ANSWERING WITH A "CLEFT": THE ROLE OF THE NULL SUBJECT PARAMETER AND THE VP PERIPHERY

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1. Introduction

Why do different languages often make use of different strategies to answer the very same question concerning the subject of the clause? To what kind of analysis do the different strategies correspond? Are these strategies as different as they appear to be? These are some of the questions which I will address in this article. Without attempting at a systematic and wide overview of several languages, I will mainly focus my attention on the comparison of two quite distinct strategies that two closely related languages such as Italian and French appear to adopt in this area. Some considerations and hypotheses will also be made on the answering strategy adopted by English (and, possibly, German) in the same domain, which is different from both the one adopted by Italian and the one adopted by French. Thus, Italian, French and English appear to characteristically adopt three different strategies to answer the very same question. I assume that this provides a relatively rich spectrum of the possibilities made available through UG.

Consider the following question/answer pair in Italian:

(1) a Chi è partito / ha parlato ?
          who has left/who has spoken
     b E' partito / ha parlato Gianni
          has left/has spoken Gianni

There is no doubt that, if a clausal answer is provided, the respective order of the verb and the DP lexical subject is VS, with the subject in the postver-

bal position[1] linearly following the verb. Consider now the equivalent question/answer pair in French:

(2)   a Qui a parlé?
        b C'est Jean

The preferred (clausal) answer in French is (2)b, namely a (reduced) cleft.

In what follows - section 2 - I will develop a proposal for an analysis of the French structures in (2)b and for the Italian-French contrast in (1),(2) which will try to uncover significant properties shared by the seemingly unrelated constructions utilized by the two languages in the same contexts ((1)b, (2)b). In section 3 the relation between the null subject property and the availability of subject inversion will be taken up and different answering strategies concerning a "new information subject" will be discussed; a tentative proposal will also be suggested for English, in comparison with French and Italian. Section 4 will take up the "question" side of the matter, and a strategy parallel to the one at work in the (reduced) cleft answer studied here will be detected, through the analysis of wh-in-situ proposed in Kato (2003).

The background assumptions which will lead the analysis are spelled out in the following section.

1.1.   *Assumptions: Italian "subject inversion"*

As proposed in previous work following "cartographic" guidelines[2], I assume that the low part of the clause contains a VP periphery along the lines in (3):

(3) $[_{CP} \ldots\ldots [_{TP} \ldots\ldots\ldots [_{TopP}$ **Top** $[_{FocP}$ **Foc** $[_{TopP}$ **Top** $\ldots\ldots VP]]]]]$

The VP periphery is characteristically activated/made use of in so called "subject inversion" structures, where the postverbal subject typically functions as the focus of new information as in (1)b above.[3]

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[1] The issue is discussed in detail in previous work of mine, e.g. Belletti (2004). On the possibly more natural answer which does not imply the repetition of the verb, see the considerations in 3.2 Below.

[2] In particular Belletti (2004) and references cited there. See Cinque (2002), Rizzi (2004) for illustration of the overall cartographic approach.

[3] In appropriate discourse conditions it can also function as a topic, as discussed in Belletti (2001, 2004). See also Cecchetto (2000) on the role of this area of the clause in Right and (partly) Left dislocation.

In a null subject language like Italian, a sentence containing a postverbal subject, focus of new information as in (1)b, should correspond to a (schematic) representation along the lines in (4):

(4)
[CP …[TP *pro*…è…partito/ha parlato…[TopP [FocP Gianni [TopP [VP ….]]]]]

I assume (much as in traditional accounts) that the relevant preverbal subject position (Cardinaletti (2004)) is occupied by a non overt null *pro*. I also assume (differently form traditional accounts, Belletti (forthcoming)) a doubling derivation of " subject inversion" structures, with a *referential pro* moved from an original "big DP" filling the (relevant, Cardinaletti (2004)) subject position, and the lexical subject stranded in the low focus (or topic, in different discourse conditions, footnote 3) position.

Hence, according to this analysis, the possible VS order (with no overt element in preverbal subject position) of subject inversion structures is brought about by two independent factors:
i.   the null subject nature of the language;
ii.   activation of the clause internal VP periphery.
i. should be considered a necessary but not a sufficient property driving "subject inversion"/VS with a silent preverbal subject; ii. is also necessary.

2.   French

To the extent that (2)a in French is the same question as (1)a in Italian, an answer like (2)b in French should be considered the equivalent answer as (1)b in Italian. The same relevant discourse-pragmatic conditions are met in both (2)b and (1)b. Let us propose that this has a direct correlate within the computational system, a fairly natural assumption, given cartographic guidelines. Let us thus assume that the computation involved in the (reduced) cleft in (2)b shares important similarities with the computation involved in the subject inversion structure (1)b. I would like to propose that the two grammatical computations are indeed the same in crucial respects, modulo independent (parametric) differences between the two languages. For those aspects related to the informational content, the (reduced) cleft in French can be considered as an "inversion" structure in disguise. The proposal can be phrased as in (5):

(5) (Reduced) Clefts exploit the (low, clause internal) VP periphery.

In particular, assume that the new information subject fills the same VP-peripheral new information Focus position, exactly as the postverbal subject in (1)b/(4) in Italian. This ensures the desired interpretation of the subject. However, in order for the VP periphery to be made use of in a way compati-

ble with the negative setting of the Null subject parameter, French has to re-sort to some strategy: insertion of a "dummy" copula is the adopted option. The copula makes available the VP periphery which can ultimately be made use of to host the new information postverbal subject. The subject in turn is originally merged as the subject of the small clause complement of the copula[4] whose predicate, I will assume, is a relative clause containing the same verb present in the question. The (relevant) preverbal subject position of the main clause is filled by the dummy subject pronoun "ce" in compliance with the requirements of the French setting of the null subject parameter, the thematic properties of the copula, and the EPP. The reduced version of the cleft is obtained through deletion of the relative clause predicate.[5] The essen-tial steps of the derivation are schematized in (6) (V-raising of the copula is also assumed):

(6) Ce …. [Top [Foc [Top [VP être [sc Jean [CP qui a parlé]]]]]]

The fundamental insight of the proposal in (5)/(6) is that answering with a (reduced) cleft to a question on the subject is the strategy adopted in French to properly activate the VP periphery in a way compatible with the non null subject nature of the language.[6]

2.1 *No "subject inversion" answers in French*

Consider the exchange in (7), parallel to (1) in Italian:

(7)   a Qui a parlé?
        b *A parlé Jean

(7)b is ruled out by the non-null subject nature of French, which I interpret as the impossibility of licensing a *pro* in the relevant preverbal subject posi-tion, neither a referential one, as in the "doubling analysis" of inversion structures in null-subject Italian referred to above (Belletti (forthcoming),

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[4] Moro (1997); Burzio (1984).

[5] Speakers' judgements vary as to the extent to which deletion of the relative clause predicate is required (yielding a sentence like (2)b), or just preferred.

[6] Note that, interestingly, in a language which disposes of a (new information) Focus marker ,such as Somali, the focus particle has been analyzed as derived from an original copula + 3rd person (clitic) pronoun, i.e. the structure of a cleft, as assumed here (from Fascarelli & Puglielli (to appear)):

    *ak + y + aa   (>*ayaa*)
     be   3sgm pres

nor an expletive one.[7] On the other hand, (8), containing the overt pronominal expletive *il* , is also excluded:

(8) *Il a parlé la maman
    it has spoken the mother

(8) should be considered underivable. A doubling derivation involving a (overt) pronominal expletive could not be available, as expletives are not freely available in the original "big DP",[8] nor are they freely added to the initial numeration.

On the other hand, the doubling answer in (9)a should be considered impossible for the same reason(s) the parallel answer is impossible in Italian[9]:

(9)   a *Elle a parlé la maman
      b *Lei ha parlato la mamma
        she has spoken the mother

Much as in Italian, however, if the lexical noun phrase is associated with a topic/known interpretation, and only in this case, the same word by word sequence becomes possible:

(10)   a Lei ha parlato, la mamma
      b Elle a parlé, la maman
        she has spoken, the mother

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[7] As in the possibly limited option in other languages (e.g. Brazilian Portuguese could be an example). See the discussion in Belletti (forthcoming).

[8] Possibly, only with indefinite DPs in the typical case. Cfr. French *il* constructions and the possibly limited option available in BP referred to in the preceding footnote; in both instances the core cases involve unaccusative verbs and no verbal agreement with the postverbal lexical subject. See Belletti (forthcoming) for the idea that the expletive could be seen as a non-agreeing pronominal within the "big DP". See Nicolis (2005) for related conclusions based on data in Icelandic TEC.

[9] In Belletti (forthcoming) the impossibility is attributed to the violation of a "discourse" constraint. As is discussed there, the constraint is assumed not to affect the doubling construction when a null *pro* is involved, thus allowing for the doubling derivation of subject inversion; the constraint does not affect this style of derivation if all elements of the original big DP are pronominal either, as discussed in the work quoted:

(i)   a Je viendrai moi
        I will come me
      b Lui verrà lui
        he will come he

I assume that the lexical subject noun phrase fills the low topic position in the VP periphery in both cases in (10) and the pronominal referential pronoun fills the (relevant) preverbal subject position.

Note, incidentally, that, if this analysis is correct, it further illustrates the possible activation of the VP peripheral area of the clause in both languages.

2.2 *"Clefts" in L2 Italian of L1-French speakers*

Circumstantial evidence in favor of the idea developed in (5)/(6) above, according to which answering with a cleft has exactly the same informational content as subject inversion in Italian in the same contexts, comes from the behavior manifested in the L2 Italian of non advanced French speakers. In an elicitation task of VS structures of the type in (1)b in Italian, originally conceived by Belletti & Leonini (2004) and administered to a group of (non advanced) L2 speakers of Italian, L2 speakers whose L1 was French systematically produced a very high percentage of cleft sentences in place of VS. Whereas a native control group produced up to 98% of postverbal subjects/VS, the group of L1-French speakers produced only 21% of the same word order in their L2 Italian answers. The by far most widely adopted answering strategy by this group, up to 70% of the cases, was a cleft sentence. Hence, in their L2 Italian these speakers manifest Transfer of what would be the preferred answering strategy in their L1 in the same context. Beside the intrinsic interest of these findings for L2 acquisition issues[10], they are also of special interest in the present context. Indeed, since the L2 speakers with L1 French typically answered with a cleft to exactly the same questions, referred to the same situations, to which the native control group typically answered with VS (and zero preverbal subject), this strongly indicates that the two answering strategies should be considered much closer to each other than meets the eye. The contrast between (1) and (2) above already suggested that; the L2 experimental data provide a particular and controlled confirmation of the this impression: given the experimental setting, we are sure that the pragmatic situations where the different answers have been produced were exactly the same indeed.

3.   Null Subjects, Inversion and Clefts

Pursuing with the considerations prompted by the L2 acquisition data concerning the L1-French speakers, in Belletti & Leonini (2004) it is noted that referential null subjects were utilized to a much larger extent by these L2

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[10] On which see the discussion In Belletti & Leonini (2004). Overall, the reader is referred to this article for detailed discussion of the experimental design, which made use of videotapes, and of some of the material reconsidered here in the perspective of the present study.

non advanced speakers of Italian than VS structures (in the elicited production test). Although at this stage the percentage of null subjects (70%) is lower than the one produced by the native control group in the same testing situation (95%) still it is significantly higher than VS (21%) and the difference with the control group is less sharp for null subjects, 70% vs 95%, than it is for VS, 21% vs 98%. This indicates a dissociation between the fundamental property of the null subject parameter, the licensing of a null referential pronominal subject, and the currently related subject inversion property. This suggests that the formal and interpretive mechanisms licensing a null subject can be (re)set on the Italian value of the parameter, but the discourse related property tends to remain on the L1 strategy. This strategy in French, I am proposing, is actually very close and makes a use of the VP periphery in a way compatible with the non-null subject value of the parameter in this language: a (reduced) cleft sentence analyzed along the lines in (6).

3.1. *Comparing with English (and German) in L2 Italian*

In the same testing situation L1-German speakers showed a similar pattern in their L2 Italian with VS produced in just 27% of the cases and Null subjects in up to 55% of the cases. In place of VS, these speakers produced the order SV, i.e. the order appropriate in their L1. Similar findings, in testing situations with a comparable pragmatics, have been reported for L1-English L2 speakers of Italian and in attrition situations.[11] Interestingly, this pattern appears to be persistent: also at the near native level[12], L1-English L2 speakers of Italian, in the same testing situation, continue to prefer the order SV in Italian in place of VS, whereas use of null subjects is close to native.[13] As noted by Belletti, Bennati and Sorace (in progress), the intonation of the produced SV sentences in Italian is peculiar, and reproduces the intonation of the parallel answers of the L1 English:

  (11)   a Who came?
          b *John* came

See 3.3 below for a sketch of analysis of (11)b.

These findings again confirm the dissociation between the two properties currently related through the null subject parameter.

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[11] Bennati (2002; Tsimpli et alii (2003); see also Lonzano (2004).

[12] Belletti, Bennati, Sorace (in progress); Tsimpli et al. (2003).

[13] Combined with a persistent slightly higher percentage of use of overt subject pronouns, Belletti, Bennati, Sorace (in progress) for discussion; see also Sorace (2000) for findings of the same nature in attrition.

I would like to speculate here that such a dissociation is not the reflex of a grammatical property. Rather it comes as a consequence of the resetting of the null subject parameter as far as availability of null referential subjects is concerned, and of the persistency of a discourse "prominent" strategy. The answering strategy of the L1 appears to remain prominent also in the L2, despite of the potential "grammatical" availability of the L2 prominent strategy, which requires a positive (re)setting of the null subject parameter, as a first necessary condition. The resetting has been undertaken by the L2 speakers. As to what pertains to the discourse aspects of the answer, the following seems to hold. In the case of the French speakers discussed in 3, the VP periphery is also activated much as it is Italian, but it continues to be activated in the "French way". In the case of the English speakers (and, probably, German as well), a possibly different strategy, implying a different structural analysis valid in English, is kept active in the L2 Italian. A speculative proposal on what this strategy and its structural analysis could be will be the topic of section 3.3.

We devote the following section 3.2. to some further empirical observations on the status of the different possible answering strategies to the same question on the subject, e.g. inversion/VS and (reduced) cleft, and we take up the French/Italian comparison again. In this connection, we will develop some considerations on the status of the different strategies from the point of view of "economy".

3.2. *On "economy": inversion vs cleft; Italian vs French*

If answering with a cleft can be analyzed along the lines illustrated in (6) for French, involving the VP periphery in a way analogous to subject inversion in Italian, answering with a cleft can be seen as a way of mimicking subject inversion. As we put it above, the (reduced) cleft is in essence an inversion structure in disguise. If this reasoning is correct, the question then arises as to why answering with a cleft is not also a real option in Italian as well. Note that no grammatical reason would rule out the reduced cleft in Italian.

(12)   a. Chi ha parlato?   (a' Qui a parlé?)
          b ?? Sono/è io/Gianni (che ho/ha parlato)   (b' C'est moi/Jean)
             -am-I   (It's me)

But (1)b is the by far preferred answer in Italian, when V is pronounced. I would like to propose that this is ultimately due to economy reasons along the following lines: since the inversion derivation in (4) is directly available in a null subject language like Italian, it is adopted as it involves less structure and, consequently, less computation, than a (reduced) cleft. In this

sense, it then qualifies as a more economical option. The adoption of VS then constitutes an "economy-driven" preferred answering strategy.

As no "grammatical" reason rules out the (reduced) cleft answer in Italian, we should expect it to show up in some contexts. Indeed, if a cleft is prompted by the question, answering with a (reduced) cleft becomes a totally natural strategy in Italian as well, as expected. Consider in this perspective, the exchanges in (13):

(13) a Chi è stato che ha parlato/a parlare?
         who has been who has talked/to talk
           "who is the one who talked"

     b E' ?(stato) Gianni
        (it)-has-been-Gianni
     c Sono ?(stato) io
         (it) has been me

(13)b,c are naturally amenable to the analysis in (14), parallel to the analysis in (6) for French, modulo presence of a null (expletive) subject *pro* in the preverbal subject position, an option available in Italian, due to the positive setting of the null subject parameter in this language:

(14)
pro E' stato/sono stato…[$_{Foc}$Gianni/io..[$_{VP}$ [$_{SC}$- che ha/ho parlato/a parlare]]..]

Note, as a side remark,[14] that, as indicated by the "?" in (13)b,c, use of past tense over present tense is much preferred in the reduced cleft answer in Italian, differently from French.[15] Note furthermore that nominative Case on the postverbal focalized subject can be available in Italian with the same mechanism at work in inversion/VS structures in general.[16] As for French, a clear indication that the postverbal focalized subject carries accusative Case is

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[14] For which an in depth analysis would take us too far afield so it will not be pursued here.

[15] For some speakers the requirement is very strong, for others less so, but all speakers tend to prefer the past option in Italian as opposed to French. It might be that this preferential judgement is less "innocent" than one might think at first sight. For the time being I will make the (possibly simplifying) assumption that the two languages share the same analysis in the domain of clefts in all respects, leaving a more detailed study for future research.

[16] See Belletti (forthcoming) for a recent proposal linking availability of postverbal nominative Case to the "doubling" analysis of inversion/VS structures.

provided by those cases where it a is a strong pronoun, for which a special Case morphology exists in French. We can assume that the same Case is carried by a lexical subject in the same position and that this is due to the fact that no comparable procedure as the one at work in Italian is available in French in structures involving expletive "ce"; hence, in these structures nominative does not reach the postverbal subject which thus displays default accusative. It should be noted that this is the only Case form which could be used for the pronominal subject in these constructions anyway, as no nominative strong form for subject pronouns exists in the French paradigm; on the other hand, the focalized status of the postcopular/postverbal subject in the (reduced) cleft necessarily requires use of a strong form for the pronominal subject. Hence, default accusative is a necessary choice in the case of a postverbal focalized strong pronominal subject in French.

Consider Italian again. The following question/answer pairs can be analyzed along similar lines, with different degrees of reduction involved in the answer:

(15)   a Chi è (- alla porta)?
          who is (- at the door)
       b Sono/è io/Gianni (~~alla porta~~)
       c Chi è (- che parla)?
          Who is (- who is talking)
        d Sono/è io/Gianni (- ~~che parlo/a~~)
            Am I/is Gianni
            "It's me/it's Gianni"

And, with further reduction:

(16)   a Chi è (- alla porta)?
        b ~~Sono/è~~ io/Gianni (~~alla porta~~)
        c Chi è (- che parla)?
        d ~~Sono/è~~ io/Gianni (- ~~che parlo/a~~)
           I/Gianni
           "Me/Gianni"

According to the analysis proposed in (16)b,d, based on (14), when the answer only contains the questioned constituent, it corresponds to a reduced sentence where the questioned constituent, the subject, fills the new information focus position in the VP periphery.[17] In the cases in (16)b, d the reduc-

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[17] The proposal shares part of the insight of the analysis presented in Brunetti (2003): reduced answers of the type in (16) are "portions" of clauses, with the sub-

tion is supposed to take place within a (reduced) cleft, assuming a parallelism to hold between the question and the relative answer. Thus, the reduction in (16)b, d constitutes in essence a step further in the reduction already at work in (15)b, d.

It is undoubtedly the case that the mostly reduced answers along the lines in (16)b, d are often the preferred (/most used?) answers by speakers in current conversational exchanges; certainly, they are considered extremely natural by everybody. We might speculate that, once again, economy is at stake here. Some economy conversational principle possibly drives this intuition (and use?): complete reduction of the content corresponding to the "parallel" question allows one to say the least possible in the answer, and at the same time to be the most informative and relevant in some Gricean-style terms.[18] Be it as it may, what is of special relevance here is that partly reduced answers are also possible and, in the case of questions on the subject, they characteristically display a postcopular or, more generally, a postverbal subject, which, we assume, fills the new information position in the VP periphery.

In conclusion, we have proposed that there is no substantial difference between French and Italian in the domain of question-answer pairs on the subject, contrary to first appearance: in both languages the VP periphery is involved in the same contexts. The apparent differences between the two languages can be interpreted as due to independent factors: adoption of different preferred strategies compatible with the different parametric setting of the null subject parameter. We have proposed that preferred strategies tend to persist, as indicated by the L2 Italian data considered. We have further speculated that ultimately economy reasons condition the prevalence of a

ject in focus. But there is an important difference between the two approaches: here the internal focus position is assumed to be involved and a crucial relation is established with (reduced) cleft sentences, which is not the case in Brunetti (2003). No remnant movement and no involvement of the clause external peripheral focus are hypothesized here, as it is done in Brunetti's proposal. I am assuming that the external, left peripheral focus position is dedicated to contrastive/corrective focalization in standard Italian, as discussed in detail in Belletti (2004).

[18] There is no assumption here that reduced answers in Italian should necessarily involve reduction of a cleft in general. This is a natural assumption in cases like (15)/(16), but reduction would probably obtain in different structures as well, e.g. in i.c where the possible analysis of the answer in i.b to the question in i.a could involve reduction of the portion of clause above the VP periphery:

i.   a Chi ha parlato?
          b Io/Gianni
          c [- Ho/a parlato [$_{Foc}$ io/Gianni …..[$_{VP}$…]]]

given answering strategy, e.g. VS in Italian, where the relevant grammatical principles are met (null subject). Answering with a (reduced) cleft, however, is an available strategy in both languages, as one would expect.

3.3. *Speculations on English*

When "be" (a (reduced) cleft?) is prompted by the question, English, much as Italian, allows for an answer utilizing a (reduced) cleft. This is illustrated in the possible analysis (17)b of the answer to (17)a, which parallels (6) above, with the postcopular subject sitting in the Focus position in the VP periphery:

(17)   a Who is knocking at the door?
          b It's [$_{Foc}$ me/John … [$_{VP}$ [$_{sc}$- ~~knocking at the door~~]..]

However, a (reduced) cleft is not the preferred answering strategy in English to a question on the subject not containing "be". Much as in Italian where inversion/VS is preferred over a (reduced) cleft when V is pronounced in the answer to a question on the subject, the order SV is typically displayed in English, with a peculiar stress on S. The question-answer pair in (11) repeated below, illustrates the point. Note that (11)b differs from (18), where, I assume, the subject is contrastively focussed in the clause external left periphery:

(11)   a Who came?
          b *John* came

(18)   JOHN came (not Bill)

Use of a (reduced) cleft appears to be more limited in English than it is in French in the most typical case. Answering with a cleft, however, seems to be more readily available in English than it is in Italian, as English speakers find exchanges like the following relatively possible[19]:

(19)   a Who came?
          b It is/was John/me

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[19] As already observed above for French, reduction/deletion of the cleft is preferred; i.e. *It was John who came* is perceived as somewhat odd.

On the other hand , it should be noted that for some French speakers the following exchange, totally parallel to the English (11), can also be admitted to some extent (although it is clearly not preferred):

(20) a Qui a parlé
      b (*) *Jean* a parlé

This is not surprising as no principled grammatical reasons should rule out the (favored) English strategy, to a possible analysis of which we turn momentarily, as a possible option in French.[20] On the contrary, it should be noted that no (favored) Italian strategy displaying the order VS could be available in English, for principled grammatical reasons: inversion structures of the Italian kind are excluded in English along similar lines discussed for French, ultimately due to the negative setting of the null subject parameter in English[21].

Let us now turn to a speculation on what the English strategy should amount to. I would like to tentatively suggest that it is a case of "focus in situ" which could be interpreted as involving DP-internal focalization of the same type overtly manifested in (21). The peculiar intonation necessarily associated with the preverbal subject in these contexts ((11)b), should be seen as the reflex of a "null" DP internally focalized "himself", i.e. ultimately an "activated" DP-internal focus position:

(21) John himself came

Whatever the better analysis should turn out to be for answers like (11)b, focalization in the answer must be obtained through an answering strategy

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[20] Indeed, some Italian speakers do not totally rule out an equivalent exchange in Italian as well:
i.   a Chi ha parlato?
        b (*) *Gianni* ha parlato
However, everybody agrees that VS is the by far preferred option in standard Italian when V is pronounced in the answer and the pragmatics of a pure question of information is ensured by the context. Cfr. also the consistent behavior of the native control group in the experimental results discussed in 2.2., 3.1. Once again, as no grammatical, formal principle is violated in i.b, it is not surprising that the sentence can be not completely ruled out by some speakers who resort to the answering strategy which is in fact the preferred one in English and as such manifests a UG option in this area.

[21] *There* constructions should be amenable to a partly different analysis along the lines in Moro (1997); I will not take up the issue here.

compatible with the negative setting of the null subject parameter of English. Focus in situ would have this property. On the possible reasons why a (reduced) cleft answer to questions on the subject happens to be overwhelmingly active only in French (and not in English), see the tentative discussion in 4 below. Of course, the reason should identify a matter of preference, as both the English like "focus in situ" strategy and the French like (reduced) cleft strategy are compatible with the negative setting of the null subject parameter in these languages.

Note that the order SV, with the peculiar stress on S just described for English, cannot be amenable to the same analysis recently proposed by Cruschina (2004) for the same word order in the same discourse conditions also found in some Sicilian varieties (Cruschina (2004), ex.(5)):

(22)   a Cu partì?
            Who left
          b *Salvo* partì
            Salvo left

As Cruschina (2004, ex. (3)) shows, the clause initial location of the new information focus is not limited to a subject: cfr. (23)a, b for a question-answer pair concerning the direct object and the contrast with (24)a, b which shows that the same possibility is not readily available in English:

(23)   a Chi scrivisti airi?
            what wrote (you) yesterday
         b *N'articulu* scrissi
            an article (I) wrote

(24)   a What have you written yesterday?
         b % *A paper* I have written
         (ok: c I have written a paper)

It seems that, in the most typical case, the clause initial, left peripheral focus position is not appropriate for purely new information focus constituents in English, much as it happens in standard Italian[22]. Some extra feature must be involved, such as contrast, correction… This is not the case in the Sicilian variety discussed by Cruschina (2004), where the left peripheral focus position can equally host both contrastive/corrective and new information focus.

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[22] As I discuss at some length in the previous work of mine quoted above.
In the well formed (24)c the direct object should fill the VP peripheral new information focus position, similarly to Italian in the same context. See (30) below.

This in turn implies that the peculiarly stressed preverbal subject in the English answer in (11)b cannot be taken to fill the same left peripheral focus position as contrastive focus; whence our (tentative) proposal that answers like (11)b are an instance of (DP-internal) "focus in situ".[23]

4.   Wh in situ in the VP periphery: the "question" side

Let us now turn to what we might call "the question" side of the matter. It is tempting to claim that the low VP periphery be made use of also in questions. This proposal has been put forth in Kato (2003) who has proposed that wh-in-situ exploits the focus position in the VP periphery in the way illustrated in (25)b for Brazilian Portuguese (BP):

(25)   a Você viu <u>quem</u>?
             you saw who
         b $[_{CP}Q$ [$_{IP}$ você viu [$_{FP}$ <u>quem</u>$_q$ [$\varnothing_{+wh}$[$_{vP}$ t$_i$ t$_v$ [$_{VP}$ t$_v$ t$_q$]]]]]]
             you saw   who

It is natural to assume that, if the analysis in (25)b holds for BP, the same analysis should also extend to other wh-in situ languages which manifest similar properties in the syntax of wh-in-situ constructions; e.g. French:

(26)   a T'as fait <u>quoi?</u>
            you have done what
        b Il a vu <u>qui?</u>
            he has seen who

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[23] Thus, languages vary as to what kind of discourse related features they associate with the different focus positions assumed, the clause external left peripheral one and the clause internal one, in the VP periphery. English and Italian are on a par in this case, with the left peripheral focus (typically) limited to contrast/correction and the clause internal focus in the VP periphery, dedicated to new information focus. In Sicilian, the clause internal VP periphery is not "visible" as far as focalization is concerned, with both contrastive and new information focus located in the left periphery, as Cruschina (2004) shows. We might speculate that French could be taken to be the mirror image of Sicilian: in French the clause external left periphery is not activated for focalization of any kind (*JEAN j'ai rencontré/JOHN I have met), while the clause internal VP periphery is, if our analysis of cleft sentences with a new information subject is on the right track. Since a cleft can also be contrastively used in French, the same clause internal focus position could be made available to contrastive interpretation as well, thus giving rise to the mirror image of Sicilian in this respect. Thanks to G.Bocci for raising this point. See also Bocci (2004) relevant discussion on clause external, left peripheral focalization in standard Italian.

In (25)b [Q] and [wh] are the features assumed to be always involved in wh questions: the [Q] feature is located in CP where it expresses the force of the clause, the [wh] feature is located in the focus position of the VP periphery. In the spirit of Miyagawa (2001), the two features can be assumed to be both located in the CP area in languages not allowing wh-in situ (e.g. Italian, English…, with movement targeting the external focus position, Rizzi (1997)). In Japanese, both positions are overtly realized, the external C[Q] (Force) and the internal [+wh]:

(27) Biru-wa John-ni <u>nani-o</u>   aguemashita-<u>ka/no</u>?
     Bill-topic J-dat   what-acc   gave   *Q* (*Q*=question)

The only difference between (27) and (25) is to be recognized in the non-overt realization of the [Q] feature in the latter.

This analysis of wh-in-situ suggests the following speculative remarks. We have begun our discussion by noticing the widespread use of (reduced) clefts in answering questions on the subject in French. In the course of the analysis, we have mentioned that SV, with the English type peculiar stress on S, is also available, although to a lesser extent, in French as well. We might now ask why (reduced) clefts should take such a clear priority in French. I would like to suggest that this is favored by the combination of two factors: (wide) availability of clefts sentences to express new information focus and (wide) availability of the wh in situ strategy in question formation, analyzed along the lines in (25)b. In both the cleft sentence and the wh-in-situ computation, the VP periphery is crucially involved in a parallel fashion. See (28), where both the wh-phrase in the question and the subject *Jean/moi* in the answer should fill the same VP peripheral focus position combining (25)b and (6) above:

(28)   a C'est qui qui a parlé?
            who is it who has spoken
        a' [$_{CP}$*Q* [$_{IP}$c' est [$_{FP}$ [$\varnothing_{+wh}$[$_{vP}$ qui [qui a parlé]]]]]]

        b C'est Jean/moi
            it is Jean/me

In the case of questions on the subject, a (reduced) cleft appears to be a most natural answer in French, and the (reduced) cleft takes priority also in the lack of a strict parallelism with the question, i.e. also if question is not formulated with a cleft and wh-in-situ (as it was the case in (2)a. However, when the question concerns the object, native speakers do not find a (re-

duced) cleft to be such a natural answer in French anymore, unless the question is also expressed through a cleft with an in-situ wh-object. The contrast in (29) illustrates the point:

(29)   a C'est quoi que t'as lu?
           Is it what that you have read
       b C'est un roman
           it is a novel

       c Qu'est ce que t'as lu?/ Qu'as-tu lu ?
           what have you read
     d*? C'est un livre
           it is a book

Indeed, French appears to behave in this case in the same way as other languages such as Italian and English. It thus seems that, in the case of the subject, the (reduced) cleft is the only way available in French to make the discourse appropriate use of the VP periphery, in a way compatible with the negative setting of the null subject parameter. Somehow this strategy is less costly than an English like (DP internal) "focus in situ" strategy, possibly due to the wide exploitation of clefts in French in general. In the case the object, however, French, similarly to English and Italian limits the use of an answer with a (reduced) cleft to those cases where parallelism with the question, also containing a cleft and wh-in-situ, is manifested[24]. Otherwise, for reasons likely to be due to computational economy, I assume that the new information object is directly located in the dedicated new information focus position in the VP periphery, yielding SVO, if V is pronounced, in all three languages. Consider, in this respect, the completely analogous behavior of French, Italian, and English in question answer pairs involving the object illustrated in (30):

(30)   a Qu'est ce que t'as lu?/ Qu'as-tu lu ?
           what have you read
       b J'ai lu un roman
           I have read a novel

       c Cosa hai letto?
           what have you read

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[24] We are claiming that the parallelism in the question-answer pair is neater in French than it is in English or Italian as these latter languages are not wh-in-situ languages as French is.

    d Ho letto un romanzo
      (I have read) a novel

    e What have you read?
    f I have read a novel

The lack of contrast in (30) stands in sharp contrast with the very different behavior manifested by the three languages in question answer pairs on the subject, which started out our discussion.

5.   Summary and some conclusions

We can now highlight some of the main points of our discussion and draw the, somewhat preliminary, conclusions, listed below.

- Languages appear to differ as to the strategy they preferably adopt in answering questions on the subject. All other things being equal, null subject languages, as standard Italian, can exploit the inversion strategy making use of the dedicated focus position in the VP periphery, with a silent preverbal subject[25]. In languages where the null subject parameter is set negatively, one of two different strategies appear to be utilized to realize a new information subject: i. creating a non-null subject compatible "inversion" structure, exploiting the informational content of the VP periphery; ii. adopting a (DP internal) focus-in-situ strategy. French and English illustrate the two options. The quite typical (reduced) cleft answer, widely adopted in French, has been interpreted here as a kind of "inversion in disguise" sharing important properties with subject inversion/VS structures of the Italian type.
- It has also been suggested that (wide) availability of wh-in-situ and cleft sentences in French might be at the source of the prominent status of clefts in answering questions on the subject. For reasons ultimately due to computational economy, answers containing a new information object, on the other hand, tend to limit use of a (reduced) cleft to those cases where strict parallelism with the question holds, where the question also contains a cleft and a in-situ wh-object.
- Answering with a (reduced) cleft to questions on the subject, appears to be a wider option than might appear at first sight, shared by the different languages considered. The VP periphery is systematically made use of in a way which parallels use of this area of the clause in subject inversion/VS structures.

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[25] But we have seen that inversion is not the only option for a null subject language, as it is suggested by the Sicilian case where the clause external left periphery is also compatible with simple new information focus (Cruschina (2004)).

- The empirical evidence which is able to reveal deep similarities across languages can be (and should be, we might add) of different nature. In our discussion, we have utilized L2 acquisition experimental data and we have seen that they provide a peculiar magnifier, able to capture deep similarities at the discourse/pragmatics interface: answering to a question of information must be essentially the same process across languages. We have tried to make explicit how this can be expressed within the clause structure assumed here.

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