VERUM FOCUS AND POLAR QUESTIONS

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Abstract: We argue that some word order phenomena in Romanian and Sardinian are the result of a checking operation in the left periphery involving verum focus (i.e. focus on the polarity component of the sentence). In particular, this operation accounts for some word order patterns found in polar questions. In Romanian, polarity fronting is realized as head-movement of (V+)T to a higher peripheral head which bears a Focus-probe. This licenses VS orders for predications in which VS is not allowed as a neutral order (i-level predicates, iteratives, generics). In Sardinian, an entire phrase headed by the lexical predicate (verbal non-finite form or non-verbal predicate) is fronted before the auxiliary. We argue that this order is obtained by two movement operations, head-raising of Aux to Foc and movement of the predicate phrase to SpecFoc. We also present the semantics of polarity focus, distinguishing several types of focus (informational, emphatic, contrastive).

Keywords: verum focus, polar questions, focalization, Romanian, Sardinian

1. Introduction

We use the term "polarity fronting" to refer to a special syntactic construction involving a fronting operation, associated to focus on the polarity component of the sentence – "verum focus" (see Höhle 1992). Focus associated to the polarity component (henceforward Pol) can be assumed for the following situations:

(i) The issue whether *p* (where *p* is a proposition) is given in a context, constitutes one of the questions under debate in a discourse; in this case, the affirmation and negation of *p*, possibly with an indication of the degree of certainty, constitutes the focus part of the sentence; we say that in this case Pol represents **informational focus**;
(ii) *p* is something not expected in the context, or assumed by the speaker to be unexpected for the hearer; in this case, Pol bears **emphatic focus** (see Krifka 2007, who uses this term as an equivalent of "scalar focus");
(iii) the negation of *p* is assumed to be true by the hearer; in this case, the affirmation of *p* involves **contrastive (corrective) focus** on Pol.

In this paper, we will not discuss negative sentences, where the polarity is overtly realized by sentential negation. We will concentrate on affirmative sentences and we will argue that the checking of a feature on a verbal element, in the left periphery, is associated to focus on polarity. This verbal element is the finite verb ((V+)T) in Romanian, and a phrase containing a non-finite verb or a non-verbal predicate (PartP/InfP/PredP) in Sardinian.

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2. Polarity fronting in Romanian interrogatives.

We will show that in some cases, the VS order in polar questions in Romanian is marked, involving polarity focus. It is usually claimed that Romanian has VS(O) as one of the unmarked orders (see Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Cornilescu 1997, a.o.). What has not been usually noticed, however, is that this order is unmarked only for a particular type of contexts. The test for a neutral (or unmarked) order is provided by sentences without narrow focus and without any context-given element[1] (so-called "out-of-the-blue" sentences). Our work on Romanian and other null-subject Romance languages[2] has shown that the VS order is acceptable in a sub-set of the out-of-the-blue sentences, characterized by the fact that the sentence introduces an event into a salient/context-given spatial and/or temporal location. We call this type of context **presentational**.

(1) [context: what's that noise?]
a. Taie cineva lemne
cuts somebody woods
'Somebody is cutting wood.'
b. Cară unii ceva
carry some-(people) something
'Some people are carrying something.'
c. [context: did you hear the news/do you know what just happened?]
I-a cerut preşedintele demisia primului ministru
CL.DAT-has asked president-the resignation-the prime-the.DAT minister
'The president asked the Prime-Minister to resign'

Following Gundel (1974) and Erteschik-Shir (1997), we consider that these sentences have the spatio-temporal location of the event as a topic – the so-called *stage* topic (Gundel 1974, Erteschik-Shir 1997). Note that the question *what happened?*, often used as a context for out-of-the-blue sentences, is not unbiased: it means 'what happened *here / now / there / then*', so it presupposes a context-given spatio-temporal location (although this generally remains covert). We proposed that the position in which preverbal subjects normally appear, characterized by an [aboutness]-feature, is occupied in this case by a null adverb referring to the spatio-temporal location, which we called STAGE[3]. As for

[1] Absence of narrow focus does not mean that no given element is present. A given element can be part of a sentence with wide focus, i.e. a sentence whose focus closure is not entailed by a salient antecedent; e.g. *I saw a movie on TV yesterday. The movie was quite bad*: *the movie* is given in the second sentence, but the whole sentence is F, because it does not have a salient antecedent. See Schwarzschild (1999) for a definition of the notions of F [= Focus-element], G [= Given-element] and Foc [= Focus] which successfully accounts for prosodic facts. The notion of "given" may include entities not previously mentioned but highly salient/accessible in the context, such as 1st and 2nd person pronouns, which usually have weak forms even if the speaker or hearer haven't been previously mentioned.

[2] See Giurgea and Remberger (2009, 2011); see also Soare (2009).

[3] The idea that the preverbal subject position is occupied by a sort of null locative adverbial in presentationals has been proposed by Pinto (1997) for Italian (and endorsed by Tortora 2001, Sheehan 2007). However, in their analysis this null adverbial is a goal / locative syntactic argument. But presentational VS can also be found with verbs which do not take a goal / locative PP complement at all:

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what this position is, we want here to remain neutral between approaches using less functional heads, where this position can be identified with SpecFin, and the cartographic proposal of a SubjP in Cardinaletti (2004).

What is important for our purposes here is that some types of predications do not allow a presentational use, and therefore do not allow the VS-order as an unmarked order. A first category is represented by predicates that do not introduce a location of the event independent of the arguments (see the characterization of i-level predicates by Kratzer 1995). As shown below, these predicates do not allow VS in neutral contexts (we use the sign '#' here to indicate inappropriateness in contexts without narrow focus):

(2) (Maria) îl place (#Maria) pe Victor
(Maria) CL.ACC likes (Maria) OBJ Victor
'Maria likes Victor.'

(3) (Fiul meu) e (#fiul meu) bun la fizică
(son-the my) is (son.the my) good at physics
'My son is good at physics.'

(4) (Fratele tău) are (#fratele tău) maşină [possession have]
(brother-the your) has (brother-the your) car
'Your brother has a car.'

Since in these cases there is no location which can be context-given independently of the arguments, there can be no stage topic. Assuming that every sentence has a topic, this is what requires another element to be a topic (providing thus a possible explanation for the ban on weak indefinites as subjects of i-level predicates, see Erteschik-Shir 1997, a.o.).

A second type of predications which do not allow the presentational use and thus do not allow VS as an unmarked order is aspectually defined. Since in a presentational, the predication must be about a current spatio-temporal location (not only the space but also the time must be context-given), iteratives – see (5b) and (6) – and generics – see (7) – are not allowed[4]:

(i) [context: what happened? What's the noise?] (Italian)
Piange il biambino
cries the baby
'The baby is crying.'

(ii) È scoppiato un incendio nella fabbrica di birra
has broken-out a fire in-the factory of beer
'A fire broke out in the beer factory.'

It is nevertheless true that in Italian the argument structure of the verb constrains presentational VS (for instance, transitives and unergatives with a PP-complement don't allow presentational VS). For a possible analysis of these syntactic constraints on presentational VS, see Giurgea and Remberger (2009, 2011).

[4] Regarding sentence (7), it should be noticed that it also allows an order V-Adv-S (*mănâncă mult belgienii*), but this order is marked: either the focal stress falls on *mult* and *belgienii* is destressed, which we interpret as an emphatic fronting of the remnant TP (with S sitting in SpecFin), or *belgienii* is narrow focus (this second focusing pattern sounds slightly marginal, but it becomes more acceptable if S is modified by a focal particle: *mănâncă mult şi belgienii* 'Belgians too eat a lot').

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(5) a. Cântă copiii un trio [episodic: answer to *What happens?*]
play-3PL children-the a trio
'The children are playing a trio.'
b. #Cântă copiii muzică de cameră sâmbăta seara [iterative]
play-3PL children-the music of chamber Saturday-the evening
'The children play chamber music on Saturday evenings'

(6) (Părinții mei) fac (#părinții mei) zilnic o plimbare [iterative]
(parents-the my) make (parents-the my) daily a walk
'My parents go daily for a walk.'

(7) #(Belgienii) mănâncă (#belgienii) mult [generic]
Belgians-the eat Belgians-the much

Let us now turn to unbiased (non-conducive) information-requiring polar questions. We find that the predications which cannot yield presentational sentences (for semantic reasons) and, consequently, do not allow VS in all-new declaratives show the same unmarked order in questions as in declaratives, i.e. SV-order:

(2) Maria îl place pe Victor?
Maria CL.ACC likes OBJ Victor
'Does Maria like Victor?'

(3) Fiul tău e bun la fizică?
son-the your is good at physics
'Is your son good in physics?'

(4) Fratele tău are mașină?
brother-the your has car
'Does your brother have a car?'

(6) Copiii tăi fac zilnic o plimbare?
children-the your make daily a walk
'Do your children go for a walk daily?'

(7) Belgienii mănâncă mult?
Belgians-the eat much
'Do Belgians eat a lot?'

However, in all these cases, the VS order in the polar question is nevertheless possible, but under special pragmatic circumstances. We discovered two possible pragmatic values of this order particular to questions:

(i) The issue whether *p* holds has already been under discussion or is in the common concerns of the participants; the speaker insists on the fact that the issue whether p is still not settled:

(8) a. Deci, ca să rezumăm, îl place Maria pe Victor?
so that SĂ sum-up-1PL CL.ACC likes Maria OBJ Victor
'To sum up, does Maria like Victor?'

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b. N-am înțeles până la urmă. ARE fratele tău mașină
not-have-1SG understood until at end has brother-the your car
(, sau nu)?
(, or not)
'In the end, I didn't understand: does your brother have a car (or not)?'

We consider that these sentences involve (narrow) information focus on Pol: the whole content of *p* is given in the context, except its truth value or degree of probability.

(ii) The speaker expresses surprise with respect to the possibility that *p* is true:

(9) a. (chiar) MĂNÂNCĂ belgienii mult?
(really) eat Belgians-the much
'Do Belgians really eat a lot?'
b. (chiar) îl PLACE Maria pe Victor?
(really) CL.ACC likes Maria OBJ Victor
'DOES Victor like Maria?'
c. (chiar) CÂNTĂ copiii tăi muzică de cameră zilnic?
(really) play children-the your music of chamber daily
'Do your children really play chamber music every day?'
d. Oare chiar ESTE Mircea așa de bun la fizică?[5]
INTER really is Mircea so of good at physics
'Is Mircea really so good at physics?'

In this case, there is emphatic focus on Pol – the truth of *p* is indicated as surprising for the speaker. Note that these examples often contain the focus particle *chiar* 'even', which in ad-verbal environments can be translated by 'really'. We consider that this particle marks the *even*-type focus ("scalar focus" in Krifka 2007) applied to Pol.

Summing up, the VS order in polar interrogatives in these constructions is licensed by focus on Pol. We analyze this as an instance of focus fronting. Formalizing fronting for information-structural reasons in the Chomskyan probe-goal framework[6], we assume that there is a peripheral head which bears a Focus probe ([uFoc]), which, being associated to an EPP-feature, requires movement of the goal (which must bear Focus)[7]. We identify the attracting head with Fin. Note that in Romanian contrastive as well as emphatic focus fronting does not allow the subject to intervene between the focused element and the verb:[8]

[5] *Oare* is an interrogative adverb, which in spite of its meaning enjoys a great deal of placement freedom (it resembles adverbs such as *probably*) and does not seem to affect the word order of the main constituents.
[6] See Chomsky (2000, 2001).
[7] We adopt Mensching's (2009) proposal that IS-probes can get only one (namely a positive) value if they find a matching goal marked with that feature.
[8] The data are in fact more complex: if the sentence contains other non-focus material beside V and S, e.g. O (cf. (i)) or an adjunct (cf. (ii)), SV becomes possible, although VS is still preferred:
(i) De MULT (fratele meu) are (fratele meu) mașină
(ii) pe MARIA (Ion) o invită (Ion) de fiecare dată
OBJ Maria (Ion) CL.ACC invites (Ion) of every time
For the time being we do not have an explanation for this contrast.

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(10) a. pe VICTOR (*Maria) îl place (Maria) [contrastive focus]
OBJ Victor (Maria) CL.ACC likes (Maria)
b. MULT (*belgienii) mănâncă (belgienii) [emphatic focus: exclamative]
much Belgians-the eat Belgians-the

This fact has been analyzed as competition for the same position (see Cornilescu 1997, Alboiu 2002), in which case the [uAbout] probe responsible for preverbal subjects would also be hosted by Fin (this is the approach we adopted in Giurgea and Remberger 2011). In case the SubjP-hypothesis is adopted, a special explanation must be provided for the blocking of the projection of SubjP by a higher Fin which attracts a focused element (for an attempt along these lines, see Cardinaletti 2009).

Note however that in the case of Pol focus, we do not find any phrase fronted, but the verb itself bears the focal stress. In order to explain this fact, we assume that a probe can also be satisfied by head movement (see the type of checking proposed by Chomsky 1995, Alexiadou and Anagnastopoulou 1998). We assume that the EPP just requires a sisterhood configuration between the probe and the goal, and therefore it can be satisfied in a head-head configuration, not only in a Spec-head configuration (for the Spec-Head configuration, sisterhood is obtained between X′ and Spec, under the standard minimalist assumption of feature percolation). We assume that Pol, realized as a Σ head (see Laka 1990), is incorporated into T, and the whole (V+)+T+Σ complex raises to Fin to satisfy [uFoc]-EPP.

3. Note on the interpretation of polarity in polar interrogatives

To talk about polarity focus in polar questions may seem surprising, because these questions have the polarity component as their open part (in Hamblin's 1973 classical analysis of questions, they denote the alternative set $\{p, \neg p\}$); therefore one would not expect them to have a specified value for polarity). But polar questions can of course be negative, so they can have specified polarity.

Notice now that usually negative polarity introduces a bias towards a positive answer (the question becomes positively conducive):

(11) Doesn't John drink? (Romero and Han 2002, example 1)
expectation: John drinks.

Romero and Han (2002) argue that conducive questions always involve verum focus:

(12) DOES John drink? (Romero and Han 2002, example 16)
expectation: John doesn't drink.
(13) Does John drink? (Romero and Han 2002, example 17)
no expectation
(14) Does John NOT drink? (Romero and Han 2002, example 18)
expectation: John drinks.
(15) a. John drinks, DOESN'T he? (Romero and Han 2002, example 20)
expectation: John drinks.

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b. John doesn't drink, DOES he?
expectation: John doesn't drink.

We explain the verum focus effect noticed by Romero and Han (2002) as an effect of the existence of an emphatic focus feature. Remember that in declarative sentences, emphatic focus presents the proposition as unexpected. In polar questions, it continues to present the value of Pol as unexpected. But since the sentence is not asserted or negated (which may be formalized by using a question operator at the C-level, a sort of *wh*-Σ[9]), the only contribution of the specified value of Pol is to convey the fact that the speaker does not believe in p with that particular value of Pol. That's why the implied sentence always has the opposite polarity with respect to the question.

But negative questions can also be non-conducive. Romero and Han (2002) claim that this is only possible, in English, if Neg remains low (does not raise with Aux).[10] Notice also that this use requires special contexts, cf. (16):

(16) Scenario: S hates both Pat and Jane. The prospect of an excursion without them pleases S. S does not have any previous belief about whether either of them is coming or not.
A: Pat is not coming.
S: Great! Is Jane not coming (either)? That would be the best!!!
S': #Great! Isn't Jane coming (either)? That would be the best!!!

The explanation for the presence of a specified Pol here is that the negation belongs to the background – the sentences have narrow focus on the subject, and negation is outside the focus. Therefore, the sentence must contain the predicate λx. ¬come(x). Perhaps Neg must remain low here, if it can (like in English), because by staying together with the predicate it is signaled that it belongs to the background.

In this case there is no focus on Pol, so we do not expect polarity fronting. Examples (16'a) and (16'b) are both Romanian counterparts to the grammatical interrogative in English (16). The order in (16'a) does not reflect polarity fronting, but the possibility to leave a narrow focus S (here *nici Jane*) in postverbal position, which is always available in Romanian.

(16) Rom.:
a. *Nu vine nici Jane?*
not comes nor Jane
b. *Nici Jane nu vine?*
nor Jane not comes

[9] The idea is that question particles (or operators) are a sort of *wh* variant of Pol – just like *who* and *what* are *wh*-forms of DPs, *where* of locative PPs and so on.
[10] But see Cattell (1973), Cornilescu (1982) for counterexamples.

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To conclude, a specified value of Pol in polar questions can appear for information-structural reasons: either Pol bears emphatic or informational focus, see (8)-(9) above, or Pol belongs to the background (inside a focus-background partition, see (16).

4. Polarity fronting in Romanian declaratives

Given our analysis of polarity fronting in interrogatives, we expect to find the same phenomena in declaratives. Using the same test – predicates which do not allow a presentational reading – we find, indeed, VS with focal stress on V involving polarity focus in the following cases:

(i) The speaker presupposes that the hearer has doubts towards *p* and reassures him on the truth of *p*:

(17) (Stai liniştit,) ÎNȚELEGE el problema
(don't worry) understands he problem-he
'Don't worry, he will understand / understands the problem.'

If the hearer clearly prefers ¬*p*, the sentence can also express a threat.[11]

(ii) The speaker expresses surprise/admiration towards the event/state:

(18) ŞTIE Maria franceză, (nu glumă)
knows Maria French (not joke)
'Maria knows / speaks really good French!'[12]

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[11] Hill (2006), discussing the construction (Subject)-Emphatic Verb-Pronominal Subject, which expresses threat or reassurance, claims that the speech-act level of the clause is involved: V is in Force, the subject pronoun which often appears after V in these sentences is in SpecTop below, a potential preceding S is a Hanging Topic. As evidence for this analysis she cites the impossibility of embedding:

(i) *Ne-a povestit că Maria, şi-a CUMPĂRAT ea o casă, şi să te ții!...
us-has told that Maria REFL.DAT-has bought she a house and SĂ REFL.ACC hold-2SG
Intended: 'she told us that, lo behold, Maria has bought a house…'

But embedding is sometimes possible:

(ii) Mă tem că premierul o să le ARATE el la toți
REFL.ACC fear.1SG that prime-minister-the will SĂ them.DAT show he to all
'I'm afraid the prime-minister will teach everybody a lesson!'

We believe therefore that this construction is an instance of polarity fronting involving the normal [uFoc] probe in Fin, and the restrictions on the embedding verbs probably comes from the pragmatic meaning of the construction (threat/reassurance).

[12] The interpretation of such examples may suggest that the emphatic focus bears on the scalar component of the verb. However, we believe that this is the result of the interplay between verum focus and the fact that verbs such as 'know' inherently denote a high degree. The fact which led us to this conclusion is that with verbs which do not inherently denote a high degree, VS cannot be used to put emphasis on the scalar component:

(i) #BEA Ion vin [meaning he drinks a lot]
drinks Ion wine

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The following sentence can express either reassurance or admiration/astonishment:

(19) ŞTIE Maria cum să se poarte cu şefii
knows Maria how SĂ REFL.ACC behave with bosses-the
Reassurance: '(Don't worry), Maria knows how to behave with her superiors.'
Admiration: 'Maria really knows how to behave with her superiors.'

(iii) (More seldom) the speaker contradicts something previously expressed by the hearer or inferable from his statements (~correction focus: contrastive focus on Pol):

(20) Dar o CUNOAŞTE Maria pe Lucia, cum să n-o cunoască?
but CL.ACC knows Maria OBJ Lucia how SĂ not-CL.ACC know
'But Maria does know Lucia, how can she not know her?'

In answers to polar questions, VS seems impossible in these constructions:

(21) a. [A: Şerban are maşină?] B: #Da, ARE Şerban maşină
Şerban has car yes has Şerban car
'Does Şerban have a car? Yes, he has a car'
b. [A: Şerban n-are maşină?] B: #Ba da, ARE Şerban maşină.
Şerban not-has car but yes has Şerban car
'Does Şerban have a car? No, he doesn't have a car.

The marginality of the answer to a negated question like in (21b) recalls the marginality of focus fronting in direct answers to *wh*-questions: as in (21b) the order in (22) is not used as a neutral answer; if it is used, it implies that the speaker finds his answer somehow surprising, unexpected, worthy of admiration or disapproval, which means that the fronted element bears emphatic focus :

(22) A: Pe cine a invitat Şerban? B: ?#Pe MONICA a invitat-o Şerban.
OBJ who has invited Şerban OBJ Monica has invited-CL.ACC Şerban
'Who did Şerban invite? He invited Monica.'

Romero and Han (2002) describe verum focus as focus on a high degree of certainty, not just on Pol: they claim that the alternatives are not just {yes, no}, but rather epistemic alternatives {certainly, probably, maybe, certainly not}. We expect then to find the possibility of focus fronting of the epistemic modal component with other values of this component (e.g. with 'possibly', 'apparently', etc.). In Romanian, we see indeed VS with

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(ii) #DANSEAZĂ Maria cu Petru [meaning they dance a lot, or very well]
dances Maria with Petru
A further indication that VS with stress on V is not used for focusing the verb is the fact that the VSX order does not sound natural if we want to contrast V with another verb:
(iii) ?#o IUBEŞTE Ion pe Maria, nu doar o place
CL.ACC loves Ion OBJ Maria not only her likes

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focal stress on V with the so-called 'presumptive mood', a mood expressing epistemic possibility, usually with a concessive flavor, being followed by *but* + a sentence which the speaker asserts:

(23) O fi ŞTIIND Maria franceză, dar nu poate şti la fel de bine ca Lucia
may be knowing Maria French but not can know at sort of well as Lucia
'Maria may well know / speak French, but she can't possibly know it as well as Lucia.'

Note that the construction only allows fronting of the verb (more precisely, of the verbal cluster, see (23); auxiliaries behave as clitics in Romanian, see Dobrovie-Sorin (1994)). An epistemic adverb with the same meaning cannot undergo focus fronting:

(24) #POATE ştie Maria franceză, dar nu poate şti la fel de bine ca Lucia
maybe knows Maria French but not can know at sort of well as Lucia

We conclude that verum focus involves not just an epistemic modal, but also Pol, which is realized in the Σ head.

Summing up, Romanian has VS orders licensed by focus on Pol and/or the degree of certainty, which we analyze as the checking of a [uFoc] probe in the left periphery by the finite verb, which incorporates the Σ head (see again Laka 1990).

5. Sardinian predicate raising

Sardinian confirms the view that a fronting operation involving a verbal constituent may be associated with polarity focus. However, it differs from Romanian in that the probe connected to polarity focus is not checked by X^0-movement, but by XP-movement, involving a whole non-finite or non-verbal predicative projection. In Sardinian, predicate fronting is very frequent; it has been studied – together with the fronting of other XP-constituents – by Jones (1993), Floricic (2009), Mensching and Remberger (2010a, b) and Remberger (2010). The fronted constituent usually is a phrase headed by a non-finite verb or by a non-verbal predicate.

5.1 Interrogatives

In Sardinian, predicate fronting is a common way of question formation (see Jones 1993, Floricic 2004 and 2009, Remberger 2010):

(25) a. [Retzidu notízias malas de su fizu] at? (Blasco Ferrer 1986: 206)
received news bad from the son have-3SG
'Did he receive bad news from his son?'

b. [A bennere] at s'attunzu? (Sa-Limba 1999-2011)
to come has the autumn
'Will autumn come?'

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c. [Mellus de nosus] funti?
better than us are.3PL
'Are they better than us?'

d. [Mortu in s' ispidale] est? (Blasco Ferrer 1986: 194)
died in the hospital is
'Did he die in hospital?'

e. O Danieli, [circhendi corpus] ses? (Sa-Limba 1999-2011)
o Daniele looking-for punches be-2SG
'Oh Daniele, are you looking for a fight?'

f. [Mannus] sunt is pipius? (Lecca 1999: 30)
big are the children
'Are the children grown-up?'

The finite verb can be an auxiliary and also an aspectual or modal verb such as 'begin', in (26), and 'want', in (27):

(26) A pippare cumintzas? (Remberger 2010: 24)
to smoke start-2SG ?
'Are you starting to smoke?'

(27) Drommire cheres? (Floricic 2004: 5c)
sleep.INF want-2SG
'Do you want to sleep?

The fronted constituent cannot contain a subject:

(28) *[Arrivada una lìtera] est?
arrived a letter is

There is a strong adjacency condition between fronted predicates and Aux. The subject, unless topicalized, like *tui* in (29), must appear after the auxiliary, like *su pitzinnu* in (30):

(29) Ma tui sempri circhendi contus a mimi sesi? (Sa-Limba 1999-2011)
but you always asking accounts from me are
'But why are you always calling me to account?'

(30) Mandicatu (*su pitzinnu) at (su pitzinnu)? (Remberger 2010: 83)
eaten (the child) have-3SG (the child)
'Did the child eat?'

Predicate fronting competes with the question particle *a*, and both compete with Neg:

(31) a. Mandicadu l' as?
eaten it-have-2SG
'Have you eaten it?'

b. A l' as mandicadu?
a it-have-2SG eaten
'Have you eaten it?'

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c. No l' as mandicadu?
not it-have-2SG eaten
'Haven't you eaten it?'
d. *Mandicadu a l'as? / * A mandicadu l'as?
e. *Mandicadu no l'as?
f. *A no l'as mandicadu? / *No a l'as mandicadu?

The question particle *a* also appears immediately before the finite verb and seems to be a clitic (cf. Remberger 2010):

(32) (Fruta) a (*fruta) nde cheres? (Floricic 2004: 3)
(fruits) a (fruits) of-it want-2SG
(33) A (*Juanne) bi venit (Juanne)? (Jones 1993: 24-25)
a (Juanne) there(CL) comes (Juanne)

This pattern as well as some semantic side effects described as mirativity or emphasis suggest that Sardinian predicate fronting is or can be an instance of positive polarity fronting. The particle *a* may represent interrogative polarity (a sort of *wh*-Σ, see f.n. 9).

Predicate fronting is usually described as involving either verum focus or narrow focus on the predicate (VP/PredP or V, A etc., cf. Jones 1993). But these formulations also cover declarative sentences (see 5.2 below), and to what extent they hold for interrogatives is an issue not sufficiently clarified yet. The corpus investigated (Sa-Limba 1999-2011) shows clear data of polarity focus. Thus, we find conducive questions, which we have analyzed as involving emphatic focus on Pol – see (34)-(36) – and sentences expressing astonishment, such as (37):

(34) Su sardu est una limba e s' italianu un atra, [faula] est?[13]
the Sardinian is a language and the Italian another lie is
'Sardinian is one language and Italian is another, isn't it?'

(35) Ma [cosas a narrere in sa lista] sunt?
but things to tell in the list are
'But are these really things to be told to the mailing list?'
(36) E custu, [sardu] est? [Su sardu ki boleus po su tempus bennidori]
and this Sardinian is the Sardinian that want-2PL for the time coming
est?
is
'And is this Sardinian? Is this the (type of) Sardinian your really want for the future?'
(37) O [ancoras in cumbata] seis?! (Sa-Limba 1999-2011)
and still in battle be-2PL
'Oh, are you still fighting?!'

[13] Sardinian *faula est* is very common; it is roughly equivalent to English tag questions, such as *isn't it*.

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The following sentences illustrate an instance of information focus on Pol – involving an issue which has been raised before but has remained open (cf. (8) above for Romanian):

(38) a. Cumpresu m' as como? (Logudorese) (Blasco Ferrer 1994: 296)
understood me-have-2SG now
b. Cumpréndiu m'as immoi? (Campidanese)
understood me-have-2SG now
'Have you finally understood (what I wanted to say)?'

On the other hand, Jones (1993) states that predicate fronting in questions is quite common, and examples can be found where the context appears to be neutral, cf. (39):

(39) a. Deu calu in Sardinnia su 23: in zona ses? (Sa-Limba 1999-2011)
I go-down in Sardinia the 23 in zone are-2SG
'I'll come down (from the UK) to Sardinia on the 23rd : Are you around then?'
b. Sardu sese?
Sardinian are-2SG
'Are you Sardinian?'

If predicate fronting is indeed acceptable in neutral contexts and non-conducive questions, a different featural trigger would need to be assumed: we can consider that the feature responsible for Pol-raising is simply the question feature associated to Pol, which represents the open part in yes/no questions. If "focus" is defined as an element introducing contextual alternatives, as in Krifka (2007), we can consider that the element representing the open part of the question, which introduces alternative sets (see Hamblin 1973), bears a certain type of focus, which we can label question-focus (Q-Foc). In partial questions, this feature is borne by the [+wh] element. For polar questions, it is borne by Pol, since the members of the alternative set differ by their polarity (the set is {p, ¬p}).

There are however indications that this construction is not pragmatically neutral: as we have shown, the subject cannot participate in predicate fronting. If this order was really neutral, we would expect to find new DPs as postverbal subjects. But the examples we have all contain either a *pro* subject or a definite DP as a subject. Moreover, a native speaker's judgments confirm that new (i.e., non-D-linked) indefinite subject are not fine with predicate fronting:

(40) a. *Arrivada est una lìtera?
arrived is a letter
b. ?Presentare sas noas at unu presentadore nobu?
Present-INF the news has a presenter new
'Is a new announcer going to present the news?'

These facts indicate that predicate fronting involves narrow focus even in questions, either on Pol or on the whole fronted predicative phrase.

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To conclude, predicate fronting in interrogatives can be correlated with focus on Pol (= verum focus).

5.2 Declaratives

Jones (1993) states that predicate fronting in declaratives can express predicate focus ("emphasis on the semantic content of the predicate itself") or verum focus ("emphasis on the truth value of the sentence as a whole").

In answers to polar questions, we also find information focus on Pol:

(41) A: Manicáu asa? (Pittau 1972: 144)
eaten have-2SG
B: Manicáu appo.
eaten have-1SG
'Did you eat? I did.'

Other examples illustrate emphatic focus on Pol: the speaker suggests that the truth of the sentence is unexpected either for the hearer (see (42)) or in general (see (43)-(44)), in which case it conveys admiration or surprise:

(42) Bénniu essèrepo! (Pittau 1972: 144)
come would-be-1SG
'I would have come!'

(43) Proendi esti! (Lepori 2001: 72)
raining is
'It is raining!'

(44) Furat su caddu chena bistentu. Bene meda! Fatu l'at. (Conrad, Falconi 2002: 51)
steals the horse without delay good very done it has
'He steals the horse without delay. Very well! He (really) DID it.'

Although such sentences involve emphasis, they are not necessarily exclamative, in the sense that it is not required that the truth of the sentence should be presupposed. The sentence can introduce new information in the form of an assertion, besides expressing an affective attitude towards it (see Mensching and Remberger 2010a, 2010b).

5.3 Syntactic analysis and comparison with Romanian

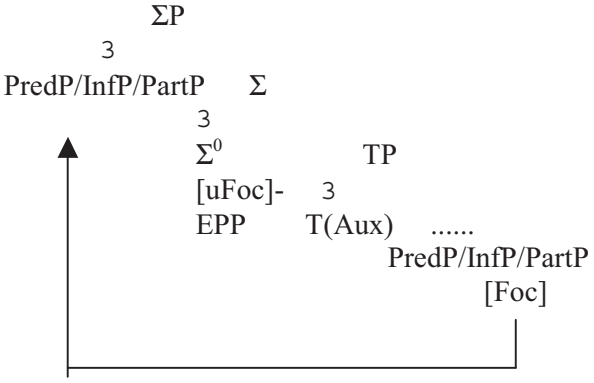
The straightforward analysis proposed for Romanian, in which the fronted element is the very element encoding polarity, the Σ head, cannot be adopted for Sardinian, because the fronted phrase represents a projection too low to be assumed to contain Σ: the preverbal position of negation in Sardinian suggests that Σ is before T, as proposed by Laka (1990) for Spanish and other Romance languages showing a similar behavior of negation (Standard Italian, Catalan, Portuguese), corresponding to Zanuttini's (1997) Neg_1 position; even if we assume that the negation is generated below T and then left-

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adjoins to it as a clitic, as proposed for French *ne* by Pollock (1989), it is doubtful that the base position of negation could be lower than the base position of the auxiliary – with aspectual verbs, for instance, it is clear that the negation takes scope over the modal or aspectual component (e.g. *no cumintzu a pippare* 'I don't start to smoke', not 'I start not to smoke'). Since what is fronted is the complement of the auxiliary, we cannot assume that it contains Σ (on the competition between predicate fronting, the question particle *a* and Neg, see (31) above). We propose that the phonological encoding of the focus feature associated with Pol needs the support of a lexical head, and auxiliaries are treated as too weak to provide this support. The emphatic feature, although ultimately interpreted as polarity focus, is borne by the lexical head of the predication, and the whole PredP/PartP/InfP is raised by pied-piping.

As for the attractor head, the competition of predicate fronting with *a* and Neg suggests that Σ is involved. Let's assume that a null Σ bearing focus is in need of phonological support for this feature and therefore attracts the phrase of the lexical predicate. This means that Σ bears [uFoc] and the lexical predicate bears [Foc]. We must depart here from the Chomskyan assumption that unvalued features which underwent Agree are disregarded at LF. Since after Agree took place both Σ and the predicate are marked [Foc], we assume that any of them can be interpreted as focus at LF:[14]

(45)



We adopted here the analysis with Σ above T (as in Laka 1990; for arguments in favor of this analysis for languages where the preverbal negation is not doubled by a postverbal negation, see Zanuttini 1997)[15].

[14] This possibility of interpreting the feature either on the probe or on the goal is more in line with the recently growing analysis of Agree as feature-sharing (Frampton and Gutmann 2000, 2006, Pesetsky and Torrego 2007). In this analysis, the features which underwent agreement form a single object (a single feature) related to several syntactic objects in the tree. Since in this case the asymmetry between probe and goal disappears, the possibility arises that their locus of interpretation may be different from the locus where the value was introduced in the derivation.

[15] For the clitic behavior of preverbal negation and of the question particle *a* – the elements which we analyze as Σ heads – there are two possible accounts: either the cliticization applies at PF, or they form a complex head with the verb in syntax but they bear a [+prefix] feature, which triggers an exceptional head-initial linearization at PF (complex heads with head-initial orders have been proposed by various authors for the Romanian verbal cluster, see Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, 2001, Cornilescu 1997, Barbu 1999, Hill 2006, Giurgea 2011).

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We still have to explain the position of the subject. First, we can say that it does not appear between Σ and T for the same reason for which it cannot appear between negation and the verb: there is no specifier position between Σ and T to which it can raise, as shown by the placement of Neg immediately before the finite verb. (Notice that if we analyze Σ as a head higher than T, from the adjacency constraint between Neg and T it follows that preverbal subjects do not occupy SpecT in Sardinian, at least not in negative clauses). But why can't the subject appear inside the predicative constituent, at least as a low indefinite subject (see (28))? Moreover, if the subject is expressed, it normally appears after the finite verb (see (46)), although, according to the tree in (45), we would expect the normal preverbal position to precede the fronted predicate, because this position precedes the negation, which means that it precedes Σ.

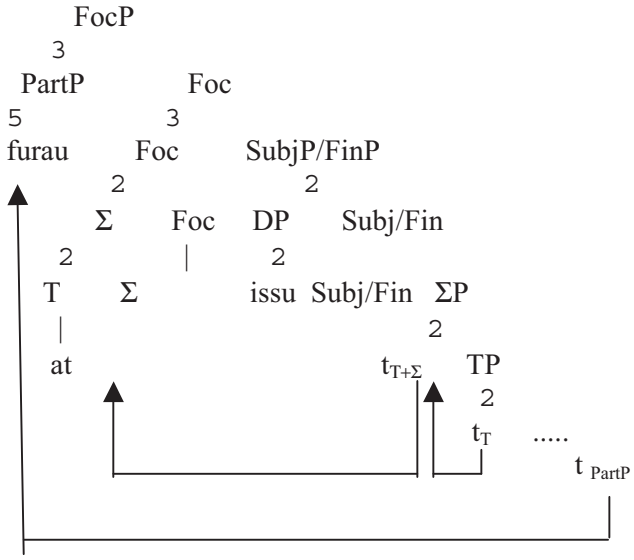
(46) furau at issu? (Blasco Ferrer 1994: 296)
stolen has he
'Has he stolen?'

We propose that the explanation for this word order difference shows that a higher left-peripheral head is involved in the derivation. Let's assume that Σ can be interpreted as under focus by being raised to a left-peripheral head situated above the preverbal subject position, together with the auxiliary, by successive-cyclic head movement. We identify this head with Foc. The idea underlying the analysis in (45) is still kept, but transferred to the Focus head: it is this head which probes the valued focus feature on the lexical predicate and triggers pied-piping movement. We maintain the idea that the ultimate reason behind this movement is the fact that null Σ cannot bear valued focus. But the way by which null Σ acquires the possibility to be interpreted as focused is more complex: it is head-moved to a position which bears [uFoc], which becomes [Foc] (valued Foc) by establishing Agree with the lexical predicate and also attracts this predicate's phrase to its specifier. The final structure we propose looks thus as follows (as mentioned in section 2, we do not decide between SpecSubj and SpecFin as the preverbal subject position):[16]

[16] As for the question particle *a*, it is in Σ, like *no*; whether they are PF-clitics or form a head-initial complex head like in Romanian is a theory-internal question we want to leave open. Maybe *a* must move to Foc, in which case we would assume that predicate fronting is unnecessary because Σ is overt, and thus it bears Foc and there is no need for the support of the lexical verb. But it is more likely that movement to Foc is not necessary, because *a* is already marked as a wh- (i.e. Q-Foc) Σ and, more importantly, *a* can be used in neutral polar questions.

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(47)



As for the fact that the subject cannot appear inside the fronted predicative phrase, this is an issue which cannot be clarified in the space of this article, because it presupposes a thorough examination of the syntax of postverbal subjects in Sardinian, which should establish whether they can ever remain in their base position, and under what conditions. However, given that Sardinian is like other null-subject Romance languages, e.g. Italian, in that it allows low subjects in presentationals and under narrow focus, a possible explanation of the absence of such subjects inside fronted predicate phrases is that predicate fronting is not used in presentational contexts and does not involve narrow focus on the subject, but on Pol or on the (lexical) predicate itself. In other words, the subject is normally given and must therefore move to a topic or subject-of-predication position (SpecSubjP/FinP or higher position associated to dislocated topics).

Comparing Sardinian to Romanian, it is interesting to notice that in Romanian too it is the lexical verb which bears the focal stress, in compound tenses, see also ((23):

(48) Va ŞTI ea cum să se poarte
will know she how SĂ REFL.ACC behaves
'She will surely know how to behave'

This shows that polarity focus needs the support of the lexical verb even in Romanian, at least at PF. The crucial difference with respect to Sardinian is that auxiliaries have a clitic behavior in Romanian: as several authors have shown (see Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Cornilescu 1997, Barbu 1999, Dobrovie-Sorin 2001, Hill 2006, Giurgea 2011), the lexical verb forms a complex X^0 with the auxiliary at some point of the derivation. Therefore the phrase of the lexical verb cannot move in front of the auxiliary, like in Sardinian. Moreover, assuming that complex head formation takes place in syntax (like the abovementioned authors claims), the [Foc] feature of Σ finds a lexical support inside the complex [[V^0 T^0] [$Σ^0$]] head. Therefore the only movement which takes place is the

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raising of this complex head to Fin to check the [uFoc] probe, which prevents the realization of the subject in the preverbal [aboutness]-position.

6. Conclusions

We have argued that focus on polarity can trigger displacement into the left periphery in Romanian and Sardinian. In Romanian, the complex head containing the finite verb checks a [uFoc] probe in Fin by head movement. In Sardinian, a projection containing the lexical predicate (headed by a non-finite verbal form or a non-verbal predicate), bearing [Foc], is raised to SpecFoc and the auxiliary moves to Foc, producing the order [PredP/InfP/PartP]-Aux-S. Polarity fronting is found both in declaratives and in polar interrogatives in both languages. In particular, the investigation of Romanian polar interrogatives has shown that they keep the basic order of declaratives; some instances of VS orders represent polarity fronting, being licensed by focus on polarity (which can be informational, in non-conducive questions, or emphatic, in conducive questions). The main results are summarized in a table:

(49) Polarity fronting with focus on Polarity in Romanian and Sardinian:

	Romanian	Sardinian
Movement involved	[T + Σ] to Fin_{+Foc}	[T + Σ] to Foc PredP/InfP/PartP to SpecFoc
Types of Pol-Focus:		
in declaratives	emphatic corrective/contrastive	emphatic informational
in interrogatives	emphatic informational	emphatic informational

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