Proceedings XXXV Incontro di Grammatica Generativa
Università di Siena

Stylistic Fronting: a comparative analysis*

IRENE FRANCO
Università di Siena - CISCL
irene.franco0318@gmail.com

Stylistic Fronting (SF) is a syntactic phenomenon present in modern Insular Scandiavian languages, probably as a residue of Old Icelandic word order. Mainland Scandinavian languages have lost SF, but diachronic studies show that Old Scandinavian languages display SF (cf. Falk 1993, Trips 2003). SF is also found in Old Romance varieties, among which is Old Italian (cf. Benincà 2006). Despite the considerable number of proposals, SF has not received a satisfactory account. It is difficult to find a theory of SF compatible with the idea that the left periphery of the clause has general structural properties.
In section 1. I give a brief overview of the properties and distribution of SF in contemporary Icelandic. In section 2. I present some comparative data showing that the same phenomenon is attested in Old Italian. In section 3. I focus on the syntactic conditions licensing SF, and identify the target position of fronted items by observing the Old Italian SF distribution with respect to overt subjects. In section 4. the distribution of SF is observed with respect to CP expletives (cf. Poletto 2005) and enclisis/proclisis (cf. Benincà 1993). In section 5. I propose a unifying analysis of SF for Old Romance and Icelandic as a potential strategy to extract/drop the subject, based on an integrated synchronic/diachronic perspective and adopting a derivation of SF in terms of remnant movement to the CP (cf. Franco 2009).

1. SF in Icelandic

SF is a quite common syntactic phenomenon in modern Icelandic. It is also found in Faroese, but in this case it is much less productive and preferred in the written language. Basically, SF is generated by a mechanism which fronts a lexical item to a preverbal position. The peculiarity of this operation is due to the fact that a considerably great variety of lexical categories can be fronted. Maling (1980; 1990), who first identified the phenomenon in Icelandic, proposes a hierarchy of frontable categories including phrasal adverbs and negation; and "items from the verbal complex" (verbal heads, particles; predicative adjective and nominal predicates). Holmberg (2000) argues that also

* This paper is the outcome of my PhD study research at the University of Siena, in cooperation with the University of Venice and Háskóli Íslands and was presented at the XXXV IGG (2009) held in Siena, Italy. I wish to thank especially my main advisor, Luigi Rizzi; my co-advisor, Cecilia Poletto; my external advisor Höskuldur Thráinsson. I express my gratitude to the faculty members of Háskóli Íslands, especially Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson and Tolli Eythórsson; to the audience of the XXXV IGG; especially to Liliane Haegeman and Anna Cardinaletti for precious comments and feedbacks; to Federico Damonte; Vincenzo Moscati and Cecilia Falk.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

complement NPs and PPs can undergo SF. Because of the promiscuous nature of frontable elements and movement types (head or phrasal?) characterizing SF, this phenomenon has not received a satisfactory account. Following the analysis of complement NP and PP SF proposed by Franco (2009) as ambiguous cases of either SF or topicalization[1] according to the syntactic licensing context, I do away with this type of fronting for the sake of the present proposal's clarity. In addition, I do away with another type of SF which does not lend itself to a good comparative analysis, namely phrasal adverb or negation SF. SF of phrasal adverbs is excluded because adverb fronting does not unambiguously identify SF, but can also characterize topicalization, which I want to keep separate from the investigated phenomenon. For the same reason, SF of negation is excluded. Because the present paper proposes a comparative analysis of SF based on facts from Icelandic and Old Italian, SF of negation cannot be considered for the additional reason that Old Italian (and Italian) negation has a different status with respect to Scandinavian negation, and cannot undergo SF (or topicalization).
As a consequence, the analysis proposed here refers exclusively to the "third" type of SF among those mentioned above, namely SF of "items from the verbal complex", to use Maling's (1990) definition. In the following examples, some relevant cases of SF in Icelandic are illustrated:

(1) Hann spurði hver **sullað** hefði bjórnum (Icelandic) *past participle*
He asked who spilt had beer.the
"He asked who had spilt the beer"

(2) Hann syndi mér flóskunnar sem **inn** verið smygglað ___ *verb particle*
He showed me bottles.the that in were smuggled
"He showed me the bottles that were smuggled in" [Hrafnbjargarson 2003]

(3) Sá sem **fyrstur** er __ að skora mark fær sérstök verðlaun *nominal predicate*
he that first is to score goal gets special prize
"He who is first to score a goal gets a special prize" [Jónsson 1991]

Mainland Scandinavian languages have lost SF, which was instead present in older varieties until about the first half of XVI century. Compare examples (4)-(6) of Old Mainland Scandinavian to (7)-(9), illustrating the impossibility of SF in the modern varieties:

(4) som **sagd** er __ ved Propheten (Middle Danish)
as said is with prophet-the
"as is told by the prophet" [1550, *The Bible*, Falk & Torp 1900:296]

(5) þæn sum **fangit** haær ____ uininum (Old Swedish)
he who caught has friend.the
"He who has caught the friend" [Delsing 2001]

[1] Franco (2009) shows that, on the one hand, Icelandic SF of complement NPs and PPs is sometimes similar to English locative inversion (LI) , but the syntactic properties of SF and LI differ in significant ways. On the other hand, NP/PP SF has a more restricted distribution than SF of adverbs or "items from the verbal complex" in subordinate contexts. I cannot illustrate the details of the analysis here, but see Franco (2009).

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

(6) eina dottur er **Droplaug** hét __ (Old Norse)
one daughter who Droplaug.N was.called
"One daughter who was called Droplaug" [Faarlund, 2008, 237, 104c., Dpl]

(7) *den, som **först** är ___ att göra mål (Swedish)
he who first is to score goal
"he who is the first one to score a goal"

(8) *Hvem tror du **stjålet** har ___ sykkelen? (Norwegian)
Who think you stolen has bike.the
"Who do you think has stolen the bike?"

(9) *Kvinden som **hjem** gik ___ var hans soster (Danish)
Woman.the who home went was his sister
"The woman who went home was his sister" [Thrainsson 2007, 377, 7.86]

SF is a much debated issue in the current approaches to generative grammar. The syntactic phenomenon of SF represents a puzzle for the economy of syntax because of its allegedly optional character. Instead of SF, a gap is also possible in many syntactic environments, e.g. in the cases of subject extractions in (1)-(3) above. Alternatively, SF substitutes the preverbal pronoun *það*, used in expletive constructions[2].

(10) a. **Það** hefur komið fram að... (Icelandic)
it has come forth that

b. **Fram** hefur komið___ að
Forth has come that
"It has been reported that…" [Thrainsson 2007]

The problematic aspects of SF can be grouped under three main points:

1) The syntactic conditions licensing SF, e.g. (arguably) the lack of an overt preverbal subject, are still unclear and basically unexplained. Some such conditions have been presented by Maling (1990) as identification criteria (cf. Table 1. below), but their relevance to SF has not been syntactically motivated in a satisfactory way and the present accounts of SF are fundamentally descriptive.

In Table 1. the criteria considered as most effective for the identification of SF were marked in bold. A brief explanation of the methodology of analysis is given in section 2.

[2] A detailed presentation of the properties and distribution of *það* with respect to SF would require much more than a paper section. For a proposal see Rögnvaldsson (1994) and Thráinsson (2007) for data.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

Table 1. (adapted from Maling (1990))

TOPICALIZATION	**STYLISTIC FRONTING**
Objects NPs; PPs, etc.	**Items from verbal complex**
Emphasis/focus on fronted constituent	Emphasis/focus not necessarily present
Uncommon in embedded clauses	**Common in embedded clauses**
Subject gap not required	**Subject gap required (SGC)**
Unbounded (cyclic)	Clause bounded
Judgments vary wrt clause type	Accepted by all speakers

2) In addition, the interpretive properties of SF are mysterious and their accounts are controversial. Some argue that SF is a pragmatically marked phenomenon: Hrafnbjargarson (2003) proposes that SF is movement to a FocusP in the CP. This hypothesis is disregarded here, because FocusP is a position dedicated to quantificational phrases (cf. Rizzi 1997; 2001), but SF behaves in a significantly different way from topicalization and focalization (cf. Table 1. above). For instance, SF is not an island to extraction whereas topics and foci are, in Icelandic.

A more "moderate" view suggesting that SF contributes to some extent to the information structure is that of Fisher and Alexiadou (2001) and Fisher (to app.) for Old Romance languages. In this perspective, the stylistically fronted material receives discourse prominence and, consequently, a slightly different interpretation from analogous sentences where SF has not taken place. This view is in apparent contrast with the idea that SF does not bear emphasis and does not contribute to the information structure put forward by Maling (1980; 1990) and shared by Holmberg (2000) and Thráinsson (2007) a.o., for Icelandic. Along these lines, the characterization of SF as a mechanism void of any pragmatic import is a point of distinction of SF from the type of topicalization taking place in V2 clauses. The present proposal solves the dispute on the (lack of) interpretive properties of SF by adopting a diachronic perspective. Basically, it is argued that SF was related to discourse prominence properties in Old Romance as well as in Old Scandinavian languages. Due to specific changes in the parameter setting happening at successive stages of these languages, SF was either lost (as in Modern Romance[3] and Mainland Scandinavian languages) or reanalyzed as a syntactic mechanism maintaining only part of its original properties, i.e. as a strategy to extract/drop the subject (as in Icelandic). In this reanalysis process, SF loses its pragmatic import, which fits the analysis of Maling (1990); Holmberg (2000) and Thráinsson (2007), a.o. Nonetheless, the diachronic perspective put forward here leaves room for a differentiated interpretation of SF according to its context of occurrence. As pointed out by Jónsson (1991), the interpretive properties of SF are subject to a fine distinction

[3] Cardinaletti (2003) argues that SF is productive in Modern Italian. I do not agree, since many (of her) sentences with SF are ungrammatical to my (and various other native speaker's) ear. Nonetheless, SF of some specific expressions is possible at a formal register in Modern Italian and has an "emphatic flavor" as a consequence of the fact that the few instances of SF in Modern Italian are basically a residue of the Old Italian style.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

related to the main vs. subordinate status of the clause where SF occurs. Specifically, the fact that main clause SF is "more restricted to literary language" (Jónsson 1991) possibly indicates the residual character of this type of SF, where a pragmatic contribution is not completely excluded[4].

3) The major syntactic consequence for the missing identification of the SF interpretive properties (cf. point 2) above) is the impossibility to determine its exact target position. Cardinaletti (2003) proposes that Modern Italian SF[5] targets a position below the IP-peripheral subject positions, i.e. a position below Spec,AgrSP. This hypothesis is disconfirmed not only for Modern Icelandic SF but also for Old Italian, as the data presented in the following sections show. By contrast, Modern Italian SF, as identified by Cardinaletti (2003), is disregarded for the following reasons: (i) it is not really productive; (ii) when attested, it is ambiguous with topicalization (which, in Italian, is different from V2 topicalization, since Italian is not V2); i.e. it does not display the characteristics identified by Maling (1990) given in Table 1.

Next section presents some facts from Old Italian, where SF is attested and analogous to the Scandinavian counterpart of this phenomenon. The comparative analysis of SF in the two language groups permits to identify the proper target position of the stylistically fronted material.

2. SF in Old Italian

As noted by Fisher and Alexiadou (2001); Roberts (1993) and Mathieu (2006), SF is attested also in Old Romance languages such as Old Catalan and Old French. By analogy with such varieties, the distribution and properties of SF were explored in three different Old Italian corpora dated between 1250 and 1330. The three corpora consist of the following texts:

- FF = Anonimous (1271-1275), *Fiori e vite di Filosafi e d'altri savi e d'imperadori*,
- FR = Bono Giamboni (1292 (1260?)) *Fiore di Rettorica* (β corpus),
- N = Anonimous(1281-1300), *Il Novellino*, XIII century.

Due to the promiscuous nature of the frontable items in SF constructions, the texts had to be excerpted manually, by means of a paper version. Specific searching was done through the OVI online database (http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it(S(d5xfwv55drcqzs55tcvzd13w))/CatForm01.aspx).

Before illustrating the facts related to SF, it is worth spending a few words on the main syntactic properties of Old Italian. Old Italian is a verb-second language of the Romance type, i.e. the verb can be preceded by more than one constituent even where it is expected to have raised to the CP. For this reason, Romance V2 is labeled here as "relaxed V2", by contrast with the Germanic "strict V2", meaning that the verb raises to the CP in both language groups, but can be preceded by a different number of constituents (one in Germanic; more than one in Romance). The productivity of V-to-C in Old Italian is attested by the presence of subject-verb inversions as illustrated in (11) below. Assuming that the verb targets the CP domain in all Old Italian main clauses, the relaxed

[4] In main clauses, discourse prominence features can in principle be associated with SF because the same environment licenses V2 topicalizations.

[5] Modern Italian SF seems a much more limited phenomenon than Cardinaletti (2003) argues.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

character of V2 is showed by cases like the one in (12), where the verb is preceded by several constituents (and the subject is left dislocated):

(11) [Anche] diceva *Iscipio* che… (Old Italian)
Also said Iscipio that…
"Scipio also said that…" [FF, 141.10]

(12) [*Carlo*] [nobile re di Cicilia e di Gerusalem] [quando era conte d'Angiò]
Carlo noble king of Sicily and of Gerusalem when was earl of Angiò
[sì] amò per amore..
SI loved.3s for love
"Carlo, noble king of Sicily and Gerusalem, when he was earl of Angiò, he truly loved…" [N, LX, 1, 2]

Another characteristic of Old Italian is the partial nature of pro-drop which displays a main/embedded asymmetry. As discussed by Benincà (1984) a.o., Old Romance pro-drop is licensed by V-to-C. Since the verb does not move to the high left periphery in most embedded clause-types, overt pronominal subjects are found, differently from modern Italian where overt pronominal subjects are possible only with a contrastive reading (or trigger a disjoint reference effect). This is shown in (13) below:

(13) a. Lo figliuolo lil domandò tanto ch'*elli* l'ebbe (Old Italian)
The son 3sDAT+ACC.cl asked much that he 3s.ACC.cl had
"The son asked it to him so that he got it" [N, 18, 166.8]
b. Il figlio$_i$ glielo chiese tanto che egli$_{*i/j}$ l'ebbe (Modern Italian)
The son 3sDAT+ACC.cl asked much that he 3s.ACC.cl had
c. Il figlio$_i$ glielo chiese tanto che *pro$_i$* l'ebbe
The son 3sDAT+ACC.cl asked much that pro 3s.ACC.cl had
"The son asked it to him so that he got it"

Contrary to Modern Icelandic, Old Italian (and Italian) pro-drop is not limited to expletives and quasi-arguments but regards argumental subjects as well. As a consequence, it is difficult to tell whether the subject gap condition required by SF (SGC, as indicated in Table 1. above) is satisfied by a null pro or by a real subject extraction/extraposition. For the present purposes, it is simply assumed that both pro subjects or subject traces in Spec,AgrSP (or lower positions, cf. Cardinaletti 2004) are valid options to satisfy the SGC, as long as the subject is not frozen in its "criterial" position, i.e. Spec, SubjP[6], along the lines of Rizzi (2004); Rizzi and Shlonsky (2007). However, part of the investigation of Old Italian SF was devoted to the identification of the SF type based on the fronted category in V-to-C and non-V-to-C contexts. The details of this analysis are given in section 4.
Let us now turn to SF in Old Italian. Below are some examples of SF: cases of adverb; negation and argument fronting were not considered in the investigation for the reasons provided above.

[6] Recall from Cardinaletti (2004) that SubjP is the highest subject position identified in the IP domain against which the "subject-of-predication" features are checked.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

(14) almeno quello che **detto** è __ non è inutile a sapere *Past participle SF*
at.least which that said is not is useless to know.INF
"At least what is said isn't useless to know" [FR, 72, 25]

(15) Col guadagno che **far** se ne dovea __ *Infinitive SF*
with.the gain that do.INF IMP of.it must.3sPAST
"With the gain that one should make of it" [N, XCVII, 16-17]

(16) **Più legier** è al pover fugire le schernie… *Nominal predicate SF*
More light is to.the poor escape.INF the mockeries
"To avoid mockeries is easier for the poor…" [FF, XXIV, 44]

(17) **signore** *pro* t'ho fatto __ di molte dilizie *Predicative adjective SF*
lord *pro* 2s.CL.ACC have.1s made of many delicacies
"I have made you lord of many delicacies" [N, LXXII, 10]

(18) e niuno era ardito che **su** vi sedesse *Particle SF*[7]
and no-one was brave who on LOC would.sit
"and there was no one who dared to sit on it" [N, XLI, 8-9]

Old Italian SF illustrated in (14)-(18) above respects the characteristics identified by Maling (1990) for Icelandic given in Table 1. As can be observed, Old Italian SF appears to be the same syntactic phenomenon attested in Icelandic and Old Scandinavian, cf. (1)-(6) above.

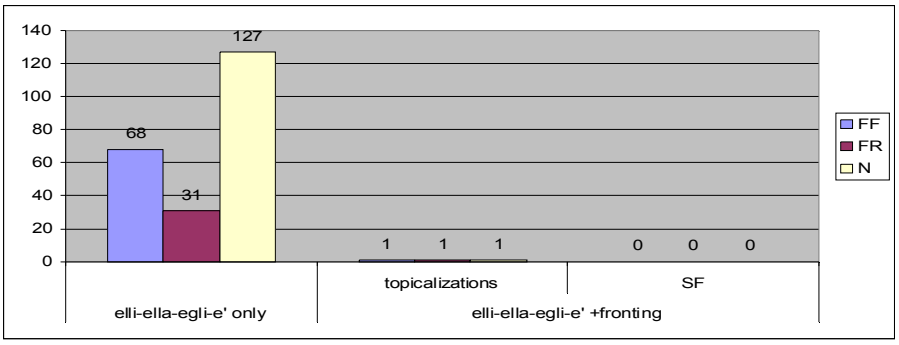
3. SF and preverbal pronominal subjects

In order to understand to which extent the SGC is a valuable criterion for identifying SF, the distribution of SF and overt preverbal pronominal subjects was observed. All pronominal subject forms in Old Italian are ambiguous between weak and strong (cf. Renzi and Salvi, to app.). As a consequence, pronominal subjects are not unambiguous signposts because they can be dislocated when used as strong forms (contrary to modern Italian weak *tu* (you) and *egli* (he), targeting specific positions in the IP, according to Cardinaletti 2004). Specifically, no exclusively weak forms are attested in Old Italian, since even *egli*, which in Modern Italian is only weak, can be dislocated. As expected, SF is in complementary distribution with overt preverbal pronominal subjects in IP, either with 1st or 2nd person pronouns (Graph. 2) or with 3rd person pronouns (Graph. 1).

[7] Particle SF is rare because (Old) Italian has very few instances of phrasal verbs, which are more common in substandard Italian, which has an informal register where SF is not productive (see Franco 2009 for details).

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

Graph. 1



As indicated by Graph 1. there is only one case of topicalization per each corpus preceding the overt preverbal 3rd person subject pronoun[8].
Among all clauses with an overt 1st or 2nd person pronominal subject there are just two instances of where a fronted constituent precede the overt subject (cf. Graph 2. below). These instances are reported in (19) below:

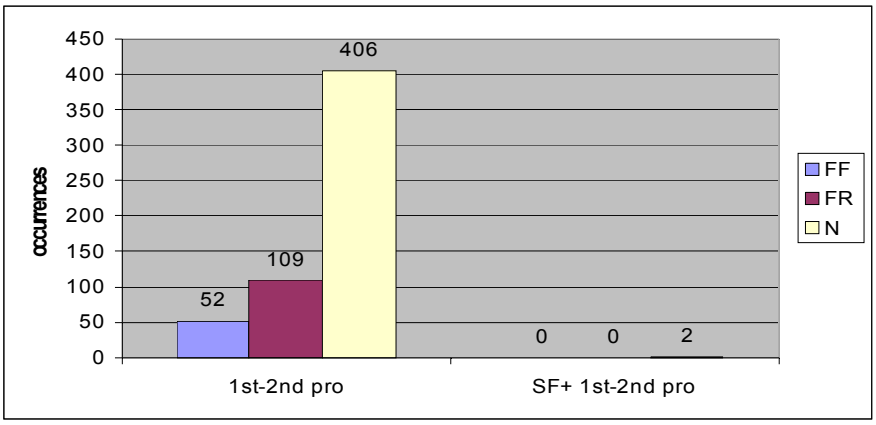
(19) a. allora m'avidi cui **figliuolo** *voi* foste
then self realized.1s of whom son you.p were
"I then realized who you were son of"

b. Io voglio che tu mi dichi cui **figliuolo** *io* fui
I want that you 1s.DAT.cl say of.whom son I was
"I want you to tell me who I was son of" [N, 2,127.20-21]

[8] Among 229 total occurrences of the 3rd person singular pronouns, only 3 cooccur with topicalizations, and they are reported below (topicalization is in bold; pronouns in italics):
(i) nell'animo suo, el quale egli abbia tuttavia inanzi li occhi e
in.the soul his, the which he has.SUBJ continuously before the eyes and
viva sì com'*egli* **tuttavia** lo riguardasse
lives.SUBJ so as he continuously 3s.cl.ACC looked.at.SUBJ
"In his soul, that he had continuously before his eyes and lived as if he looked at it continuously"
(ii) *Egli*, **in questo mezo, pieno d'inganni e di sozi pensieri**, uscì della chiesa
He in this mean full.of deceits and of filthy thoughts went.out of.the church
"He came out of the church in that moment, full of perfidy and bad thoughts"
(iii) «Pensa, guiglielmo, che **per la tua follia** *e'* ti conviene morire».
think guiglielmo, that for the your folly it 2s.cl.DAT is.convenient die.INF
"May you realize, Guiglielmo, that because of your folly it is more convenient for you to die" [FF, 132.6; FR, cap. 51, 55.14; N, 42, 224.16]
Topicalization may either precede (as in (iii)) or follow (as in (i) and (ii)) the pronoun, in accordance with its weak or strong status. By contrast, the results of Graph. 1 and 2. with respect to SF only refer to the order where SF precedes the subject pronoun and they both precede the verb (SF-subj pro-V). This word order would obtain if SF could coexist with weak subject pronouns in preverbal position. Instead, a pronominal subject preceding SF (subj pro – SF –V) could result from subject dislocation, given that the same pronominal forms could be strong. Moreover, no cases of the SF- V- subject pro order obtain in Old Italian.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

Graph. 2.



The examples in (19) may as well be cases of topicalization of *figliuolo*, depending on the adopted analysis of copular inversion. Therefore, I do not consider (19) as counterevidence to the SGC. In contrast to the linear order of (19), cases of order Subj pro – SF – V are found with first and second person pronouns as in (20) below:

(20) a. io obligo l'anima mia a perpetua pregione
I force the soul my to everlasting prison
[infino a tanto che *voi* **pagati** siate]
until to much that you.s payed are.2p.SUBJ
"I force my soul to everlasting imprisonment until you get payed"
[N, 19, 98-100]

b. Messere, *io* **lavato** l'hoe
Sir, I washed 3s.CL.ACC have
"Sir, I did wash it" [N, XLIII, 10]

Cases like those in (20) were analyzed as clauses where the pronominal subject is dislocated to a position in the CP, and it is not an unambiguous signpost of SubjP for the following reasons:
(i) the order subject pro- SF- V (cf. 20) is only found with 1st and 2nd person subjects. The equivalent forms in Modern Italian are only strong, thus it is plausible that also Old Italian ones are used in such a way in (20).
(ii) there are no cases of subject pro- SF- V order with 3rd person pronouns (like *egli*, which is weak in Modern Italian).
In line with her (2003) facts and proposal for Modern Italian, Cardinaletti (p.c.) suggests that the presence of a weak pronominal subject *followed* by SF (and verb) would clearly indicate that the stylistically fronted element targets a position in the IP, lower than SubjP, under the assumption that this is where certain weak pronouns (like *egli*) move.[9,10]Because Old Italian lacks

[9] Strong subjects, on the contrary, cannot be used as signposts as they can occur in different positions, with a free use. For instance, preverbal strong subjects might as well be dislocated in CP in Old and Modern Italian.
[10] The evidence that Cardinaletti (2003) adopts in support of the idea that "Modern Italian SF" targets an IP position consists of the alleged possibility to have preverbal pronominal subjects preceding the stylisitically fronted item. Such evidence is similar to a possibility that occurs in Icelandic, according to Hrafnbjargarson, namely that the stylistically fronted item be preceded

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

unambiguously weak forms, and also *egli/ella/esso/essa* may be strong pronouns, this hypothesis cannot be proved with certainty. Nonetheless, *at least some* occurrences of third person singular pronouns must be weak forms, since they diachronically lose their strong property and only weak forms are available in Modern Italian. Since the order subject pro- SF- V is not attested with 3rd person subjects, there is no support to the idea that SF targets a position in the IP. Moreover, the absence of clauses with order SF – subject pro – V (at least with 3rd person pronouns[11], cf. Graph 1.) indicates that SF is really in complementary distribution with pronominal subjects.
A plausible interpretation of these facts is that SF functions like a subject to some respect, as I propose below. This idea can also account for the general scarcity of contexts where an overt pronominal subject (any person) cooccurs with SF. Syntactically speaking, the presented results speak against the possibility that SF target a position in the inflectional field, because there are no cases where the stylistically fronted item linearly follows a subject that is unambiguously and necessarily in SubjP (at the highest). An alternative, then, is that SF targets a higher position, in CP: because this hypothesis needs support of further data, relative order of SF with clitics was observed.

4. SF and verb clitics

Benincà (1993) shows that enclisis and proclisis in Old Romance languages are triggered in different syntactic/pragmatic contexts. Enclisis on the verb results from verb movement to a position in CP higher than Focus. Benincà shows that enclisis is possible only when FocP is empty. Following Benincà analysis, Poletto (2005) accounts for the distribution of some CP fillers found in Old Italian: *e* and expletive *sì*. *E* can be followed by a V-clitic sequence and is thus considered a topic marker, whereas *sì*, when moved to the left periphery, must occupy Spec, FocP as witnessed by its complementary distribution with enclisis (it is only found in clitic – verb sequences).
In the three Old Italian corpora under examination, the distribution of SF with respect to enclisis and proclisis results as reported in Graph 3. below:

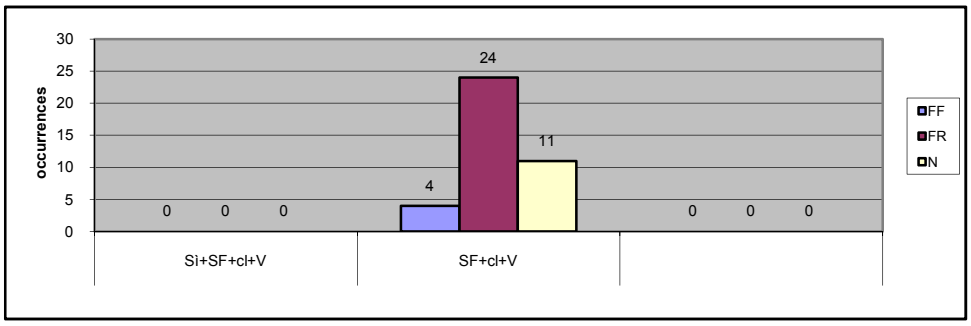
by a weak subject pronoun. Despite reaching different conclusions on the target position of SF, the two arguments are based on the controversial claim that the order pronominal subject – SF – V is (marginally) possible in Italian and Icelandic respectively. While I do not agree with the idea that Italian has productive SF, Thráinsson (2007) and p.c. maintains that the cooccurrence of SF and subjects in Icelandic, as described by Hrafnbjargarson is ungrammatical.

[11] It is worth pointing out that even the 3rd person reduced form *e'*, patterns like other 3rd person pronouns and never cooccurs with SF. The reduced form is not clitic on the verb, and it can be separated from it by other syntactic material as in (i):

(i) ed *e'* cortesemente / mi disse immantenente
and he kindly 1s.DAT.cl told immediately
"And he kindly told me immediately" [Brunetto Latini, Tesoretto, vv. 155-160]

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

Graph 3.



The distribution of SF was observed in clauses with the expletive *sì* particle followed by proclisis (1st column, Graph 3.); by cl-V only (2nd column); and by enclisis (3rd column). Following Benincà's (1993) and Poletto's (2005) observations, the results in Graph 3. indicate that
- SF does not target a very high position in CP (enclisis is not possible);
- SF is in complementary distribution with *sì*: even assuming that SF and *sì* do not target the very same position, the hypothesis that SF targets a position in IP is unexplained under its incompatibility with *sì* (cf. Franco 2009 for facts and details).

Accordingly, SF can be assumed to target a position in CP, below FocP and above the highest IP subject position, SubjP, as illustrated in the following scheme:

(21) FocP ≥ SF > SubjP

5. A unifying analysis

Given the analogies between Old Italian and Icelandic SF shown in section 1., the account of the Old Italian facts presented above can be potentially extended to Icelandic SF. One advantage of the comparative approach proposed in this paper consists of the possibility to carry out a finer investigation on the syntactic properties of SF. Romance languages, represented here by Old Italian, have clitics, which function as clear signposts for both verb movement and the positioning of preverbal material (cf. Section 4.). Under the assumption that Old Italian and Icelandic SF are the same phenomenon, the syntactic analysis of the first, as suggested in the previous sections, can be extended to the latter. To sum up, facts presented in Section 3. show that SF is in complementary distribution with overt preverbal pronominal subjects allegedly occupying the specifier of SubjP. These facts also support the claim that SF does not target a position in IP, but one in CP. This hypothesis is corroborated by the facts presented in Section 4. Icelandic, as well as other Scandinavian languages, does not have clitics, therefore a fine-grained analysis of SF based on the distribution of V-clitic/clitic-V order as the one conducted on the Old Italian corpora sheds new light on the investigated phenomenon. In conclusion of Section 4. it has been argued that SF targets a position in the low CP area, with FocP as upper bound and SubjP as lower bound. Given the lack of specific (subject) features of stylistically fronted items, SubjP itself is not considered as a proper target for SF (i.e. it is an excluded lower bound). Given this syntactic positioning of SF, why are subjects in SubjP in complementary distribution with stylistically

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

fronted items? Unfortunately, space restrictions do not allow to enter the details of the proposal, thus the reader is addressed to the full treatment of this issue as is presented in Franco (2009). The basic idea of this analysis is that SF functions as a strategy to extract/drop the subject, similarly to what Rizzi and Shlonsky (2006) have proposed for English locative inversion, although with proper modifications of their system in order to account for the SF facts. On the basis of evidence like the one presented in Sections 3.- 4. as well as of facts revealing a differentiation of SF types in root vs. non-root contexts, Franco (2009) argues that SF moves to/through FinP, which locally c-commands the criterial subject position, SubjP. By doing so, the stylistically fronted checks the uninterpretable subject features on FinP, which in the case of SF constructions are not fully specified phi-features, but rather a formal, default counterpart. This mechanism enables subject drop or extraction (e.g. relativization, extraposition, wh-extraction…). In this proposal, SF is derived as movement of a remnant phrase (e.g. VP) from where all elements but the fronted head have been evacuated. Despite the apparent complexity of a remnant movement approach, this proposal can account for both Old Italian and Icelandic facts. Moreover, the analysis of SF as a strategy to extract/drop the subject provides an explanation for the function of this syntactic phenomenon and accounts for its distribution with respect to the setting of other parameters. Indeed SF is found only in languages where the pro-drop and V2 parameters have a positive setting.[12]

Selected references

Benincà P. (2006) A Detailed Map of the Left Periphery of Medieval Romance. In Zanuttini R.; Campos H.; Herburger H.; Portner P. (eds.) *Crosslinguistic Research in Syntax and Semantics. Negation, Tense and Clausal Architecture*. Georgetown University Press, Washington 2006, pp. 53-86.

Benincà P. (to app.) Lexical complementisers and Headless Relatives, ms. University of Padua.

Cardinaletti A. (2003) Stylistic Fronting in Italian. In: *Grammar in focus. Festschrift for Christer Platzack 18 November 2003. Volume 2.* L. Delsing, C. Falk, G. Josefsson & H. Á. Sigurdsson (eds.). Department of Scandinavian Languages, Lund University, 47-55.

Cardinaletti, A. (2004), Toward a Cartography of Subject Positions. In *The Structure of CPand IP. The cartography of syntactic structures*, vol. 2, ed. by Luigi Rizzi, 115-165. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cardinaletti A. & I. Roberts (2002) Clause structure and X-second. In Cinque G., Functional Structure in DP and IP. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, volume I, Oxford, Ed. Oxford University Press, pp. 123-166.

Cinque G. (1999) *Adverbs and Functional Heads*. A Crosslinguistic Perspective. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[12] In addition, languages with SF also have an OV order, as Old Italian and Old Scandinavian languages (or at least a residual OV, as Icelandic). According to Rögnvaldsson (1996) the coexistence of SF and OV may be explained in acquisitional terms, as SF recreates an OV order in V2 structures. Following Poletto's (2006) idea, a cross-phasal uniform setting of a parameter affecting the left-periphery could explain the correlation between SF (CP periphery) and OV (vP periphery). See Franco (2009) for a deeper investigation of this issue.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

Delsing L.O. (2001) Stylistic Fronting. Evidence from Old Scandinavian. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 68, 141-171.

Egerland V. (1996), *The Syntax of Past Participles. A Generative Study of Nonfinite Constructions in Ancient and Modern Italian*. PhD dissertation, Études Romanes de Lund 53, Lund.

Faarlund J. T. (2008) *The syntax of Old Norse*, Oxford University Press.

Fischer S. & A. Alexiadou (2001) On Stylistic Fronting: Germanic vs. Romance. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 68, 117-145.

Fischer S. (to app.)a. Stylistic Fronting: a contribution to information structure. In *MLC-effects in syntax*, eds. A. Stepanov, G. Fanselow, and R. Vogel. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter

Fischer S. (to app.)b. The Diachronic Relationship between Quirky Subjects and Stylistic Fronting. In K.V. Subarao and P. Bhaskarao (Eds.) *Non-Nominative Subjects*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Franco (2009) *Verbs, Subjects and Stylistic Fronting. A comparative analysis of the interaction of CP propertieswith verb movement and subject positions in Icelandic and Old Italian.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Siena.

Holmberg A. (1999) Stylistic fronting: an overview, draft.

Holmberg A. (2000) Scandinavian Stylistic Fronting: how any category can become an expletive. In *Linguistic Inquiry* 31, 3, MIT Press.

Jónsson, J. G.(1991) Stylistic Fronting. in Icelandic. In *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax,* 48: 1-43.

Maling J. (1990) Inversion in embedded clauses in modern Icelandic. In *Modern Icelandic Syntax, Syntax and Semantics* 24, pp. 71-91, Academic Press Inc.

Poletto C. (2005) Sì and e as CP expletives in Old Italian. In M.L. Hernqanz et al. (Ed.) *Grammaticalization and Parametric Variation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Poletto C. (2006) Parallel Phases: a study on the high and low left periphery of Old Italian. In Mara Frascarelli, *Phases of Interpretation*, volume 91, Berlin, Ed. Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 261-295

Rizzi L. (1990) *Relativized Minimality*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Rizzi L. (2004) On the Form of Chains: Criterial Positions and ECP Effects". In Cheng, L. and Corver, N. (eds,) *On Wh Movement*. Cambridge, MA., MIT Press.

Rizzi L. (2007) On Some Properties of Criterial Freezing. *STiL - Studies in Linguistics*, Vol.1

Rizzi L. and I. Roberts. (1989). Complex Inversion in French. *Probus* 1: 1–30.

Rizzi L. and U. Shlonsky (2006) Satisfying the Subject Criterion by a Non Subject: English Locative Inversion and Heavy NP Subject Shift. In Frascarelli M. (ed.) *Phases of Interpretation* 341-361, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter

Rizzi L., Shlonsky U. (2007) Strategies of subject extraction. In *Interfaces + Recursion = Language? Chomsky's Minimalism and the View From Syntax-Semantics*, Hans M. Gärtner and Uli Sauerland (eds.), Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Roberts. I, (1993) *Verbs and Diachronic Syntax: A Comparative History of English and French*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Rögnvaldsson, E. (1984) Icelandic Word order and *það*-insertion. In *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax*, 8.

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)

Rögnvaldsson, E. (1996) Word Order Variation in the VP in Old Icelandic. In *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 58:55-86.
Rögnvaldsson E.; Thráinsson H. (1990) On Icelandic word order once more. In *Modern Icelandic Syntax, Syntax and Semantics* 24, pp. 3-39, Academic Press Inc.
Sigurðsson H. A. (1990) V1 declaratives and verb raising in Icelandic. In *Modern Icelandic Syntax, Syntax and Semantics* 24, pp. 41-69, Academic Press Inc.
Thráinsson H., (2007) *The syntax of Icelandic*. Cambridge University Press.
Vikner S. (1995) *Verb movement and expletive subjects in the Germanic languages.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Excerpted Old Italian texts

FF= Anonimous (1271-1275), *Fiori e vite di Filosofi e d'altri savi e d'imperadori*, ed. by Alfonso D'Agostino (1979), La Nuova Italia editrice, Firenze. L2
FR= Bono Giamboni (1292 (1260?)) *Fiore di Rettorica* (β corpus), ed. by Gian Battista Speroni (1994), Università degli Studi di Pavia, Dip. di Scienza e della Letteratura e dell'Arte Medioevale e Moderna. ATA
N= Anonimous(1281-1300), *Il Novellino*, XIII century, ed. by Guido Favati, Genova, Bozzi, 1970. OD

BDD-A22692 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 00:55:52 UTC)