

# Exhaustivity operators and fronted focus in Italian\*

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“*Une idée forte communique un peu de sa force au contradicteur*”  
Ad Adriana con stima ed amicizia

## Abstract

In this contribution we present an original analysis of Fronted Focus (FF) in Italian (contrastive/corrective focus in the terminology of Belletti 2004), based on the insight that alleged FF is not a variant of the discourse-level category of *Focus* but rather instantiates a combination between the semantics associated with the discourse-level category of *Contrast* and the kind of Exhaustivity Operator involved – crosslinguistically – in the interpretive mechanism of ‘Association with Focus’ and in the computation of grammaticalized implicatures.

Building on work on focus constructions by Belletti, we further argue that the different varieties of alleged focus-movement in Italian can be amended to an analysis according to which the trigger for movement is an attracting Q-feature in the clausal left-periphery, on strict parallelism with focus-movement in Hungarian. In order to elucidate the comparative/parametric dimension of this analysis, we propose that the difference between Italian and Hungarian can be derived from the properties of lexical endowment of the (phonologically empty) Exhaustivity Operator *Exh*, together with the fact that the latter ‘associates’ with *Focus* in Hungarian and with *Contrast* in Italian. We also present an explicit semantics for the mechanism of ‘Association with Contrast’, arguing that the notion of *Contrast* is strictly

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intertwined with the grammatical computation, on strict analogy with the notion of *Focus*.

The paper is structured in four sections.

In the first section, we introduce the basic ingredients of the semantics of *Focus*, clarifying the role played by exhaustivity operators in different languages and in different constructions.

In section two, we develop the basic insight that *Fronted Focus* in Italian is interpreted as a mechanism of ‘association with Contrast’, and defend this claim on empirical and conceptual grounds.

Section three contains an explicit presentation of the interpretative mechanism of ‘association with Contrast’. Although the semantics proposed strongly resembles that of ‘association with Focus’, the procedure of selection of both the Asserted Value and the set of (propositional) alternatives is quite different. The Asserted Value is added to the set ALT of alternatives, whereas the latter is identified with the set containing the proposition that is ‘corrected’ and the proposition involving the contrastive constituent.

The last section presents some important conceptual refinements (mainly inspired by Belletti’s analysis of focus constructions and Bianchi’s observations on the different interpretation of FF with respect to ‘Contrastive Focus *in situ*’) that allow us to conveniently elucidate the emerging issues at the syntax/semantics interface and the (possibly parametric) dimension of the attested typological variation. More particularly, we address two puzzles emerging from the proposed analysis: (i) If Contrastive Focus (both *in-situ* and *ex-situ*) is a consequence of the fact that an exhaustivity feature is expressed on the focused constituent, why are the *in-situ* and *ex-situ* variants interpreted differently? (ii) If presuppositionality is the source of this interpretive difference, why can the *in-situ* variant be indifferently interpreted presuppositionally and non-presuppositionally? We show that there is a unitary and elegant solution to both (i) and (ii), according to which when exhaustivity triggers movement, it does so as a consequence of discourse-linking, and that this solution may be taken to confirm the correctness of Belletti (2008)’s analysis of object cleft-sentences.

## References

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