

The Status of Preverbal Subjects in Romance Null Subject Languages

Abstract

Under standard Minimalist assumptions, competing analyses of null subjects make strikingly different predictions with respect to the status of preverbal subjects. Analysis (A) which argues that agreement morphology is interpretable/pronominal (Barbosa 1995, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1995, 1998, Rohrbacher 1994, 1999, Speas to appear) essentially predicts that *all* preverbal subjects are base-generated in an A'-position in a manner akin to CLLD. Analysis (B), which assumes that agreement is not interpretable but is rather the spellout of uninterpretable features, (Holmberg 2003, 2004, Roberts 2004) predicts that *at least some* preverbal subjects are in an A-position, attracted there by a universal EPP. In what follows I assess the evidence from a number of Romance languages and conclude that there is, in fact, robust evidence to suggest that preverbal subjects in Romance NSLs are not *always* CLLD. I show that this is a considerable, though perhaps not insurmountable, problem for (A). I then briefly discuss the repercussions of adopting analysis (B), and suggest how this kind of analysis might deal with post-verbal subjects, one of the proposed correlates of the Null Subject Parameter (Rizzi 1982).

1. Why should we care?

The status of preverbal overt subjects allows us to assess competing null subject analyses.

1.1 Analysis A

Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998):

- (1) Parameterised mode of EPP checking: Move/Merge XP vs. Move/Merge X⁰
 - In null subject languages (NSLs), V-movement to I satisfies the EPP where it has morphology which “includes a nominal element ([+D, +interpretable phi-features, potentially +Case]” (A& A 1998:516).
 - As agreement morphology has the status of a pronoun, all preverbal subjects in null subject languages (NSLs) must be Clitic Left Dislocated (CLLD) in an A-bar position.

1.2 Analysis B

Holmberg (2003) & Roberts (2004) make the following implicit assumption:

- (2) Rich agreement NSLs also have EPP which requires Move/Merge XP
 - Null subjects are the result of a deleted pronoun in spec TP
 - Agreement morphology is the spellout of uninterpretable features valued by the pronoun.
 - Preverbal subjects can occupy the same A-position as such a pronoun and need not always, though might (in the right pragmatic contexts), be CLLD.

1.3 A vs. B

If there is evidence that not all preverbal subjects are CLLD then this serves to disprove the strongest version of A.

2. What exactly is CLLD?

Object CLLD, possible in Italian, Spanish, French and European Portuguese, has specific structural properties, as discussed by Cinque (1990):

- i. The element doubled by a clitic appears at the left of the clause, forming “a clearly distinct melodic phrase, set off from the rest of the clause by a pause (represented by the comma)” (Raposo (1996:1).
- (3) [DP Cet homme], je ne le connais pas
 This man I NEG CL-him know NEG
 Lit. ‘This man, I don’t know him.’ [French]
- ii. Any “maximal phrase” (PP, AP? or DP) can be CLLD (Cinque 1990:57) as long as the corresponding clitic exists in a given language:¹
- (4) [PPAl mare], ci siamo già stati
 To-the sea CL-there are:1PL already been
 Lit. ‘To the seaside, we have already been there.’ [Italian]
- iii. “CLLD can occur at the front of virtually any subordinate clause.” (Cinque 1990:58)
 - iv. There is “no theoretical limit” to the number of elements that can be CLLD (Cinque 1990:58).
 - v. CLLD is not subject to ‘Kayne’s Generalisation’, whereby doubled elements must be case marked by a preposition.
 - vi. CLLD, with a resumptive clitic is not possible with robustly non-referential QPs or bare NPs in Italian, Spanish, EP or French (Raposo 1996), Kato and Raposo (2005):
- (5) *Livros do Tintim, li-os antes de adormecer. [E. Portuguese]
 Books of-the Tintin read:1S-CL-THEM before of sleep:INF-1S
- (6) *Poucos candidatos, ouvi-os falar na televisão.
 Few candidates heard-them speak on-the television
- vii. “There is obligatory Connectivity between the [CLLD] phrase and the IP-internal position [in null subject languages]” (Cinque, 1990:59), (though not in French – Cechetto 1999:3):

¹ Spanish, unlike French and Italian, does not have locative (y/ci) or partitive (ne/en) clitics and so is more limited in the kind of CLLD structures it can form. EP has a locative ‘la’ but no partitive. Spoken BP, which has lost clitics displays only LD similar to that seen in English, with full resumptive pronouns (Raposo & Kato 2005).

- (7) A se stessai/*lei_i Maria_i non ci pensa
 about herself/her Maria not CL-there thinks
 'Maria is not thinking about herself.'

viii. CLLD is sensitive to strong island constraints (Cinque 1990:59):²

- (8) * A casa, lo abbiammo incontrato [prima che ci andasse]
 at home cl-him have:1pl found before that cl-there went:3s
 'At home, we found him before he went there.'

ix. CLLDed elements do not reconstruct. (Cinque 1990:66)

x. CLLD does not license parasitic gaps in Italian, EP, Spanish or French (see Cinque 1990:60 for Italian):

- (9) *Esses documentos, eu queimei-os depois de ler EC
 Those documents, I burnt-CL-THEM after of to-read
 (10) *Ces documents, je les ai rangés, après avoir lus EC
 Those documents, I CL-THEM have put away after of to-read
 Lit. 'Those documents, I burnt them after reading.'

Assuming that islands and binding are really restrictions on representations, Cinque concludes that CLLD is a base-generated dependency, based only its inability to license PGs.³

2.1 Evidence that preverbal subjects are CLLD

Given that Romance NSLs are usually considered canonical SVO languages (Hulk and Pollock (2001:3)), and that subjects are not separated from their predicate by a pause or melodic break, the burden of proof lies with those claiming that *all* preverbal subjects are CLLD. A&A (1998), drawing on Barbosa (1995) give the following evidence:

- An adverb can intervene between the subject and the verb.
- QPs and indefinites in preverbal subject position have unambiguous wide scope.
- In Catalan, post-verbal overt pronominal subjects can be bound, unlike preverbal pronouns (briefly discussed in section 3).

Barbosa (1995) gives additional evidence from:

² Or at least CLLD with non-DPs is (Raposo 1996):

1. capitão_i, encontrei [um negociante que lhe_i telefonou ontem]. ✓ EP
 the captain, (I) met the businessman that called 3pcl yesterday
2. Ao capitão_i, encontrei um negociante que lhe_i telefonou ontem. *EP
 To-the captain, (I) met the businessman who called 3pcl yesterday
 "The captain, (I) found [the businessman that called him yesterday]"

³ Subsequently, this has been questioned by many. Raposo (1996) proposes that CLLD involves covert movement, and thus disallows PGs while being subject to island constraints. Belletti (2005), following Cecchetto (1999, 2000) proposes that in all doubling structures the clitics and the doubled XP are merged as a single constituent in argument position and are separated during the course of the derivation. I will ignore these alternate analyses here as it is not clear how they fit in with A&A's analysis of null subjects.

- Indefinites, which must be post-verbal
- Italian dialect subject clitics

2.1.1 Adverbs

- (11) Juan ya se fue
 Juan already self went
- (12) O Petro xtes meta apo poles prospathies sinandisa ti Maria
 Petro yesterday after from many efforts met Maria
 Lit. 'Petro, yesterday, after a great deal of effort, met Maria.'
- (13) Jean *(déjà) veux (déjà) s'en aller
 Jean always wants always self-of go
 'Jean already wants to leave.'

Assuming adverbs cannot adjoin to the X'-level, (13) is explained if the subject is the specifier of the head housing the inflected verb. (11)&(12) are unexpected. On these assumptions (14) remains unexpected:

- (14) [_{TP} Eric probably/really/never [_T has met Mary]

But this evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive...

- Subjects are not necessarily in the same position in (11)&(12) as they are in sentences without such adverbs. See section 2.2.4 for empirical evidence that this might be true.
- Strict adjunction to maximal projections has been disputed in the literature (cf. Johnson 1991, Chomsky 1995).
- Ledgeway and Lombardi (2005), like Cardinaletti (1997a:47), give evidence from Standard Italian and Southern Italian dialects to show that a more intricate split IP is required in order to capture differences in possible word orders between adverbs clitics and verbs in Romance. In their system, French precludes the possibility of an adverb intervening between the subject and the finite verb simply because the verb raises to a very high position, above the position occupied by adverbs like 'already':

- (15) Jean [_{YP} me connaît [_{LAS} déjà t_{me} t_{connaît}] [_{VP} t_{connaît} t_{me}]]
 Jean me=knows already
- (16) *Jean [_{YP} me [_{LAS} déjà t_{me} connaît] [_{VP} t_{connaît} t_{me}]]
 Jean me= already knows

2.1.2 Subject QPs have only wide scope

- (17) **Kapios fititis**sitihiothetise kathe arthro [wide scope only]
 Some student filed every article
- (18) Sitihiothetise **kapios fititis** kathe arthro [ambiguous]
 Filed some student every article
- (19) **Kapjo pedi** to eksetase kathe kathigitis [wide scope only]
 Some child cl-ACC examined every professor

Rizzi (1982:138) has argued, similarly, that preverbal subjects in Italian have fixed scope, whereas post-verbal subjects can take scope over quantificational elements in higher clause. A&A argue that the same is also true of Spanish. Suñer (2002) refutes this for Spanish, showing preverbal subjects to be ambiguous:

- (20) **Algún estudiante** sacó prestado cada libro
 Some student took lent each book
 (a) 'Each book was borrowed by some student.' [narrow scope]
 (b) 'Some (specific) student borrowed each book.' [wide scope]

Dobrovie-Sorin (1990) shows that, in Romanian, preverbal subjects are uniformly ambiguous between wide and narrow scope readings:

- (21) **Fiecare profesor** va examina zece elevi
 Each teacher will examine ten students
 (a) Each teacher will examine ten (possibly different) students.
 (b) There are ten students x, such that each teacher will examine x.

At least in Spanish, EP and Romanian, the subject position is fundamentally ambiguous in scope. Greek, and perhaps Italian, appear to differ from Romance in this respect.

2.1.3 Fiorentino, Trentino and post-verbal extraction

Barbosa takes the clitic and agreement patterns of Fiorentino and Trentino as evidence that preverbal subjects are CLLD:

- (22) Le tu' sorelle l' hanno telefonato iere
 The your sisters CL-Fempl have:3pl telephoned yesterday
 'Your sisters telephoned yesterday.'
 (23) Gl' ha telefonato le tu' sorelle
 CL-Exp has:3s telephoned the your sisters
 'Your sisters telephoned.'

Interestingly, Rizzi (1982) cites the same data as evidence for the opposite.

2.1.4 Indefinites

Barbosa (1995:38) and Sheehan (2004) have both shown that indefinite subjects in Catalan, Spanish, Italian and EP (but not in BP), only get an indefinite reading in post-verbal position. This is predicted under a type A analysis, as all preverbal subjects are CLLD. Under a type B analysis, however, a further explanation for this phenomenon is required (i.e. Diesing's (1992) Mapping Hypothesis).

2.2 Evidence against it

Barbosa (1995) rightly points out that a theory cannot be based entirely upon intuitive notions of markedness. Evidence is still required to refute the A-type analyses and to lend support to a type-B analysis. Evidence of this kind comes from:

- Different pragmatics
- Non-topic-like preverbal subjects
- Robustly non-referential QP subjects

- Italian weak pronouns
- Acquisition
- Ad sensum agreement
- The fact that *pro* patterns with preverbal subjects

2.2.1 CLLD only in certain pragmatic contexts with a specific melodic contour

CLLD serves to bring to the foreground old or given information in the universe of discourse, setting it as a 'point of reference' against which the main predication of the sentence is then construed. (adapted from Raposos 1996:6)

But, "any clitic left-dislocated element can be pronounced without any special pause or phonological clue possibly differentiating it from what would be a "true" non-dislocated subject". (Sola 1992:268).

Costa and Adragão (2004:1) show that in answer to sentence focus questions in EP, where all sentence constituents are focussed, "in transitive and intransitive structures, SV(O) word order is obligatory [but] left-dislocation is impossible":

- (24) O que é que aconteceu?
 The what is that happened?
 'What happened?'
 a. O Pedro partiu o braço.
 the Pedro broke the arm
 b. #Partiu o Pedro o braço.
 broke the Pedro the arm
 c. #O braço, o Pedro partiu-o.
 the arm, the Pedro broke it

Cardinaletti shows that in Italian, CLLD also has certain pragmatic effects, which are not shared by preverbal subjects.

Preverbal subjects are much more widespread than CLLD objects.

2.2.2 Non-topicalised preverbal subjects

In Italian, an overt pronoun is required to disambiguate ambiguous agreement morphology in the subjunctive (Cardinaletti 1997). Cole (2000) argues that the same thing is more generally true of Romance, where ambiguity arises. These preverbal subjects have no special discourse status.

2.2.3 QP subjects

We know from French and BP, which have overt subject pronouns, and object CLLD, that robustly non-referential QPs cannot be CLLD:

- (25) *[Ninguém]_i ele_i gosta de chorar [BP]
 Nobody he likes of cry:inf
 'Nobody likes to cry.' [non-referential]

However, non-referential QPs are the norm in Romance NSLs:

- (26) Nadie quiere ser político
 Nobody wants be:inf politician
 'Nobody wants to be a politician.'

A&A gloss over this claiming, following Cinque 1990, that non-referential QPs can be CLLD with a null clitic. However others have argued that CLLD with a null clitic has very different properties to CLLD proper (Barbosa 1995, Raposo 1996, Raposo and Kato 2005). Barbosa (1995) proposes that these kind of examples involve A-bar movement.

2.2.4 European Portuguese (Barbosa 1995)

CLLD triggers enclisis in EP:

- (27) Esse livro, a Maria deu-o ao Luis.
 This book the Maria gave-CL-IT to-the Luis
 (28) *Esse livro, a Maria o deu ao Luis.
 Lit. 'This book, Maria gave it to Luis.'

Most preverbal subjects also trigger enclisis, except robustly non-referential QPs which obligatorily trigger proclisis:

- (29) A Maria comeu-o
 The Maria ate-CL-IT
 (30) Ninguém o comeu
 Nobody CL-IT ate
 'Maria/nobody ate it.'

Barbosa (1995), therefore, takes the weaker stance that referential subjects are CLLD, whereas quantificational subjects are A-bar moved to preverbal position, at least in EP, triggering proclisis. Wh-movement always triggers proclisis:

- (31) Quem o viu?
 who him saw
 'Who saw him?'
 (32) *Quem viu-o?

However, saying that it is A'-movement which triggers proclisis is a simplification. The presence of certain quantificational adverbs or negation also triggers proclisis, irrespective of the type of subject, for a break down see Rouveret (1989):

- (33) O José já o comeu
 The José already CL-IT ate
 (34) O José nunca o comeu
 The José never CL-IT ate
 (35) O José as vezes come-o
 The José sometimes eats- CL-IT

In some cases, this varies depending on the position of the adverb:

- (36) O José sempre o come

- (37) The Jose always CL-IT eats
 O José come-o sempre

In embedded CPs, proclisis, and not enclisis is obligatory in all cases:

- (38) Eu acho que te vi ontem
 I think that CL-YOU saw yesterday
 'I think I saw you yesterday.'

EP clitics provide dubious support that preverbal subjects occupy an A-bar position.

2.2.5 Italian weak pronouns (Cardinaletti 1997)

Cardinaletti (1997a) has shown that weak pronouns in Italian are only allowed in preverbal position and not post-verbally or CLLD:

- (39) *Egli/lui/Gianni Maria non l' ha appoggiata
 Him/him/Gianni Maria not him has supported
 'Him, Maria has not supported.'

- (40) Ha adherito Gianni/lui/*egli
 has adhered He/he/G
 'He has adhered.'

She concludes that, in Italian, the preverbal position must be an A-position.

2.2.6 Acquisition

Analysis A predicts that children should acquire VS order before SV and that SV should emerge at the same point as CLLD structures. Costa and Adragão (2004) give evidence from the acquisition of EP to show that in Portuguese children use preverbal subjects before they acquire object CLLD, and use VS structures very seldomly.

2.2.7 Ad sensum agreement

Following Bosque (1999), Suñer shows that true CLLD subjects in Spanish allow optional ad sensum agreement:

- (41) El jurado, María nos aseguró que estaban presionados
 The jury:ms María us assured:3s that were:3pl pressured:mpl
 'The jury, Maria assured us that they felt pressured.'

- (42) El jurado *estaban presionados / estaba presionado
 The jury were pressured was pressured
 'The jury felt pressured.'

2.2.8 Null Subjects are Pre-verbal

Analysis A predicts that null subjects should pattern with post-verbal subjects. Analysis B predicts that null subjects should pattern with preverbal subjects. Null subjects share many properties with preverbal subjects in Italian, Spanish and EP:

Presentationals – only overt post-verbal subjects possible (Rizzi, Burzio):

- (43) *Io ci sono alla festa
I CL-LOC am at-the party
- (44) Ci sono io alla festa
CL-LOC am I at-the party
- (45) * Ci sono alla festa
CL-LOC am at-the party
- 'There's me at the party.'

Floating quantifiers – only preverbal subjects or *pro* possible (Rizzi, Burzio):

- (46) [Todos los chicos] se han comprado un coche
All the boys CL-SELF have bought a car
- (47) [Los chicos] se han comprado todos un coche
The boys CL-SELF have bought all a car
- (48) Se han comprado un coche [todos los chicos]
CL-SELF have bought a car all the boys
- (49) *Se han comprado todos un coche [los chicos]
CL-SELF have bought all a car the boys
- (50) Se han comprado todos un coche
CL-SELF have bought all a car
- 'All the boys bought themselves a car.'

Many Italian dialects – preverbal subjects and *pro* trigger full agreement (Cardinaletti (1997a)):

- (51) Questo, lo fa sempre i bambini.
This, it does always the children
- (52) *Questo, i bambini lo fa sempre.
This the children it does always
- (53) Questo, I bambini lo fanno sempre.
This the children it do always
- 'THIS, the children always do.'
- (54) Questo, lo dimostrano tutte
This, it demonstrate all:FPL
- (55) *Questo, lo dimostra tutte
This it demonstrates all:FPL
- 'THIS, they all demonstrate.'

The fact that null subjects pattern with preverbal subjects falls out neatly from B. A requires additional assumptions to account for this fact. But note that in Old French null subjects are post-verbal only (Adams 1987).

2.3 Preliminary conclusions

While it is clearly true that some preverbal subjects are CLLD, there is evidence to suggest that not all preverbal subjects are. In Italian, Spanish, Romanian and EP, at least some subjects behave like they are in an A-position.

This is a problem for A, but not B.

3. What about free inversion and that-t violations?

3.1 Rich agreement morphology satisfies the EPP

A type A analysis has the advantage of predicting free inversion. Sola (1992) claims that, in Catalan, post-verbal, unlike pre-verbal, subject pronouns, can be get a bound reading, like null subjects, contrary to Montalbetti (1984, 1986):

- (56) Tots els estudiants₁ es pensen que ells₁ aprovaran.
 all the students think that they passed
- (57) Tots els jugadors₁ están convençuts que guanyaran ells₁
 all the players are persuaded that will-win they
- (a) All the players believe that they as a team will win (football)
 (b) For all the players it is true that x thinks x will win. (tennis)

This is expected if post-verbal overt pronominals are in an A-position, whereas preverbal overt pronominals are CLLD. In EP, likewise, Barbosa (1995) shows that post-verbal overt pronouns behave like null pronouns with respect to binding:

- (58) *Nenhum aluno₁ disse que ele₁ falaria com ela
 no student said that he would-talk with her
 'No student said that he would talk to her
- (59) Nenhum aluno₁ disse que falaria ele₁ com ela.
 no student said that would-talk he with her.
 No student said that he would talk to her.

A type B analysis provides no obvious explanation for these facts.

Barbosa points out that a CLLD analysis of preverbal subjects rightly predicts that subject extraction will always take place from a post-verbal position. B-type analyses also require further machinery to explain free inversion and that-trace violations.

3.2 Type B analyses and free inversion

Type B analyses have to assume that something satisfies the EPP in instances of Free inversion. This could be a null / deleted expletive (Rizzi 1982, 1990, 2004a) or a deleted referential pronoun (Belletti 2004, 2005). Alternatively, it could be the post-verbal subject, with the vP remnant moved higher.

An assessment of the syntactic properties of FI is needed to assess these approaches. Note, though, that Gilligan's (1987) study shows that free inversion implies null expletives and that-t violations but NOT referential pro-drop.

4. Conclusions

- Type A analyses face problems due to the behaviour of preverbal subjects in Romance languages.
- Type A analyses have clear advantages over type B analyses with respect to free inversion, extraction and the binding properties of post-verbal subjects.

- In order for a type B analysis to be implemented a clear account of free inversion needs to be developed which can account for these deficiencies.

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