

# VSO ORDER IN ROMANCE: A DISTINCTNESS ACCOUNT

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1. **GOAL:** This paper explores the distribution of subjects in VSO languages under Distinctness Condition (cf. Richards 2010). We argue that the possibility to display VSO order is related to the complexity of the Direct Object, which can be differentially marked or not (DOM, cf. López 2012; Torrego 1998; among others). DOM allows the subject to be maintained *in-situ* since it makes possible to differentiate two <DP, DP> (cf. Richards 2010).

2. **BACKGROUND DATA:** As reported in the literature (cf. Belletti 2004; Gallego 2007; 2013; Ordóñez 1998, 2005) VOS order is found in most Romance languages, but VSO order displays a more restrictive distribution being only possible in European Portuguese, Spanish, Romanian and Galician. This paper focus on contrasts between Catalan and Spanish (see (1) and (2)).

- (1) a. *En Joan fullejava el diari.* SVO (Catalan)  
the Joan browsed-3.SG the newspaper  
b. *Fullejava un diari en Joan.* VOS (Catalan)  
browsed-3.SG the newspaper the Joan  
c. *\*Fullejava en Joan el diari. \*VSO (Catalan)*  
browsed-3.SG the Joan the newspaper  
'Joan browsed the newspaper.' [taken from Picallo 1998:228 229]
- (2) a. *Juan compra todos los días el diario.* SVO (Spanish)  
Juan buy-3.SG every days the newspaper  
b. *Todos los días compra el diario Juan.* VOS (Spanish)  
every the days buy the newspaper Juan  
c. *Todos los días compra Juan el diario.* VSO (Spanish)  
every the days buy-3.SG Juan the newspaper  
'Every day Juan buys the newspaper.'

Typically, these differences are accounted for by postulating additional projections that license the extra subject position in VSO languages: FocusP (cf. Belletti 2004), SubjectP (cf. Ordóñez 2005) or a second specifier of vP (cf. Gallego 2013). Thus, the parameter proposed to explain the asymmetry in all analyses consists in extending the repertoire of projections. This paper offers an alternative that relates VSO sentences to other (well-known) phenomena such as DOM, clitic doubling or leísmo. This connection (at least with DOM) is already mentioned in Belletti (2004) and Gallego (2013).

3. **DISTINCTNESS ACCOUNT:** We put forward a proposal based on the 'Distinctness Condition' (cf. Richards 2010, Hiraiwa 2010, 2009). With Richards (2010), we assume the following PF condition in (3):

(3) Distinctness:

If a linearization statement  $\langle \alpha, \alpha \rangle$  is generated, the derivation crashes at PF.

We submit that the excluded VSO order in Catalan discussed above (1c) fails to satisfy (3). Let us see how. (4) shows the structure we assume for VSO (cf. Ordóñez 1998, Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2001, Cardinaletti 2001, Richards 2010).

(4)  ${}_{\nu\text{CP}}[{}_{\nu\text{P}} [\text{DPSUBJECT V VP}[\text{V DPOBJECT}]]]$  \*VSO

The structure of (4) violates (3) since both DPs appear in the same domain: <DP, DP>. The idea that we defend here is that the structure of the Object is more complex in Spanish than

in Catalan and this allows to avoid Distinctness. Specifically, we propose that the DOM marker is the evidence of this complexity. DO in Spanish exhibit the following structure:

(5)  $KP[K(a) DP[OBJECT]]$  Spanish DO

Spanish DOs are introduced by an extra head that is phonetically realized in some discursive contexts (animacy, specificity cf. Leonetti 2013). Then, the derivation is well-formed: the structure to be linearized is  $\langle DP, KP \rangle$  (see (6)).

(6)  $vCP[vP [DP_{SUBJECT} v VP[V KP_{OBJECT}]]]$  VSO

In fact, DOM is not the only feature that distinguishes the DO in Spanish. Spanish displays the phenomenon so-called ‘leísmo’ (cf. Bleam 1999, Fernández-Ordóñez 1999) and also exhibits clitic doubling (cf. Suñer 1988). These phenomena are not attested in Catalan, which suggests that case assignment behaves different.

Another relevant question that must be addressed is why the subject is maintained *in-situ* only in some contexts. We defend that this fact can be related to the informative structure that it is attributed to VSO sentences. As Leonetti (2013) points out, VSO sentences are interpreted as ‘wide focus’ (or ‘background’, if some other constituent receives narrow focus), but always as an informative unit. This author notes that it is not possible to assign narrow focus to one constituent in VSO. We consider that the movement of the subject to a TP position could break this unit since the specifier of the TP receives a topic interpretation in Spanish (according to Ordóñez & Treviño 1999, Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2000, 2001). Topic interpretation is incompatible with the informative structure assigned to VSO by default (wide focus).

**4. CONSEQUENCES AND PREDICTIONS:** If the analysis is on the right track, VSX order should be possible with PPs in languages that not allow VSO. This prediction seems to be borne out (see (7)).

(7) a. È arrivato un marziano *a Roma*. (Italian)  
 be.PRS.3SG arrived an alien to Rome  
 ‘An alien arrived in Rome.’

b. Ha telefonato una ragazza *a tuo fratello*. (Italian)  
 have.PRS.3SG phoned a girl to your brother  
 ‘A girl phoned to your brother.’ [Taken from Leonetti 2013: 20]

c. Ha telefonat una nena *al seu pare*. (Catalan)  
 have-3.SG phoned a girl to her father.  
 ‘A girl phoned to her father.’

Also, \*VSO languages can avoid the restrictions dislocating the DO (see (8)). Thus, the object is situated outside the vP domain (cf. (8)).

(8) La guanyarà el Barça, *la Lliga*. (Catalan)  
 CL.AC win.FUT.3SG the Barça the championship  
 ‘Barça will win the championship’ [Taken from Leonetti 2013: 20]

In fact, it seems that to insert ‘a’ in Catalan improves the agrammaticality (as a ‘last resort’ see (9)).

(9) a. \*Ha vist en Joan la Maria. (Catalan)  
 AUX-3.SG seen the Joan the María  
 b. ??? Ha vist en Joan *a la Maria*. (Catalan)  
 AUX-3.SG seen the Joan the María  
 ‘Joan has seen María.’

The proposal is also compatible with ‘the subject *in-situ* generalization’ (cf. Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2000, 2007). In addition, this paper connects the possibility to have VSO order with other phenomena treated by Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (2000, 2007) and Richards (2010) such as ditransitive structures and ‘linkers’ (cf. Collins 2003). All

languages resort to the same strategies to avoid the appearance of two DPs inside the vP (by dislocating some constituent or adding a head).

**5. CONCLUSIONS:** This paper offers an analysis of VSO sentences based on Richards (2010). We argue that the possibility to display VSO order is related to the complexity of the DO. In this analysis sketched here is not necessary to postulate a specific new projection for the subject, it can be derived related to other phenomena (DOM), which clearly distinguishes Spanish and Catalan.

**6. REFERENCES (SEL.):** Alexiadou, A., & Anagnostopoulou, E. (2001). The subject-in-situ generalization and the role of case in driving computations. *Linguistic inquiry*, 32(2), 193-231. Belletti, A. (2004). "Aspects of the low IP area". In L. Rizzi (ed.), *The structure of CP and IP*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Richards, N. (2010). *Uttering trees* (Vol. 56). MIT Press. López, L. (2012). *Indefinite objects: Scrambling, choice functions, and differential marking* (Vol. 63). MIT Press.