ON THE INTERPRETATION OF FOCUS FRONTING IN ROMANIAN

Ion Giurgea[*]

Abstract: I discuss the semantics of a sub-type of focus fronting in Romanian, which is neither associated to focal particles nor mirative or exclamative. I show that this type is not "contrastive" in the sense of involving a closed set of contextually identifiable alternatives, as has been claimed in previous studies, and does not necessarily have a corrective import. The conditions this type is subject to are: (i) the fronted constituent is a true focus (in the sense of an element introducing alternatives in the interpretation, see Rooth 1992, Krifka 2008) and not just new information; (ii) an exhaustivity presupposition or implicature (described as rejection of all other alternatives) and an existential presupposition (one alternative is true) are introduced, in a way similar to English *it*-clefts, as discussed by Büring and Križ (2013). I further present some differences with respect to English clefts. Finally, I discuss the status of the negation that precedes a fronted focus, arguing for a sentential negation analysis.

Keywords: focus, fronting, exhaustivity, Romanian, negation

1. Introduction[1]

A widespread claim in the literature on focus fronting in Romance languages is that being a narrow focus is not a sufficient condition for focus fronting. First, it has been claimed that the fronted focus is not just "information focus", but must be "contrastive" – see Benincà et al. (1988), Rizzi (1997), Frascarelli (2000), Belletti (2004), Cruschina (2011), a.o. for Italian, Zubizarreta (1998, 1999), López (2009) for Spanish, Göbbel (1998), É. Kiss (1998), Motapanyane (1998), Alboiu (2002) for Romanian; contrastivity has been further narrowed down to corrective import (Bianchi and Bocci 2012, Bianchi 2013 for Italian, Costa and Martins 2011 for European Portuguese). More recently, a second sub-type of focus fronting has been recognized, the so-called "mirative" focus (see Cruschina 2011, Bianchi et al. 2015, 2016 for Italian, Giurgea 2015a, b, Cruschina et al. 2015 for Romanian): in this case, the rest of the clause is not necessarily given, and no contextually salient alternatives are required; the fronted constituent that bears focus stress is surprising, unexpected, or affectively marked; the focus marks the sentence as surprising in a likelihood scale provided by focal alternatives, or undesirable, in a bouletic scale provided by focal alternatives. Furthermore, as shown by Giurgea (2015a, b), Cruschina et al. (2015), Giurgea and Remberger (2016), mirative focus must be distinguished from a type of focus fronting used to mark a special type of exclamative sentences, which was called 'exclamative focus fronting' (mirative focus fronting is not used to mark illocutionary force, and can be found in declaratives as well as interrogatives)[2].

[*] The "Iorgu Iordan – Alexandru Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, giurgea ion@yahoo.com.

[1] This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0372.

[2] The so-called "evaluative focus fronting" proposed for Portuguese by Ambar (1999) qualifies as exclamative focus fronting, see Martins (2012), Costa and Martins (2011).

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

In Romanian, we can distinguish four types of focus fronting (FF):

(i) FF with focal particles. Here, the type of focus is indicated by the focal particle: *şi* 'also' – additive, *doar*, *numai* 'only' – exclusive, *chiar* 'even' – scalar:

(1) Şi pe MARIA am anunţat-o
also OBJ Maria have.1 informed-CL.ACC
'I also informed Maria'

(ii) mirative FF, in which the fronted constituent indicates something surprising, unusual, subject to various affective attitudes, without requiring salient focal alternatives:

(2) O MIE de LEI am dat pe aparatul ăsta!
a thousand of lei have.1 given on device-DEF this
'I paid a thousand lei for this device!'

(iii) exclamative FF, characterized by fronting of a scalar element, which, in the case of nominals, must be placed at the beginning of the noun phrase/DP; such sentences qualify as exclamative by virtue of introducing presupposed content:

(3) FRUMOASĂ casă i-a făcut!
beautiful house CL.3SG.DAT-has made
'Is it nice, the house he built her!'

(iv) The forth type, which has been described as "contrastive" in the literature, can be for now negatively defined as involving no focal particle, no mirative or exclamative import. Pending for a precise characterization, I will refer to this type as "plain FF":

(4) Pe MARIA am anunţat- o
OBJ Maria have.1 announced-CL.ACC
'MARIA, I informed.'

It is this fourth type I will discuss in this article. I will argue that plain FF is *not* required to be "contrastive" if "contrastive" is defined as involving a **closed** set of **contextually identifiable** alternatives. The minimal requirement of plain FF is that the fronted constituent is indeed **a narrow focus** and **not just new information** (for the distinction between Focus and New Information, see section 2). In addition to this, plain FF appears to be associated with exhaustivity (rejection of any focal alternative not entailed by the clause) and with an existential presupposition (more precisely, the presupposition that one alternative is true), resembling the English cleft construction (which does not exist in Romanian).

2. On the distinction between Focus and New

The idea that special conditions are required for FF has often been formulated in a context where 'focus' in general, or at least a sub-type of it, is defined as new information, as the opposite of 'given'. It is true that if a constituent represents new

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

information, even if it is the only new part of a sentence, this does not suffice for FF, as can be seen in the following example:

(5) Am fost ieri la munte. # CU MAŞINA ne-am dus.
have.1SG been yesterday to mountain with car REFL.1PL-have.1SG went
'We went yesterday to the mountains. # By CAR we went.'

FF here becomes acceptable if the issue of the way of travelling is made salient, as in the case the interlocutor intervenes after the first sentence in (5) in the following way:

(6) A: Aţi fost cu trenul? / Probabil aţi luat trenul.
have.2PL been with train- DEF probably have.2PL taken train-DEF
'Did you go by train? / You probably went by train.'
B: Cu MAŞINA ne- am dus.
with car REFL.1PL-have.1SG went
'We went by CAR / It's by car that we went.'

The difference between (5) and (6) suggests that the notion of "focus" involved in FF is the one proposed by Rooth (1992) and defended by Krifka (2008), namely, an element that introduces alternatives relevant for interpretation. In (6), the context provides an antecedent for the alternative set "λx. we travelled to the mountains by x".

As focus is manifested by prosody, triggering exceptions to the default prosodic strength rules, and givenness has complementary prosodic effects, triggering deaccentuation, it has been tried to define one of these notions in terms of the other. Schwarzschild (1999) provides a theory which, defining focus in terms of givenness, may also account for the contrast between (5) and (6) – in this system, givenness is evaluated for larger constituents comprising given and F-marked elements, based on the existence of antecedents (defined in a way similar to Rooth 1992); in (5), the whole sentence *We went by car* is not given, because there is no salient antecedent which can imply *∃x.we went by x* (the "F-closure" of *We went [by car]*$_F$); therefore, the whole sentence (the root node) is F-marked; in (6), there is such an antecedent, therefore the entire sentence is given and the root node does not receive F-marking. The constituent [*by car*] thus has a different status in the two sentences; if we define "narrow focus" as F-marked not immediately dominated by an F-marked constituent, it ensues that [*by car*] is a narrow focus in (6) but not in (5) (the special status of F-marked constituents not immediately dominated by an F-marked constituent is recognized by Schwarzschild, who calls them "Foc" and argues that they represent the relevant notion for focus prosody).

More recent studies (Krifka (2006), Féry and Samek-Lodovici (2006), Selkirk (2008), Beaver and Clark (2008), Rochemont (2013, 2016)) have argued that the notions of givenness and (alternative-based) focus are irreducible to each other. A typical instance of divorce between non-given and focus is focus inside given material, indicated by focus-sensitive expressions; if a domain containing a focal particle with an associated focus is repeated, it will be deaccented as given, but the focus is still present for interpretation – the so-called "second occurrence focus" – and also has prosodic effects

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

(its prominence is marked by means of intensity or duration, though not by pitch, due to deaccenting[3]):

(7) A: Mrs. Dálloway [only introduced Ánabel to [Wílliam]$_F$].
B: Even her húsband [only introduced Anabel to [**William**]$_{+G, +F}$]$_{+G}$
(Selkirk 2008, example (14))

(8) A: We were ordered to [only think [good thoughts]$_F$].
B: But we were bóred by [only thinking [**good thoughts**]$_{F, G}$]$_G$.
(Selkirk 2008, example (20c))

If the whole focus structure is not given, a focused element receives full stress even if it satisfies the requirements for givenness.

(9) A: Who did John's mother praise?
B: She praised [HIM]$_F$.
(Schwarzschild 1999, example (11))

(10) Brady taught semantics and ..
a. the students were glad that [BRADY]$_F$ taught semantics].
b. the students were glad that [Brady taught [SEMANTICS]$_F$.
(Beaver and Clark 2008, example (2.31))

Although such elements make good candidates for a combination +F+G, Selkirk (2008), due to lack of deaccenting, claims that for +F elements, a stronger Givenness constraint holds, which requires the whole focus structure to be given[4]. In any case, this idea presupposes that Focus and Given receive independent definition.

"New" means non-given, and is compatible with both presence and absence of Focus. As only Focus and Given receive positive definitions, it is reasonable to view the features F and G as privative, being just absent on non-given or non-focused constituents, respectively (instead of showing −F or −G values). The independence of F and G means that any of the feature combinations [+F +G], [+F], [+G], [] can occur on an element. Selkirk concludes that "new" is not an actual feature, but just represents the absence of the given feature (she claims that "discourse-new is unmarked").

This predicts that no grammatical rule should target a constituent just by virtue of its being discourse-new. A fortiori, it is expected that a constituent cannot be focus-fronted only by virtue of being discourse-new. This prediction is fulfilled in Romanian and other Romance languages. If "new information focus" is another name for "discourse-new" (a traditional view which persisted in the literature on Romance), then it is true that Romanian cannot front a "new information focus". If "contrastive" means just

[3] See the results of a large scale experiment by Beaver et al. (2007). A similar result has been obtained for German by Féry and Ishihara (2009) and Baumann et al. (2010).

[4] Here is her formulation of the constraint, in the definition of Givenness:

(i) (a) An F-marked constituent α will be G-marked iff the phrasal scope f of the focus ~ operator corresponding to it has an antecedent in the discourse for its focus semantic value $[[f]]^f$.
(b) Otherwise, a constituent α will be G-marked if it has an antecedent in the discourse for its ordinary semantic value $[[a]]^o$. (Selkirk 2008: 16)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

that a set of alternatives is involved, then the fact that only contrastive foci front in Romanian is trivially true[5].

But the literature on focus fronting in Romance uses a test for "information focus" that identifies **foci,** and not just new constituents: answer to (unbiased) wh-questions (this test is also used by Alboiu 2002 for what she calls "presentational focus" – a term also used by É. Kiss (1998) and Zubizarreta (1998), which is defined as new information). This is definitely an instance of focus, as the set of alternatives is provided by the question. The claim is that the type of focus involved in answers to yes/no questions is not sufficient to license focus fronting in Romance, but further conditions are required:

(11) a. A GIANNI ho dato il libro (no a Piero) (contrastive)
to Gianni have.1SG given the book not to Piero
(It., Belletti 2004:17)

b. Chi ha parlato? Ha parlato Gianni / # GIANNI ha parlato ('inf. focus')
who has spoken has spoken Gianni Gianni has spoken
(It., Belletti 2004: 21)

(12) Que compró Pedro?
what bought Pedro
Pedro compró manzanas/#MANZANAS compró Pedro
Pedro bought apples apples bought Pedro
(Sp., Zubizarreta 1999)

Alboiu (2002, chapter 3) claims that the same is the case in Romanian. However, we will see in the next section that FF does appear in answers to unbiased questions, in actual speech, but in such cases the answer does not have exactly the same wording as the question. Brunetti (2009) observed, in a corpus research on Italian and Spanish, that FF can appear in answers if the question is implicit (see 13) or does not immediately precede the answer (see 14), and for Spanish she even found an example of direct answer.

(13) A: L'ho sentito alla televisione da uno… ora non mi ricordo come si chiama… 'nsomma…
'I heard it said on TV by a guy… now I don't remember his name…anyway…'

B: [**un politico dei DiEsse**] mi sembra che fosse.
a politician of-the DS me.CL seems that was.3SG
'I think he was a politician of the DS party.'
(It., Brunetti 2009, example (27))

(14) [WOM: Okay, se lui ce li ha sfusi… **Fammi vedere quanti ne servono**.
'Ok, if he has them unpacked… Let me see how many we need.'
AND: Sì.
'OK'

[5] Note also that what has been described as "information focus fronting" by Cruschina (2011) and others must receive a different interpretation.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

WOM: Ma non credo che ce li ha sfusi.
'But I doubt he has them unpacked.'
AND: Questo grigio, dove l'hai preso?
'This grey one, where did you take it from?'
WOM: Dieci, dieci… mah, non mi ricordo, comunque sento. […] Io sento dove vado, intanto dal Celerini, e poi dipende dove devo andare.
'Ten, ten… er, I don't remember; in any case I'll ask. [...] I'll ask wherever I go: first at the Celerini's, and then, depending on the place I have to go.'
Dieci, venti, trenta, quaranta… [**quaranta BIANCHI**] mi servono, all'incirca
'Ten, twenty, thirty, forty… it's forty white ones that I need, roughly.'
(It., Brunetti 2009, example (28))

We will come back in section 7 to the issue of the infelicity of FF in (some cases of) direct full answers.

3. Plain FF is not necessarily contrastive or corrective

É. Kiss (1998) claimed that fronted foci in Romanian are +identificational +contrastive. "Identificational foci" are defined as involving exhaustivity: "[the focus] identifies the subset of a relevant set for which the predicate holds, excluding the complementary subset for which the predicate does not; in other words, it expresses exhaustive identification" (É. Kiss 1998: 267). English *it*-clefts and Hungarian FF are given as examples of identificational foci[6]. In addition, contrastivity means that the focal alternatives are each known to the discourse participants: "[a focus is contrastive] if it operates on a closed set of entities whose members are known to the participants of the discourse" (É. Kiss 1998: 267). This characterization of Romanian FF has been taken over by Alboiu (2002).

Whereas there is evidence for exhaustivity, which will be discussed in the next section, the second condition – "contrastivity" as defined above – is definitely too strong. É. Kiss bases her claim on two examples of an acceptability contrast between answers with and without FF presented in a manuscript version (1996) of Göbbel (1998), with which I disagree[7].

[6] The analysis of Hungarian preverbal foci as "exhaustive" goes back to Szabolcsi (1981).
[7] Here are the examples (with the judgments given by Göbbel, which I do not agree with):
(i) a. A: Am auzit că i- ai invitat pe Ion şi pe Ioana
have.1SG heard that CL.ACC-have.2SG invited PE Ion and PE Ioana
B: Numai pe Ion l- am invitat
only PE Ion CL.ACC have.1SG invited
'A: I heard you invited Ion and Ioana. B: Only Ion I invited.'
(É. Kiss 1998, example (69), from Göbbel 1996)
b. A: Am auzit că ai mulţi musafiri
have.1SG heard that have.2SG many guests
B: # Numai pe Ion l-am
only PE Ion CL.ACC-have.1SG invited
'A: I heard you have many guests. B: Only Ion I invited.'
(É. Kiss 1998, example (70), from Göbbel 1996)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

Examples of FF with open sets of alternatives, where no specific alternatives known to the discourse participants are involved, can often be found in actual speech or in written texts. Here are some attested examples:

(15) Atâta timp cât ştia că piesa îi aparţine, că **pentru ea** o
as long as knew.3SG that play-DEF 3SG.DAT belongs that for her it
scriu şi **pentru ea** o păstrez, era neglijentă până la indiferenţă.
write.1SG and for her it keep.1SG was.3SG neglectful.FSG until indifference
'As long as she knew that the play belonged to her, that it was for her that I was writing it and keeping it, she was neglectful up to indifference'
(Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 81)

(16) [context: conversation on the phone:
LDJ: Putem să venim măcar la cinci şi-un sfert?
'Can we come at least at a quarter past five?'
SS: la cinci şi-un sfert ↓ da da .. Sigur. Acuma să-ţi spun adresa.
'At a quarter past five, yes.. Sure. Now let me tell you the address.']
LDJ: Acum ⊥ Exact. **ASta** voiam să-ntreb.
now exactly this wanted.1SG SĂ-ask.1SG
'Now… right. That's what I wanted to ask.'
(CORV 210)

(17) A: eram coPIL pă timpu ăla. Da mai erau ŞI fete mai mari.
'I was a child at that time. But there were older girls too.'
B: despre CÂŢI ani vorbim?
about how-many years talk-1PL
'What age are we talking about?'
A: e:: **şapte opt ani** aveam↓
eh seven eight years had.1SG
'I was seven or eight'
(ROVA 70)

(18) [context: Actul III, de care am încercat să mă apropiu, este cu totul inform. De atîtea zile, nici o idee nouă. Şi soarele nu mai vine. 'The third act, which I tried to approach, is totally unformed. For so many days, no new idea. And the sun still doesn't come out']
Încep să cred că **din cauza lui** îmi merge aşa de prost.
start.1SG SĂ believe.1SG that from cause-DEF its me.DAT goes so badly
'I start to believe that it's because of it that things are going so badly for me.'
(Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 75)

(ii) Cine vinde cazane?
who sells cauldrons
a. Ţiganii vând cazane: OK "only if a salient set of alternatives is present in the minds of both the speaker and the hearer"
gypsies-DEF sell cauldrons
b. Cazane vând ţiganii: no such requirement
cauldrons sell gypsies-DEF
(É. Kiss 1998, example 71, from Göbbel 1996)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

(19) [Context: Toată averea asta va rămâne acestui /î: **.** băiat beţivan↓ pe care-l au.
'The whole collection will remain to this .. hard-drinking boy they have.'
CJ: Da↓ 'Yes.' **]**
VJ: Păi **DE-Aia** vrea el să doneze colecţia
INTERJ for that wants he SĂ donates collection-DEF
'You see, that's why he wants to donate the collection'
(CORV 72)

For Italian, Bianchi and Bocci (2012) and Bianchi (2013) argue that focus fronting, when not mirative, has a corrective import (a view also endorsed by Rizzi 1997). In Romanian, fronting does not require that the hearer believes or expects another focal alternative, as the examples above show. Here are some more attested examples which show that FF needs not be corrective; (20)-(21) also show FF in answers to unbiased questions, a case treated as 'information focus' in most work on focus in Romance and predicted to be impossible:

(20) [context: a group of friends plan a trip, looking at offers on the Internet]
B: Şi cât ai zis că e? treizeş..?
'And how much did you say it was? Thirty...'
A: **TreizeşiDOI de euro** e: pe CIN_zile am impresia↑ sau pe
thirty-two of euros is for five days have.1SG impression-DEF or for
patru
four
'It's 32 euros, for 5 days, I think, or for 4'
(ROVA 84)

(21) C: în CE an a fost asta
'What year was this?'
B: (râde) nu mai ştiu.
'(laughing) I don't remember.'
A: CE-I?
'What is it?'
B: nu mai ştiu în ce an a fost.
'I don't remember the year'
C: nu mai ştii în ce a:n?
'You don't remember the year?!'
B: cre_ că **prin două mii patru** o fost.
think.1SG that around two thousands four has been
'I think it was around 2004.'
(ROVA 174)

(22) la sfârşitu lunii vă CHEM NEapărat↑ că dup-atâţia
at end-DEF month-DEF.GEN you$_{polite}$.ACC.PL call.1SG definitely for after so-many
mosafiri, după ce pleacă SOra mea↑ părinţii:↑ **aTUNcea** o să
guests after leaves sister-DEF my parents-DEF then will SĂ
vă chem TANti↓ (ROVA 122)
you$_{polite}$.ACC.PL call.1SG auntie

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

'At the end of the month I'll definitely call you, because after so many guests, after my sister and my parents leave... that's when I'll call you, auntie!'

Likewise, some examples given by Bianchi (2013) as bad for Italian, due to the lack of corrective import, are fine in Romanian:

(23) A: Gianni è andato a Londra?
Gianni is gone to London
'Did Gianni go to London?'
B: #No, a Berlino è andato (non a Londra).
no, to Berlin is gone not to London
'No, to Berlin he went (not to London).'
(It., Bianchi 2013, example (7))

(24) A: Ion s-a dus la Londra?
Ion REFL-has gone to London
B: Nu, la Berlin s-a dus (nu la Londra).
no to Berlin REFL-has gone not to London

4. Plain FF and exhaustivity

The following contrasts suggest that É. Kiss (1998) and Alboiu (2002) were right in treating Romanian plain FF as exhaustive (example (27) reproduces a test based on Szabolcsi 1981, used by É. Kiss 1998):

(25) Pe cine a menţionat?
'Whom did he mention?'
a. L- a menţionat pe Stănescu, apoi şi pe Dimitriu
CL.ACC.SG.M has mentioned PE Stănescu then also PE Dimitriu
'He mentioned Stănescu, and then also Dimitriu.'
b. # Pe STĂNESCU l- a menţionat, apoi şi pe Dimitriu
PE Stănescu CL.ACC.SG.M has mentioned then also PE Dimitriu
'Stănescu he mentioned, then (he) also (mentioned) Dimitriu.'

(26) Unde aţi fost?
'Where have you been?'
a. Am fost la MUNTE, între altele.
have.1 been at mountain among others
'We've been to the mountains, among others.'
b. La MUNTE am fost (#, între altele).
at mountain have.1SG been among others

(27) a. Maria îi urăşte pe Ion şi pe Dumitru |= Maria îl
Maria CL.ACC.PL.M hates PE Ion and PE Dumitru Maria CL.ACC.M urăşte pe Ion
hates PE Ion
'Maria hates Ion and Dumitru' 'Maria hates Ion'

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

b. Pe Ion şi pe DuMItru îi urăşte Maria |≠ Pe ION îl urăşte Maria
PE Ion and PE Dumitru CL.ACC.PL.M hates Maria PE Ion CL.ACC.M hates Maria
'It's Ion and Dumitru that Maria hates' 'It's Ion that Maria hates.'

The test in (28), used by É. Kiss (1998) for Hungarian following a suggestion by Donka Farkas, indicates that a denial can target exhaustivity; note however that in Romanian this type of denial is not perfectly acceptable:

(28) A: O PĂLĂRIE a cumpărat Maria
a hat has bought Maria
'It's a hat that Maria bought.'
B: ?Nu, a cumpărat şi o haină
no, has bought also a coat
'No, she also bought a coat.'

This can be explained by the fact that exhaustivity is not part of the at-issue content of FF. The fact that exhaustivity does not belong to the at-issue content (the asserted content, in declaratives) has been shown for English clefts by Halvorsen (1978), Horn (1981) (see also Büring and Križ 2013, Horn 2016), and this also holds for Romanian plain FF; this distinguishes FF and clefts from focus marked by exclusive focal particles (*only*, Rom. *doar, numai*), where exclusion of other alternatives belongs to the at-issue meaning[8]:

(29) a. #Bob knew she invited Fred, but he didn't know it was Fred she invited.
b. Bob knew she invited Fred, but he didn't know she only invited Fred.
(Büring and Križ 2013, example (2))
#Ion ştia că ea l-a invitat pe Marius, dar nu ştia că #(doar) pe MARIUS l-a invitat
'Ion knew she had invited Marius, but he didn't know {she had invited only Marius / #it was Marius she invited.}' (Rom.)

(30) a. #It wasn't Fred she invited. She also invited Gord.
b. #It wasn't Fred she invited. She invited Fred and Gord.
c. She didn't only invite Fred. She also invited Gord.
d. She didn't only invite Fred. She invited Fred and Gord (ibid.: ex.3)

(30)' a. Nu e adevărat că l- a invitat doar pe Fred.
not is true that CL.ACC.SG.M has invited only PE Fred
L- a invitat şi pe Gord. / I- a invitat pe Fred şi Gord. (Rom.)
CL.ACC.SG.M has invited also PE Gord CL.ACC.PL.M has invited PE Fred and Gord

[8] In the Romanian correspondent of (30), example (30)', I did not use the Neg + FF construction, the closest equivalent of negated clefts, because this construction involves further complications (one might take negation to function as a focal particle attached to the fronted constituent). See section 7 for discussion.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

b. #Nu e adevărat că pe FRED l- a invitat. L- a
not is true that PE Fred CL.ACC.M has invited CL.ACC.M has
invitat şi pe Gord. / I- a invitat pe Fred şi Gord.
invited also PE Gord CL.ACC.PL.M has invited PE Fred and Gord

There is disagreement in the literature on whether exhaustivity in clefts is an implicature or a presupposition: Horn (1981), Declerck (1984, 1988), Zimmerman and Onea (2011), de Veaugh-Geiss et al. (2015) argue it as at most a conversational implicature, being cancelable; Halvorsen (1978) and Collins (1991) considered it as a "conventional implicature", but not in the sense of Potts (2007) – their use of the term also corresponds to what is called "presupposition" in Potts; a presupposition status is argued for by Percus (1997), Büring and Križ (2013).

A prima facie problem for the presupposition view is that exhaustivity is not inferred in interrogative and negative contexts. Büring and Križ (2013) account for this by proposing that the presupposition has a conditional form:

(31) It is *q* that *P*
Presupposition: if *P(q)*, then *q*=*max* (*P*)
(Büring and Križ 2013, example 19)

This has the effect that only affirmative declaratives yield the exhaustivity inference.

Thus, the three sentences in (32) all have the same presupposition:

(32) It was Fred she invited / It wasn't Fred she invited / Was it Fred she invited?
Presupposition: if she invited Fred, she invited no-one else

The authors who endorse a conversational implicature analysis (see Horn 1981, 2016, Zimmerman and Onea 2011, DeVeaugh-Geiss et al. 2015; see also Onea and Beaver 2009 on Hungarian FF) argue that the exhaustivity inference is cancelable. In the absence of any experimental data about cancelability of the exhaustivity inference in Romanian, I will not take a definite stance on this matter. All I can say at this point is that a conversational implicature status seems too weak, as it would make FF indistinguishable from in-situ narrow focus, which does not seem to be the case, as seen in examples such as (25)-(26). Therefore, I will follow Büring and Križ's (2013) analysis here.

The corrective use, which is indeed not uncommon for plain FF in Romanian, can be considered a by-product of exhaustivity: when some other discourse participant has expressed a belief in a different focal alternative, by using FF this alternative is rejected, by virtue of exhaustivity, at the same time with the assertion of the correct alternative.

When the fronted focus is modified by a focal particle, exhaustivity is no longer imposed (contrary to Hungarian, where exhaustivity rules out additive particles, according to É. Kiss)[9]:

[9] For English clefts, É. Kiss claims that the additive focus (*also*-phrase) is "understood to identify a member of a relevant set in addition to one or more members identified previously as such for which the predicate holds, with the rest of the set still excluded":

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

(33) Şi cu ION a vorbit Maria
also with Ion has spoken Maria

Unlike in Hungarian FF and English clefts, in Romanian plain FF universals are allowed:

(34) *It was everybody that Mary invited to her party (É. Kiss 1998, example (20a))[10]

(35) a. Pe TOŢI i- a invitat Maria
PE all-PL.M CL.ACC.M has invited Maria

b. Cu FIECARE am vorbit
with each have.1SG spoken
'I spoke with each of them.'

These examples can have a mirative focus interpretation, but also allow a plain FF interpretation, either corrective or just answering an open question in the context.

This is not problematic if exhaustivity is understood as rejection of all the other (unentailed) alternatives in the contextually restricted set of focal alternatives (see Rooth 1992 on contextual restrictions on focal alternatives, for which he devised the ~ operator); in the case of universals, the alternatives can be of the type "not all x, P(x)", "only a, P(a)", etc. This idea is formalized in (36); the second line says that the at-issue content is the ordinary semantic value; the third line introduces the exhaustivity presupposition, in

---

(i) A: Bill danced with Mary.
B: No, it was Sam that danced with Mary.
C: It was also John that danced with her. → only Sam and John danced with Mary
(É. Kiss 1998: 252, example (18))

A fronted *also*-phrase in Romanian does not lead to this inference (I use the focus on the *with*- phrase, in order to be sure that we are dealing with focus fronting and not with a neutral preverbal S):

(ii) A: Maria a dansat cu Bill.
Maria has danced with Bill
B: Nu, cu Sam a dansat Maria
no with Sam has dansed Maria
C: Şi cu Ion a dansat Maria ⊭> Maria a dansat doar cu Sam şi cu Ion
also with Ion has danced Maria Maria has danced only with Sam and with Ion

[10] The impossibility of using universals in clefts has been noticed by Lees (1963). Declerck (1984) cites cases where this constraint does not apply, but they are *negative* clefts (e.g. *It is not everyone who can do this*), in which the focus is not exhaustive, but just denies one alternative (the one corresponding to the ordinary semantic value). Counterexamples can be found on the Internet, most of them on forums, blogs etc., but also in some books:

(i) Ocelot: I was 270th no nam<e>plate
Cobra Coddie: So it was **everybody** that didn"t get nameplates.
(https://steamcommunity.com/app/...)

(ii) Then, I remembered in my parents' house, it was no persons' duty or responsibility to cook and clean, it was **everybody** that did it
(Derric Moore, *Maa Aankh, Finding God the Afro-American Spiritual Way*; https://books.google.ro/books?isbn=0615299180)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

the form of a definedness condition; C is the contextual set of focal alternatives, included in the focal value of *a*[11]:

(36) Configuration: [$[b]_{\text{Focus}}$ [$\text{Foc}_{\text{exhaust}}$ $[a]_{\text{Background}}$]]] ~C
$\text{Foc}_{\text{exhaust}}$ (⟦*a* ⟧)(⟦b⟧)(C) = (⟦*a*⟧ (⟦b⟧))^0
defined iff ⟦*a*⟧ (⟦b⟧) is a proposition and if ⟦*a*⟧ (⟦b⟧) is true, ∀*p*∈C, if ⟦*a*⟧ (⟦b⟧) does not entail *p*, then *p* is false (first version)

For English clefts, Büring and Križ (2013) use a definition that involves an entity-denotation for the focus expression[12]:

(37) CLEFT = $\lambda P_{et}\, \lambda X_e$: ∀Y ∈P [X⊄ Y] . P(X)
(Büring and Križ 2013: 24)

This explains why clefts allow existentials, but not universals as foci – if the argument of CLEFT is an individual, clefts must be interpreted via QR or Quantifying-in:

(38) It was a friend she invited
(∃x.x a friend) (λx. CLEFT (*λz.she invited z) (x))

If we use a universal, the exhaustivity introduced by the cleft leads to a contradiction for any domain of quantification containing more than one individual.

As shown by É. Kiss (1998) for Hungarian identificational focus and by Büring and Križ (2013) for clefts, the exhaustivity implication is embeddable (it may take scope under an operator in the sentence) – which justifies an analysis as a presupposition, rather than as a conventional implicature (Büring and Križ 2013, using Potts's 2007 tests). The different scope possibilities of the exhaustivity implication with respect to a universal quantifier are illustrated below for Romanian (cf. É.Kiss 1998: 22):

(39) a. Cu MARIA a vrut fiecare băiat să danseze
with Maria has wanted every boy SĂ dances
'It's MARIA everybody wanted to dance with'
→ for all (girls) x≠ Maria, not every boy wanted to dance with x

[11] We could also have attached the Exhaust operator above the entire phrase whose specifier is targeted by plain FF, as Bianchi et al. (2016), Bianchi & Cruschina (2016) do for various sub-types of foci, in which case the lexical entry would be:

(i) $\text{Foc}_{\text{exhaust}}$ (⟦*a* ~C⟧) = ⟦*a*⟧ ^{0}, defined iff ⟦*a*⟧ is a proposition and if ⟦*a*⟧ is true, ∀*b*∈C , if ⟦*a*⟧ does not entail *b*, then *b* is false

[12] However, they later propose an intensional version of CLEFT, which takes generalized quantifiers, for examples such as *It's a new cat that I want*.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

b. Fiecare băiat a vrut cu MARIA să danseze
every boy has wanted with Maria SĂ dances
'Every boy wanted it to be Maria who he would dance with'
→ for every boy x, for all girls y ≠ Maria, x didn't want to dance with y

5. The existential presupposition

It is generally agreed that clefts carry a presupposition of existence – i.e., that there is an (individual-type) value for the variable which replaces the focus constituent for which the proposition is true (cf. Dryer 1996, Rooth 1999). At first look, this does not seem to hold for FF in Romanian, as it allows fronted N-words:

(40) a. Pe NIMENI n- a văzut Maria
PE nobody not has seen Maria
'Maria didn't see ANYBODY'
b. *It's nobody that Mary saw

(41) - I-ai spus cuiva? / Cui i-ai spus?
'Did you tell anybody?' 'Whom did you tell?'
- NIMĂNUI nu i- am spus
nobody.DAT not CL.DAT.M have.1SG told
'I told NOBODY.'

However, in interrogatives, plain FF *does* introduce a presupposition of existence:

(42) Pe MARIA ai chemat- o?
PE Maria have.2SG called- CL.ACC.F
Presupposition: you called somebody
'Is it Mary you called?'

For Italian, Bianchi and Cruschina (2016) claim that in polar questions focus fronting, if not mirative, has the following reading (dubbed "double-checking reading"):

(43) Double-checking import: In every possible world that is compatible with the common ground information shared by the conversational participants (at the relevant point of the conversation), one of the contextually relevant focus alternatives is true (Bianchi and Cruschina 2016: 61).

If all alternatives are affirmative, varying by the individual that occupies the focus position, we derive the presupposition of existence.

Now, in spite of (40)-(41), there are indications that even declaratives carry a presupposition of existence. Consider the following pairs of contrasting sentences, which show that when the interlocutor does not consider false or unlikely the possibility that for no value of the focused part the sentence is true, the use of FF is not felicitous:

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

(44) A: I-a spus lui Ion
'He told Ion'
B: Nu, lui GEORGE i- a spus
no DAT George CL.DAT.M has told
'No, he told GEORGE / It was GEORGE he told'

(45) A: N-a spus nimănui
'He didn't tell anybody'
B: #Nu, lui GEORGE i- a spus (vs. Nu, i- a spus lui George)
no DAT George CL.DAT.M has told not CL.DAT.M has told DAT George
'No, he told GEORGE / #It was GEORGE he told'

(46) Pe cine ai chemat?
PE who have.2SG called
'Whom did you call?'
Pe MARIA am chemat-o
OBJ Maria have.1SG called- CL.ACC

(47) Ai chemat pe cineva?
have.2SG called PE somebody
'Did you call anyone?'
#Pe MARIA am chemat-o
PE Maria have.1SG called- CL.ACC.F

I conclude that there is indeed an existential presupposition in affirmative clauses. In order to cover negative clauses, the presupposition can be formulated as **a requirement that at least one alternative is true**. Assuming that among the focal alternatives of affirmatives there is no member with an N-word in the focus position, the existential presupposition follows. For the use in negative clauses, I assume that the alternatives are of the form {∃x P(x), ¬∃x P(x)} – e.g., for (41) the alternatives are {∃x. I told x; ¬∃x. I told x}. This set of alternatives is immediately triggered by the question *I-ai spus cuiva*? 'Did you tell anybody?', but can also be obtained quite easily from the question *Cui i-ai spus*? 'Whom did you tell?': by uttering this, the speaker expresses her belief that the interlocutor told it to somebody. The answer with fronted 'nobody' is an instance of corrective FF, denying the implicature of the wh-question.

Thus, we must enrich the entry in (36) with a second presupposition:

(48) Configuration: [$[b]_{\text{Focus}}$ [$\text{Foc}_{\text{exhaust}}$ $[a]_{\text{Background}}$**]]]** ~C
$\text{Foc}_{\text{exhaust}}$ (⟦a⟧)(⟦b⟧)(C) = (⟦a⟧ (⟦b⟧))^0
defined iff
(i) ⟦a⟧ (⟦b⟧) is a proposition and if ⟦a⟧ (⟦b⟧) is true, ∀p∈C, if ⟦a⟧ (⟦b⟧) does not entail p, then p is false
(ii) ∃ p∈C such that p is true (final version)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

Here are examples of the presuppositions associated to interrogative and declarative sentences with plain FF:

(49) Pe MARIA ai chemat-o?
PE Maria have.2SG called- CL.ACC.F
At-issue meaning: did you call Maria?
Presupposition1: in case you called Maria, you called only Maria
Presupposition2: you called someone

(50) Pe MARIA a chemat-o.
PE Maria has called- CL.ACC.F
At-issue meaning: he called Maria
Presupposition 1: in case he called Maria, he called only Maria
Presupposition 2: he called someone

To conclude, the semantics of Romanian plain FF is quite similar to that of English *it*-clefts, except for the allowance of universal quantifiers and N-words. This similarity of meaning may be correlated with the fact that Romanian lacks *it*-clefts: the function of clefts in languages such as English is performed by plain FF in Romanian. In case Italian FF is indeed more restricted than Romanian FF (see section 3 above), this may again be correlated with the fact that Italian, in addition to FF, does possess *it*-clefts.

Regarding the similarities between Romanian plain FF and clefts, we must notice that this actually concerns just one type of clefts, the so-called "contrastive" (Declerck 1984) or "stressed-focus clefts" (Prince 1978). English also has clefts where the relative CP is not destressed, e.g. *A: Do you know Brian's book? B: It was Brian's book that got me interested in clefts* (DeVeaugh et al. 2015: fn. 1) – the so-called *informative presupposition-clefts* (Prince 1978; this covers two types in Declerck's classification: *unstressed-anaphoric-focus clefts*, with given 'Focus' and new CP – e.g. *it is to that evidence that we must now turn* – and *discontinuous clefts*, with new "Focus" and new CP – e.g. *It was just about 50 years ago that Henry Ford gave us the weekend*). Such cases do not have a focus fronting correspondent in Romanian, as focus fronting is always associated with destressing of the rest of the clause.

6. Note on focus fronting in answers

Although some examples of focus fronting in answers can be found (see (17), (20), (21)), it is true that this order is not always fully natural (see also Alboiu 2002, chapter 3):

(51) Pe care o alegi?
PE which CL.ACC.F choose.2SG
'Which one do you choose?'
a. O aleg pe cea verde
CL.ACC.F choose.1SG PE the.SG.F green

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

b. ?#Pe cea verde o aleg
PE the.SG.F green CL.ACC.F choose.1SG
'I choose the green one.'

(52) Cine a venit?
who has come
A venit poştaşul / ?# Poştaşul a venit
has come mailman-DEF mailman-DEF has come
'Who came? The mailman came.'

Note however that this type of tests is problematic because the most natural answer in such cases is the short (elliptical) one. In attested examples, full answers are very hard to find, except if the answer does not reproduce the words of the question exactly – see (17), (20), (21) above.

Brunetti (2004) claims that fronted foci are hard to find in Italian in answers because the relevant structure is correlated with the ellipsis of the background, yielding exactly the short answers that are the **most natural** way of answering a constituent question (for the fact that ellipsis is involved in short answers, she cites the copious argumentation in Merchant 2004; assuming that deletion must target constituents, she concludes that focus fronting is a preliminary step):

(53) Che cosa ha vinto Gianni? La maglietta [~~ha vinto Gianni~~]
what has won Gianni the T-shirt has won Gianni
'What did Gianni win? The T-shirt.'

(Brunetti 2004: 100, examples (15)-(16))

Brunetti (2004:113) proposes that the background in these cases must be deleted because it is *the same as the background of the antecedent sentence* – assuming that wh-questions have the wh-item as Focus. As evidence for this requirement, she cites the following contrast, which shows that with corrective focus, ellipsis of the background is strongly preferred if the corrected part is the Focus of the corrected sentence, whereas it is infelicitous if it is part of the background:

(54) a. A: Gianni ha vinto [la felpa]$_F$.
Gianni has won the sweatshirt
'Gianni won the SWEATSHIRT.'
B: No, [la maglietta]$_F$ (??ha vinto Gianni)
no the T-shirt has won Gianni
'No, the T-SHIRT (# Gianni won).'

b. A: La felpa, l' ha vinta [Gianni]$_F$.
the sweatshirt CL.ACC has won Gianni
'The sweatshirt, GIANNI won.'
B: # No, [la maglietta]$_F$.
no the T-shirt
#'No, the T-shirt.'

(Brunetti 2004:114, example (59))

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

My judgments for Romanian fully agree only for the b example; in a, repetition of the verb seems unproblematic (the subject is preferably realized as *pro*, due to the high level of accessibility):

(55) a. A: Ion a câştigat [treningul]$_F$.
Ion has won sweatshirt-DEF
B.: Nu, [maioul]$_F$ (l- a câştigat (?Ion)).
no T-shirt-DEF CL has won Ion
b. A: Treningul, l- a câştigat [Ion]$_F$.
sweatshirt-DEF CL has won Ion
B: # Nu, maioul.
no T-shirt-DEF

As we have seen in section 2, Brunetti (2004, 2009) showed that FF may appear in answers in Italian, if the question is implicit or does not immediately precede the answer. This follows from the fact that in such cases the background is not so salient as to trigger ellipsis, yielding a short answer. Here are some more examples, from Brunetti (2004):

(56) Sai, l' ho scoperto: [uno studente]$_F$ aveva rubato quel libro.
know.2SG CL have.1SG found-out a student had stolen that book
'You know, I found it out: a student stole that book'
(Brunetti 2004: 121, example (81))

(57) Ora ricordo: [una sciarpa rossa]$_F$ mi ha regalato Luigi per Natale.
now remember.1SG a scarf red me.DAT has given Luigi for Christmas
'Now I remember: Luigi gave me a red scarf for Christmas'
(Brunetti 2004: 121, example (82))

Since the natural way of answering involves deletion of the material which is repeated from an immediately preceding question, it is likely that, when asked to provide full answers, speakers tend to choose a neuter order, with focus only prosodically marked. Note indeed that *A venit poştaşul* 'The mailman came' in (52) has VS also in out-of-the-blue contexts. If S is questioned in a sentence with an overt object, where SVO orders are the most frequent (and are also allowed out-of-the-blue), the most natural answer would be SVO, with focus first (if we allow pronominalization of O, we get both VS and SV as acceptable orders):

(58) Cine a mâncat mandarina?
who has eaten tangerine-DEF
'Who ate the tangerine?'
a. ION a mâncat mandarina
Ion has eaten tangerine-DEF
b. ?# A mâncat ION mandarina
has eaten Ion tangerine-DEF
c. ?# A mâncat mandarina ION
has eaten tangerine-DEF Ion

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

d. A mâncat-o ION / ION a mâncat-o
has eaten it Ion Ion has eaten it

I conclude that the test of question/answer pairs does not reveal the true nature of plain FF, because the requirement of providing a full answer distorts the natural use of language from the very beginning. In order to understand the interpretation of FF, it is better to look at attested examples. As we have seen in section 3, such examples clearly show that FF can be used to provide an answer to an open question in the discourse, without any corrective import or choice between mutually known alternatives.

7. Focus fronting and negation

As in our discussion in sections 4-5 we mentioned negative clefts, a few words are in order about the correspondents of such sentences in Romanian.

Negative clefts involve focus-associated negation, which is used to remove an alternative from the set of focus alternatives, while keeping the presupposition that one alternative is true:

(59) It's not Mary I saw.
Presupposition: I saw somebody.

In Romanian, sentential negation is a functional head, which must be adjacent to the clitic+verb complex. Sentential negation can be associated to focus, like a focal particle, denying a focal alternative:

(60) **N**-am vorbit [**cu Maria**]$_{Foc}$ (ci cu Lucia)
not-have.1SG spoken with Maria but with Lucia
'I didn't talk to Maria (but to Lucia) / It's not Maria I talked to (but Lucia)'

With this interpretation, the negation can be separated from the verb by a fronted focus, interpreted as the focus negation is associated with:

(61) Nu cu Maria am vorbit (ci cu Lucia)
not with Maria have.1SG spoken but with Lucia
'It's not Maria I talked to (but Lucia)'

Given that otherwise negation must be adjacent to the verbal complex, one may consider that in such cases we have to deal with constituent negation, which directly combines with the focus constituent (see 0a), like focal particles (in Romanian focal particles are always adjacent to the associated focus, except for the use of negation in (60), if this is considered to be a focal particle). A second possibility is that there is a

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

variety of sentential negation (a clausal functional head) which takes a FocP as its complement (see 62b)[13]:

(62) a. [$_{FocP}$ [$_{PP}$ nu [$_{PP}$ cu Maria]] [Foc^0 [$_{IP}$ am vorbit]]]
b. [$_{NegP}$ nu [$_{FocP}$ [cu Maria] [Foc^0 [$_{IP}$ am vorbit]]]]

At first sight, the analysis in (62a) is problematic because this negation, unlike sentential negation, does not license N-words:

(63) *Nu cu Maria am vorbit nimic
not with Maria have.1SG spoken nothing/anything

However, one can reply that on top of the IP in (62b) there is a covert head marking **positive** polarity (cf. Laka's 1990 S head), which blocks the licensing of the N-word. Indeed, the IP can also be headed by sentential negation in this configuration:

(64) Nu cu Maria **n-** am vorbit nimic
not with Maria not have.1SG spoken nothing/anything
'It's not Maria that I didn't speak about anything with.'
(65) [$_{Neg1/Neg\text{-}FocP}$ nu [$_{Foc}$ cu Maria [$_{Neg2/\Sigma P}$ n-am vorbit nimic]]]

In the following, I will use the label "IP" for the phrase headed by the whole verbal complex / the highest head in the complex, including polarity. Note indeed that FF can occur before the highest element of the verbal complex, the subjunctive mood particle *să*, which is anyway higher than negation; the exact labeling of the components of the verbal complex is irrelevant here:

(66) a. Nu mie **să**-mi mulţumeşti, ci...
not me.DAT SĂ me.DAT.CL thank-2.SG but
'It's not me that you should thank, but...' ('Don't thank ME, but...')
b. Nu de mine **să nu** vă apropiaţi, ci de Ştefan, că el e răcit
not of me SĂ not REFL approach.2PL but of Ştefan for he is cooled
'It's not me you shouldn't come close to, but Ştefan, he's the one who has the flu.'

I will now turn to facts that are problematic for the constituent negation analysis in (62a). As constituents modified by focal particles generally have the same distribution as the corresponding constituents without the focal particle, (62a) predicts that the string Neg + Focus can occur anywhere in the clause. But this is not the case: when postverbal, the string *nu* + Foc cannot freely appear, but **requires an overt "replacive"** – by replacive, I refer to the element that indicates which focal alternative is true:

[13] I notated the head whose specifier is occupied by the fronted focus with the label Foc for convenience; the analyses I discuss are compatible with a view in which this head is a multifunctional head F (e.g. Fin) which can be endowed with a focus-attracting feature: in this case, we may say, for (62b), that Neg selects F_{+Foc}.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

(67) *Am vorbit nu cu Maria.
have.1SG spoken not with Maria

(68) a. Am vorbit **cu Lucia**, nu cu Maria.
have.1SG spoken with Lucia not with Maria
b. **Cu Lucia** am vorbit, nu cu Maria.
with Lucia have.1SG spoken not with Maria
'I talked to Lucia, not to Maria.'

If the replacive follows Neg + Focus, it must be introduced by the replacive conjunction *ci*[14]:

(69) Am vorbit nu cu Maria, **ci cu Lucia**.
have.1SG spoken not with Maria but$_{replacive}$ with Lucia
'I talked not to Maria, but to Lucia.'

(70) Nu cu Maria, **ci cu Lucia** am vorbit.
not with Maria but$_{replacive}$ with Lucia have.1SG spoken
'It's not Maria I talked to, but Lucia.'

Note moreover that there exist instances of a truly constituent negation, not associated with focus, but restricted to certain types of constituents – degree phrases, quantitatives, scalar adverbs and manner PPs; in such cases, we do not find the distributional constraints shown by Neg + Foc strings:

(71) a. Am vorbit cu ea [nu [mult]] după aceea
have.1SG spoken with her not much after that
'I talked to her not long after that.'

[14] *ci*, traditionally included among adversative conjunctions, is a replacive particle, as it requires a clause (or fragment) with focus-associated negation as the first conjunct, and introduces the correct alternative (as the second conjunct):

(i) Ion zice că le ştie pe toate, {dar /totuşi /*ci} a întrebat-o pe Rodica
Ion says that them knows PE all-F.PL but /however /*ci* has asked-CL.ACC.F PE Rodica
'Ion says he knows everything, but he asked Rodica.'

(ii) a. Ion n-a vorbit cu MARIA, ci a vorbit cu RODICA
Ion not-has spoken with Maria but has spoken with Rodica
b. Ion n-a vorbit cu MARIA, ci cu RODICA a vorbit
Ion not-has spoken with Maria but with Rodica has spoken
c. Ion nu cu MARIA a vorbit, ci a vorbit cu RODICA
Ion not with Maria has spoken but has spoken with Rodica
d. Ion nu cu MARIA a vorbit, ci cu RODICA a vorbit
Ion not with Maria has spoken but with Rodica has spoken

From (iib), we obtain (iii) by IP ellipsis:

(iii) Ion n-a vorbit cu MARIA, ci cu RODICA
Ion not-has spoken with Maria but with Rodica

From (iid), we obtain (iv) by IP right node raising:

(iv) Ion nu cu MARIA, ci cu RODICA a vorbit
Ion not with Maria but with Rodica has spoken

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

b. Mi- a adus o brânză [nu foarte bună].
me.DAT has brought a cheese not very good
'He brought me a not so good cheese'
c. Au venit [nu mai mult de o sută de persoane].
have come not more much than a hundred of persons
'No more than a hundred people came.'
d. S-a ridicat [nu fără greutate].
REFL-has stood-up not without pain
'He stood up not without pain.'

These facts support the clausal head analysis in (62b)/(65). Under this analysis, the data can be explained as follows: in (68)/(67b), the string Neg + Focus is followed by IP-ellipsis; (70) is an instance of right node raising; (69) is derived from (70) by IP topicalization. (68a) can be derived either by ellipsis as in (68b), or by right node raising followed by IP topicalization as in (69) – for right node raising with a replacive in the first position, see (72):

(72) Cu Lucia, nu cu Maria am vorbit
with Lucia not with Maria have.1SG spoken

In the constituent negation analysis in (62a), we need an additional assumption in order to explain the data – namely, that constituent negation used as a focal particle requires focus fronting of the constituent it attaches to. This would yield the same types of structures as the clausal head analysis in (62b)/(65) – with all instances of Neg + Focus not followed by the verb representing FF followed by IP ellipsis or IP in right node raising. However, as other focal particles do not force fronting in Romanian, I consider the sentential negation analysis preferable[15].

[15] Another instance of a sentential negation higher than the verbal complex appears in the *nu cumva* construction. The string *nu cumva* (lit. 'not somehow') can occur in interrogatives and subjunctive-based directive and subordinate sentences before the verbal complex, and, like the Neg before FF, is compatible with a second negation inside the verbal complex, leading to a double negation reading:

(i) Nu cumva [a fost pe-aici şi n-am auzit soneria]?
not somehow has been around-here and not-have.1SG heard bell-DEF
'Might it be that he came by and we didn't hear the bell?'
(ii) Să nu cumva { [să nu-i spui] / [să-i spui]} !
SĂ not somehow SĂ not CL..DAT tell-2SG SĂ.CL.DAT tell-2SG
'Don't dare not to tell her! / Don't dare to tell her!'
(iii) A fost mai drăguţ în ultima vreme, ca nu cumva [să nu-l invităm].
has been more kind.M.SG in last-DEF time so-that not somehow SĂ not-CL.ACC.M invite-1PL
'He has been kinder lately, lest we should not invite him.'

This negation appears higher than FF, and can co-occur with the FF-associated negation:

(iv) Nu cumva nu pe EL l-am sunat?
not somehow not OBJ him CL.ACC-have.1 called
'Could it be that it was not him we called?'

Romanian can thus stack three sentential negations in the same clause:

(v) Nu cumva nu EA nu mai voia să continue?
not somehow not she not more wanted.3SG SĂ continue.3SG
'Could it be that it was not her who didn't want to go on?'

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

8. Conclusions

"Plain" focus fronting in Romanian (i.e. that type which is neither mirative, nor exclamative, nor introduced by a focal particle) is similar to English clefts, introducing (i) the presupposition that at least one alternative is true and (ii) an exhaustivity inference, which, if it is not an implicature, can be treated as a presupposition with a conditional form (following Büring and Križ 2013): if the proposition at hand *p* is true, any other focal alternative (not entailed by *p*) is false. FF has a wider distribution than *it*-clefts, being allowed with universals and N-words. It is only with N-words that focal alternatives include affirmative and negative versions of the proposition, which explains why FF has an existential presupposition in affirmative clauses. Plain FF does not require that the alternatives form a closed set of contextually identifiable propositions (it is not necessarily "contrastive" in the sense of É. Kiss 1998), or that the hearer believes another focal alternative (it is not necessarily corrective). As for the Neg + FF construction, the correspondent of negative clefts in Romanian, it is very likely that it involves a variety of sentential negation attached immediately above the [Focus [Background]] constituent, where the Background is itself a clausal constituent marked for polarity.

Corpus

CORV = L. Dascălu-Jinga (coord.), *Corpus de română vorbită (CORV). Eşantioane*, Bucharest, Editura Oscar Print, 2002.

ROVA = L. Dascălu-Jinga (coord.), *Româna vorbită actuală (ROVA), Corpus şi studii*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 2011.

Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal (1935-1944*), Bucharest, Humanitas, 1996.

References

Alboiu, G. 2002. *The Features of Movement in Romanian*. Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.

Ambar, M. 1999. Aspects of the syntax of focus in Portuguese. In G. Rebuschi, L. Tuller (eds.), *The Grammar of Focus*, 23-54. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Baumann, S., Mücke D., Becker, J. 2010. Expression of second occurrence focus in German. *Linguistische Berichte* 221: 61-78.

Beaver, D., Clark, B., Flemming, E., Jaeger, T. F., Wolters, M. 2007. When semantics meets phonetics: Acoustical studies of second occurrence focus. *Language* 83: 245-276.

Beaver, D., Clark, B. 2008. *Sense and Sensitivity*. Walden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Belletti, A. 2004. Aspects of the low IP area. In L. Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP*, 16-51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beninca, P., Frison, L., Salvi, G. 1988. L'ordine degli elementi della frase e le costruzioni marcate. In L., G. Salvi (eds.), *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione*, vol. 1, 129-194. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Bianchi, V. 2013. On focus movement in Italian. In M. V. Camacho-Taboada, A. Jiménez Fernández, J. Martín-Gonzáles, M. Reyes-Tejedor (eds.), *Information Structure and Agreement*, 193-215. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Bianchi, V., Bocci, G. 2012. Should I stay or should I go? Optional focus movement in Italian. In C. Piñon (ed.), *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics 9*. http://www.cssp.cnrs.fr/eiss9/eiss9_bianchi-and-bocci.pdf.

Bianchi, V., Bocci, G., Cruschina, S. 2015. Focus fronting and its implicatures. In E. O. Aboh, J. C. Schaeffer, P. Sleeman (eds.), *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2013. Selected Papers from 'Going Romance' Amsterdam 2013*, 1-19. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Bianchi, V., Bocci, G. and Cruschina, S. 2016. Focus fronting, unexpectedness, and evaluative implicatures. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 9 (3): 1-54.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

Bianchi, V., Cruschina, S. 2016. The derivation and interpretation of polar questions with a fronted focus. *Lingua* 170: 47-68.
Brunetti, L. 2004. *A Unification of Focus*. Padua: Unipress.
Brunetti, L. 2009. Discourse functions of fronted foci in Italian and Spanish. In A. Dufter, D. Jacob (eds.), *Focus and Background in Romance Languages*, 43-81. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Büring, D., M. Križ. 2013. It's that, and that's it! Exhaustivity and homogeneity presuppositions in clefts (and definites). *Semantics and Pragmatics* 6: 1-29.
Collins, P. C. 1991. *Cleft and Pseudo-cleft Constructions in English*. London, New York: Routledge.
Costa, J., Martins, A. M. 2011. On focus movement in European Portuguese. *Probus* 23 (2): 217-245.
Cruschina, S. 2011. *Discourse-related Features and Functional Projections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Cruschina, S., Giurgea, I., Remberger, E. 2015. Focus fronting between declaratives and exclamatives. *Revue roumaine de linguistique* LX (2-3): 257-275.
Declerck. R. 1984. The pragmatics of *if*-clefts and *wh*-clefts. *Lingua* 64: 251-289.
Declerck, R. 1988. *Studies on Copular Sentences, Clefts and Pseudo-clefts*. Leuven: Leuven University Press & Dordrecht: Foris.
Dryer, M. 1996. Focus, pragmatic presupposition and activated propositions. *Journal of Pragmatics* 26: 473-523.
É. Kiss, K. 1998. Identificational focus versus information focus. *Language* 74: 245-273.
Féry, C., Ishihara, S. 2009. The phonology of second occurrence focus. *Journal of Linguistics* 45: 285-313.
Féry, C., Samek-Lodovici, V. 2006. Focus projection and prosodic prominence in nested foci. *Language* 82: 131-150.
Frascarelli, M. 2000. *The Syntax-Phonology Interface in Focus and Topic Constructions in Italian*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
Giurgea, I. 2015a. Types of exclamative clauses in Romanian. *Revue roumaine de linguistique* LX (1): 3-27.
Giurgea, I. 2015b. Exclamativele în română şi alte limbi romanice. In M. Sala, M. Stanciu-Istrate, N. Petuhov (eds.), *Lucrările celui de-al cincilea Simpozion internaţional de lingvistică. Bucureşti, 27 – 28 septembrie 2013*, 262-280. Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold.
Giurgea, I., Remberger, E. 2016. Illocutionary Force. In A. Ledgeway, M. Maiden (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Romance Languages*, 863–878. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Göbbel, E. 1996/1998. Focus Movement in Romanian. Ms., University of Tubingen, published in 1998 in E. Benedicto, M. Romero, S. Tomioka (eds.), *Proceedings of the Workshop on Focus*, 83-99. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Occasional Papers.
Halvorsen, P.-K. 1978. The Syntax and Semantics of Cleft Constructions. PhD dissertation, University of Texas, Austin.
Horn, L. R. 1981. Exhaustiveness and the semantics of clefts. In V. Burke, J. Pustejovsky (eds.), *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the North Eastern Linguistic Society*, 125-142. Amherst, MA: GLSA Publications.
Horn, L. R. 2016. Information structure and the landscape of (non-)at-issue meaning. In C. Féry, S. Ishihara (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, 108-127. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Krifka, M. 2006. Can focus accenting be eliminated in favor of deaccenting given constituents? In B. Gyuris, L. Kálmán, C. Piñon, C. Varasdi (eds.), *Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium on Logic and Language*, 107-119. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
Krifka, M. 2008. Basic notions of information structure. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 55 (3-4): 243-276.
Laka, M. I. 1990. Negation in Syntax: On the Nature of Functional Categories and Projections. PhD dissertation, MIT.
Lees, R. B. 1963. An analysis of the 'cleft sentence' in English. *Zeitschrift für Phonetik, Sprachwissen-schaft und Kommunikationsforschung* 16: 371-388.
López, L. 2009. *A Derivational Syntax for Information Structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Martins, A. M. 2012. Contrastive Focus Fronting in European Portuguese. Ms., http://alfclul.clul.ul.pt/wochwel/documents/Martins%20Contrastive%20focus%20fronting.pdf.
Merchant, J. 2004. Fragments and ellipsis. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27: 661-738.
Motapanyane, V. 1998. Focus, checking theory and fronting strategies in Romanian. *Studia Linguistica* 55 (3): 227-243.
Onea, E., Beaver, D. 2009. Hungarian focus is not exhausted. In E. Cormany, S. Ito, D. Lutz (eds.), *Proceedings of the XIXth Semantics and Linguistics Theory Conference (SALT)*, 342-59. Linguistic Society of America and Cornell Linguistics Circle Publications.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

Percus, O. 1997. Prying open the cleft. In K. Kusumoto (ed.), *Proceedings of the 27th Annual Meeting of the North-East Linguistics Society (NELS)*, 337-351. Amherst, MA: GLSA Publications.
Potts, C. 2007. Conventional implicatures, a distinguished class of meanings. In G. Ramchand, C. Reiss (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Interfaces*, 475-501. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Prince, E. 1978. A comparison of *wh*-clefts and *it*-clefts in discourse. *Language* 54: 883-906.
Rizzi, L. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar*, 281-337. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
Rochemont, M. 2013. Discourse new, F-marking and normal stress. *Lingua* 136: 38-62.
Rochemont, M. 2016. Givenness. In C. Féry, S. Ishihara (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, 41-63. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Rooth, Ma. 1992. A theory of focus interpretation. *Natural Language Semantics* 1: 75-116.
Rooth, M. 1999. Association with focus or association with presupposition. In P. Bosch, R. van Der Sandt (eds.), *Focus – Linguistic, Cognitive, and Computational Perspectives*, 232-244. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Schwarzschild, R. 1999. Givenness, AvoidF and other constraints on the placement of accent. *Natural Language Semantics* 7: 141-177.
Selkirk, E. 2008. Contrastive focus, givenness and the unmarked status of "discourse-new". *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 24 (3-4): 331-346.
Szabolcsi, Anna. 1981. The semantics of topic-focus articulation. In J. Groenendijk, T. Janssen, M. Stokhof (eds.), *Formal Methods in the Study of Language*, 513-541. Amsterdam: Matematisch Centrum.
de Veaugh-Geiss, J. P., Onea, E., Zimmermann, M., Boell, A. 2015. Contradicting (not-)at-issueness in exclusives and clefts: An empirical study. In S. d'Antonio, M. Moroney, C. Rose Little (eds.), *Proceedings of the XXVth Semantics and Linguistic Theory Conference (SALT)*, 373-393. Linguistic Society of America and Cornell Linguistics Circle Publications.
Zimmermann, M., Onea, E. 2011. Focus marking and focus interpretation. *Lingua* 121: 1651-70.
Zubizarreta, M. L. 1998. *Prosody, Focus and Word Order*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Zubizarreta, M. L. 1999. Las funciones informativas: Tema y foco. In I. Bosque, V. Demonte (eds.), *Gramática Descriptiva de la Lengua Española*, 4215-4244. Madrid: Espasa.

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)

BDD-A26099 © 2016 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 08:54:57 UTC)