

Stylistic Fronting: a phase-based analysis

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The topic. This paper offers a phase-based account of Stylistic Fronting (SF) in Old Italian (OI) (spoken until 1350 in the Florence area). SF is an optional syntactic phenomenon and consists of movement of a lexical item that may belong to various syntactic categories to a pre-finite V position, if no subject is merged in SpecIP, (1) (e.g. Not attested: *nodrito elli era/era elli* =educated he was/was he).

- (1) a. *Buona è detta <buona> quella favella che à in sè quattro cose*
 Good is said that word that has in self four things
 ‘That speech which contains four things is called good’ [FR, 5, 1]
- b. *Fu lli contato come nodrito era stato <nodrito>*
 was to.him told how educated was been
 ‘It was told him how he had been educated’ [N, 5, 28]

SF is productive in Icelandic and Old Scandinavian (Nygaard 1906; Platzack 1988; Maling 1980, 1990, Rögnvaldsson & Thráinsson 1990; Jónsson 1991; Falk 1993; Holmberg 2000 Delsing 2001; Hrafnbjargarson 2003, 2004; Thráinsson et al. 2004; Thráinsson 2007; Heycock & Sorace, 2007; Ott 2009; Wood 2011; Ingason & Wood 2013, a.o.), and it is also attested in some Old Romance languages (Old Catalan, Old French, Fischer & Alexiadou 2001; Cardinaletti & Roberts 2003; Mathieu 2006, 2009; Fischer 2010; Labelle & Hirschbühler 2012ff; Salvesen 2011, 2013, a.o.). In OI, SF displays some characteristics that have neither been reported for SF in other Old Romance languages nor for SF in Old Scandinavian/Icelandic, thus the question is whether such difference has been overlooked or whether it reflects some microparametric variation.

This paper argues that the productivity of SF depends on the following parametric properties: (i) the presence of a strong [*] feature on phase-heads, (ii) the possibility to satisfy the pragmatic requirement for a ‘Subject-of-Predication’ in other ways than by merging a nominative DP, and (iii) an active/inactive structural distinction at the vP level.

The data. A corpus study on three OI texts in prose shows that SF displays a root/non-root asymmetry in the typology of fronted items. In root clauses, nominal elements (table 1), such as nominal predicates with a special semantics, front more frequently than verbal elements (infinitivals, past participles), which mostly undergo SF in non-root clauses (table 2).

Table 1. SF categories in root (V-to-C) contexts

	SF categories				
	Infinitive/VP	Past Participle	Verb Particle	Predicative Adjective	Nominal Predicate
Occurrences	11	7	0	17	77
Percentage	10%	6%	0%	15%	69%

Table 2. SF categories in non V-to-C contexts

	SF categories				
	Infinitive	Past Participle	Verb Particle	Predicative Adjective	Nominal Predicate
Occurrences	14	22	2	3	13
Percentage	26%	41%	4%	5%	24%

The analysis. OI has V-to-C and pro-drop for all persons in root clauses, whereas pro-drop is limited to 3rd person in non-root clauses (Benincà 1994ff a.o.). Root and non-root SF are analyzed as two different phenomena: root SF is movement to CP, where it contributes to information structure (similarly to topicalization and focalization in V2 clauses); non-root SF is a movement that anchors the semantic content of event structure (vP) to the context (FinP). In both root and non-root contexts, movement to CP is determined by the strong features [*] that are encoded on a functional phase-head, which is a characteristic of Old but not of

Modern Italian. The formalization of feature strength is as follows (cf. Chomsky 1995, Lasnik 1999, Biberauer & Richards 2006).

(2) If a feature F of a phase head H is strong $[*]$, then F^* requires overt Merge on H .

In my analysis, I assume that phase-edges may consist of more than one functional head+specifier, and specifically they may correspond to a cartographic field, according to the definition of Roberts (2010). A cartographic field consists of adjacent heads that encode the same number of formal features (e.g. V , T , Clause type). Phase heads encode an uneven number of formal features and alternate with non-phase heads (Richards 2007), see (3).

(3) $C[+clause\ type, +T, +V]$, $T [+T, +V]$, $v[+V]$, $V[$

$C=3$; $T=2$; $v=1$; $V=0$

In a split CP (Rizzi 1997ff), various C heads may encode F^* and trigger movement of an element to the CP-phase edge, depending on the sentence pragmatics. I show that the probe of OI SF is located in CP, between Focus and Fin, and that root and non-root SF have a different syntax and semantics.

Root SF. In root clauses the ‘nominal’ elements undergoing SF are generally extracted modifiers, quantifiers, comparative forms or elements with an epistemic or a deontic value (cf. (1a)). This type of elements has a semantics that matches the semantic features encoded on Mod, a functional head that is merged between Fin and Focus (Rizzi 2004:91). Nonetheless, root SF is ambiguous with focalization and other types of fronting in sentences with null pro subjects, which are attested also in other V2 Romance languages (see Labelle & Hirschbühler 2012, to app. for Old French SF).

Non-root SF. The elements that undergo SF in non-root clauses have a different semantics. I show that SF of verbal elements is phrasal movement of a non-active event structure (result states, fig. 1, passivized transitive achievements or unaccusative achievements) to SpecFinP. Assuming that v is a phase-head only when it assigns an Agent theta-role (= $v[Agent^*]$; cf. Baker 1988, Larson 1988, Grimshaw 1990, Chomsky 1995, Kratzer 1996, Folli & Harley 2004, 2007, Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer 2006, Travis 2010 a.o.), SF is possible only if vP is not a phase, in non-root clauses. That is, no intervening agentive external argument is merged in SpecvP. As a result, the fronted material (event structure) is interpreted as ‘Subject-of-Predication’ by checking the respective semantic feature in Fin ([Subj-of-Pred*]). If present, this feature may otherwise be checked by a nominative DP in SpecIP (under feature-sharing, cf. Abels 2012 a.o.), a position that is directly c-commanded by Fin.

Support. The argument is corroborated by pragmatic tests that show that the semantic content of the event structure that undergoes SF is interpreted as presupposed information (*pace* Mathieu 2006ff), on a par with subjects in standard predicative (i.e. SV) constructions whereas expletive-associate constructions have a different pragmatics. Comparative and diachronic facts further support the analysis of SF as the result of specific parametric properties (see (i)-(iii) above). First, a corpus search reveals that SF is absent in Old Northern Italian varieties, which only allow for a nominative subject in SpecIP, in non-root clauses (no 3rd person pro-drop). Second, a search on Renaissance Italian texts (1350-1500) reveals that SF disappears from the Italian grammar (*pace* Cardinaletti 2003, cf. Author 2009), as soon as the features encoded on CP heads lose $[*]$, thus the capability to attract the inflected verb (loss of V2), and other XPs to their specifier (Poletto 2005, 2014).

This analysis makes clear crosslinguistic predictions with respect to the parameter setting that is related to SF, and arguably to other phenomena that are attested in Old Romance, but are lost at subsequent diachronic stages (cf. Author et al. 2014). Testing these predictions by means of diachronic studies in Old Romance and Old Scandinavian, as well as of a synchronic comparison with Modern Icelandic may lead to interesting discoveries on the mechanisms that underlie morphosyntactic variation.