On word order variation and information structure in Spanish and Italian ‘why’-interrogatives

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Word order variation in Italian and Spanish ‘why’-interrogatives

  - Chinese (*Luca) ha comprato (Lucas)? (Italian) what Luca has bought Luca ‘What did Luca buy?’
  - ‘Why’ (Sp. *qué y It. *perché) allows preverbal and postverbal subjects (e.g., Rizzi 2001, Torrego 1984)
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RQ 1: Does information structure affect word order in Italian and Spanish ‘why’-interrogatives?

RQ 2: Do Spanish and Italian ‘why’-interrogatives differ from each other and if yes, why?

Parallel Text Corpus: Method & Results

- Manual annotation of
  - Syntactic features: word order (whSV vs. whVS) clause type (matrix vs. embedded) subject (null vs. overt)
  - Discourse categories of the subject: (Heidinger 2016)
  - Focus: set of relevant alternatives ([-Foc] vs. [Foc]), IRA: 97.3%, Cohen’s k = 0.73 (substantial)
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- Statistical analysis with mixed-effects regression model in R:
  - Significant effect of language (β = 5.48, SE = 0.81, z = 6.74, p < .001)
  - Significant effect of ‘markedness’ in Italian (β = 3.54, SE = 0.84, z = 4.22, p < .001) and Spanish
  - No effect of text (β = 0.42, SE = 0.40, z = 1.05, p = 0.30)

Table 1: Word order in ‘why’-interrogatives (Parallel Text Corpus)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SV</th>
<th>VS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 2: Word order in ‘why’-interrogatives across information structure conditions (absolute numbers) |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|        | unmarked | marked |
|意大利 | wthSV    | 51      | 1        | 7        | 5        |
|         | whVS     | 2       | 0        | 13       | 3        |
|西班牙 | wthSV    | 8       | 2        | 9        | 6        |
|         | whVS     | 73      | 1        | 14       | 4        |

Forced-choice experiment: Method & Results

Experimental design:
- Web-based questionnaire in a Latin square design
- Three independent variables with two levels each:
  - Language: Italian vs. Spanish
  - Concerning the subject:
    - Focus: [+Foc] vs. [-Foc]
    - Status of information: [-Given] vs. [+Given]
  - 24 items, resulting in 96 experimental stimuli
  - 4 lists, each participant receives 24 experimental stimuli and 24 fillers in a pseudo-randomized order

Participants:
- 372 participants (recruited via Facebook)
- 157 Italian monolinguals (mean age = 32.3, range = 20-63, 111 female, 46 male)
- 215 speakers of Spanish from Spain (mean age = 34.3, range = 20-78, 169 female, 45 male, 1 other)
- 3 Italian and 3 Spanish participants were excluded (mean age = 34.3, range = 20-63, 111 female, 46 male)

RQ 1: Does information structure affect word order in ‘why’-interrogatives?

Italian: YES
- Especially focus has important impact on word order in Italian ‘why’-interrogatives

Spanish:
- Intransitive verbs: NO
  - general preference for postverbal subjects regardless of the information structure
- Transitive verbs: more research needed

RQ 2: Do Spanish and Italian ‘why’-interrogatives differ from each other and if yes, why?

YES → differences with respect to the frequency of word order patterns: facep 
- Italian: subject position is triggered by information structure (preverbal = [+Foc], postverbal = [+Foc])
- Spanish: subject position only marginally affected by information structure

A first syntactic account for ‘why’-interrogatives within the cartographic framework:
- Verb: ‘why’ is directly integrated in TP (Rizzi 2001, Shinlyon 2011, Stepanow & Tsao 2008)
- Subject: location in subject position is due to different properties regarding information structure. Finite structure of the split-TP (as in Bellietti & Cardinaletti 2004)

| Table 3: Word order in ‘why’-interrogatives across information structure conditions (relative numbers) |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|        | unmarked | marked |
|意大利 | wthSV    | 51      | 1        | 7        | 5        |
|         | whVS     | 2       | 0        | 13       | 3        |
|西班牙 | wthSV    | 8       | 2        | 9        | 6        |
|         | whVS     | 73      | 1        | 14       | 4        |

Discussion

Empirical studies

REFERENCES: