

Focus fronting in mirative and information contexts

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ABSTRACT

According to theoretical studies, in the Spanish language, focus fronting is associated with a contrastive interpretation and is considered infelicitous as an answer to a wh-question. Empirical studies, on the other hand, have recently found that Spanish native speakers use focus fronting to answer such questions. Cruschina (2021) proposes that, in order to fully understand the mechanisms behind focus fronting, different ‘degrees’ of contrastive focus must be assumed, as opposed to a mere dichotomy between contrastive and non-contrastive foci. In order to contribute to the debate, this paper tests Cruschina’s hypothesis on mirative focus being of higher contrast than information focus and therefore favouring the use and acceptability of focus fronting. This paper also investigates another controversial topic: whether subject or object constituent can favour the use of focus fronting. To do so, I carried out two experiments, a production task and an acceptability judgment test. The results show that mirativity does not favour the use of focus fronting and that focus fronting is higher rated when the subject is a fronted constituent in both information and mirative contexts. The findings also show that focus fronting is acceptable by Spanish native speakers. Thus, considering focus fronting infelicitous with no contrastive interpretation may be erroneous.

Keywords

focus fronting – mirative focus – information focus – information structure

RESUM

Segons estudis teòrics, en llengua espanyola, la focalització ('focus fronting' en anglès) s'associa a una interpretació contrastiva i es considera inadequada com a resposta a una pregunta. Els estudis empírics, per altra banda, han trobat recentment que els parlants nadius d'espanyol usen la focalització per respondre preguntes. Cruschina (2021) proposa que, per comprendre completament els mecanismes darrere la focalització, cal assumir diferents "graus" de focus contrastiu, en lloc d'una mera dicotomia entre focus contrastius i no contrastius. Amb la finalitat de contribuir a aquest debat, aquest treball posa a prova la hipòtesi de Cruschina que el focus miratiu té un major contrast que el focus informatiu i, per tant, afavoreix l'ús i l'acceptabilitat del focus preverbal. Aquest treball també investiga un altre tema polèmic: si el constituent subjecte o objecte pot afavorir l'ús del focus preverbal. Per fer-ho, es van realitzar dos experiments, una tasca de producció i una prova de grau d'acceptabilitat. Els resultats mostren que la mirativitat no afavoreix l'ús del focus preverbal i que el focus preverbal és més ben valorat quan el subjecte és el constituent focalitzat tant en el context informatiu com en el miratiu. Els resultats també mostren que els parlants nadius d'espanyol accepten el focus preverbal. Per tant, pot ser erroni considerar inacceptable el focus preverbal sense una interpretació contrastiva.

Paraules clau

focus anteposat – focus miratiu - focus informatiu - estructura d'informació

RESUMEN

Según estudios teóricos, en lengua española, la focalización ('focus fronting' en inglés) se asocia a una interpretación contrastiva y se considera inapropiado como respuesta a una pregunta. Los estudios empíricos, por otro lado, han encontrado recientemente que los hablantes nativos de español usan el foco antepuesto para responder preguntas. Cruschina (2021) propone que, para comprender completamente los mecanismos detrás de la focalización, se deben asumir diferentes "grados" de foco contrastivo, en lugar de una mera dicotomía entre focos contrastivos y no contrastivos. Con el fin de contribuir al debate, este trabajo pone a prueba la hipótesis de Cruschina de que el foco mirativo tiene un mayor contraste que el foco informativo y, por lo tanto, favorece el uso y la aceptabilidad del foco preverbal. Este trabajo también investiga otro tema polémico: si el constituyente sujeto u objeto puede favorecer el uso del foco preverbal. Para hacerlo, se realizaron dos experimentos, una tarea de producción y una prueba de grado de aceptabilidad. Los resultados muestran que la miratividad no favorece el uso del foco preverbal y que el foco preverbal es mejor valorado cuando el sujeto es un constituyente antepuesto tanto en el contexto informativo como en el mirativo. Los hallazgos también muestran que los hablantes nativos de español aceptan el foco preverbal. Por lo tanto, puede ser erróneo considerar inaceptable el foco preverbal sin una interpretación contrastiva.

Palabras clave

foco antepuesto – foco mirativo – foco informativo – estructura de información

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1. INTRODUCTION

Spanish syntax is flexible and facilitates the use of postverbal and preverbal focus. Several studies have been done on the frequency of the two foci with the same conclusion of a greater preference for the postverbal focus. Example (1) illustrates how the syntactic expression of focus manifests itself linguistically. In Spanish grammar, the answer (1B) to (1A) is considered grammatical since the focus appears after the verb. The example (1C), on the other hand, is considered ungrammatical since Spanish admits the preverbal focus only when it is used for contrast or correction.

- (1) A. Qué has comprado?
B. He comprado [FPantalones].
C. *[FPantalones] he comprado.

In some instances, however, the studies have indicated that the Spanish native speakers use the structure of (1C) without meaning contrast or correction. One of the linguists, Cruschina, suggests that context plays a role in deciding which structure to use. One of the contexts he suggests may favour preverbal focus is the mirative context in which an element of surprise appears. Since mirative context has not yet been investigated by many linguists, I decided to test Cruschina's hypothesis and investigate to what extent mirativity facilitates the use of the preverbal focus. The objective of this paper is thus to investigate whether Spanish native speakers use preverbal focus in mirative contexts more frequently than in an information (neutral) contexts. The paper also seeks to establish whether there is a higher grade of acceptability for preverbal focus in mirative contexts rather than information contexts. Finally, the paper will investigate whether the subject or object constituent favours focus fronting in both of the contexts.

The structure of the paper is as followed. Section 2 explains the notion of focus and presents the realization of focus in Spanish. Section 3 presents two experiments that I carried out to investigate whether a mirative context favours the usage of preverbal focus. The last section 4 is the final conclusion of the whole paper.

2. CONTEXTUALIZATION

2.1 The notion of focus

2.1.1. Information Structure

Since the focus is one of the notions of Information Structure, it is worthwhile to determine the concept of IS to further understand the concept of focus. Information Structure according to Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011) is “the level of sentence organisation which represents how the speaker structures the utterance in context in order to facilitate information exchange. Specifically, it indicates how the propositional content of an utterance fits the addressee’s state of knowledge at the time of utterance”. Having said that, it is important to differentiate between new and old information, which will greatly affect our understanding of the focus. Following Huddleston R., Pullum G., et al. (2002), there are two types of new and old information: discourse-old/new information and addressee-old/new information.

Discourse-new information refers to the information that is new in the current discourse whereas discourse-old information is the information already mentioned in the discourse, known due to silent relationship or features of the situation of utterance.

(2) I called Jan; he is sick,

(3) The lecture was nice because the professor was funny.

(4) I don’t like most of the animals, but I like cats.

In example (2), *Jan* is discourse-new, and *he* is discourse-old because it has already been mentioned in the discourse. Thus, the addressee knows who *he* refers to. In example (3), there is a relationship between *the lecture* and *the professor*. This relationship is called „silent” since it is commonly known that professors lead lectures. Another example of a silent relationship is shown in example (4) between *animals* and *cats*. Since animals are a general class while cats are a subtype of this class, cats become discourse old-information. Once one of the elements that have a silent relationship is mentioned as a discourse new-information, the latter becomes discourse old-information due to this relationship. For this reason, *the professor* in example (3) and *cats* in

example (4) are considered discourse old-information. Following the authors, discourse-old information is also the information known by the addressee, whereas discourse-new is not. Sometimes, however, the speaker assumes that the addressee knows certain things although they have not been mentioned before nor could be inferred by the silent relationship nor context of the utterance. Although *Jan* is discourse-new in example (2), it is addressee-old information since the addressee knows who *Jan* refers to. In this case, *Jan* is probably a common friend of the speaker and the addressee. The existence of a common friend *Jan* is a knowledge shared between the two.

Speaking of the common knowledge, I will introduce the term *Common Ground* (CG) proposed by Stalnaker (1978) which assumes that both the speaker and the addressee have a shared knowledge, which is in a form of propositions. The information (propositions) exchanged between speakers become a part of Common Ground. For instance, if a speaker utters (5), the propositions expressed by (5) are added to CG shared between the speaker and the addressee. From now on, the proposition that the speaker is not accepted yet to his dream university will change to him being accepted. This information will be particularly useful for describing different types of focus.

(5) I got accepted into my dream university.

Having introduced the basic notions necessary to understand the notion of focus, I can proceed to define the term of our interest: the focus.

2.1.2. Definition of focus

There is a great discrepancy between the definition of focus proposed by different linguists. Focus is defined as the new information in the sentence that is highly informative, is usually marked by prosody (pitch accent) and typically occurs at the end of the sentence (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik 1985). As Zubizarreta (1999) mentions based on Chomsky (1971, 1976) and Jackendoff (1972) focus is also defined as the part of the sentence that is not presupposed. In such a definition: “the presupposed part of the sentence is the information shared by the speaker and the listener at the time that sentence is uttered in given speech” (1999:4224).

The focus can therefore be identified by asking a question because the focus is the part that replaces the interrogative pronoun. There are, however, other linguists, such as Krifka (2008) and Cruschina (2021), who disagree with this and adapt, in their opinion, a more precise definition of focus. Those linguists base themselves on the definition proposed by Alternative Semantics (Rooth 1985; 1992): “Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions”. This definition is also the one I decide to adopt in order to develop this paper. Once the definition for purpose of this paper is established, I can begin to explain its meaning and its forms.

Let’s have a look at an example (6). In example (5B) the focus “the dog” answers the question and indicates that there are other alternatives for the description *x ate the sausage* that could have been answers to the question (‘the kid ate the sausage, ‘the cat ate the sausage’, etc). The focus, thus, indicates the correct alternative from the set of possible alternatives.

- (6) A. Who ate the sausage?
B. [FThe DOG] ate the sausage.

The focus does not necessarily correspond to the answer to a wh-questions. It can as well be used to correct an assertion. In such cases, the focus is prosodically marked to emphasize the contrast (Zubizarreta 1999; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik 1985).

- (7) A. She bought a laptop.
B. She bought a [F SMARTPHONE].

Through these examples, we can also observe that, depending on the context, the focus can be in different parts of the sentence, such as a subject (6), direct object (7) or even a whole clause (8).

- (8) Adopted from Zubizarreta (1999)
A. What happened?
B. [FThe cat ate the rat].

In the next section, I will discuss the notion of focus more in detail, explaining different types of focus and presenting relevant examples.

2.1.3. *Types of focus*

Just as the notion of focus is defined in various ways, so are the types of focus differently divided. However, there seems to be a tendency to divide the focus into two subtypes: information focus and contrastive focus. Information focus, which can be observed in examples (6) and (8), is mostly defined as part of the utterance that introduces new information into the discourse (discourse newness) and can be identified by an interrogative context. The contrastive focus, on the other hand, is identified by the correction of a certain alternative as in examples (7) and (9). In the case of contrastive focus, one of the alternatives is negated and the other one is assigned (Zubizarreta 1999). Contrastive focus according to Zubizarreta, who as well refers to Chomsky (1976) and Jackendoff (1972), is recognized by prosodic prominence.

(9) A. [FJOHN] called. (not Thomas).

[Thomas called.]

This distinction is particularly important as linguists explain the syntactic distribution of focus based on these two groups. However, authors such as Krifka (2008) and Cruschina (2021) argue that this distinction, although common, is not accurate enough. As an example, Krifka proposes the following example:

(10) A: Who stole the cookie, John or Mary?

B: [FJohn] stole the cookie.

Krifka argues in this example that *John* is not new information thus the definition of focus as being new information is incorrect. Cruschina (2021) has a similar view on the vague distinction between two categories and goes even further with his recognition of contrastive and information focus. He proposes avoiding the distinction between contrastive and non-contrastive focus and instead proposes the identification of different degrees/types of focus as seen in (11). He finds this distinction essential in order to describe the syntactic effects of focus.

- (11) A. **information focus:** a contextually open set (only pragmatically delimited);
B. **exhaustive focus:** exhaustive identification or the exclusion by identification with respect to a set of alternatives;
C. **mirative focus:** the proposition asserted is more unlikely or unexpected with respect to the alternative propositions;
D. **corrective focus:** correction of explicitly given alternatives.

Cruschina states that all these types of focus have different degrees of contrast, with (11A) being the least contrastive, and (11D) being the most. According to Cruschina “the more ‘active’ or ‘given’ the alternatives are in the context, the greater the contrast” (2021:5). Since this paper focuses on information focus and mirative focus, let’s proceed to the examples and their explanation based on Cruschina (2021).

- (12) A. What did you have for dinner?
B. I had [Fpasta].

Example (10) is a typical information focus with an open set which refers to the fact that no alternatives are explicitly active nor given. The answer to a wh-question as in (12) can usually be any possible answer of the proper semantic type which is why it is called *open set*. Mirative focus, however, is more complex and requires a better explanation. Cruschina refers to his previous paper from 2012 where he defined *mirative focus* as “the type of focus that is related to new information which is particularly surprising or unexpected” (2021:9). Mirative focus is considered to be a part of close-set with the alternatives given in the context or not. Those alternatives, if absent in the context, can be present in the interlocutors’ belief systems and common ground.

- (13) Adopted from Cruschina (2021)
A. They had told us that there weren’t any and instead...
B. They had told us that we would only see zebras and lions and instead...
C. ... we saw a tiger yesterday at the zoo.

In example (13) there is a “contrast against the expectations, whereby the proposition asserted is presented as being more unlikely or unexpected with respect to the alternative propositions” (2021:6). Examples (13A) and (13B) present two different contexts for the mirative focus: an unexpected event and a more unlikely proposition, respectively. Mirative focus is, thus, a violation of expectations. Assuming that two people live in a certain country where a cup of coffee costs 1 euro, and therefore share knowledge about the coffee pricing (this information is in their common ground) in this country, a person A would not expect the answer to the question (14) to be (14B).

(14) A. How much did you pay for coffee?

B. I paid [F5 euros].

Cruschina base himself on Repp’s (2016) suggestion that if there are different degrees of focus, it can be expected that they can affect the grammar differently. In the next section, I will discuss how information and mirative contrast affect grammar, particularly referring to, so called *focus fronting* (FF).

2.2. Realization of focus in Spanish

Following Zubizarreta (1999), contrastive and non-contrastive focus can be identified by prosody and syntax in Spanish. The information focus (non-contrastive) can be identified by a neutral core accent which in the Spanish language occurs at the end of the prosodic group. In example (14B), *Juan* is marked by this type of accent and is, thus, an information focus.

Spanish admits non-contrastive focus as an answer to a wh-question. This type of focus is supposed to occur sentence-finally or post-verbally as in (15B). Spanish also allows so-called Focus Fronting (FF), which consists of "putting a focus phrase in front of the left periphery of the sentence" (Zubizarreta 1999:4239). However, FF as shown in (15C) is considered unfelicitous because FF in Spanish has a contrastive and emphatic interpretation. This type of focus is also identified by an emphatic nuclear accent.

(15) A. ¿Quién llamó?

B. Llamó [FJuan].

C. *[FJUAN] llamó.

FF in Spanish is felicitous in examples such as (16A) and, according to Zubizarreta, cannot be an answer to a question such as (16B).

(16) A. A [FJUAN] le contó Pedro la historia (y no a Alba).

B. ¿A quién le contó Pedro la historia?

Although FF is not considered felicitous as an answer to a wh-question, Cruschina (2021) reports that several experiments (see Gabriel 2010; Hoot 2012; 2016; Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2013; 2018; Feldhausen & Vanrell 2014; 2015; Uth 2014; 2018; Heidinger 2015; 2018; 2020; Jiménez-Fernández 2015a; b; Sánchez Alvarado 2018) have been carried out on Spanish native speakers that show that native speakers indeed produce answers with FF, especially when the subject is the fronted constituent. Cruschina brings up the example of Jiménez-Fernández (2015b: 126) in which both answers (17B) and (17C) were produced by native speakers:

(17) A. ¿Quién ha ganado el Premio Planeta este año?

B. Lo ha ganado [FJorge Zepeda] .

C. [FJorge Zepeda] lo ha ganado.

Although there is a lot of tension between the results of different studies, Cruschina explains that different types of focus can occur in the context of the wh-question. To his mind, it might be because some speakers instead of answering with a purely informative value, answer with a mirative one due to surprise (18B) or obviousness (19B).

(18) Adapted by Cruschina (2021:21)

A. ¿Quién está tocando el piano?

B. ¡(No me lo puedo creer!) ¡[FJuan] está tocando!

(No tenía idea de que sabía tocar...)

(19) A. ¿Quién comió el pastel?

B. ¡[FMarta] lo comió! (Marta siempre lo come)

The FF as an answer to wh-question in Spanish seems to be rather problematic, but Cruschina proposes an interesting explanation. In this paper, I will try to see to what extent Cruschina's view that the mirative context can favour FF is correct.

3. EXPERIMENTS

3.1. Experiment 1

In the previous chapter, I discuss the realization of focus in Spanish and explained that some authors consider that FF is infelicitous as an answer to wh-questions. I also refer to Cruschina (2021) who reports that several experiments have been carried out and their results yield that the native Spanish speakers sometimes use FF in answers to wh-questions. He suggests that the mirative context can affect eliciting answers with FF. This production experiment aims to test his hypothesis and evaluate to what extent a mirative context (versus a purely informative context) can affect eliciting answers with FF.

3.1.1. Methods

3.1.1.2. Materials¹

As the point of my reference, I used the study conducted by Cruschina & Mayol (2022). Their study aims to investigate the realization of information focus and FF in Spanish and Catalan. For the purpose of my investigation, I took their study as my starting point and decided to extend it to also consider a mirative focus. Therefore, the experiments conducted by me are modified experiments designed by Cruschina & Mayol (2022). The items present in the experiments are mostly the same, with variation in a few, since some of the information contexts proposed by Cruschina & Mayol could not be easily converted into mirative contexts.

The production experiment was conducted by presenting 32 items to participants and asking them to respond to the question asked within the given context. Of the 32 contexts, 16 were distractors to ensure the participants were not aware of the phenomenon investigated. Examples (20) and (21) present two fillers used in the experiment:

¹ All the materials and results of Experiment 1 and 2 can be found in the following link:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HMS5vXADJROK_xphlzMV3Ea5VZOAPkw6?usp=sharing

(20) Estás con una amiga tomando un café. Te llega una notificación al móvil. Es un mensaje en el que se te comunica que te han dado una beca para hacer un curso en Italia. Sueltas un grito de alegría. Tu amiga te pregunta: “¿Qué pasa?”. Para responder dices:

(21) Tu amigo Martín y tú habéis decidido ir a pasar unos cuantos días a Menorca. Martín está reservando los vuelos y te pregunta: “¿Qué prefieres, pasillo o ventana?”. Para responder dices:

The other 16 contexts were the critical items: there were 8 information and 8 mirative contexts. Within these two context categories, there were 4 questions with subject focus (22) and 4 questions with object focus (23) to investigate whether the grammatical function of focus can affect FF production. Examples (22) and (23) show the two types of context (information and mirative, respectively) and the question to which participants had to reply.

(22) Estás viendo un partido de fútbol en la tele. Tu padre entra en el salón y te pregunta: “¿**Quién gana?**”. En ese instante llega tu hermano a casa y lo saludáis. Después te diriges de nuevo a tu padre y para responder a su pregunta, dices:

(23) Vas a ver a tu tutor de la carrera a su despacho. Le cuentas que estás preocupada porque has suspendido una asignatura. Te pregunta: “¿**Qué asignatura has suspendido?**”. Antes de poder responder, otro estudiante llama a la puerta. El tutor le pide que se espere hasta que acabéis. Para responder a su pregunta, dices algo sorprendente:

As seen in both examples, each context was broad to ensure that the participants imagine the given situation and answer as naturally as possible. After each question embedded in the context, there was at least one additional sentence to make the participants remember the question and answer with a full sentence instead of a fragment. The structure of mirative and information context does not vary until the last sentence of the context. The mirative contexts, as presented in the example (23), end with asking the participants to say something surprising. In mirative contexts, the ending varied as shown in the example below:

(24) En tu respuesta mencionas a una persona que odia la leche sin lactosa y dejas a tu oyente sorprendido:

Para responder dices algo que lo sorprende:

Para responder dices algo que ella no se espera:

Para responder dices algo que deja a tu amiga sin palabras:

There were two versions of the study, which were given to an equal number of participants. The two versions had the same contexts and fillers but the information contexts were changed to mirative contexts and the mirative contexts were changed to information ones. To illustrate, while half of the participants saw the context (22) as information context, the other half saw the same context as a mirative one:

(25) Estás viendo un partido de fútbol en la tele. Tu padre entra en el salón y te pregunta: “¿**Quién gana?**”. En ese instante llega tu hermano a casa y lo saludáis. Después te diriges de nuevo a tu padre y para responder a su pregunta, dices algo que tu padre no se espera:

Two lists of items were designed to ensure a variety of different contexts since the context could favour the use of FF. In both versions, however, the items were mixed with fillers in the way that no mirative and information context items were asked one after the other. The items with fillers were always in between the two contexts investigated.

3.1.1.3. Procedure and participants

Data was collected through video calls carried out on the GoogleMeets platform. Before the interview started, participants were presented with a short presentation containing instructions to complete the study. The instruction indicated that the participants should answer the question embedded in a given context with a direct and simple sentence in the most natural way possible. Two examples of mirative and information context were presented to the participants along with two potential answers; with and without FF. After completion of the interview, some personal data such as the age and linguistic profile of the participants were collected.

In total, 10 students participated in the study, six of which were male and four female. All of the participants were raised in Catalonia and declared Peninsular Spanish as their first language. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 26 years old. At the moment of the study, seven participants were completing their Bachelor in Applied Languages and three were completing Master's degrees in other fields.

3.1.2. Hypotheses

Based on Cruschina (2021), I make the following hypotheses:

1. There should be more answers with FF in mirative contexts than information contexts since the mirative context is the context of the greater contrast.
2. Although there are authors who claim that there should be no difference between the occurrence of FF when the subject or object is a fronted element, I assume there should be more answers with FF when the subject is fronted as reported by Cruschina based on several authors (Gabriel 2007; 2010; Adli 2011; Hoot 2012; 2016; Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2013; 2018; Feldhausen & Vanrell 2014; 2015; Uth 2014; 2018; Heidinger 2015; 2018; 2020; Jiménez-Fernández 2015a; b; Sánchez Alvarado 2018).

3.1.3. Data coding

A total of 320 answers were collected from 32 items asked to 10 participants. Only half of the answers were transcribed and coded since the other half consisted of fillers used as a distraction from the phenomena studied. The answers were codified with 8 categories as presented in Table 1:

Participant	Item	Context	Focus	Transcription	Fragment	Direct answer	Verb repetition	Syntax
1	1	Information	Object	Voy a empezar Casa de Papel.	No	Yes	Yes	VO

2	15	Mirative	Subject	Tío, que nos ha invitado el dueño del restaurante.	No	No		
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Table 1: Experiment 1 - categories of data coding

Fragments or indirect answers or both were not further analyzed and coded as seen in the case of the participant 2. Fragments and indirect answers do not provide any information on the realization of focus since the verb or the focus is missing. For this reason, of the 160 answers, 28 answers were not further analysed. Moreover, only answers in which the participants repeated the verb asked in the question counted towards the results. Answers with different verbs were discarded because it was not certain whether the object/subject was focalized or the entire verb phrase was. This paper seeks to investigate only object and subject focalization (as opposed to verb phrase focalization). To avoid ambiguous results, of the remaining 132 answers, after discarding fragments and indirect answers, another 26 answers were discarded. The results presented in section 4.4 are therefore calculated from 106 answers.

3.1.4. Results

To see whether there is a relation between FF and context, we shall first compare results with object and subject focus separately before proceeding to a broader comparison with the two foci. Table 2 presents data collected from answers with object focalization expressed in numbers:

Object	Mirative	Information
Postverbal	33	33
Preverbal	1	0
Cleft	0	1

Table 2: Experiment 1 - object focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in numbers

There were a total of 34 answers provided for each context. In the mirative context, only one answer was provided with preverbal focus while in the information context, there was no focalization in any answer. Figure 1 presents the same data expressed in percentages:

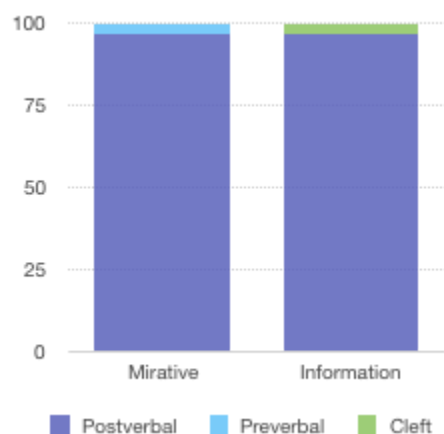


Figure 1: Experiment 1 - object focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in percentages

One preverbal answer accounts only for 3%. Since this is a very small percentage, the conclusion that a mirative context favours FF cannot be drawn.

We shall now analyse subject focalization in a mirative and informative context. The data collected for this comparison is presented in Table 3:

Subject	Mirative	Information
Postverbal	15	16
Preverbal	2	2
Cleft	0	3

Table 3: Experiment 1 - subject focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in numbers

Based on Table 3, we can observe that the number of answers with a subject focus is lower than that of answers with an object focus. Moreover, there is no equal number of answers for mirative and information context. There were 17 answers provided for mirative context and 21 for information context. The number of FF for both contexts was the same, accounting for only 2 answers. Since there is no equal number of answers, the comparison will be more illustrative when expressed in percentages as in Figure 2:

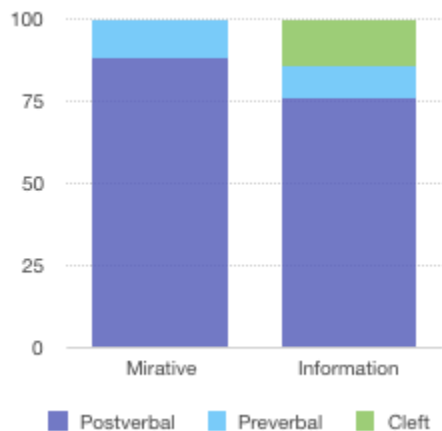


Figure 2: Experiment 1 - subject focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in percentages

Now it can be seen that 12% of answers in the mirative context included FF as compared to 10% of FF answers in the information context. Once again the difference between mirative and information context is too slight to jump to the conclusion that mirative context favours FF. What can be derived from this data is, however, the fact that FF is more common when the subject is fronted. Figure 3 presents the comparison between FF when the object and the subject are focalized.

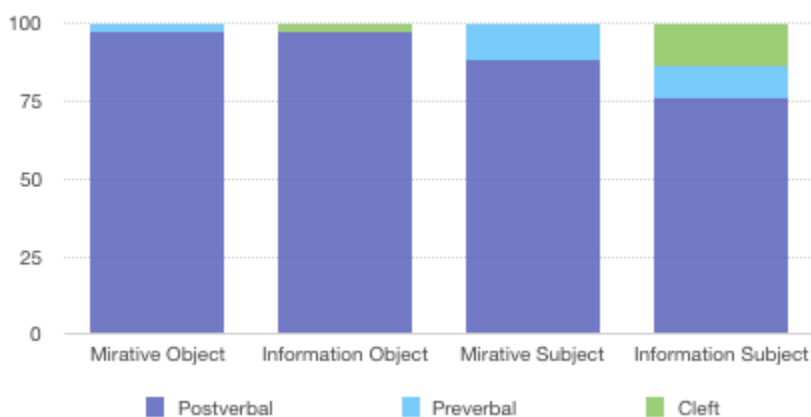


Figure 3: Experiment 1 - subject focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in percentages

Figure 3 suggests that FF occurs more frequently when the subject is a focus. This applies not only to mirative but also to information context. Although the data suggests that hypothesis 2 is correct, more data is needed to draw such a conclusion.

Since fine-grain analysis did not yield any significant answers to confirm hypothesis 1, we shall now try to derive data from the bigger picture excluding subject and object focus distinction. This data is presented in Table 4 and Figure 4:

Focus	Mirative	Information
Postverbal	48	49
Preverbal	3	2
Cleft	0	4

Table 4: Experiment 1 - focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in numbers

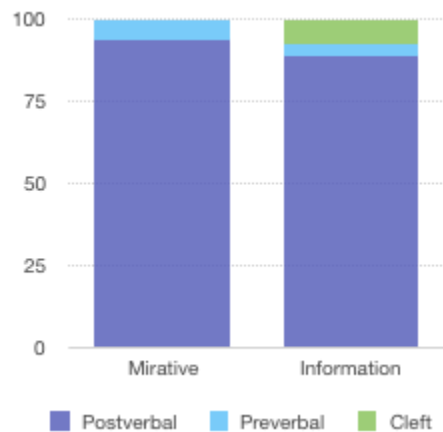


Figure 4: Experiment 1 - focalization in mirative and information contexts expressed in percentages

Data indicates that of 51 answers in mirative context, 3 included FF while of the 55 answers in the information context, 2 included FF. Percentage-wise, FF answers in the mirative context accounted for 6% while in the information context for 4% (both results rounded to the nearest whole number). Thus, although there seems to be a little tendency toward mirativity playing a role in eliciting answers with FF, 2% does not account for a big number and hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed nor refuted based on this experiment.

In conclusion, the results yield that there were more answers with FF in mirative contexts than in information contexts. However, since the difference was just one number, hypothesis 1 cannot be confirmed. More samples would have to be provided in order to confirm or refute the hypothesis. The same conclusion applies to hypothesis 2 since the difference between subject and object fronting is just three numbers, the conclusion that the subject focus favours FF cannot be properly drawn without having more samples.

3.2. Experiment 2

Experiment 2 aims to support Experiment 1 by using an acceptability judgement test to acquire a greater amount of samples that could confirm the hypothesis seen in Experiment 1.

3.2.1. Methods

3.2.1.2. Materials

Parallel to Experiment 1, the acceptability judgement test was designed based on Cruschina & Mayol (2022) who carried out a similar experiment on the realization of information focus and FF in Spanish and Catalan. Therefore, Experiment 2 is a continuation of their work by adding mirative focus in addition to information focus. The construction of the acceptability judgement test is as of Cruschina & Mayol's test, with variation in a few items and their conversion into mirative items.

The acceptability judgement test was created based on the two versions of the interview carried out in Experiment 1. Items included in those two versions served for the creation of two versions of the acceptability test. Consequently, the number of items and fillers (16 each) remained the same and items including both object and subject focus as well. The difference between the two experiments is that the participants in Experiment 2 were provided with an answer to the question asked within the given context and were asked to evaluate it on a scale of 1 ("impossible, I would never answer like this") to 7 ("perfect, I could also answer like this"). Providing an answer to the question instead of asking the participants to elicit an answer, allowed us to see if Spanish native speakers accept FF and if context and element fronted play a role in

deciding whether FF sounds natural and acceptable to them. Examples (25) and (26) present two items used in the experiment and the answers the participants had to evaluate:

(25) A: Estás volviendo del restaurante y tu madre te llama y pregunta: “¿Qué has comido?. En el mismo momento tu móvil se apaga y la vuelves a llamar en 15 minutos. Para responder a su pregunta dices:
B: **Macarrones** he comido.

(26) A: Estás volviendo del restaurante y tu madre te llama y pregunta: “¿Qué has comido?. En el mismo momento tu móvil se apaga y la vuelves a llamar en 15 minutos. Vuelves a responder a su pregunta diciendo algo loco:
B: **Canguro** he comido.

The answers provided to information contexts, as seen in example (25), were made to sound neutral. In contrast, the answers to mirative contexts were made to sound more surprising as seen in example (26). The order of focus varied in both contexts. There were 8 items with mirative context and 8 with information context. Half of the answers in each context had answers with FF while the other half had answers with postverbal focus. Therefore, there were 4 conditions created: *mirative context + FF*; *mirative context + postverbal focus*; *information context + FF* and *information context + postverbal focus*. Examples (25) and (26) present *information context + FF* and *mirative context + FF*, respectively.

In addition, two more versions of the acceptability judgement test were created to assure that the results are not determined by the contexts given. It is possible that the participants will consider FF to be of high acceptability in one context and of a less in another. For this reason, two already existent acceptability tests were copied and then the focus was placed the other way around. To illustrate, examples (25) and (26) were included in version 1 of the acceptability test and version 2, respectively. Examples (27) and (28) were in versions 3 and 4, created based on the two first versions.

(27) A: Estás volviendo del restaurante y tu madre te llama y pregunta: “¿Qué has comido?. En el mismo momento tu móvil se apaga y la vuelves a llamar en 15 minutos. Para responder a su pregunta dices:

B: He comido macarrones.

(28) A: Estás volviendo del restaurante y tu madre te llama y pregunta: “¿Qué has comido?. En el mismo momento tu móvil se apaga y la vuelves a llamar en 15 minutos. Vuelves a responder a su pregunta diciendo algo loco:

B: He comido canguro.

The creation of four versions of the test will allow us to reduce the margin of error in Experiment 2.

3.2.1.3. Procedure and participants

Data was collected through Google Forms. Before proceeding to the acceptability judgment test, participants were asked several questions about their sociolinguistic profile. The questions included, among others, age, gender, place of birth, native language, other languages spoken and level of studies. After having responded to the basic questions needed to evaluate whether the participants were eligible to participate in the questionnaire, the participants were presented with an explanation of the questionnaire. They were asked to read carefully the contexts and the words of the first speaker, pay special attention to the question, and, above all, assess how natural and appropriate to the context the response of the second speaker was on a scale of 1 to 7. They were indicated to judge the answers of the second speaker, not according to the rules that they might have learned in Spanish classes, but exclusively according to their intuition as a native speaker and user of the language. It was also explained to the participants that the words in bold meant that those words received a special intonation, more empathic than usual. Finally, two examples of contexts and answers were provided for the participants before proceeding to the real questions.

In total, 22 people participated in the study, twelve of whom were female and ten male. Three of the participants were discarded at the very beginning for stating that Spanish was not their native language. The other 19 participants indicated a Catalan-speaking region (including Mallorca) as their place of birth and Spanish as their first language. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 30 years old, with an average age of 23 years old. All of the participants declared a Bachelor's degree or Master's as their level of education, with 15 declaring languages or linguistics as their field of study.

3.2.2. Hypotheses

Parallel to Experiment 1, I make the following hypotheses based on Cruschina (2021):

1. The average degree of acceptability should be higher for FF in mirative contexts than in information contexts since the mirative context is the context of greater contrast.

2. Although there are authors who claim that there should be no difference between the occurrence of FF when the subject or object is a fronted element, I assume there should be on an average higher degree of acceptability for FF when the subject is fronted as reported by Cruschina based on several authors (Gabriel 2007; 2010; Adli 2011; Hoot 2012; 2016; Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2013; 2018; Feldhausen & Vanrell 2014; 2015; Uth 2014; 2018; Heidinger 2015; 2018; 2020; Jiménez-Fernández 2015a; b; Sánchez Alvarado 2018).

3.2.3. Results

A total of 608 answers were collected from 32 items asked to 19 participants. As in Experiment 1, fillers were discarded, therefore 304 answers were analysed. The number of answers for each of 8 categories is presented in Table 6:

Context	Focus	Postverbal	Preverbal
Mirative	Subject	28	29
	Object	48	47
Information	Subject	28	29
	Object	48	47

Table 6: Experiment 2 - number of answers for each category

It should be noted that more samples of object focus were collected, 190 in total, as compared to 114 of subject focus. In this study, the margin of error because of the uneven number of samples for each category will not be counted. However, the possibility of error has to be taken into consideration.

To analyse data, results from each category were summed up and the average rating of acceptability was counted. Figure 5 presents this calculation:

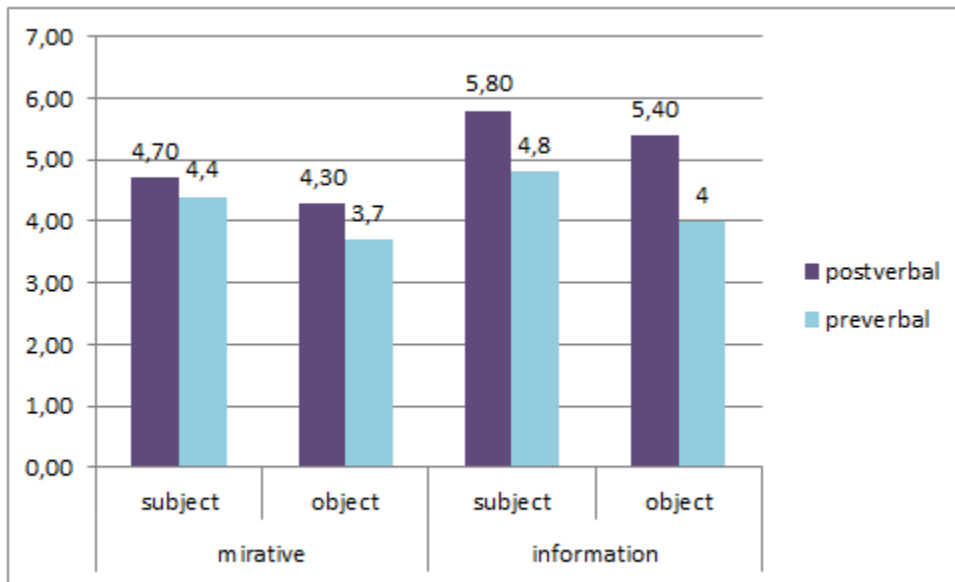


Figure 5: Experiment 2 - average grade of acceptability for each of 8 categories

The first hypothesis assumes that the average grade of acceptability for FF in a mirative context will be higher than the average grade for FF in an information context. Looking at Figure 5, however, it can be observed that the average grade of acceptability for preverbal focus is higher for both subject and object foci in information context as compared to mirative context. The difference between mirative and information context is 0.4 for subject focus and 0.3 for object focus. Although this difference is not major, there seems to be a slight tendency toward FF being more accepted within information focus. To better understand this phenomenon, it is also important to see whether there is a high discrepancy between grades given by the participants.

For this reason, Table 7 presents standard deviations for FF in mirative and information context rounded to the nearest hundredths:

Context	Focus	Preverbal
Mirative	Subject	1.97
	Object	1.84
Information	Subject	1.92
	Object	1.8

Table 7: Experiment 2 - standard deviation for FF in mirative and information context

Table 7 shows that the participants disagreed more as to the rating for subject focus in both contexts (1.97 and 1.92 as compared to 1.84 and 1.8). Another slight disagreement that can be observed is that participants generally disagreed more with grading mirative context (1.97 and 1.84 as compared to 1.92 and 1.8). However, standard deviations shown in Table 7 suggest that the difference between answers was not major. Therefore, it can be concluded that the tendency seen in Figure 5 about FF being slightly more accepted in the information context could be true. Further studies should be carried out to confirm this hypothesis.

As for hypothesis 2, acceptability for subject FF in mirative context was 4.4 and of object FF 3.7 whereas acceptability for subject FF in information context was 4.8 and of object FF 4. Both contexts suggest that subject FF is more acceptable than object fronting. However, as shown in Table 7 also the disagreement for subject FF acceptability was greater than for object FF. For this reason, more experiments should be carried out to confirm hypothesis 2.

Focusing on a bigger picture, however, we can observe that FF can be considered correct by the native Spanish speakers as seen in subject focus in information context that accounts for the acceptability grade of 4.8 out of 7. The least acceptable FF seems to be a fronted object in a mirative context which obtained a grade of 3.7/7.

In conclusion, Experiment 2 did not find that a mirative context improved the rating of focus fronting. This experiment suggests, however, that subject fronting is more acceptable than object

fronting. To confirm these suggestions more samples would have to be gathered and examined especially since in this experiment uneven number of subject and object samples were analysed.

3.3. Discussion

While production Experiment 1 revealed that Spanish native speakers barely produce any FF, Experiment 2 indicated that they rate FF well but worse than postverbal focus. Experiment 2 also found that subject FF is better rated than object FF and that mirativity does not improve the ratings of FF. The question that appears after both experiments is: why the participants did not produce FF although they rated it well?

In the production experiment, only 5 answers out of 160 were elicited with FF. Such a small number could suggest that the participants felt unnatural during the experiment. During the task, many participants hesitated and did not know what to answer, especially in a mirative context as they were faced with an unnatural and unexpected situation that would not normally happen. Asking the participant to imagine a certain situation and give a surprising response required the participants to act rather than elicit a natural response. In a natural setting, no one asks them to reply in a surprising way. For this reason, I think most of the answers were not elicited spontaneously. It was also seen that the participants took their time to fully comprehend the context and find a surprising answer that they would not normally elicit. The lack of spontaneity could affect the order of words in their response.

In the acceptability judgement test, FF was rated well in both information and mirative contexts. It could be observed, however, that mirative ratings were generally lower than information ratings. This was also found in postverbal focus which should be highly rated for both contexts (since it is grammatically correct) but was significantly better rated in information. Also, while the gap between preverbal and postverbal is very large in informative focus, it is smaller in mirative focus. Such a finding could suggest that the participants felt confused about the mirative context and the answer to it and decided to rate it lower as neither the context nor the answer sounded natural. Another finding that seems to confirm this line of thinking is that there was a greater standard deviation in answers for mirative context. Not fully agreeing with each other on how to rate the answers could suggest confusion among the participants.

For all above-said, I think that if the context and answers were provided differently so that they sounded natural to the participants, more answers with FF could be elicited and there would be more differences between FF in mirative and information context.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this paper was to investigate the syntactic expression of FF in Spanish and the effect of mirative and information context on FF. The paper intended to find out whether Spanish native speakers are more prone to use FF in a mirative context than in the information context, whether they rate better the answers with FF in the mirative context and whether the subject or object constituent affects focus fronting in both of the contexts. The paper was a continuation of Cruschina & Mayol's (2022) study on the syntactic expression of information focus in Spanish and Catalan and served to investigate the hypothesis proposed by Cruschina (2021).

In the Spanish language, FF used in answer to a *wh*-question is considered infelicitous unless the speaker wants to point out a certain contrast (contrastive focus) that he reinforces with an emphatic nuclear accent. However, different studies found that Spanish native speakers produce answers with FF to *wh*-questions (which assume the use of information focus) without meaning to contrast anything. Cruschina put forward the view that the distinction between contrastive and information focus is not accurate and focus shall be discussed in the function of the grade of contrast. He pointed out that mirativity is of high contrast and can prompt the speakers to use FF as answers to *wh*-question.

The objectives of this paper were set to investigate Cruschina's idea. Two experiments were carried out, and two hypotheses were made based on Cruschina's 2021 paper. Experiment 1 was a production task that sought to investigate whether Spanish native speakers produce answers with FF in mirative and information contexts while the acceptability judgement test in Experiment 2 aimed to investigate how they rate FF in both of the contexts. The hypotheses made prior to the experiments assumed that mirative context will favour production and higher ratings of FF and that subject FF will be more frequent and better rated than object FF. Experiment 1 suggested that the first hypothesis could be true but the difference in the number of results in mirative and information contexts was too small to confirm such a hypothesis. Experiment 2 did not find that a mirative context favoured a higher rating of FF. As for the second hypothesis, Experiment 1 suggested a positive trend toward FF being more frequently used when the subject was preposed but the number of samples was not enough to draw that

conclusion for certain. Experiment 2, however, confirmed that subject FF was better rated not only for mirative but also for information context.

Some limitations have to be taken into account while considering the results of two experiments carried out in this paper. First of all, all the participants came from the Catalan speaking-region and most of them were bilingual in Spanish and Catalan. Although the participants indicated Spanish as their first language, it is not known to what extent their bilingualism with Catalan could affect Spanish grammar. Furthermore, in Experiment 2, some of the participants were discarded because they stated that their native language was not Spanish but Catalan, while other participants chose Spanish as their mother tongue but later indicated that the language they spoke in childhood was Catalan. Those participants were not discarded. It is not known how participants were deciding which of the two languages was their native one. Another limitation is therefore the lack of enough participants to manipulate the variables such as bilingualism. The shortage of samples present in Experiment 1 is another limitation as a proper conclusion could not be drawn since FF was barely produced. Acquiring a bigger number of samples could lead to more significant results. Finally, subject and object focuses were not distributed equally within the lists of questions. It led to collecting more samples with object focus than subject focus, which could have potentially manipulated the results obtained.

The study could be continued by eliminating the limitations mentioned above, especially by finding a better method to investigate mirative context and by collecting enough samples to control the variables, incl. bilingualism. One way the investigation of the mirative context could be improved could be through a more natural setting, such as face-to-face sample collection, and informal pre-study conversation about ridiculous topics to trigger participants' creativity before giving surprising answers. Another way that might be more effective than asking participants to imagine a certain context and reply might be to provide participants with a video stimulus of these contexts. In those videos, two friends could be talking in natural settings, being informal and showing their surprise at certain answers. Several videos could be played before the elicitation task so that participants could immerse themselves in each context and engage with the story shown. As for the elicitation task, they could also be provided with videos which would be stopped for the answer and participants would be asked to complete the sentence. I think that if the videos were made in a funny and engaging way, showing the very likely context in which

participants could easily imagine being with friends and having a similar conversation, participants would be more likely to act naturally and possibly elicit more FF responses.

In total, the paper put forward an example of how Cruschina & Mayol's (2022) study could be expanded by investigating the mirative focus in addition to the information focus. Although the study conducted in this paper has several limitations, it did yield certain suggestions about tendencies of FF in mirative and information context as well as of subject and object fronting. The paper could contribute to spiking interest in investigating mirative focus and serve as the basis for further investigation of both information and mirative focus.

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6. ANNEXES

The following link gives access to a Google Drive unit in which resources to conduct and analyse the results of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 can be found:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HMS5vXADJROK_xphlzMV3Ea5VZQAPkw6?usp=sharing