TO MOVE OR NOT TO MOVE: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FOR FOCUS STRATEGIES IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract: *As shown by previous analysis, contrastively focused constituents in Romanian may occupy different positions in the clause structure: a post-verbal position, which may be an "in situ" occurrence or movement to a lower clause periphery, sometimes masked by the movement of other constituents as well, and a left-periphery position, with focused constituents undergoing operator-movement motivated in syntactic theory by feature-checking requirements. The paper uses experimental data to investigate which strategy (fronting or in situ) is preferred by speakers, and any other syntactic effects of the chosen strategy. Furthermore, it tests whether the presence of the focus particles influences the word order preference, given the additional features carried by the particles.*

Keywords: *narrow focus; contrastive focus; focus particle; scrambling; clause periphery*

1. Introduction

Contrastively focused constituents in Romanian may occupy different positions in the clause structure: post-verbal, which may represent either an "in situ" or a vP periphery position, given the relatively free position of post-verbal constituents in Romanian, exemplified in (1a), and a left-periphery position, as shown in (1b). The two configurations receive a uniform interpretation

(1) a. Femeia s-a întâlnit (doar) CU O PRIETENĂ în parc.
woman.def refl.-has met only with a friend in park
b. Doar CU O PRIETENĂ s-a întâlnit femeia în parc, (nu și cu soțul său).
only with a friend refl.-has met woman.def in park (not too with husband her)
'The woman met only a fiend in the park, not her husband too.'

Studies on Romanian word order, particularly those that address left-periphery phenomena, among which Alboiu (2002), Alboiu (2004), Motapanyane (2000), attest both possibilities, but, to the extent of our knowledge, no experimental studies have been conducted on Romanian to check which strategy (fronting or word-order preservation) is preferred by speakers. Another factor that might, theoretically, influence the position occupied by focused constituents is the presence of the so-called focus particles, i.e. lexical items that trigger stress on their associate, whole additional features

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could be expected to lead towards the preference for a left-periphery position. In this case as well there is no experimental evidence showing this to be true.

2. Theoretical background

Approaches to focus generally fall into three categories: primarily syntactic (Cinque 1990, Kiss 1998), primarily semantic/pragmatic (Rooth 1996, Krifka 2006) and primarily phonological (Reinhart 1995, Büring 2003). Accordingly, the notion of focus receives different interpretations in different fields: semantic interpretation (novel information), phonological interpretation (prosodic stress) also syntactic interpretation (item carrying a feature [Foc]).

Depending on the primary focus of the analysis, several classifications have been proposed for focus: informational and identificational (Kiss 1998) or contrastive and presentational (Drubig 2000); in semantics/pragmatics focus is either taken to mean *new* as opposed to *given* information or it is taken to represent the associate of focus sensitive expressions such as focus particles which may not necessarily represent new information (Beaver and Clark 2008).

Focus sensitive particles (FP): A word is focus sensitive if its semantics involves essential reference to the information structure of the sentence containing it (Aloni, Beaver and Clark 1999).

- FPs: *only*, *even*, *too*, *also*, *always*, *usually*, *never*, *because*, generics, negations, questions and counterfactual conditionals; *doar*, *numai*, *chiar și*, *și*
- dependency between scope-restriction partition and stress (prosodic prominence) in prosodic languages e.g. English, Romanian (intonational focus)

Studies on Romance languages, such as Cinque (1990), Rizzi (1997), have proposed that the left periphery contains dedicated projections encoding discourse relations such as focus and topic. Under these analyses, contrastively focused constituents move to the specifier of a dedicated functional projection in the left periphery.

(2) ForceP > TopP > FocP > TopP* > FinP >IP

Analysing the position of the subject in Italian, Beletti (2004) proposes that both the CP and the VP periphery host Focus and Topic positions. The VP periphery mirrors the CP periphery.

(3) ……..[$_{\text{TopP}}$ Top [$_{\text{Foc}}$ Foc [$_{\text{Top}}$ Top ……VP]]]

The lower FocP position hosts infomational focus. Postverbal focalized subjects are taken to occupy the lower Spec FocP position.

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3. Focus in Romanian

Romanian is a prosodic language, marking focus by pitch stress. Stress is assigned to the most deeply embedded element in the VP.

(4) Ce ai făcut azi? ("What have you done today?")
M-am întâlnit cu Ioana [în PARC]
refl-have.1SG met with Ioana in park
'I met Ioana in the park.'/'I went got together with Ioana in the park'

So in a wide-focus question like (4) stress will fall on the complement of the PP *parc*.

Furthermore, Romanian is not a discourse configurational language (discourse relations are not associated with a specific position in the syntactic structure, so it will allow for focus in situ for narrowly focussed constituents.

(5) Cu cine te-ai întâlnit în parc? ("Who did you meet in the park?")
a. M-am întâlnit [cu IOANA] în parc
b. M-am întâlnit în parc [cu IOANA]

In order to ensure prosodic prominence to narrow information focus phrases (answers to wh- questions) Romanian employs distressing strategies: scrambling (5b) or local deaccentuation (5a) as suggested by Winkler and Gobbel 2002).

Costa and Kula (2008) propose that, in a free word order languages like Spanish, syntax generates more than one possible output. At the syntax-phonology interface where discourse relations are taken to be established, PF will decide which order will be spelled-out according to the prosodic properties of the language. Given that Romanian is usually taken to be a free word order language and if we assume that the right edge of the prosodic phrase is prominent in Romanian just like in Spanish, we would expect both word orders above to be possible in Romanian.

Contrastive focus is generally taken to have the semantic effect of inducing a set of contextual alternatives, while restricting this set to the entity it is assigned to, i.e. it carries an existential presupposition with respect to alternatives to the focused term. There needs to be an expressed or implied alternative antecedent proposition introducing an alternative to the contrastively focused constituent

(6) A: L-am văzut pe Marius în parc sâmbăta trecută.
B: Nu, pe PAUL l-ai văzut în parc sâmbăta trecută.
'I saw Marius in the park last Saturday.'
'No, it was Paul that you saw in the park last Saturday.'

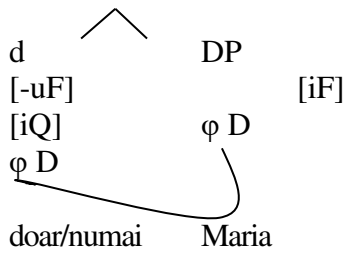
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Assuming the type of semantics for focus provided by Alternative semantics (Rooth 1996, Beaver and Clark 2008) whereby the interpretation of a sentence containing a focused constituent is given by the set of propositions generated by replacing the focus with a variable which is then assigned a value (the focus) from a contextually retrievable set of possible values, contrast seems to be a particular case where the discarded alternative is specifically indicated.

As far as the syntax of contrastive focus in Romanian is concerned, Alboiu (2002, 2004) argues that contrastively focused constituents carry an [uF] that gets valued at Spell-Out by the PF component feature and further values a [uF] feature of a [Foc] operator located in the CP periphery by Agree. Motapanyane (2000) claims that the [F] feature combines with the semantically related formal features [+ wh] and [T] giving rise to two types of binary features: (i) [focus/wh] (English); (ii) [focus/tense] (Romanian). Contrastively focused elements move to Spec TP overtly if T is strong and covertly if T is weak.

Analysing the syntactic behaviour of focus particles, Sava (2014) proposes that focus particles are a-categorial functional items (Bayer 1996) which carry two semantic features, a valued interpretable [Q] feature and an unvalued uninterpretable [F] feature; particles select for a constituent bearing a valued [F] feature. (association with focus is syntactically motivated)

7) dP [iQ] [iF] φ D



The analysis proposed takes apparently *in situ* focus particles to be structurally in a vP periphery position. Evidence to suggest focus movement of the focus particle to a functional vP periphery Romanian is not readily available, since Romanian allows for a relatively free order of post-verbal constituents, motivated by prosodic properties associated with discourse properties of the constituents undergoing scrambling. The theoretical arguments are that the *doar/numai* XP constituent undergoes movement to value an [-uF] feature hosted in the vP periphery. Empirical arguments include weak crossover and parasitic gap effects. According to Nissenbaum (1998), parasitic gaps are dependent on overt A-bar movement:

(8) a. *Who kept [how many papers]$_i$ without reading e$_i$?
b. [How many papers]$_i$ did you kept without reading e$_i$?

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(9) a. *Părinţii lui_i au citit poveşti doar COPILULUI$_i$.
parents.def his_i have.3pl.aux read stories only child.def.Dat_i
‘* It is to the $child_i$ that his_i parents read stories.’
b. Părinţii lui_i au citit poveşti copilului$_i$.
‘His mother read stories to the child’

(10) ? A împrumutat [numai CĂRŢI]$_i$ fără să citească e_i.
has.3.sg.aux borrowed only books without subj. read
‘He borrowed only books without reading’

The *doar*/*numai* XP constituent is, thus, analysed as a quantificational element undergoing A-bar movement to the vP periphery.

Another piece of evidence comes from NPI licensing. Linebarger (1987) argues that an NPI will be licensed in the scope of negation only if at LF no other quantifier intervenes.

(11)a. * Nu am văzut [doar COPIII] încă.
not have.1.sg.aux seen only children.def yet
b. * Nu am văzut încă [doar COPIII].
not have.1.sg.aux seen yet only children.def
‘*I haven’t seen only the children yet’
c. [Doar COPIII] nu i-am văzut încă.
only children.def not 3.pl.Acc.cl-have.1.sg.aux seen yet
‘It’s only the children that I haven’t seen yet’

As shown by examples (11a) and (11b) show, the post-verbal position of the focus particle blocks the licensing of the NPI *încă*.

Movement to the left periphery is assumed to be triggered by an [-uF] feature present in a periphery position. The target position of this movement is the specifier of a syncretic T, exhibiting a strong adjacency requirement (as opposed to Italian, in Romanian no intervening Topics are allowed and there exist co-occurrence restrictions for other operators).

(12)a. Mama [doar pe MARIA$_i$] a certat-o t_i.
mother only PE-Acc Maria have.3sg.Aux scolded-3sg.fem.Acc.Cl
b. * [Doar pe MARIA$_i$] mama a certat-o t_i.
only PE-Acc Maria have.3sg.Aux scolded-3sg.fem.Acc.Cl mother
‘Mother scolded only Maria’
c. *Doar JUCĂRII de la cine vor t_i copiii t_v t_i?
only toys from whom want.3.pl.pres.ind. children.def. tv ti
‘From whom do children want only toys’
d. *Doar JUCĂRII cineva vrea t_i t_v t_i

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only toys somebody want.3.sg.pres.ind. t_i t_v t_i
'Somebody wants only toys'

The left-periphery contrastively focused constituents exhibit A-bar properties
A) weak cross-over effects

(13) *Doar COPILULUI$_i$ au citit părinţii lui$_i$ poveşti.
only child.def.Dat$_i$ have.3pl.aux read parents.def his$_i$ stories
'* It is to the child$_i$ that his$_i$ parents read stories.'

B) parasitic gaps

(14) Doar DRAGOSTE$_i$ am dat fără să primesc e_i
only love$_i$ have.1.sg.aux. given without SUBJ. receive e_i
'It's only love that I gave without receiving.'

The proposed analysis is that constituents headed by restrictive particles undergo movement to the left periphery to check an unvalued [uF] feature located in the left periphery. Movement to the left-periphery of restrictives and their associates is an operator-type movement and gives rise to A-bar effects such as weak cross-over and parasitic gap licensing, as shown in the exampled above.

An alternative solution would be to propose uniform movement to the left periphery, with covert movement of post-verbal focus particles. Counter evidence for this proposal comes from the behaviour of negation.

(15)a. Nu l-am felicitat doar pe MARIUS.
not cl.3masc.sg have.1sg congratulated only prep.Acc Marius
'I haven't congratulated only Marius'
b. Doar pe Marius nu l-am felicitat.
only prep.Acc Marius not cl.3masc.sg have.1sg congratulated
'It's only Marius that I haven't congratulated'

As the examples show, the focus particle lower that negation limits the scope of negation while the focus particle in a position higher than negation lacks this effect

4. The experiment

The procedure: the participants in the experiment (20 informants aged 15-70) were presented with a set of 12 pictures and short descriptions of these pictures. They were asked to correct the description if it did not correspond to what they

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saw in the picture. The informants were asked to use full sentences only. Some of the descriptions contained an ‘incorrect’ sentence (not matching the picture) for which informants were expected to provide an alternative and some of them contained filler items. Some of the incorrect descriptions were created so as to elicit the use of a focus particle, the informants being expected to correct the sentence using the particles *doar*, *numai*, *decât* (*only*). The word order of the post-verbal constituents was varied, with the constituent to be replaced occupying both final and non-final position.

Example:

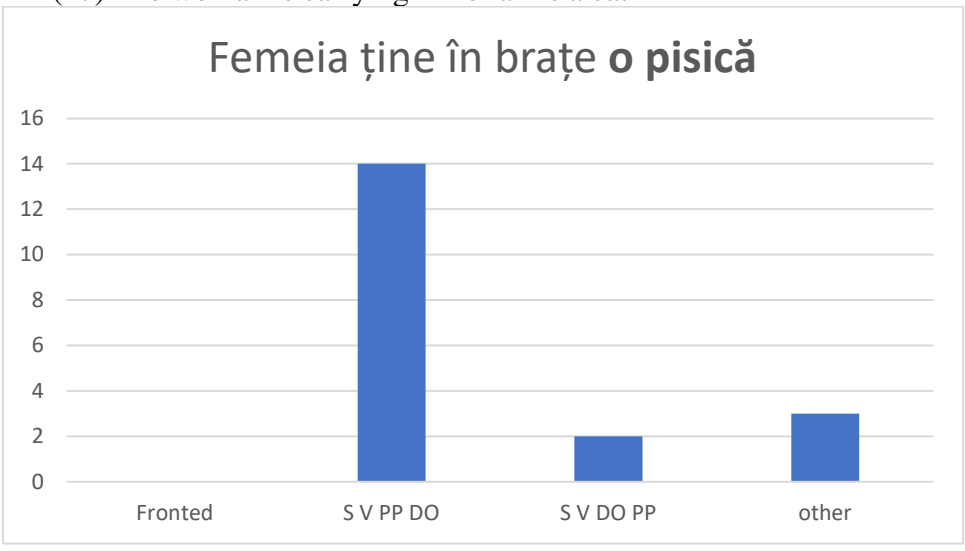
(16) Femeile stau în casă de vorbă.



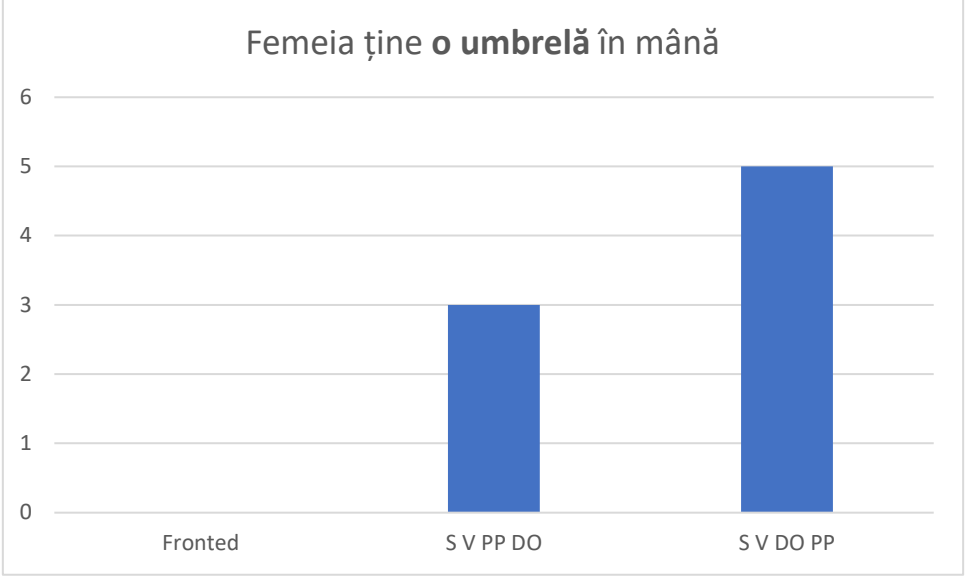
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The results of the experiments are presented in the graphs below.

(17) The woman is carrying in her arms a cat

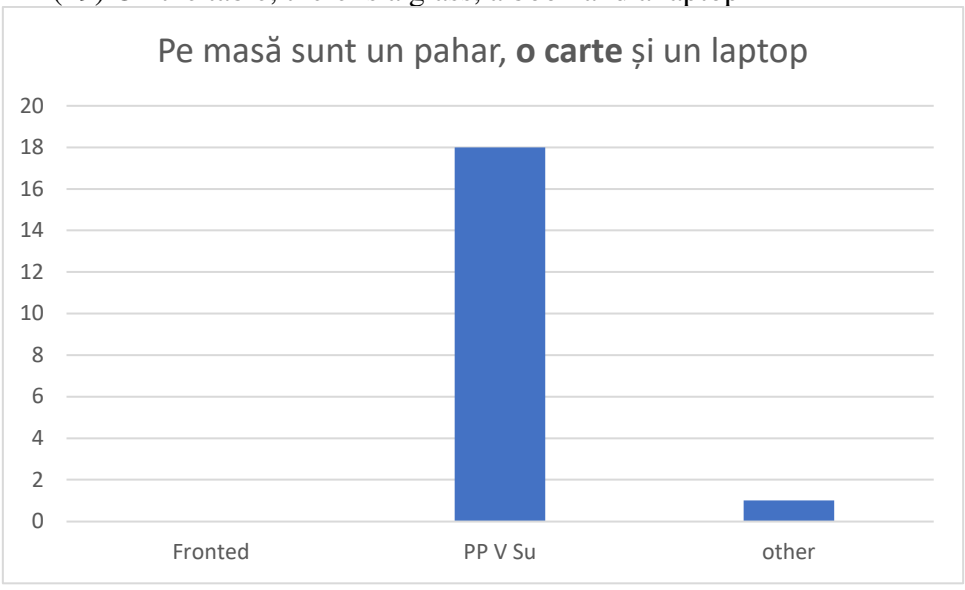


(18) The woman is holding an umbrella in her hand

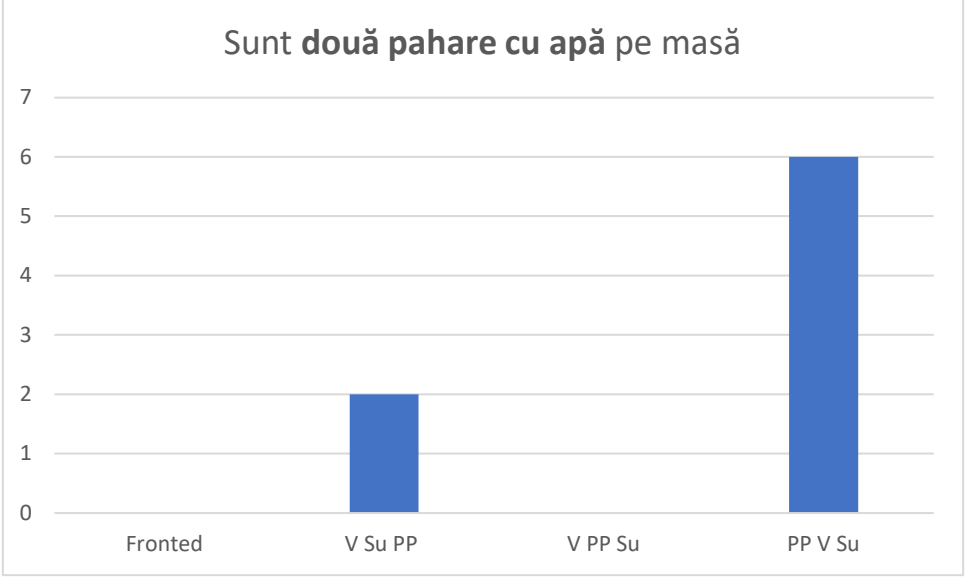


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(19) On the table, there is a glass, a book and a laptop

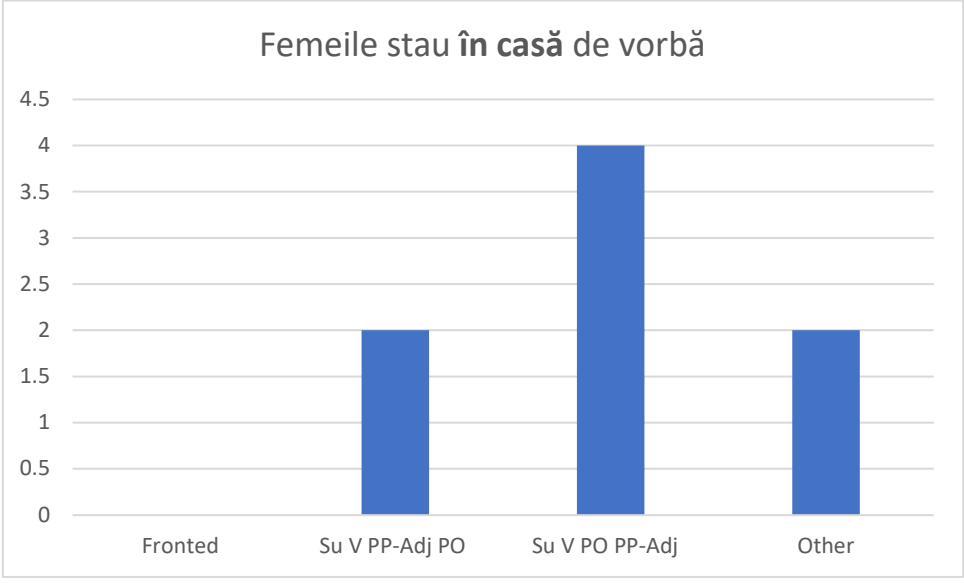


(20) There are two glasses of water on the table

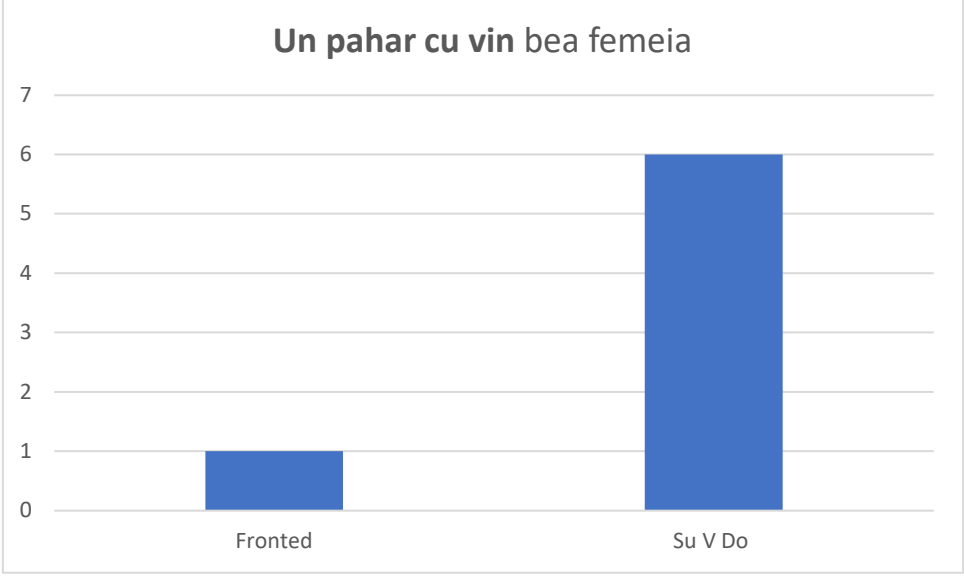


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(21) The women are in the house talking



(22) It’s a glass of wine that the woman drinks.



5. Conclusions

The results of the experiment have shown that none of the answers provided by the participants contained fronted contrastively focused constituents. Instead, contrastively focused constituents tend to occupy a sentence-final position, both scrambling and local deaccentuation being employed as a

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strategy in case the focused constituent does not carry nuclear scope. Furthermore, the presence of a focus-sensitive particle (*doar*, *numai – only*) did not affect the position occupied by the contrastively focused constituent.

The experimental evidence seems to indicate that movement to the left periphery has a different motivation, perhaps phonological, having to do, more generally, with information structure partitioning.

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