sub> ha vinto Gianni.  
'No, it was the medal that Gianni won'

While an IF can only be low in the clause, a CF can either be low or move to the left periphery. The CF in (2b) moves to the left covertly (Rizzi 1997, É. Kiss 1998).

In this paper I shall demonstrate that the differences between two foci either do not exist, or do not pertain to focus itself, but are a reflex of the context in which focus occurs.

In § 2 I show that focus in Italian does not express exhaustive identification, but it always entails non-presupposed information. In § 3 I argue that focus projection is always possible and that there is only one rule of accent placement. In § 4 I claim that there aren't two different landing sites in the left periphery for focus movement and that focus always displays operator-like properties. Finally, in § 5 I suggest a possible explanation for the differences between Italian focus and Hungarian focus.

## 2 INTERPRETATION

É. Kiss (1998) makes probably the more systematic and exhaustive presentation of the arguments in favor of a distinction between two kinds of focus. As for the interpretive aspects, she says that a CF, which she calls 'identificational focus', expresses 'exhaustive identification', while an IF simply expresses non-presupposed information. Her idea is based on data from Hungarian and English, such as the following:<sup>2</sup>

- (3) a. Mari EGY KALAPOT nézett ki magának  
Mary a hat-acc picked out herself-acc  
'It was a hat that Mary picked for herself'
- b. Nem, egy kabátot is ki nézett  
no a coat too out picked  
'No, she picked a coat, too'
- (4) a. Mari ki nézett magának **egy kalapot**  
Mary out picked herself a hat  
'Mary picked herself a hat'
- b. # Nem, egy kabátot is ki nézett  
# 'No, she picked a coat, too'

In (3) the identificationally focused object represents the only thing that Mary picked for herself; in (4), where the object is informationally focused, 'a hat' is just one of the possible things that she could have picked for herself. Since the b sentence denies that Mary picked only one thing, it is appropriate only if it follows a sentence that asserts that Mary picked only one thing.

É. Kiss argues that in English the same results are obtained when the a sentence is a cleft (see the translation of 3 and 4). In other words, a CF in English is expressed by a cleft.<sup>3</sup> Consider now the Italian example corresponding to (3):

<sup>2</sup> From now on I indicate the CF with capital letters, the IF with boldface. The two notations do not say anything about accents, but simply highlight the focused constituent. Of course, the two notations are merely descriptive, since I do not believe in the existence of two distinct foci.

<sup>3</sup> As for Italian clefts, they behave differently. See § 2.3 below.

- (5) a. IL CAPPELLO ha comprato Maria.  
       the hat       has bought Maria  
       ‘It is the hat that Maria bought’  
   b. # No, ha comprato anche il cappotto.  
       no has bought   too   the hat  
       ‘No, she bought the coat too’

(5a) cannot be followed by a sentence like (5b). Therefore, *il cappello* in (5a) does not express exhaustive identification.

The unacceptability of the exchange in (5) is even clearer if we compare it with an exchange where the first sentence contains a focus associated with *solo* ‘only’. *Only*-phrases inherently express exhaustive identification, so the exchange should be perfect in this case. This is in fact born out by the example below:

- (6) a. Maria si è comprata solo un cappello.  
       Maria for-herself is bought only a hat  
       ‘Maria bought only a hat for herself’  
   b. No, si è comprata anche un cappotto.  
       no for-herself is bought also a coat  
       ‘No, she bought herself a coat too’

The exchange in (6) is as good as the Hungarian one in (3). In fact, the sentence in (6a) excludes that Mary bought something else apart from a hat. Another example É. Kiss reports is the following:

- (7) a. Hol jártál a nyáron?  
       ‘Where did you go in the summer?’  
   b. Jártam **Olaszországban**.  
       went-I Italy-to  
       ‘I went to Italy [among other places]’.  
   c. OLASZORSZÁGBAN jártam.  
       Italy-to went-I  
       ‘It was Italy where I went’

É. Kiss says that the meaning of sentence (7b), with IF, is that Italy isn’t the only place where the speaker went in the summer. Sentence (7c) with CF means that the speaker went to Italy and didn’t go to any other place.<sup>4</sup> In the corresponding Italian example, again, no difference in meaning is found between (8b) and (8c):

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<sup>4</sup> Szendrői (2001) suggests that the differences between (7b) and (7c) are not differences between two types of focus, but between a DP focus and a VP focus. When the VP is focused, stress in Hungarian falls both on the verb and on the complement. The verb in (7), though, is semantically empty, therefore it never bears main stress. If we look at a different verb, however, an answer like the one in (7b) becomes marginal, showing that a sentence without focus movement does not have a DP focus, but a wider focus on the VP.

- (i) a. Hol nyaraltál a nyáron?  
       ‘Where did you have holidays in the summer?’  
   b. ?\*Nyaraltam Olaszországban.  
       had-holidays-I Italy-in

- (8) a. Dove sei andata quest'estate?  
 'Where did you go last summer?'  
 b. Sono andata **in Francia**.  
 (I) am gone in France  
 'I went to France'  
 c. ?? IN FRANCIA sono andata.  
 in France (I) am gone  
 'It was France where I went'

The two question marks in (8c) are due to the preverbal position of focus (cf. 1c). This fact does not mean that there is a semantic difference between a preverbal focus and a postverbal focus. In fact, no constraint exists for focus with exhaustive interpretation that prevents it from being in an answer to a question. This is confirmed by the the Hungarian example in (7c), which is fully grammatical.

Like we have seen in (5) and (6) above, if we add the adverb *solo* 'only' to the focus in (8), the sentence expresses exclusion:

- (9) a. Dove sei andata quest'estate?  
 'Where did you go last summer?'  
 b. Sono andata solo in Francia.  
 (I) am gone only in France  
 'I went only to France'

## 2.1 Lexical restrictions on the CF

According to É. Kiss (1998), further evidence that the CF expresses exhaustive identification comes from certain lexical restrictions. A CF cannot be a universal quantifier, an *also*-phrase or an *even*-phrase, and an existential quantifier. She says that a CF performs a semantic operation characterized as 'exclusion by identification', while those expressions perform identification *without* exclusion. Therefore, their meaning is incompatible with the meaning of the CF.

Putting aside existential quantifiers for the moment, consider the other cases in É. Kiss's examples below:

- (10) a. \* Mari MINDEN KALAPOT nézett ki magának.  
 Mary every hat picked out herself-dat  
 \* 'It was every hat that Mary picked for herself'  
 b. \* Mari (MÉG) EGY KALAPOT IS nézett ki magának.  
 Mary even a hat also picked out herself-dat  
 'It was ?also / \* even a hat that Mary picked for herself'

Both in Hungarian and English the sentences in (10) are ungrammatical. In Italian, the same expressions can function as preverbal CFs. The b sentences in (11) and (12) are fully grammatical:

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If Szendrői's observation is correct, then also the distinction proposed by É. Kiss for Hungarian loses its strength.

In this paper, I take for granted that the distinction in Hungarian exists. In § 5 however, I suggest, following Horvath (2000), that the differences between the two Hungarian foci have to be ascribed to factors that are *independent* from focus.

- (11) a. Qualche proposta è stata già presa in considerazione.  
       ‘Some proposal has already been taken into account’  
       b. OGNI PROPOSTA è stata già presa in considerazione.  
           every proposal is been already taken into account  
           ‘Every proposal has already been taken into account’
- (12) a. La sciarpa, l’ha comprata Maria.  
       ‘As for the scarf, it is Maria who bought it’  
       b. Anche / Persino IL CAPPELLO ha comprato Maria.  
           also / even the hat                      has bought Maria  
           ‘It is also / even the hat that Maria bought’

As expected, the corresponding sentences with *only*-phrases are ungrammatical:

- (13) a. \* Maria ha preso in considerazione solo ogni proposta.  
           Maria has taken into account only every proposal  
       b. \* Maria ha comprato solo anche / persino un cappello.  
           Maria has bought only also / even a hat

As for existential quantifiers, É. Kiss herself observes that in Hungarian an existential quantifier is bad also when it functions as an IF. The same happens in Italian (cf. 14). Therefore, the incompatibility of an existential quantifier with focus doesn’t say anything about the difference between two types of focus.

- (14) Chi stai aspettando?  
       ‘Who are you waiting for?’  
       # Sto aspettando qualcuno.  
       ‘I am waiting for someone’

I think that the problem with an existential quantifier is its poor informative content, which doesn’t make it a good candidate to be the sentence focus. This is confirmed by the fact that the quantifier is accepted as focus if it can be informative enough, like in the following contexts:

- (15) a. ‘Are you waiting for the bus?’  
       b. No, sto aspettando qualcuno.  
           ‘No, I am waiting for someone’  
       c. No, QUALCUNO sto aspettando.  
           ‘No, it is someone that I am waiting for’
- (16) a. ‘What are you doing?’  
       b. Sto aspettando qualcuno.  
           ‘I am waiting for someone’

In (15), the quantifier is informative because it indicates that I am waiting for a person, not for a bus; in (16), the quantifier is included in a wider focus, so it is not the only informative part of the sentence.

## 2.2 Scope effects with a CF

A further piece of evidence given by É. Kiss that a CF expresses exhaustive identification is its capability of taking scope. An IF, on the contrary, cannot take scope. In fact, it is the property of exhaustive identification that interacts with the property of other scope-taking elements. In the Hungarian examples in (17), a CF interacts with the scope of a universal quantifier:

- (17) a. Minden fiú MARIVAL akart táncolni.  $\forall$  >> Exhaustive identification  
           every boy Mary-with wanted to-dance  
           ‘For every boy, it was Mary [of the relevant persons] that he wanted to dance with’  
       b. MARIVAL akart táncolni minden fiú. Exhaustive identification >>  $\forall$   
           ‘It was Mary [of the relevant persons] that every boy wanted to dance with’

According to what É. Kiss says, the meaning of (17a) is that every boy wanted to dance with one of all the girls present in the ballroom, and did not want to dance with any other girl (universal quantification takes scope over exhaustive identification). The meaning of (17b), instead, is that Mary is the only girl in the ballroom that was asked to dance by all the boys; the other girls may have been asked to dance by smaller subsets of boys (exhaustive identification takes scope over universal quantification).

In (18), É. Kiss’s example with information focus is given. Here, the universal quantifier takes scope over the whole sentence. In fact, the example may be true in any situation in which some or all the boys wanted to dance with more than one person:

- (18) a. Kikkel akartak táncolni a fiúk?  
           ‘Who did the boys want to-dance with?’  
       b. Minden fiú táncolni akart **a szépségkirálynővel**.  
           ‘Every boy wanted to dance with the beauty queen’

In Italian, a CF does not take scope, as the following example shows:

- (19) a. Ogni ragazzo CON MARIA voleva ballare.  
           every boy with Maria wanted to-dance  
       b. CON MARIA voleva ballare ogni ragazzo.  
           with Maria wanted to-dance every boy  
           ‘Every boy wanted to dance with Maria’

The truth value of each sentence is the same. Both (19a) and (19b) mean that all the boys wanted to dance with one person, and that this person is Maria; neither sentence excludes that some boy wanted to dance also with other girls. This is clearer if we look at the corresponding sentences with ‘only’-phrases. In (20a) and (20b) differences in scope are evident.

- (20) a. Ogni ragazzo voleva ballare solo con Maria.  $\forall$  >> Exhaustive identification  
           every boy wanted to-dance only with Maria  
           ‘For every boy it was Maria [and nobody else] that he wanted to dance with’  
       b. Solo con Maria voleva ballare ogni ragazzo. Exhaustive. Identification >>  $\forall$   
           only with Maria wanted to-dance every boy  
           ‘It was Maria that every boy [not just a subset of boys] wanted to dance with’

The meaning of (20a) and (20b) is the same as that of the corresponding Hungarian sentences in (17a) and (17b) respectively.

### 2.3 Clefts in Italian

We have seen that for É. Kiss (1998) a CF in English is represented by a cleft. Since a CF in Italian both in postverbal and in preverbal position never expresses exhaustive identification, one might ask whether also in this language it is focus in clefts that expresses exhaustive identification. The answer is no. Although in a few cases they behave differently, in most cases clefts in Italian pattern like ‘normal’ sentences.

Consider the examples with clefts below, which correspond respectively to the examples with normal sentences in (5), (8), (11), and (15).

- (21) a. E’ il CAPPELLO che ha comprato Maria.  
           ‘It is the hat that Maria bought’  
       b. # No, ha comprato anche il cappotto.  
           ‘No, she bought the coat too’
- (22) a. Dove sei andata quest’estate?  
           ‘Where did you go last summer?’  
       b. ?? E’ in FRANCIA che sono andata.  
           ‘It was France where I went’
- (23) a. Qualche proposta è stata considerata.  
           ‘Some proposal has been taken into account’  
       b. ? Veramente è OGNI PROPOSTA che è stata considerata.  
           ‘To tell the truth, it is every proposal that has been taken into account’
- (24) a. Stai aspettando l’autobus?  
           ‘Are you waiting for the bus?’  
       b. ? No, è QUALCUNO che sto aspettando.  
           ‘No, it is someone that I am waiting for’

In (21), b is not a good continuation of a; therefore, as we said in § 2, the focused constituent in a does not express exhaustive identification (cf. 5).

In (22), the answer does not entail that I went only to France, but I could have been in other places as well (cf. 8).

The sentence in (23), where the focused constituent is a universal quantifier, is acceptable, although with a slight marginality flavour (cf. 11). The same slight marginality is present with an existential quantifier in (24) (cf. 15).

Moreover, like focus in normal sentences, focus in clefts does not take scope (cf. § 2.2). This is clear if we compare clefts containing a focused constituent and clefts containing an *only*-phrase. Only in the latter case the interpretation of the sentence changes according to the ordering of the focused constituent and the universal quantifier:

- (25) a. Ogni ragazzo è con MARIA che voleva ballare.  
           every boy (it) is with Maria that (he) wanted to-dance  
       b. E’ con MARIA che voleva ballare ogni ragazzo.
- (26) a. Ogni ragazzo è solo con MARIA che voleva ballare.     $\forall >>$  Exhaustive identification  
           every boy (it) is only with Maria that (he) wanted to-dance  
           ‘For every boy it was only Maria that he wanted to dance with’

- b. E' solo con MARIA che voleva ballare ogni ragazzo. Exhaustive identification  $>> \forall$   
 'It was only Maria that every boy [not a subset of boys] wanted to dance with'

(25a) and (25b) have the same meaning as (19a) and (19b); (26a) and (26b), instead, have different interpretations. (26a) means that all the boys didn't want to dance with anybody else apart from Maria; (26b) means that the entire group of boys wanted to dance with Maria, but smaller groups of boys may have been interested in dancing with other girls.

Strangely, in just one case clefts behave differently from normal sentences. It is very hard to accept a cleft where the focused element is accompanied by an adverb like *anche* 'also' or *persino* 'even' (cf. 12):

- (27) E' <sup>\*?</sup>anche / <sup>\*?</sup>persino il CAPPELLO che ha comprato Maria.  
 (it) is also / even the hat that has bought Maria  
 'It was also / even the hat that Maria bought'

The reason for such a difference remains unexplained to me. In any case, the behaviour of clefts is mostly the same as that of normal sentences. Therefore, we cannot say that clefts express exhaustive identification and represent the CF in Italian.

## 2.4 Contrastiveness

From what I have said up to now, I can conclude that the semantic property that according to É. Kiss differentiates the CF from the IF, namely the property of exhaustivity, is never present in Italian focus. One might wonder whether it is the effect of contrastiveness that has to be considered as a property that distinguishes the semantics of a CF from that of an IF.

Following Rooth's (1992) semantic theory of focus, I claim that the property of contrastiveness doesn't represent any inherent property of focus. Rooth analyzes several cases in which a focus can occur: focusing adverbs, scales, question-answer pairs and contrasting phrases. He proposes a unified account for focus occurring in all those cases.

First, he assumes that a focus phrase has a 'focus semantic value', defined as "a set of propositions obtainable from the ordinary semantic value by making a substitution in the position corresponding to the focused phrase". For instance, the focus semantic value of a sentence like (28a) is a set of propositions of the form 'I gave x to John' like those in (28b).

- (28) a. I gave [a book]<sub>F</sub> to John.  
 b. I gave a book to John, I gave a cd to John, I gave a watch to John, I gave a kiss to John, I gave an advice to John, etc., etc.

Second, Rooth states that:

- (29) a. Focus interpretation at the level of  $\alpha$  introduces a free variable  $\gamma$ , restricted by the formula  $\gamma \in [\alpha]^f$   
 b. The semantic value of any phrase  $\beta$  is a discourse object, available as an antecedent for free variables  
 c. If  $[\beta]^\circ \in [\alpha]^f$ , the semantic value of a phrase  $\beta$  can serve as the antecedent for the variable introduced by focus interpretation at the level of the phrase  $\alpha$

In a sentence where a focus phrase  $\alpha$  is construed as in contrast with a phrase  $\beta$ , the semantic value of  $\beta$  constitutes the antecedent for the variable  $\gamma$  introduced by  $\alpha$ . The crucial point is that the characteristics of contrasting sentences (like that of other contexts considered by



Rooth) do not pertain to theory of focus, which remains the same, but to the semantic object available as antecedent for the variable introduced by the focus phrase.

In other words, the effect of contrastiveness depends on what surrounds the focus, not on focus itself. Quoting from Lambrecht (1994), “the impression of contrastiveness which we receive (...) arises from particular inferences which we draw on the basis of given conversational contexts”. Trivially, if I say *Ho mangiato i ravioli* ‘I ate ravioli’, with an accent on *ravioli*, the focus will be contrastive if the sentence is preceded by a sentence like *You ate spaghetti, didn’t you?*, but it will express plain new information if it is preceded for instance by the question *What did you eat for Christmas?*, where no alternative options to *i ravioli* are made explicit.

Lambrecht also points out that the effect of contrastiveness is not related to any particular prosodic characteristic of the focus. In the following paragraphs I will make the same claim, namely I will show that there aren’t two different accents and accent rules for focus.

### 3 PROSODY

As concerns the prosodic characteristics of focus, two aspects have been mainly considered by the literature: the extension of focus domain and accent placement.

As for the first aspect, I treat it in the following two paragraphs, and challenge Donati and Nespor’s (2001) arguments about ‘focus projection’ and the restrictions on focus extension. As for the second aspect, I discuss it in the last paragraph of this section, and challenge Zubizarreta’s (1998) analysis of accent placement and its relation with focus.

#### 3.1 Focus Projection

The phenomenon that Selkirk (1984, 1995) names ‘focus projection’ was probably noticed for the first time by Chomsky (1971). Chomsky proposes a principle which says that the focused constituent of a phrase must contain the intonational nucleus of that phrase, and observes that the focus of a sentence can extend to larger constituents than the one immediately containing the accented word. The focus of a sentence like that in (30) can be taken as any of the bracketed phrases:

(30) He was warned to look out for [an ex-convict [with [a red shirt]]].<sup>5</sup>

Cinque (1993) assumes Chomsky’s (1971) principle that relates the focus of a phrase to the nuclear stress of that phrase, and proposes that the nuclear stress falls on the *most embedded* element in the constituent structure of the focus phrase. Therefore, according to Cinque, focus projects bottom up from the smallest (and lowest) constituent containing the accented word to the largest one.

Donati and Nespor (2001) argue that a CF cannot ‘project’. More precisely, they say that a CF cannot be larger than a word:

- (31) a. I always thought John was [ANTI]<sub>F</sub>-communist.  
       b. I always thought John was [WELSH]<sub>F</sub>.  
       c. I always thought John was \*[A YOUNG JOURNALIST]<sub>F</sub>.

<sup>5</sup> Underscoring indicates the stressed word.

Assuming Cinque's definition of focus projection, Donati and Nespor's claim about CF result incorrect, as the example below clearly shows:

- (32) a. Tua sorella ha incontrato il Prof. Rossi.  
 'Your sister met Prof. Rossi'  
 b. No, ha incontrato [<sub>DP</sub> IL MAESTRO [<sub>PP</sub> DELLA FIGLIA [<sub>PP</sub> DI PIETRO]]].  
 no (she) has met the teacher of the daughter of Pietro  
 'No, she met Peter's daughter's teacher'

The accent in (32b) is on the word *Pietro*, which is in the most embedded constituent of the clause. Therefore, the focused constituent can be the whole DP object, exactly like it would be if the same sentence answered a wh-question (that is, if focus were informational):

- (33) a. Chi ha incontrato tua sorella?  
 'Who did your sister meet?'  
 b. Ha incontrato [<sub>DP</sub> **il maestro** [<sub>PP</sub> **della figlia** [<sub>PP</sub> **di Pietro**]]].  
 'She met Peter's daughter's teacher'

Note that focus projection also occurs if the accented word is contained within a moved phrase:

- (34) a. Tua sorella ha incontrato il Prof. Rossi?  
 'Did your sister meet Prof. Rossi?'  
 b. No, [<sub>DP</sub> IL MAESTRO [<sub>PP</sub> DELLA FIGLIA [<sub>PP</sub> DI PIETRO]]] ha incontrato.  
 no the teacher of the daughter of Peter (she) has met  
 'No, it was Peter's daughter's teacher that she met'

In this case, the accented word is contained in the most embedded constituent of the moved DP. It is not surprising, then, that a sentence like (34b) cannot answer an out-of-the-blue question of the type 'What happened?', namely that focus cannot project to the whole clause. In fact, the accent on *Pietro* indicates that the largest constituent that can be focused is the DP object. Therefore, the impossibility for (34b) to be fully focused does not say anything about the distinction between two types of focus, but simply reflexes the rule governing the relation between accent placement and the extension of the focus domain.

Notice that, if the accented word stays in the most embedded constituent of an entire clause, a contrastive interpretation of focus does not prevent focus from extending its domain to the whole clause, as shown by the following examples:

- (35) a. Hanno bussato alla porta?  
 'Did someone knock the door?'  
 b. No, [STANNO PIANTANDO [UN CHIODO]].  
 'No, they are driving a nail'
- (36) a. Gianni è ingrassato perché ha mangiato molti muffins?  
 'Did Gianni get fat because he ate many muffins?'  
 b. No, perché [HA BEVUTO [MOLTE [BIRRE]]].  
 'No, because he drank many beers'

Summarizing, focus projection is not restricted to the IF: any focused constituent can be larger than a word, and even as large as the whole clause, if the context requires it.

### 3.2 The IF domain

Donati and Nespor (2001) argue also that an IF cannot be smaller than a word. They say that a part of a compound, like *black* in the example below, can never be the IF of a sentence:

(37) [John [just bought [a \***black**]<sub>F</sub>bird]<sub>F</sub>]<sub>F</sub>.

I claim that this restriction does not depend on the type of focus, but on purely pragmatic factors. An informationally focused constituent is usually represented as the answer to a wh-question. A Q-A pair is the more natural environment in which an IF can occur. Now, an answer to a question strictly depends on how the question is formulated. I think that it is this dependence of an answer on its question that makes the IF domain more restricted, and not an inherent property of the focus itself. In other words, I claim that an IF has the same domain as a CF, but certain focus domains that are frequent in contrastive contexts result less frequent in Q-A contexts.

Going back to (37), it is difficult to find a question whose answer is a part of a word. However, it is not impossible. We can imagine an example where the new information is given by a part of a word. Consider for instance the exchange in (38).

(38) a. Sono state coniate nuove parole per indicare chi è contro la globalizzazione, e tutte terminano in ‘global’.

‘New words have been coined for those who are against globalization, and all of them end in ‘global’

b. E come definiresti Enrico?

‘And how would you define Enrico?’

c. Enrico lo definirei un **new-global**.

Enrico him-(I)-would-define a new-global

‘As for Enrico, I would define him a new-global’

The only informative part of (38c) is the prefix *new*, which is therefore accented.

Cases like (38) are rare. Moreover, in those cases the accent could also fall on the noun the prefix is attached to:

(38)’ c. Enrico lo definirei un **new-global**.

Enrico him-(I)-would-define a new-global

‘As for Enrico, I would define him a new-global’

This optionality is probably due to the fact that *new-global* can be interpreted either as a compound or not. Only in the former case the accent goes on *new*. In the latter case, the accent will fall on the main accent of the noun *new-global*, and the focus of the sentence will be then considered as the *whole* noun.

Notice however that the optionality is also admitted when focus expresses contrast, as in (39) below.

(39) Io definirei Enrico un **no-global**, non un **new-global**.

I would define Enrico a no-global not a new-global

This means that the optionality depends on the characteristics of compounds, not of focus.

### 3.3 Accent placement

Zubizarreta (1998), like Cinque (1993), assumes that the focused constituent of a phrase must contain the intonational nucleus of that phrase and that the accent placement in a sentence is governed by the Nuclear Stress Rule.

She also argues that in certain languages defocalized and anaphoric phrases can be metrically invisible. The NSR does not apply to them. In this way she can account for the difference between Romance languages and Germanic languages. In English and German defocalized and anaphoric phrases can follow an accented word, in Spanish and Italian only dislocated items can.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, if in these languages an accent is *not* placed on the lower node of the clause, then it is clear that that accent does not follow the NSR but a different rule, that Zubizarreta calls *Emphatic/Contrastive Stress Rule*, and the corresponding focus is therefore a CF, not an IF. The Emphatic/Contrastive Stress Rule says that

(40) A word with contrastive stress must be dominated by every focused constituent in the phrase.

In other words, according to this rule, what is important is not that the accent falls on the lower node of the clause, but rather that, *wherever* the accent is located, all focused material dominates it. To show this, Zubizarreta reports the following examples in Spanish:

- (41) a. El gato del sombrero [ROJO]<sub>F</sub> escribió un libro sobre ratones (no el de sombrero azul).  
           the cat of hat red wrote a book about rats not the-one of hat blue  
           ‘The cat with a red hat wrote a book about rats (not the one with a blue hat)’  
       b. [EL GATO DEL SOMBRERO ROJO]<sub>F</sub> escribió un libro sobre ratones (no el perro de chaqueta verde).  
           the cat of hat red wrote a book about rats not the dog of jacket green  
           ‘The cat with a red hat wrote a book about rats (not the dog with a green jacket)’

In (41) the contrastive stress falls on the lower node of the phrase *el gato del sombrero rojo*. It seems to me then that the difference between a CF accent and an IF accent in Zubizarreta’s proposal is that, while the former can fall anywhere in the clause, regardless of the possibility for the language to have post-focal (non-dislocated) material, the latter is constrained by that possibility. An IF accent could not fall on *rojo* in (41) because defocalized material would follow the accented word.

Zubizarreta’s proposal, however, is not supported by Italian data. In Brunetti (2003) I extensively show that an IF can stay in a position that is *not* the lower one in the clause. An IF accent can be followed by non-focused material that is not dislocated. I report below a couple of examples where an IF stays in preverbal position and is followed by non-dislocated material (42a and 42b respectively).

- (42) a. Ora ricordo: i guanti mi ha regalato Luigi per Natale.  
           now (I) remember the gloves to-me has given Luigi for Christmas  
           ‘Now I remember: it was the gloves that Luigi gave me as a present for Christmas’  
       b. Allora è deciso: contatterà Gianni il sindaco.  
           then is decided will-contact Gianni the major  
           ‘Then we are decided: it is Gianni that will get in touch with the major’

<sup>6</sup> In fact, dislocated items are part of a distinct intonational grouping.

Neither in (42a) nor in (42b) there is a contrastive interpretation of focus. In (42a), the speaker implies that the hearer knows that Luigi gave him/her a present for Christmas, and that he/she had forgotten what it was. The interlocutors do not imply any alternative option to the gloves. In (42b), the speaker implies that the hearer knows that it is necessary to get in touch with the major and that somebody had to be chosen to do that. In this case the alternative options to Gianni are presumably known by the interlocutors, but no contrast is entailed between Gianni and the others who could get in touch with the major.

In conclusion, these examples show that the only restriction an accent has in Italian is that it must fall on the most embedded constituent of the focused phrase. This restriction holds for both a CF and an IF, as we have seen in § 3.1 and in (41). Therefore, there aren't two different rules for accent placement, as Zubizarreta claims.

#### 4 SYNTAX

Examples (43) and (44) seem to indicate that while a CF can move to the left, an IF cannot:

- (43) a. La coppa, l'ha vinta Gianni.  
           'As for the cup, Gianni won it'  
       b. No, LA MEDAGLIA ha vinto Gianni.  
           'No, it was the medal that Gianni won'

- (44) a. Che cosa ha vinto Gianni?  
           'What did Gianni win?'  
       b. ?? **La medaglia** ha vinto Gianni.  
           'It was the medal that Gianni won'

In Brunetti (2003) I discuss these data, and show that it is not true that an IF cannot move. I claim that the apparent unacceptability of a preverbal focus in (44b) depends on the question-answer context in which a focus occurs when it expresses 'plain' new information, and does not depend on focus itself.

In the following paragraphs I will take for granted that a focus can always move to the left periphery in Italian and I will challenge Benincà and Poletto's (1999) claim that the landing site of IF movement is *different* than that of CF movement. If Benincà and Poletto were right, in fact, the existence of two different foci would be confirmed by the twofold landing site of focus movement.

##### 4.1 Two landing sites for focus movement?

Benincà and Poletto (1999) propose that both a CF and an IF move to the left periphery, but the latter moves to a different (lower) position than that where a CF moves. They argue that in the example below the post-focal PP *a Gianni* 'to Gianni', which is a topic in Rizzi's (1997) framework, is in fact an IF:

- (45) QUESTO a Gianni gli dovremmo dire!  
       this to Gianni to-him (we) should say  
       'We should say this to Gianni'

The arguments that Benincà and Poletto consider in order to support their claim are not convincing.

First, contra Rizzi (1997), they say that the presence of the object clitic in (45) does not prove that the PP is a topic. They point out that in colloquial Italian a dative clitic can occur with a focused indirect object, as in (46).

- (46) Gliel'ho detto **a Gianni**.  
 to-him-it (I) have told to Gianni  
 'I told this to Gianni'

Second, they claim that the presence of an accent is not crucial to determine the information status of an element. According to them, *il divano* 'the sofa' in (47b) is not focused, but left-dislocated, as the resumptive clitic would demonstrate.

- (47) a. Mi ha detto che il tappeto, lo compra l'anno prossimo.  
 'He has told me that the carpet he will buy *it* next year'  
 b. No, ti sbagli, IL DIVANO *lo* compra l'anno prossimo.  
 no (you) are wrong the sofa it buy the year next  
 'No, you are wrong, it is the sofa that he will buy next year'

Finally, they argue that a post-focal element is sensitive to weak crossover, which is a property of focused items (cf. Rizzi 1997). They report the following data:

- (48) \*A MARIA, Giorgio<sub>i</sub>, sua<sub>i</sub> madre presenterà  
 to Maria Giorgio his mother will introduce  
 'His mother will introduce Giorgio to Maria'

They conclude that the post-focal element that in Rizzi (1997) is a topic is instead an IF moved to a position lower than the position where the CF moves.

We must note that the first argument presented by Benincà and Poletto - the presence of a resumptive clitic for a focused constituent - invalidates the second - the fact that intonation is not related to focus. Why should (47) represent a topic with a focus intonation? (47) can be seen as another case of focus with resumptive clitic. Both examples in (46) and (47) then show that a focused constituent can have a resumptive clitic, but do not prove that the PP in (45) is focused.

As for (48), Benincà and Poletto observe in a footnote that when the post-focal element is not coindexed with the possessive pronoun of the subject, but the subject is preverbal, the sentence is still not very good:

- (49) ? A MARIA, Giorgio, mia madre presenterà  
 to Maria Giorgio my mother will-introduce

According to my judgments and those of my informants, the unacceptability of (49) is as strong as that of (48). Moreover, while according to Benincà and Poletto's judgments (48) is still bad with a resumptive object clitic, according to my judgments the clitic rescues the sentence and makes it more acceptable:

- (50) ? A MARIA, Giorgio<sub>i</sub>, sua<sub>i</sub> madre lo presenterà.  
 to Maria Giorgio his mother him will-introduce

In conclusion, Benincà and Poletto do not bring convincing arguments that a post-focal element is in fact an IF.

Furthermore, if we look again at (45), we notice that the post-focal PP *a Gianni* could have been previously mentioned in the discourse, so it is clearly part of the background:

(51) a. Pensi che a Gianni dobbiamo raccontare tutto?

‘As for Gianni, do you think we should tell him everything?’

b. Niente affatto. Secondo me solo QUESTO a Gianni (gli) dovremmo dire: che stiamo bene e che ci divertiamo.

not at all according to me only this to Gianni to-him (we) should say that (we) are good and that (we) have a good time

‘Not at all. I think that we should tell Gianni only the following: that we are fine and we are having a good time’

Concluding, the post-focal element in (45) is not another focus, but it is part of the background. Therefore, there is no evidence that a focus expressing new information moves to a different position than a focus expressing contrast.

## 4.2 Operator-like properties of focus

It is quite a common assumption in the literature that a preverbal contrastive focus in Italian has operator-like properties (cf. Rizzi 1997, Belletti 2001a, etc.). In fact, a CF is sensitive to weak crossover and licenses parasitic gaps, as shown by the examples in (52) and (53).

(52) a. \* I suoi<sub>i</sub> genitori hanno visto Maria?

‘Did her parents see Maria?’

b. \* No, LUIGI<sub>i</sub> i suoi<sub>i</sub> genitori hanno visto t<sub>i</sub>.

no Luigi his parents have seen

(53) UN LIBRO DI STATISTICA<sub>i</sub> ho buttato via senza leggere t<sub>i</sub>

a book of statistics (I) have thrown away without to-read

If an IF is the same grammatical object as a CF, as I claim in this paper, we should expect that it displays operator-like properties as well. This is borne out by the following data from Frascarelli (2000), showing respectively that an IF is sensitive to wco and licenses parasitic gaps:

(54) a. \* Chi<sub>i</sub> hanno visto i suoi<sub>i</sub> genitori?

‘Who did his parents see?’

b. \* I suoi<sub>i</sub> genitori hanno visto **Luigi**<sub>i</sub>.

the his parents have seen Luigi

(55) a. Che cosa<sub>i</sub> hai buttato via senza leggere t<sub>i</sub> ?

‘What did you throw away without reading?’

b. Ho buttato via senza leggere t<sub>i</sub> **un libro di statistica**<sub>i</sub>.

(I) have thrown away without to-read a book of statistics

‘I threw away without reading a book about statistics’

Presumably, in (54) and (55) the focused constituent occupies the left peripheral position at LF.

In conclusion, a focused item in Italian displays operator-like properties both when it moves to the left and when it stays in situ, and both when it triggers contrast and when it expresses new information.

## 5 TOWARDS A UNIFIED ACCOUNT FOR FOCUS

In this paper I have brought several pieces of evidence that there is only one type of focus in Italian. It would be theoretically desirable to show that this result is not constrained to Italian but that focalization is a unique phenomenon in natural languages in general. In other words, it would be desirable to show that there is a unique category of the grammar that is called ‘focus’.

We have seen that from an interpretive point of view Italian differs from Hungarian in that it does not have a focus expressing exhaustive identification. Do we have to conclude that the difference between Italian and Hungarian is just that Italian *lacks* one kind of focus?

Horvath (2000) suggests a different analysis. She proposes that focus is a unique phenomenon also in Hungarian, and that the properties of a preverbal focus noted by É. Kiss (1998) are the result of association by movement of the focused phrase with a null operator of ‘exhaustive identification’. Focus *per se* is a unique phenomenon: it is the operator that makes the difference between the two focus constructions. Horvath points out that the operator is independent from focus: the only relation between the two is that the operator needs to associate with a focused element, in the same way as operators like ‘only’ and ‘also’ need to.

Horvath suggests that the same association with focus probably occurs in other languages with focus movement, like Italian, and points out the fact that also in those languages the moved focus has some systematic extra semantic function beyond just being ‘new information’ in the discourse. Having shown in this paper that focus in Italian never displays an extra semantic function apart from new information, I suggest that Italian focus associates with an operator that *does not add* any special meaning to the focused item (presumably an existential operator, see Manzini and Savoia 1999).<sup>7</sup> This idea however needs further investigations and therefore is left for future research.

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<sup>7</sup> The operator-like properties observed in § 4.2 would not be evidence that focus itself is an operator, but rather that it is *bound* by that operator.



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