

Polar explorations: Polarity, Focus and Force

Evidence from Paduan pointed out in Zanuttini and Portner 2000, suggests that the negative marker can check the interrogative force feature.

(1) shows that Paduan exhibits “subject clitic inversion”: a subject clitic that precedes the verb in linear order in non interrogative clauses follows the verb in matrix interrogatives.

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| (1) a. | El vien
S.CL comes | (2) a. | Quando vien’lo
When comes S.CL. |
| b. | vien-lo?
*El vien? | b. | *quando el vien? |

Even though subject clitic inversion is obligatory in matrix interrogatives, it yields ungrammaticality in the presence of preverbal *no*

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (3) | *No vien-lo? | *Cossa no ga-la magna?
what neg has-s.cl eaten |
| (4) | no (e)l vien?
neg s.cl comes?
isn’t he coming? | no la ga magna?
neg s.cl has eaten
hasn’t she eaten? |

Proposal:

(i) the relation between the Neg feature on the negative marker and the interrogative [Q] force feature is not direct, but it is mediated by a Polarity feature and a Focus feature. More specifically the syntactic head hosting the [Q] feature syncretically hosts the Pol feature and the Foc feature. Neg raises to this head in order to check the Pol feature and in doing so, it simultaneously checks the [Q] feature and the [Foc] feature.

(ii) there are two syntactic heads that syncretically host [Pol] and [Foc] features, and the Neg marker can check the lower [Pol] feature, but not the higher one. This is because the [Pol] feature of the higher head is set as affirmative when a wh-phrase raises to it.

Arguments:

(a) **[Foc] + [Pol]**: narrow foci belong to a natural class of polarity constituents which check both a polarity and a focus feature in the spec of Pol.

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|
| (5) | With NO job is John satisfied | (negative quantifiers) |
| | Only HER FRIENDS did Mary invite to any party. | (‘only’ phrases) |
| | Not HER MOTHER did she invite (but HER FATHER) | (replacive negation) |
| | Not HER MOTHER, but HER FATHER did she invite | |
| | John is happy and SO is his family | (so/ neither) |
| | Who will MArY invite? | (wh phrases) |

(b) **[Foc] + [Q]**: several authors have argued that focus is correlated to wh-phrases (see Chomsky 1976, Zubizaretta 1998, Kiss 1998, etc)

(c) crosslinguistic variation in the target position of focus movement (sentence peripheral or verb adjacent) support the postulation of **two Pol projections**, one in the C domain and one in the Infl domain, with different effects on interpretation. Similar proposals have been made for the host of the [Q] feature (see Richards’ 1997 distinction between IP absorption and CP absorption languages), and for the host of the [Foc] feature (see Zubizaretta 1998, who argues that Foc features could be hosted either by the T node, as in Spanish, or by an independent Foc head placed higher than TP, as in Italian)

(e) **wh-questions vs yes/no questions**

I argue that the [Q] feature is checked in two positions depending on the type of interrogative: in yes/no questions [Q] is checked in a lower position, whereas in wh-

questions it is checked in a higher position. This distinction is highlighted by negative sentences, as follows. Negative sentences with contrastive focus illustrated in (6) present the following asymmetry: when they stand on their own, they can be interpreted as in (6a), but not as in (6b).

- (6) I don't love MARY (i.e. I love somebody else)
a. It's not MARY that I love.
b. *It's MARY that I don't love

A yes/no interrogative corresponding to (6) presents a parallel restriction on its interpretation:

- (7) Don't you love MARY?
a. Isn't it MARY that you love?
b. *Is it MARY that you don't love?

In contrast, when (6) occurs as an answer to a wh-question, such as (8), (6b) is a possible interpretation, but not (6a).

- (8) WHO don't you love?
MARY. i.e. I don't love MARY.
a. *It's not MARY that I love.
b. It's MARY that I don't love

This switch is surprising, given that in affirmative wh-interrogatives, the dislocated wh-expression corresponds, at least sometimes, to the narrow focus. When this happens, the information structure of the answer corresponds to that of the question, and the constituent that corresponds to the wh-expression in the answer is interpreted as the narrow focus in the answer. In (9a), for example, the wh-expression is interpreted as narrow (identificational or contrastive) focus and it corresponds to the capitalized narrow focus in the answer.

- (9) a. WHY did John marry Joan?
b. John married Joan BECAUSE HE WANTS A BABY.

Similarly, in negative wh-interrogatives, the wh-expression can also be interpreted as narrow focus. Hence, the expectation would be that MARY should be interpreted in the same way as in (9). However, it is not.

This indicates that the focus structure of negative sentences is sensitive to the properties of the discourse. More specifically the focus structure of negative sentences is modified as a result of pairing with a wh-question, but not with a yes-no question.

I propose that the [Q] feature of yes/no questions is in the lower head and that the negative marker can check the Pol in this head and implicitly the [Q] feature. In contrast, the [Q] feature of wh-questions is hosted in the higher node. The negative marker cannot check the higher Pol, which is now checked by the wh-phrase, and so neg must stay low, i.e. in the scope of the exhaustive Focus operator. The resulting interpretation will thus always be "it is... that NOT...", rather than "It is not... that...". The reason why neg cannot check this higher Pol is that the wh-phrase introduces a variable that is in need of identification. Identification of the wh-variable is always positive and with wh questions it is a function of linguistic interaction (question/answer pairs)

I will also discuss how my view differs from Kuno and Takami's 1993 proposal that the restriction on interpretation illustrated in (8a,b) should be expressed as in (10).

- (10) An element that is the focus of negation cannot be extracted out of the scope (the c-command domain) of the negative element.