Focus fronting in the layered structure of the clause

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Abstract

This paper deals with a focusing strategy, focus fronting, whereby the focused information unit precedes the finite nucleus. Our principal concern is with the micro-parametric variation between Nuorese Sardinian, Sicilian, and Italian, three Romance languages which display focus fronting to different extents and in different modalities. We claim that whereas focus fronting in Sardinian occurs in the pre-core slot, thus paralleling fronting in German (Van Valin/Diedrichsen 2006, Diedrichsen 2008), in Sicilian focus fronting distinguishes between contrastive and completive focus. The locus of contrastive focus fronting is the pre-core slot, whilst completive focus fronting places the focused information unit in the first position in the core (Bentley 2008). The contrast between Sardinian and Sicilian illustrates two V2 strategies; one is defined by the placement of the finite nucleus in the core-initial position ([pre-core Slot X] [core [nucleus]...]), whilst the other is defined by the placement of the finite nucleus in the second position of the core ([core X [nucleus]…]). In Italian, fronting is highly constrained, affecting only wh- and contrastive units, and leaving scope for SVO order in almost all its instances. The proposed analysis is compatible with the current understanding of fronting in Medieval Romance (Lombardi 2007; Vanelli 1986).

Key words: focus, fronting, V2, LSC.
1. Introduction
In this study we consider a focusing strategy called focus fronting (henceforth FF) whereby the focused information unit precedes the finite verb, that is, in RRG terms, the finite part of the nucleus. Our principal concern is with the micro-parametric variation between Nuorese Sardinian, Sicilian, and Italian, three Romance languages which display FF to different extents and in different modalities. The adoption of the RRG theory of clause and discourse structure enables us to shed new light on a problematic aspect of the comparative analysis of FF which has so far remained poorly understood, in particular the contrast between FF in Sardinian and Sicilian. We claim that whereas FF in Sardinian occurs in the pre-core slot, thus closely resembling fronting in German (Van Valin/Diedrichsen 2006, Diedrichsen 2008), in Sicilian FF distinguishes between contrastive and completive focus. The locus of the former is the pre-core slot, whilst the latter places the focused information unit in the first position in the core (Bentley 2008). The contrast between Sardinian and Sicilian illustrates two V2 strategies; one is defined by the placement of the finite nucleus in the first position of the core ([pre-core slot X [core [nucleus]...]]), whilst the other is defined by the placement of the finite nucleus in the second position of the core ([core X [nucleus]...]). In Italian, contrastive focus can involve FF in the pre-core slot, whereas completive focus must be expressed post-verbally (Bentley 2008). Finally, in all the languages under investigation wh-units are fronted. Despite apparent counterevidence from the adjacency constraint on wh-fronting, we pursue the hypothesis, which is standard in RRG, that the locus of all wh-units be the pre-core slot. In accordance with this assumption we analyse adjacency in terms of semantic conditioning on the loss of V2. The proposed analysis is compatible with the current understanding of fronting in Medieval Romance (see, among others, Benincà 2004; Ledgeway 2008; Lombardi 2007; Vanelli 1986, 1999).

2. Focus fronting in Sardinian
In Sardinian, focused information units can precede the finite verb. Although this word order often characterises interrogative clauses, it is also found in declarative clauses as well as in exclamations.

(1a)  *SU DUTTORE appo vistu.*  
    The doctor have.1SG seen.  
    ‘I have seen the doctor.’

(1b)  *SU DUTTORE as vistu?*  
    The doctor have.2SG seen.  
    ‘Have you seen the doctor?’

(1c)  *ISTRACCU est(?) (.) (!)*  
    Tired.MSG be.3SG

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1 In our account, the term fronting does not presuppose movement. It only presupposes displacement to the extent that the unmarked word order is SVO in languages under investigation, an assumption which is challenged by the Sardinian evidence presented below.

2 The data on Sardinian have in part been drawn from the secondary literature (in particular, Jones 1993 and Mensching/Remberger in press) and in part collected by the author in the following Nuorese villages: Bitti, Fonni, Orgosolo, Orosei. The abbreviations used in the glosses are as follows: F = feminine; INF = infinitive; M = masculine; OCL = object clitic; PCL = partitive clitic (Bentley 2006); PF = existential or locative pro-form (see unstressed there in English); PL = plural; Q = marker of polar questions; RFL = reflexive; SG = singular.
‘Is he tired?’ ‘He is tired.’ ‘He is tired!’

(1d) INOCHE seS(?) () (!)
Here be.2SG
‘Are you here?’ ‘You are here.’ ‘You are here!’

(1e) FRITTU META b’ at (?) () (!)
Cold much PF have.3SG
‘Is it very cold?’ ‘It is very cold.’ ‘It is very cold!’

(1f) MANDATU SA LITTERA appo.
Sent the letter have.1SG
‘I have sent the letter.’

(1g) MANDICATU IN SU RISTORANTE as?
Eaten in the restaurant have.2SG
‘Have you eaten at the restaurant?’

(1h) SU SARDU CHI BOLEUS PO SU TEMPU S BENNIDORI est?
The Sardinian which want.2PL for the time coming be.3SG
‘Is this the Sardinian which you want for the future?’
(for (1h) see Mensching/Remberger in press)

The focused-fronted unit can be a referential phrase (cf. (1a-b)), a predicate (cf. (1c-d)), or a heavier information unit which comprises both a predicate and a referential phrase, as is the case with (1f-g). In the last case, the focused unit may constitute what is traditionally considered to be the verb phrase of the clause. Finally, consider (1h), where fronting affects a referential phrase which includes a subordinated clause. The focused-fronted unit always bears primary stress (Jones 1993:332, 338).

The further characteristics of Sardinian FF can be subsumed as follows. To begin with, there can only be one focused-fronted unit in the clause, as is indicated by the ungrammaticality of the examples in (2a-d). In fact, the fronted unit must be the only focused unit in the clause.

(2a) SU DUTTORE (*CHIE) at vistu?
The doctor who have.3SG seen
‘Who has the doctor seen?’

(2b) CHIE (*SU DUTTORE) at vistu?
Who the doctor have.3SG seen
‘Who has the doctor seen?’

(2c) A CHIE (*SU IOCATULU) as datu?
To whom the toy have.2SG given
‘Who did you give the toy to?’
(Jones 1993:334)

(2d) A JUANNE (*UNU IOCATULU) appo datu (unu iocàtulu).
To John a toy have.1SG given a toy
‘I gave John a toy.’

FF is incompatible both with negation (cf. (3)) and with the interrogative marker a (cf. (4)), which can otherwise be found in polar Sardinian questions (cf. (5)).

(3) ISTRACCU (*no) est?
Tired.MSG not be.3SG
‘Is he (not) tired?’
(4) \textit{SU DUTTORE} (*a) as vistu?
The doctor \textit{Q} have.2SG seen
‘Have you seen the doctor?’

(5) \textit{A bin(d)’ a,} chistiones?
\textit{Q PF.PCL} have.3SG problems
‘Problems, are there any?’

FF is also clause internal (cf. (6)), and subject to a strict adjacency constraint, in that the
fronted information unit must precede the nucleus immediately, including, where applicable,
its operator or auxiliary, and any agreement specifications figuring in syntax on the agreement
index node (Belloro 2004). In the judgement of my Nuorese informants, the adjacency
condition does not distinguish between completive and contrastive focus (see (7a) for the
former and (7b) for the latter). It is, however, relaxed for non-argumental referential
expressions like \textit{pro custu} ‘for this reason’ in (7c).

(6) \textit{*CUSTU LIBRU} appo natu ch’ appo lessu.
This book have.1SG said that have.1SG read
‘I said that I read this book.’

(7a) \textit{ISTRACCU} (*Juanne) est.
Tired.MSG John be.3SG
‘John is tired.’

(7b) «\textit{Petru bos at} mandatu una littera.»
Peter OCL have.3SG sent a letter.
«\textit{UNACARTOLINA} (*Petru) nos at mandatu (Petru).»
A card Peter OCL have.3SG sent Peter
‘Peter sent you a letter’. «On the contrary, he sent us a card».

(7c) \textit{PRO CUSTU} Juanne at isticchitusu dinari.
For this John have.3SG hidden the money
‘For this reason John has hidden the money.’

Finally, in some Sardinian varieties, FF is licensed within a finite complement clause,
where the fronted unit follows the complementizer (cf. (8a)), but in no variety is it licensed
within a non-finite complement regardless of the position of the fronted unit with respect to
the linkage marker (cf. (8b)).

(8a) Juanne m’ at natu chi \textit{SU DUTTORE} aiat vistu.
John OCL have.3SG said that the doctor had.3SG seen
‘John told me that he had seen the doctor.’

(8b) \textit{*Maria m’ at natu (a) SU DUTTORE (a) videre.}
Mary OCL have.3SG said to the doctor to see
‘Mary told me to see the doctor.’

(Jones 1993:335).

To conclude this general introduction to Sardinian FF we should note that, although this is
comparable to wh-fronting, which can indeed be taken to be a sub-type of FF, there are
differences between wh-fronting and the other kinds of FF. In particular, whereas wh-fronting
is not compatible with another focused-fronted unit (cf. (2a-c)) or with the question marker \textit{a}
(cf. (9a)), and is subject to adjacency constraints which are comparable to those that generally
apply to FF (cf. (9b-c)), the wh-unit is not necessarily the only focal information unit in the clause and thus may not bear the main stress (cf. (9d)). In addition, wh-fronting is compatible with negation (cf. (9e)), and is not constrained to the syntactic boundary of the clause (cf. (9f)). Lastly, wh-units can be fronted within non-finite complement clauses (cf. (9g)).

(9a) (*A) chie (*a) est veitu?
    Q who Q be.3SG come
    ‘Who has come?’

(9b) CHIE (*Juanne) at vistu (Juanne)?
    Who John have.3SG seen John?
    ‘Who did John see?’

(9c) »PROITTE Juanne at isticchitu su dinari?»
    Why John have.3SG hidden the money
    ‘Why did John hide the money?’

(9d) A CHIE as datu SU LOCÀTULU?
    To whom have.2SG given the toy?
    ‘Who did you give the toy to?’

(9e) CHIE no est veitu?
    Who not be.3SG come
    ‘Who has not come?’

(9f) CALE LIBRU as natu ch’ as lessu?
    Which book have.2SG said that have.2SG read
    ‘Which book did you say you read?’

(9g) No’ isco ITTE fàchere.
    Not know.1SG what do
    ‘I do not know what to do.’
    (for (9e-g) see Jones 1993:335).

2.1 The syntax of Sardinian FF.
In the light of the above evidence we propose that, in Sardinian, focused-fronted units take the clause-external position which in RRG is called pre-core slot (Van Valin 2005:5-8). We shall now provide evidence in support of this claim.

To begin with, it seems clear that focused-fronted information units do not figure in the left-detached position. In Romance, this is typically occupied by topical units of information, and this is also the case with Sardinian.

(10) Sa domu, l’ at comporata Luchia.
    The house OCL have.3SG bought Lucy
    ‘The house, Lucy bought it.’

Although the referential phrase sa domu ‘the house’ precedes the nucleus in (10), as is the case with focused-fronted information units, this phrase cannot be assumed to occur in the same position as focused-fronted units, in that, first, it does not bear primary stress; secondly, it is set apart from the clause by a pause, which is represented in writing by a comma, and, finally, it is doubled by a resumptive clitic pronoun, l(a). Clitic doubling indicates that sa domu ‘the house’ is a topic.3 None of the mentioned properties characterize FF. Indeed, this can co-occur with a topical information unit in left periphery.

3 To be sure, in Sardinian, clitic doubling can also occur within the boundaries of the clause: (i) imoi mi dha papu una pira ‘now I shall eat it a pear’, (ii) (n)ke soe torrau dae Kastedhu ‘I have got back from-there from Cagliari’ (examples from Virdis 2003), similarly to what happens in European and Latin-American Spanish (Belloro
(11) Sa domu, COMPORATA l’ as?
The house bought.FSG OCL have.2SG
‘The house, did you buy it?’

The topic must always precede the focused-fronted unit in the left periphery. See the counterpart of (11), which is ungrammatical:

(11’) *COMPORATA, sa domu, l’ as?
Bought.FSG the house OCL have.2SG
‘The house, did you buy it?’

We thus assume that the topic occurs outside the clause, precisely in the left-detached position, whilst the focused-fronted unit takes a following, clause-internal, position.

Since focused-fronted units may be composed of sub-units that would otherwise belong to separate layers of the clause, as is the case with (1g), which is repeated here for convenience, the designated position of FF is unlikely to be within the core. In fact, if this were the case, a peripheral element (in su ristorante ‘at the restaurant’) would appear within the core in (1g), splitting the predicate from its aspectual operator (cf. (1g’)). This operator is only represented outside the core in (1g’) because operators are not considered to be part of the constituent (i.e., syntactic) projection in RRG.4

(1g) MANDICATU IN SU RISTORANTE as?
Eaten in the restaurant have.2SG
‘Have you eaten in a restaurant?’

(1g’) [Core [Nuc MANDICATU] IN SU RISTORANTE] as?
Eaten in the restaurant have.2SG
‘Have you eaten at the restaurant?’

RRG does recognize, of course, that some languages license structures whereby a periphery splits the core. The problem with the structure represented in (1g’), however, is that the aspectual operator as ‘have.2SG’ does not occur in a position which represents its scope over the nucleus. In addition, if the fronted material occurred within the core, as is the case with the syntactic representation proposed in (1g’), it would be unclear exactly what position FF targets in syntax. Another relevant example is provided below.

(12) MORTU IN S’ ISPIDALE est?
Dead/died in the hospital be.3SG

2004, 2007). Whether the function of clause-internal clitic doubling is comparable to that of its counterpart in Spanish is an issue which would clearly go beyond the scope of this paper, and will thus be left out of the present discussion. What should be noted here is that clause -internal clitic doubling typically refers cataphorically to the co-referent argument and is not separated from it by a pause.

4 In RRG only the auxiliaries that are necessary for the formation of the nucleus (e.g., be in English copular constructions) are represented as part of the constituent projection, whereas operators are not taken to be part of this projection because they are not predicating or referential units, and hence they are not part of the building blocks of the layered structure of the clause. In addition, whereas the position of the elements of the constituent projection is determined by language-specific ordering rules, that of operators is subject to universal scope constraints (Van Valin 2005:11-12). The matter at hand might, however, deserve further thought, since operators can be necessary for the formation of specific layers of the clause, as is the case with aspectual operators in the perfect, given that a past participle could not stand alone, i.e., without the person specifications provided on the operator.
‘Is he dead in hospital?’ / ‘Did he die in hospital?’, ‘Has he died in hospital?’
(Blasco Ferrer 1986:194).

(12') [Core [Nuc MORTU] IN S’ ISPIDALE [Nuc est]]?
    dead in the hospital be.3SG
‘Is he dead in hospital?’

(12'') [PrCS MANDICATU IN SU RISTORANTE] as [Core [Nuc]]?
    Eaten in the restaurant have.2SG
‘Have you eaten at the restaurant?’

In one possible reading of (12), ‘Is he dead in hospital?’, the predicate is split from an auxiliary, est ‘be.3SG’, which is essential for the formation of the nucleus, and is thus represented within the constituent projection in RRG (Van Valin 2005:13). The result is a split nucleus. In the other construal, ‘Has he died in hospital?’, the aspectual operator est ‘be.3SG’ is separated from the predicate over which is has scope (cf. (1g')). In both readings, it is unclear how to define the position of the focused-fronted unit on the basis of the representations in (12’).

Evidence such as (1g) and (12) strongly suggests that the position of focused-fronted units is the pre-core slot.

(1g'') [PrCS MANDATU SA LITTERA] appo [Core [Nuc]].
    Sent the letter have.1SG
‘I have sent the letter.’

In (1g'') and the second construal of (12''), whilst being separated from the predicate, the perfective operators do have scope over the nucleus. In the first construal of (12''), the auxiliary occurs within the nucleus, as should be the case with copular structures. In addition, the nucleus is not split.

The same conclusion is reached on the basis of data like (1f), where, again, the position targeted by FF is unclear if this is taken to be inside the core. This problem does not arise, instead, if we assume that mandatu sa littera ‘sent the letter’ is a focal information unit which, for discourse purposes, constitutes the pre-core slot of the clause.

Examples of FF such as (1f-g) and (12) are reminiscent of a fronting strategy which is commonly found in German.

(13) Er hat immer noch nicht die Blumen begossen, He have.3SG always still not the flowers watered
    aber das Auto gewaschen hat er gestern.
    but the car washed have.3SG he yesterday
‘He still has not watered the flowers, but he did wash the car yesterday.’
Drawing upon a proposal originally put forward in Van Valin / Diedrichsen (2006), Diedrichsen (2008) suggests that the fronted unit of structures like (13) is placed in the pre-core slot. Since German is characterised by V2 order, the finite nucleus must figure in the first position in the core, with some other clause constituent (e.g., an argument) preceding it in the pre-core slot. A non-finite predicate is either placed in the pre-core slot, as is the case with gewaschen ‘washed’ in (13), or in the final position of the core, as with begossen ‘watered’ in the same example. When the predicate is non-finite, the finite operator, which, following the standard RRG analysis, Diedrichsen (2008) does not take to be part of the constituent projection, will occur immediately before the first slot in the core. This is clearly the case with the second clause in (13), where gewaschen ‘washed’ is fronted in the pre-core slot and the aspectual operator hat ‘have.3SG’ precedes the first position in the core ([Core er…]). The result in terms of linear order is V2, in the sense that the finite verb hat ‘have.3SG’ is only preceded by the pre-core slot.

Interestingly, the fronted material of German structures like (13) need not constitute a single syntactic constituent, as long as it is wholly focal or topical. This is the case with das Auto gewaschen, lit. the car washed, in (13), if, adopting the RRG theory of non-relational syntax, we do not have a notion of verb phrase, and with the fronted unit of (14).

(14) _Er hat vergessen, die Blumen zu gießen,_

He have.3SG forgotten the flowers to water

_aber DEM HUND DAS WASSER HINGESTELLT hat er._

but the dog the water put.down have.3SG he

‘He forgot to water the plants, but he did put the water down for the dog.’

(Diedrichsen 2008: 219)

As Diedrichsen (2008:222) puts it: “It seems that at least for the pre-core slot position the demands of focus structure override the traditional notion of “constituent””. The same situation is found in Sardinian FF (cf. (1g) and (12)), although, by contrast with German, this language only appears to front focal information units in the pre-core slot.

Since Jones (1993:336) it has been suggested that Sardinian FF could be related to a general verb-second principle. After all, Medieval Romance is claimed to have exhibited V2 word order (Benincà 2004; Benincà/Poletto 2004; Ledgeway 2008; Salvi 2004; Vanelli 1986, 1999), and FF could represent what is left of this order in a group of Romance varieties, the Sardinian ones, which are notoriously archaic in many respects. Interestingly, however, the testimony of a corpus of Sardinian texts dating from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, has led Lombardi (2007) to claim that early Sardinian does not display V2 order, but rather V1 (i.e., VSO), in that, in these documents, the finite verb strongly tends to occur in clause-initial position, and fronting is on the whole rather sporadic. In the light of these results, Cruschina (2008) has suggested that FF might actually have developed after the Medieval times in Sardinian.

Although Lombardi’s (2007) findings might reflect the stylistic conventions of the chancery language of the Middle Ages, and, even at that stage, fronting may have been much more frequent in other registers, in the light of these results it seems undeniable that V1 or VSO order was grammatical, if not basic, in early Sardinian. In RRG term, this word order is characterized by the occurrence of the finite nucleus in the first position in the core, regardless of whether there are any fronted unit. This would still appear to be the position of the finite nucleus in the Modern Sardinian structures with FF, whereas the fronted information unit is placed in the pre-core slot. If there is a finite operator or a finite auxiliary, these will follow
the pre-core slot immediately in the string, the only difference between the two cases being that auxiliaries take the first position in the core (see the first construal of (12) in (12'')), whereas operators do not belong to the core and thus leave this empty (see (1g'') and the second construal of (12) in (12''), where, crucially, the aspectual operators do occur in a position which marks their scope over the nucleus).

In the last analysis Sardinian FF realizes V2, in that it places the finite (part of the) nucleus - or the finite operator - in the second position in the clause, that is, in RRG terms, in the position which immediately follows the pre-core slot. Our hypothesis captures the adjacency constraint (cf. (7a-b)), inasmuch as the finite (part of the) nucleus - or the finite operator - must follow the pre-core slot immediately. Accordingly, there cannot be any intervening syntactic material between the two. Of course, the exceptions to this constraint are not explained (cf. (7c)), and we shall return to these in section 4.

The syntactic analysis also fails to capture the incompatibility of FF with negation (cf. (3)) and with the question marked a (cf. (4)), its being constrained to the boundaries of the clause (cf. (6)), and, finally, the fact that, in some varieties, FF is licensed within a finite complement clause, where the fronted unit follows the complementizer (cf. (8a)), but in no variety is it licensed within a non-finite complement regardless of the position of the fronted unit with respect to the linkage marker (cf. (8b)). Let us, therefore, turn to discourse and ascertain whether this is where the answer to these questions is to be sought.

2.2 Discourse constraints on Sardinian focus fronting

Jones (1993:334) points out that Sardinian FF can only apply to one element within the clause. We claim, more specifically, that the focused-fronted unit must be a single information unit as well as the only focal unit in the clause. Thus, FF fronting is incompatible with wh-fronting (cf. (2a-c), and cannot be double, that is, it cannot apply to two information units (cf. (2d)).

(2a) **SU DUTTORE (**CHIE) at vistu?  
   The doctor who have.3SG seen  
   ‘Who has the doctor seen?’

(2b) **CHIE (**SU DUTTORE) at vistu?  
   Who the doctor have.3SG seen  
   ‘Who has the doctor seen?’

(2c) **A CHIE (**SU IOCÀTULU) as datu?  
   To whom the toy have.2SG given  
   ‘Who did you give the toy to?’
   (Jones 1993:334)

(2d) **A JUANNE (**UNU IOCÀTULU) appo datu (unu iocàtulu).  
   To John a toy have.1SG given a toy  
   ‘I gave John a toy.’

Significantly, Sardinian FF is not constrained to any particular type of focus and is subject to the same restrictions regardless of whether it expresses completive or contrastive focus. By way of example, consider the adjacency constraint.

(7a) **ISTRACCU (**Juanne) est?  
   Tired.MSG John be.3SG  
   ‘Is John tired?’

(7b) «Petru bos at mandatu una littera.»  
   Peter OCL have.3SG sent a letter.
Our informants have categorically ruled out the possibility of any syntactic material intervening between the fronted unit (see ISTRACCU 'tired' in (7a) and UNA CARTOLINA in (7b)) and the (rest of the) nucleus, regardless of whether the focused-fronted unit is contrastive.5

The only possible exception to the uniform treatment of completive and contrastive focus is provided the structure illustrated in (8a), which was found to be grammatical in the Nuorese variety of Lula (Jones 1993:335), but was deemed to be ungrammatical by most of our informants, although some provided evidence which suggested that it might be acceptable if the focal information unit is contrastive.

(8a) Juanne m’ at natu chi SU DUTTORE aiat vistu.

John OCL have.3SG said that the doctor had.3SG seen
‘John told me that he had seen the doctor.’
(Jones 1993:335).

Although some speakers deem the structure illustrated in (8a) to be grammatical, the one in (8b) is clearly ungrammatical accordingly to all speakers.

(8b) *Maria m’ at natu (a) SU DUTTORE (a) videre.

Mary OCL have.3SG said to the doctor to see
‘Mary told me to see the doctor.’
(Jones 1993:335).

From the purely syntactic point of view, the contrast between (8a) and (8b) is puzzling. Assuming as we do that the fronted unit is placed in the pre-core slot, there would seem to be no reason for FF to be grammatical in (8a) but not in (8b). In fact, (8a) involves clausal subordination, and the fronted unit presumably occupies the pre-core slot which is within the subordinated clause. As for (8b), this appears to involve core co-ordination, as the joined units do not share any core operators (e.g., modals, negation), and thus they are not part of a single core, whilst the second unit lacks its own tense specifications, thus failing to classify as a clause. The two linked units also share one argument (the first singular object clitic ‘me’), and this is another clue that the juncture occurs at the core level. In this structure, the fronted unit could in theory be placed in the pre-core slot of the co-ordinated core, but this possibility is ruled out.

Jones (1993:335-336) notes that the same structure as (8b) is entirely grammatical with fronted wh-units (cf. (9g)), suggesting that, if wh-units take the same syntactic position as focused-fronted units, then the ungrammaticality of (8b) is to be sought outside syntax, specifically, in discourse.

(9g) No’ isco ITTE fächere.

Not know.1SG what do
‘I do not know what to do.’
(Jones 1993:335).

5 Recall that we adopt Belloro’s (2004) proposal on the placement of agreement specifications, e.g., the clitic pronoun nos ‘to us’ in (7b), in the agreement index node of the nucleus.
Pursuing Jones’s (1993) suggestion, we propose that the contrast between (8a) and (8b) ultimately depends on the restriction that the fronted unit must be the only focal unit in the clause. Being the only focal unit, it must occur in the first pre-core slot of the clause, which will precede the co-ordinated cores in (8b). Needless to say, the fronted unit is the only focused unit in the subordinated clause of (8a), which can be deemed to be grammatical, at least in the contrastive sense.

The reason why FF is constrained to the boundaries of the clause (cf. (6)), unlike wh-fronting, which can occur across clause boundaries (cf. (9f)), is also to be sought in discourse.

(6) *CUSTU LIBRU appo natu ch’ appo lessu.
   This book have.1SG said that have.1SG read
   ‘I said that I read this book.’

(9f) CALE LIBRU as natu ch’ as lessu?
Which book have.2SG said that have.2SG read
‘Which book did you say you read?’

Some native-speaker informants have pointed out that the structure in (6) would be acceptable without the subordinated clause (cf. (15)), whereas no such restriction appears to apply to wh-fronting (cf. (9f)).

(15) CUSTU LIBRU appo natu.
This book have.1SG said
‘This book’ I said.’

In (15) the fronted unit is clearly the only focal portion of its clause, occurring in the pre-core slot. By contrast, the fronted unit of (6) is not the focal unit of its clause, as it is focused in the pre-core slot of another clause. The predicate of the subordinated clause may also be to some extent new or focal, and hence the ungrammaticality of this structure.

To be sure, (6) and (15) differ in syntactic terms, insofar as only in the latter can the fronted unit be said to be within its clause boundaries. However, if discourse is not taken into consideration, the restriction to the boundaries of the clause can only be postulated rather than explained. Neither does the contrast illustrated in (6) and (9f) make sense unless one bears in mind the independent evidence which indicates that a wh-unit need not be the only focal unit in the clause (cf. (9d)) whereas other fronted units do.

Turning now to the incompatibility of FF with the marker of polar questions a (cf. (4)), the obvious explanation of this fact would be that the question marker a takes the same syntactic position as focused-fronted units, including wh-units, with which it is also incompatible (see Jones 1993:25 for this suggestion). Within our analysis this would amount to claiming that the locus of a be the pre-core slot. This proposal, however, would clash with the RRG assumption that operators do not occur in the constituent projection. The question marker a is not a referential expression (an argument or an adjunct) or a predicate, but rather an operator of illocutionary force, and thus it belongs to the operator projection. Adopting the RRG analysis of operators, we must seek elsewhere the rationale of the incompatibility of FF with a. Let us, therefore, consider the distribution and the function of the latter.

As pointed out by Jones (1993:24-25, 357-358), the question marker a is often found in requests for action, invitations, and offers, signalling that the predicate is in focus. To give one example, (16a) and (16b) contrast in that the former is a request for action, whilst (16b) is simply a request for information, and this is indicated by the presence of a in the former example.
The interrogative marker *a* can also occur in requests for information whereby the focus must be on the predicate rather than on an argument. Thus, *a* immediately precedes the nucleus, including its operators and any agreement specifications in the agreement index node, and strongly tends to co-distribute with topiced arguments, including propositional ones.

(16a) A *faches su brodu?*  
Q make.2SG the broth  
‘Will you make the broth?’

(16b) *Faches su brodu?*  
Make.2SG the broth  
‘Are you making the broth?’

(Jones 1993:358)

The distribution of *a* in existential constructions is particularly telling. Compare, first, the structure given above in (5), and repeated here for convenience, with its counterpart in (18).

(5)  
_A* *bin(d)*’ at, *chistiones?*  
Q PF.PCL have.3SG problems  
‘Problems, are there any?’

(18) (*A) *b’ a *chistiones?  
Q PF have.3SG problems  
‘Are there any problems?’

The nominal of the existential construction in (5) constitutes a classic case of ‘NE’-cliticization (Bentley 2004b, 2006), since it encodes a split referential expression which consists of an understood focal quantifier ‘some’ and its topical nominal head *chistiones* ‘problems’. By contrast, the nominal of (18) is not ‘NE’-cliticized, and hence it is not split and it is entirely focal. Although both (5) and (18) are polar questions, only the former can display the question marker *a*. This is because the focus is exclusively on the finite nucleus in (5) but not in (18).

Observe now the existential construction in (19): here, the question marker *a* is admitted, although it is not obligatory.

(19) (*A) *b’ est sa sorre ‘e Luchia?*  
Q PF be.3SG the sister of Lucy  
‘Is Lucy’s sister there?’
Indeed, interrogative *a* has been found generally to be compatible with interrogative existentials with the copula ‘be’ (Bentley in press), that is, interrogative existential structures which introduce an identifiable referent into discourse.\(^6\) We propose that this compatibility is due to the possibility of construing these structures as questions on a locative existential copula. In this sense, *a b’est sa sorre e Luchia* does not mean ‘does Lucy’s sister exist?’, but rather ‘is Lucy’s sister there?’, where *b’est* ‘be there’ is the finite nucleus.

The above evidence suggest that the actual focus domain of polar questions marked by *a* is the finite nucleus, including any auxiliaries, any agreement specifications in the agreement index node, and, crucially, any nuclear operators. This explains why *a* is not compatible with FF: the latter strategy does not necessarily target the nucleus (see, e.g., *SU DUTTORE as vistu?* ‘Have you seen the doctor?’), and, when it does, it only concerns the predicative part of the nucleus, leaving behind any auxiliaries, operators and agreement specifications (*ISTRACCU ses?* ‘Are you tired?’ *MANDICATU (l’)as?* ‘Have you eaten (it)?’). In sum, interrogative *a* and FF are different, and mutually exclusive, focusing strategies.

We finally turn to the incompatibility of FF with negation (cf. (3)).

(20a) *MACCU* (*no)est!
    Mad.MSG not be.3SG
    ‘He is (not) mad!’

(20b) *MANDICATU* (*no)(l’) as?
    Eaten not OCL have.2SG
    ‘Have you (not) eaten (it)?’

(20c) *SU DUTTORE* (*no) appo vistu.
    The doctor not have.1SG seen
    ‘I have (not) seen the doctor.’

Since negation is an operator, again, it is not possible for us to capture these facts in terms of the competition of the fronted unit and the negation for the same syntactic position. There is, however, a straightforward explanation in discourse for the ungrammaticality of structures such as the negated ones in (20a-c). Negatives are presuppositionally marked vis-à-vis corresponding affirmatives (Givón1975, see also Horn 1978:131). Thus, they occur in contexts where the affirmative counterpart has been mentioned, or where the speaker assumes that the hearer might contemplate it. We have seen that the focused-fronted unit is focal, i.e., not presupposed (Lambrecht 1994), and emphasised. The categorical incompatibility of FF and negation indicates that the focused-fronted unit cannot even be presupposed in the sense required by negation, i.e., within a contemplated affirmative counterpart of the proposition, as this would run counter to the discourse function of FF.

To sum up, the discourse constraints on FF explain why this strategy is restricted to one information unit, it is limited to the boundaries of the clause, it can - admittedly, marginally – occur in a subordinated clause, but not in a co-ordinated core, and, finally, it is incompatible with the question marker *a* and with negation. We now turn to Sicilian and Italian to verify whether our proposal on Sardinian FF is tenable in the light of comparative evidence from closely cognate languages.

\(^6\) In the majority of the Sardinian varieties the existential copula *éssere/essi* ‘be’ (cf. (19)) alternates with *áere/ai* ‘have’ (cf. (5), (18)) in accordance with a cluster of pragmatic and semantic properties of the referent of the post-copular nominal, i.e., the argument which is introduced into discourse by the construction (Bentley 2004a, in press). Thus, (19) exhibits the copula *éssere* ‘be’ because the post-copular nominal encodes a highly identifiable referent (*sa sorre e Luchia* ‘Lucy’s sister’), whereas (5) and (18) exhibit *áere* ‘have’ because the post-copular nominal encodes an unidentifiable referent (*chistiones* ‘problems’).
3. The cross-dialectal perspective.

Sicilian and Italian exhibit FF to different extents. In the former language, FF can be completive or contrastive, as well as being the strategy adopted in wh-questions. Both completive and contrastive FF have affective emphatic connotations which are absent from post-nuclear focus (Cruschina 2006, 2008; Leone 1995; Sornicola 1983). Drawing upon Sperber/Wilson (1995: 48)’s notion of relevance, Cruschina (2006, 2008) describes the pragmatic value of Sicilian FF in terms of special contextual effects created by the interconnectedness of the new information provided with old information already available in discourse.

Unlike Sardinian, Sicilian provides evidence that completive and contrastive FF differ in syntactic terms (Bentley 2008, Cruschina 2008). In particular, whereas contrastive focused-fronted units need not be adjacent to the nucleus (cf. (21a)), completive ones do (cf. (21b)).

(21a) Chi ci accattasti a tò niputi? A bicicretta?
‘What OCL bought.2SG to your nephew the bike’

NA MACHINA (a mè niputi) (ci accattai).
A car to my nephew OCL bought.1SG
‘I bought a car for my nephew.’

(21b) Chi ci accattasti a tò niputi?
‘What did you buy for your nephew?’

NA MACHINA (*a mè niputi) (ci accattai).
A car to my nephew OCL bought.1SG
‘I bought a car for my nephew.’

In Bentley (2008) we proposed that the syntax of the replies in (21a) and (21b) be represented in the layered structure of the clause as in (21a’) and (21b’), respectively.

(21a’) [PrCSNA MACHINA] [Corea me niputi] [RDPci accattai].
(21b’) [CoreNA MACHINA (*a me niputi) [Nuc ci accattai]].

The syntactic representations in (21a’) and (21b’) explain why, in Sicilian, contrastive focused-fronted units can be separated from the nucleus, whilst completive ones cannot. The former type of fronted unit occurs in the pre-core slot, whereas the latter occurs in the first position in the core, thus immediately preceding the nucleus. Further examples are provided here.

(22a) [PrCSNA MACHINA] [CorePippinu [Nucaccattau] [RDPno a bicicretta]]
A car Joseph bought.3SG not a bike
‘A car Joseph bought, not a bike.’

(22b) [CoreNA MACHINA (*Pippinu) [Nucaccattau]].
A car Joseph bought.3SG
‘Joseph bought a car.’

Whereas the core-initial position is available for the subject (Pippinu) in (22a), it is not in (22b), where the focal completive unit na machina ‘a car’ takes this position.

To be sure, in our analysis of Sardinian FF, we claimed that the adjacency restrictions depend on the requirement that the finite nucleus be placed in the core-initial position. We are thus proposing that adjacency is based on different types of syntax in Sardinian and Sicilian.
FF. For a more in-depth discussion of adjacency we refer the reader to section 4. Here we should note that there are other reasons to believe that the syntax of Sardinian and Sicilian FF really does differ in the way outlined above. In particular, unlike Sardinian, Sicilian cannot front heavy information units which would otherwise belong to more than one syntactic layer. Contrast the Sardinian evidence in (12), which is repeated below, with the Sicilian one in (23).

(12) **MORTU IN S’ ISPIDALE est?**  
Dead/died in the hospital be.3SG  
‘Is he dead in hospital?/ ‘Did he die in hospital?’/ ‘Has he died in hospital?’  
(Blasco Ferrer 1986:194).

(23) **MORTU (*ò SPITALI) èni?**  
Dead at-the hospital be.3SG  
‘Is he dead in hospital?’

The peripheral unit *ò spitali* ‘at the hospital’ cannot intervene between the fronted part of the nucleus and the auxiliary ‘be’ in (23).\(^7\)

Comparable evidence is offered by structures with ‘do’-support. In Sicilian ‘do’-support is exclusively found in progressive structures with FF.

(24) **MANCIARI fazzu.**  
Eat.INF do.1SG  
‘I am eating.’ [Contextual effect: what else should I be doing?]

The usual adjacency restrictions apply. Thus, the example in (25) can only encode contrastive focus, meaning ‘I am joking’ as opposed to ‘I am being serious’.

(25) **BABBIARI iù fazzu.**  
Joke.INF I do.1SG  
‘I am joking.’ [Contextual effect: please do not get offended.]

Regardless of the completive vs. contrastive opposition, the fronted infinitive cannot be separated from its support ‘do’ by other fronted material which belongs to different syntactic layers, i.e., by non-nuclear units.

(26a) **MANCIARI (*A PASTA) fazzu, no dòrmiri.**  
Eat.INF the pasta do.1SG not sleep  
‘I am eating (the pasta), not sleeping.’

(26b) **MANCIARI (*A PASTA / Ô BAR) fai?**  
Eat.INF the pasta at-the café do.2SG  
‘Are you eating (the pasta / in a café)?’

\(^7\) In Sicilian, the structure in (23) can only receive a copular reading, in that the only perfective operator of this language is *aviri* ‘have’. In addition, the Sicilian perfect (auxiliary *aviri* ‘have’ plus past participle) is only used in restricted contexts with specific aspectual connotations, whereas the Sardinian perfect (auxiliary *éssere/essi* ‘be’ or *áere/ai* ‘have’ plus past participle) has the function of an aspectually unmarked past tense. Given that the Sicilian perfect is only used in very restricted contexts (for instance, in the presence of adverbials indicating reiteration or negation), the Sicilian counterpart of Sardinian (1f) (*MANDATU SA LITTERA appo* ‘I have sent the letter’) would be odd, if not ungrammatical, for reasons other than FF.
If, as we believe, the evidence in (23) and (26a-b) indicates that FF in Sicilian is restricted to units belonging to one single syntactic layer, then Sicilian FF sharply contrasts with Sardinian FF in this respect and this difference is not trivial.

Before we provide an explanation, we should note that within theories of clause structure other than that of Role and Reference Grammar, it would be hard to explain why Sardinian should allow fronting of the verb phrase (MANDATU SA LITTERA appo, lit. sent the letter I have) and Sicilian would not (MANCIARI (*A PASTA) jàzza, lit. eat the pasta I do). Furthermore, it would be hard to relate this contrast to that between structures such as (12) (MORTU IN S’ISPIDALE est?, lit. dead at the hospital is he?) and (23) (MORTU (*Ò SPITALI) èni?, lit. dead at the hospital is he?). Adopting the RRG theory of the layered structure of the clause, whereby the notion of verb phrase does not have any theoretical status, we have to conclude that in Sicilian it is not possible to front information units which would otherwise belong to various layers of the clause, whereas in Sardinian this kind of fronting is unproblematic.

In accordance with our findings, we suggest that FF in Sardinian and Sicilian realize two V2 strategies; one is defined by the placement of the finite nucleus in the first position in the core (cf. (27a)), whilst the other is defined by the placement of the finite nucleus in the second position in the core (cf. (27b)). In both cases, the position immediately preceding the nucleus is filled.

(27a) \[PCS X] [Core [nucleus]...]
(27b) [Core X [nucleus]...]

The former type is comparable to V2 as it is found in Modern German main clauses (cf. (13) and (14)), except that, in this language, V2 is motivated in syntactic terms, and the fronted constituent may be focal or topical. In Sardinian, the word order represented in (27a) would appear to be a continuation or a development of the word order attested in the early texts and analysed by Lombardi (2007) as VSO or V1 (see § 2.1).

The word order represented in (27b), on the other hand, is a left-over of the V2 order which is frequently found in early Romance texts (Benincà 2004; Benincà/Poletto 2004; Ledgeway 2008; Salvi 2004; Vanelli 1986, 1999), and whereby the fronted constituent is claimed to occupy a low position in the left periphery, in our terms the first position in the core. Interestingly, Vanelli (1986:262-266) points out that if, in early Italian, a heavy constituent occurs before the predicate, then it is dislocated and resumed by a co-referential pronoun within the clause. In other words, since the medieval times, this type of V2 is different from the type of fronting that is attested in Sardinian, in that it only affects syntactically simple information units. Furthermore, although (27b) differs from SVO in that the latter does not rule out an unfilled core-initial position, V2 as characterized in (27b) can be a discourse-marked option in a predominantly SVO language. SVO would indeed appear to be the predominant - or basic - word order of early Sicilian and Italian, if not, more generally, early Romance (Cruschina 2008 for Sicilian and Vanelli 1986:266-170 for Italian and Romance).

Having a dedicated position outside the core, namely the pre-core slot, Sardinian FF is not constrained to units from one syntactic layer, as it does not incur in the problem of separating nuclear operators from the syntactic layer over which they have scope. Of course, in our analysis, the predicate of a structure like (12) (MORTU IN S’ISPIDALE est?, lit. Dead at the hospital is he?, Died at the hospital has he?) is itself outside the nucleus. However, it is in a dedicated extra-core position for pragmatic reasons. On the contrary, if we assumed this predicate to be within the core, the nucleus would be split into two parts and it would be difficult to see exactly what position is targeted by FF.
In Sicilian, completive focused-fronted units are placed in the core-initial position. This is a single slot within the core layer, hence the ungrammaticality of FF of heavy units otherwise belonging to various syntactic layers.

We claimed above that, in Sicilian, contrastive units occur outside the core in the pre-core slot. At this point it is natural to wonder why complex contrastive units are not fronted in Sicilian (cf. (26a), *MANCIARI (*A PASTA) fazzu, no dòrmi*, lit. eat (the pasta) I do, not sleep). There are two possible solutions to this puzzle. We could hypothesize that contrastive units only occur in the pre-core slot if the core-initial position is unavailable (cf. (22a), *NA MACHINA Pippinu accattau, no na bicicretta*, lit. A car Joseph bought, not a bike). If it is available, fronted contrastive units occur in the core-initial position and the nucleus will take the second position in the core, as is by default the case with Sicilian. According to this solution (which would involve a refinement of our claim on contrastive FF in Sicilian, see Bentley 2008), the focusing of complex syntactic material would be banned because it would not be licensed by the default locus of FF, i.e., the core-initial position. Alternatively, it could be said that Sicilian FF is constrained to syntactic units belonging to a single syntactic layer because, historically, fronting targets the core-initial position in this language. In accordance with this solution, contrastive FF in the pre-core slot is a later development by comparison with the medieval type of V2 which we described above. In this account, therefore, V2 has never involved complex syntactic material in Sicilian. In the light of comparative evidence examined below we shall subscribe to this second hypothesis.

A Romance language which, we propose, does not allow any type of fronting in the core-initial position is Modern Italian (see Bentley 2008 where we revisit a hypothesis put forward in Lambrecht 1986, 1994, Van Valin 1999). Whilst exhibiting a great deal of fronting, whether topical or focal, in its early attestations, that is, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Florentine, Italian has moved away from V2 syntax, and the related patterns of discourse structure, to a much greater extent than Sicilian. Indeed, the only two types of FF that are licensed in Modern Italian are wh-fronting and contrastive FF. Wh-fronting is subject to adjacency restrictions which are comparable to those illustrated above (cf. (7b) vs. (7c) and (9c)).

(28a) CHI (*Pietro) ha visto (Pietro)?
    Who Peter have.3SG seen Peter
    ‘Who has Peter seen?’
(28b) PERCHÉ Pietro è partito?
    Why Peter be.3SG left
    ‘Why did Peter leave?’

Any FF that does not involve a wh-word requires a contrastive interpretation in Modern Italian (Benincà 1988). Thus, the reply in (29) is unacceptable in the given context.

(29) Che ha comprato Pietro?
    What have.3SG bought Peter
    ‘What has Peter bought?’
    *IL PANE ha comprato Pietro.
    The bread have.3SG bought Peter
    ‘Peter bought bread.’

Contrastive FF is not subject to any adjacency restrictions, and this suggests that it occurs in the pre-core slot.
(30) *IL PANE Pietro ha comprato, non il latte.
The bread Peter have.3SG bought not the milk
‘Peter bought bread, not milk.’

Another clue that contrastive FF is not core-internal is that this type of focus is marked by
distinctive prosodic prominence, similarly to Sardinian FF, and to contrastive FF in Sicilian.
Thus, the contrastive focal subject of (31a) is not only prosodically more prominent than that
of (31b), which is topical, but also than the post-nuclear subject of (31c), which expresses
completive focus.

(31a) PIETRO ha telefonato, non Luca.
Peter have.3SG phoned not Luke
‘Peter phoned, not Luke.’

(31b) Pietro HA TELEFONATO.
Peter have.3SG phoned
‘Peter has phoned.’

(31c) Ha telefonato PIETRO.
Have.3SG phoned Peter
‘Peter has phoned (/did).’ [Context: who phoned?]

Observe that there is reason to believe that post-nuclear contrastive focus occurs in the
post-core slot in Italian, in that it can follow an immediately post-nuclear argument (the
Undergoer) within the core (see Bentley 2006 and references therein).

(32) * Ha vinto il premio QUESTO STUDENTE, non quello.
Have.3SG won the prize this student not that
‘This student won the prize, not that one.’

Therefore, our analysis assigns symmetric positions to contrastive focus in Italian, the pre-
and post-core slots.

On a par with Sicilian FF, Italian FF does not involve syntactic material belonging to more
than one syntactic layer.

(33) *LA MACCHINA IN GARAGE ho messo, non la bici nel capanno.
The car in garage have.1SG put not the bike in the shed
‘I put the car in the garage, not the bike in the shed.’

In addition, Italian FF is constrained to referential phrases, whether arguments or adjuncts,
thus banning nuclei or portions thereof.

(34a) *STANCO è, non monello.
Tired be.3SG not naughty
‘He is tired, not naughty.’

(34b) *MANGIA Paolo, non dorme.
Eat.3SG Paolo not sleep
‘Paolo is eating not sleeping.’

(34c) *MANGIATO (l’) ho, non bevuto.
Eaten it have.1SG not drunk
‘I have eaten (it), not drunk (it).’
(34d) *MANGIANDO sto, non dormendo.
Eating stay.1SG not sleeping
‘I am eating, not sleeping.’

Italian FF is thus a much more restricted focusing strategy than Sardinian and Sicilian FF. Assuming, in accordance with the relevant literature, that Italian FF derives from a V2 strategy that is comparable to the Sicilian pattern, rather than the Sardinian one, we propose that, compared with Sicilian FF, Italian FF represents a further step in the advancement of SVO to the detriment of \((\text{core} \ X [\text{nucleus}] \ldots)\) (cf. (27b)). Since it derives from fronting in the core-initial position, it cannot affect material belonging to more than one syntactic layer. In this sense, it patterns with Sicilian FF. In addition, it has been banned from the core-initial position altogether and constrained to the pre-core slot where it must be contrastive. The extension (Sicilian) and confinement (Italian) of FF to the pre-core slot is in accordance with the advancement of SVO, in that it leaves the core-initial position available for a non-focused S. Finally, only referential phrases can be fronted, whereas predicative ones must be focused in the nucleus within the core.

In the last analysis, of the three sister languages considered above, Sardinian is the one where FF is maximally productive, as it has a dedicated syntactic position, the pre-core slot, and thus it can concern information units which would otherwise belong to more than one syntactic layer, as long as they form a single focal information unit, regardless of whether it is completive or contrastive. Sicilian allows both completive and contrastive FF, albeit with an affective connotation. By contrast with Sardinian, it places completive focus in the core-initial position, and constrains FF in the pre-core slot to contrastive (and wh-) units. Italian appears not to allow FF in the core-initial position and only admits FF of syntactically-simple referential contrastive phrases in the pre-core slot.

Before we close the discussion of Italian, we should mention so-called mirative fronting, i.e., a type of fronting which does not contrast the focal element with an antecedent that is available in the discourse context, but rather marks a piece of information as unexpected.

(35) Caspita! L’ACQUA mi sono scordato (di comprare)!
Gosh The water RFL be.1SG forgotten of buy
‘Gosh! I forgot to buy water!’
(Cruschina 2008:135)

Although, in the relevant literature (Cruschina 2008 and references therein), it has been suggested that this type of fronting actually parallels Sicilian completive FF, that is, in the terms adopted in this study, fronting in the core-initial position, in this study we shall assume that the mirative strategy needs not involve fronting at all. Indeed, structures like (35) can be analysed as follows (see also Bentley 2008).

(35’) \[\text{core}L’acqua] [\text{RDP} mi sono scordato (di comprare)!]\.

This analysis explains why speakers tend not to accept structures like (36).

(36)*?Caspita! L’acqua, al supermercato, mi sono scordato!
Gosh The water at.the supermarket RFL be.1SG forgotten
‘Gosh! At the supermarket, I forgot to buy water!’

Topics tend to be pre-nuclear in Italian, occurring either in the core-initial position or in the left-detached position, as is normally the case with languages with predominant SVO.
order. In addition, they do not follow foci (Bentley 2008). What is usually found in the Italian right-detached position is afterthoughts (cf. (35) and (35')), rather than topics, hence the awkwardness of (36), where *al supermercato* ‘at the supermarket’ would be a post-nuclear post-focal topic.

4. Wh-fronting and adjacency.

We have assumed that, whereas the lack of adjacency restrictions suggests that the fronted unit occurs outside the core (cf. (21a), (22a), (30)), the presence of such restrictions does not in itself constitute conclusive evidence that the fronted unit is within the core (cf. ((1g'') and (12'')). The former of these assumptions is, in a sense, self explanatory: the absence of adjacency constraints indicates that there is no competition with respect to the placement in the core-initial position. The latter assumption arose from the analysis of Sardinian FF. As we pointed out, although Sardinian FF is subject to a strong adjacency constraint, if it were core internal, then some of its characteristics would remain unexplained. First, it would be unclear exactly where the fronted unit occurs within the core (cf., e.g., (1f), (1g'), and (12')). Secondly, we would have to conclude that, in some Sardinian structures with FF, an operator is separated from the nucleus over which it has scope (cf. (1f), (1g'), and one reading of (12')). With respect to Sardinian structures with FF we have claimed that adjacency depends on the requirement that the finite (part of the) nucleus occur in the core-initial position.

The analysis of the adjacency restrictions which apply to wh-fronting provides further reason to assume that these do not depend deterministically on the syntactic position of the fronted unit. In particular, only some wh-units must be adjacent to the nucleus (cf. (2b-c) for Sardinian and (28a) for Italian).

(2c) A CHIE (*SU IOCÀTULU) as datu?
   To whom the toy have.2SG given
   ‘Who did you give the toy to?’
   (Jones 1993:334)

(2d) A JUANNE (*UNU IOCÀTULU) appo datu (unu iocàtulu).
   To John a toy have.1SG given a toy
   ‘I gave John a toy.’

(28a) CHI (*Pietro) ha visto (Pietro)?
   Who Peter have.3SG seen Peter
   ‘Who has Peter seen?’

Others are not subject to adjacency: the data in (37) are from Sardinian (cf. (9c)), those in (38) from Italian (cf. (28b)).

(37) «PROITTE Juanne at isticchitu su dinari?»
   Why John have.3SG hidden the money
   ‘Why has John hidden the money?’

(38a) PERCHÉ Pietro è partito?
   Why Peter be.3SG left
   ‘Why did Peter leave?’

(38b) COME MAI Pietro è partito?
   How ever Peter be.3SG left
   ‘How come Peter left?’
The above data suggests that the adjacency restrictions do not apply if the wh-unit is not argumental (cf. (37), (38a-b)) or is a so-called D-linked wh-unit (Cruschina 2008 and references therein), the latter being a wh-unit which is related to the previous discourse context in the sense that it presupposes a range of variables among which one must be chosen (Cruschina 2008).

Given that only some wh-units have to satisfy the adjacency requirement, it could be claimed that these occur in a core-internal position, whilst the others occur in an extra-core position. It goes without saying that this claim would not in itself constitute an explanation unless one demonstrated that the said syntactic split was principled in some way. We shall, however, take a different approach. Specifically, we claim that the adjacency constraints should be captured in terms of semantic conditioning on the loss of V2.

Starting with Sardinian, it is important to observe that, apart from FF, which is no doubt a very productive discourse strategy, this language has all the characteristics of a null-subject SVO language.

Evidence like that presented in (37) suggests that, in the modern language, the medieval word order which requires that the nucleus occur in the core-initial position (Lombardi 2007), has not only entrenched to clauses with a focused unit, but, within these, it is in competition with SVO. As a result of this competition, the word order which we have analysed as [Pre-Core Slot X] [Core [nucleus]...] (cf. (27a)) yields to SVO in questions where the wh-unit is not argumental.

SVO is also the predominant word order of Modern Sicilian and Modern Italian. In fact, according to Cruschina (2008) and Vanelli (1986:266-170)), SVO was already the basic word order in medieval Sicilian and, respectively, Italian, and thus the type of V2 order which we have analysed as [core X [nucleus]...] (cf. (27b)) was only an option. The adjacency restrictions which characterize completive FF in Modern Sicilian can be explained by the position of the fronted unit, which is core-initial (see § 3). The contrast between argumental and non-D-linked wh-units, which are subject to adjacency, and, on the other hand, non-argumental and D-linked ones, which are not, indicates that non-argumental and D-linked wh-units are thoroughly compatible with canonical SVO, on a par with contrastive fronted units, whereas argumental and non-D-linked wh-units are still to some extent constrained to putatively V2 order, and ban any intervening material in the available core-initial position.

The parallel between, on the one hand, non-argumental and D-linked wh-units, and, on the other, contrastive fronted units is captured by the following formulation of adjacency: the fronted unit must not be separated from the nucleus if it realizes an argument variable from an open set. There is, thus, a degree of semantic conditioning on the establishment of SVO to the detriment of V2, in that the fronting of argument variables from an open set is more resilient to canonical SVO.
In Sardinian, V2 is much stronger than in Sicilian and Italian. Thus, Sardinian FF requires that the nucleus - or the finite part thereof - occur in the second position in the string (the core-initial position, in the case of auxiliaries and predicates) regardless of whether the fronted unit takes its value from an open or a closed set. On the other hand, Sardinian does appear to differentiate between arguments and non-arguments, as suggested by the evidence provided in (37) and (39) (cf. (7c)).

\[(39)\]  PROCUSTU Juanne at isticchitu su dinari.  
For this John have.3SG hidden the money  
‘For this reason John has hidden the money.’

Other Romance languages would seem to be subject to stronger adjacency conditions than Italian and Sicilian (see Zubizarreta 1998:103 for Spanish), although a detailed analysis of FF in these languages would be beyond the scope of this work and will not be pursued here.

5. Conclusion  
We have provided an RRG analysis of focus fronting in Sardinian Nuorese, Sicilian, and Italian, claiming that this focusing strategy is a continuation of two different V2 strategies attested in early Romance: (i) [Pre-Core Slot X] [Core [nucleus]…], in the case of Sardinian, and (ii) [Core X [nucleus]…], in the case of Italian and Sicilian. Although in all of these languages the V2 strategy is in competition with SVO, we have suggested that SVO is better established in Modern Italian than in Modern Sicilian, and, in turn, in Modern Sicilian than in Modern Sardinian. The adoption of the layered structure of the clause has enabled us to identify the difference between the two types of fronting and to analyse the putative inconsistency of the adjacency constraint in terms of semantic conditioning on the retrenchment of V2 to the benefit of SVO.

6. References  


