

Italian background: links, tails, and contrast effects

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1 Introduction

Vallduví 1992 : S = {FOCUS + Background}

Background = {Link + Tail}

Link: An expression that directs “the hearer to a given address (or file card [...]) in the hearer’s knowledge-store, under which the information carried by the sentence is entered” (Vallduví 1992:59).

Tail: Background material that does not display link-like behavior. A tail specifies *how* the information must be entered under a specific address.

In Italian, a link is typically a Clitic Left Dislocated element (CLLD), and a tail is typically a Clitic Right Dislocated element (CLRD).

From Frascarelli 2000 (LIP corpus, De Mauro et al. 1993):

(1) Non è questione che **il tempo** non te l’ho DATO ;
not is question that **the time** not to-you it I-have given

io te l’ho DATO **il tempo**
I to-you it have given **the time**

‘The point is not that I didn’t give you time. I DID give you time.’

Exception: No subject clitics in Italian.

Open issue: whether or not preverbal subjects that function as links are LD (cf. Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1998, Vallduví 1993, a.o.), and postverbal subjects that function as tails are RD.

→ I will remain agnostic whether a link-like and a tail-like interpretation *only* concern dislocated material (left and right, respectively) or not.

2 Properties of links and tails

2.1 Discourse status (Prince 1992)

A link can be discourse new. A discourse new (discourse initial) link is usually a preverbal *subject*.

(2) Sai? **Un mio amico** ha vinto la lotteria.
you-know **a my friend** has won the lottery
‘You know? **a friend of mine** won the lottery’

When the subject cannot be a topic, e.g. when the subject is arbitrary (cf. Murcia-Serra 2003), the link is a non-subject argument in CLLD position:

(3) Sai? **A mio fratello** gli hanno rubato la moto.
you-know **to my brother** to-him they-have stolen the motorbike
‘Did you know? **My brother** got his motorbike stolen’

A tail, instead, is always discourse old, namely an antecedent for it must always be recoverable from the previous discourse or at least from the situational context (cf. Birner and Ward 1998, Ziv and Grosz 1994).

(4) ?? Sai? Ha vinto la lotteria, **un mio amico**.
you-know has won the lottery **a my friend**
‘You know? He won the lottery, a friend of mine’

(5) ?? Sai? Gli hanno rubato la moto, **a mio fratello**.
you-know to-him they-have stolen the motorbike **to my brother**
‘Did you know? They stole the motorbike, to my brother’

2.2 Contrast effects

Links can be contrastive (so-called ‘contrastive topics’, see Büring 1997), tails cannot.

(6) A: Che cosa hai regalato ai tuoi fratelli?
‘What did you give to your brothers?’

B1: **A Leo** (gli) ho regalato un cd, e **a Ugo** (gli) (ho regalato) un libro.
to Leo to-him I-have given a cd and **to Ugo** to-him I-have given a book
‘Leo, I gave a cd, and Ugo, I gave a book’

B2: * (Gli) ho regalato un CD, **a Leo** e (gli) ho regalato un LIBRO, **a Ugo**.
to-him I-have given a CD **to Leo** and to-him I-have given a BOOK **to Ugo**
‘I gave a cd to Leo and I gave a book to Ugo’

Cf. Benincà 1988, Frascarelli 2000. Cf. also Villalba 1998 for Catalan.

Another case of a contrastive interpretation of links (but not tails)

Cf. Brunetti 2006

(7) A: Dante, lo boccerai?
‘As for Dante, will you fail him?’

B1: No, non lo boccerò (**Dante**).
no not him I-will-fail **Dante**
‘No, I won’t FAIL **Dante**’

B2: No, **Dante** non lo boccerò. (...ma Ugo e Leo, sicuramente sì.)
no **Dante** not him I-will-fail (...but Ugo and Leo surely yes)
‘No, **Dante**, I won’t fail’ (‘...but Ugo and Leo, I surely WILL fail’)

B2 is interpreted as a partial answer.

Cf. Arregi 2003 for Spanish:

(8) A: ¿Qué le diste a Juan ?

‘What did you give to Juan?’

B1: Le di un libro (**a Juan**)
him I-gave a book **to Juan**
‘I gave a BOOK, **to Juan**.’

B2: **A Juan**, le di un libro.
to Juan to-him I-gave a book
‘**Juan**, I gave a book’

‘While answer B1 is simply a complete answer to the question, answer B2 (...) presupposes that there are other people the speaker gave things to’ (Arregi 2003:3).

Arregi 2003: **CLLD = contrastive topic**

Büring 1997: the meaning of a sentence with a contrastive topic corresponds to a set of sets of propositions (cf. Rooth 1992 for focus).

(9) A: What did the pop stars wear?
B: **The female pop stars** wore CAFTANS.

(10) { {the female pop stars wore caftans, the female pop stars wore white dresses, the female pop stars wore tuxedos... }
{the male pop stars wore caftans, the male pop stars wore white dresses, the male pop stars wore tuxedos... }...}

BUT: A contrastive interpretation of a CLLD does not arise if the referent is introduced in the discourse for the first time (cf. 3, repeated below).

(3) Sai? **A mio fratello** gli hanno rubato la moto.
you-know **to my brother** to-him they-have stolen the motorbike
‘Did you know? **My brother** got his motorbike stolen’

Why?

2.2.1 Non-realized links

In an Italian discourse, an expression representing a ‘continuous topic’ (Givón 1983) is never realized in sentence initial position unless the topic ‘continuum’ is interrupted by the introduction of a different topic.

‘Frog story’ narration

- (11) a. dunque **il bambino** si prepara per andare a...
so **the boy** is-getting-ready to go to...
- b. Ø è davanti allo specchio
he is in-front of-the mirror
- c. e Ø si prepara, Ø si mette la cravatta per andare al ristorante [...]
and **he** is-getting-ready he puts-on the tie to go to-the restaurant
- d. E **i suoi amici** lo guardano tristi perché sanno che non andranno con lui
and **the his friends** at-him look sad because they-know that not they-will-go with him
- e. Allora poi **il bambino** saluta il cane e la tartaruga [...]
so then **the boy** says-goodbye-to the dog and the turtle [...]

‘So, the boy is getting ready to go to... He is in front of the mirror, he is getting ready, he is putting on his tie to go to the restaurant [...] and his friends are looking at him with sad faces because they know they won’t go with him. So then the boy says bye to the dog and the turtle [...]’

Cf. Butt and King 1997 for Hindi.

Cf. Di Eugenio 1990, 1998 for Italian (subjects) within the Centering Theory framework (Grosz et al. 1995).

Cf. Japanese (Walker, Iida and Cote 1994), Turkish (Turan 1995)

My analysis:

What is unrealized is a link that represents the current topic. (It does not matter if the expression is a subject or not.)

‘Frog story’ narration:

- (12) a. ... e **il cane** casca dalla finestra, col barattolo infilato nella testa
and **the dog** falls from-the window with-the canister wedged in-the head
- b. e **gli** si rompe il barattolo
and **to-him** SI_{refl} breaks the canister
- c. e così Ø se ne può liberare
and so **he** SI_{refl} of-it can get-free

‘... and he dog falls out of the window with the canister wedged into his head, and the canister breaks so the dog can get rid of it’

N.B.: An expression representing the current topic *can* be realized if it is a *tail*.

LIP corpus

- (13) B: ah ho capito, ma **XYZ** che cosa vorrebbe? altri sconti...
uh I-have understood but XYZ what would-want other discounts...
‘Uh, I understand, but XYZ, what does he want? Other discounts..’

A: no, niente, eh, trovare una soluzione
no nothing eh find a solution
‘No, nothing, just find a solution’

B’: ah va be’, la soluzione gliela troviamo, naturalmente gli taglieremo dei margini, **a XYZ**
uh ok the solution for-him-it we-find of-course to-him we-will-cut some margins to XYZ
‘Uh that’s ok, we’ll find a solution for him; of course we’ll cut some margins, to XYZ’

See also (1).

→ A LINK always represents a shifting topic.

2.2.2 Contrast effects again

(7) A: Dante, lo boccerai?

‘As for Dante, will you fail him?’

B2: No, **Dante** non lo boccerò. (Ma Ugo e Leo sicuramente sì)
no **Dante** not him I-will-fail but Ugo and Leo surely yes
‘No, **Dante**, I won’t fail (but Ugo and Leo, I surely will)’

If *Dante* represented the same topic in A and B2, we would expect *Dante* to be unrealized as a link in B2, given what we saw in the preceding par. (cf. 11, 12).

Proposal:

The contrastive interpretation is the result of an accommodation that allows the hearer to interpret the topic in B2 as different from the previous topic.

In B2, the topic is interpreted as a set formed by Dante, Ugo and Leo. That explains why the sentence is considered as a partial answer.

→ A topic shift occurs between A and B2, which explains the presence of the link in B2.

Cf. Zeevat 2004: 207-8 for English.

A tail never represents a shifting topic → no contrastive interpretation is triggered in (7B1).

(7) A: Dante, lo boccerai? ‘As for Dante, will you fail him?’

B1: No, non lo boccerò (**Dante**).
no not him I-will-fail **Dante**
‘I won’t FAIL **Dante**’

2.2.3 Conclusions on contrast

A contrastive interpretation of a link arises:

- - when the link is explicitly compared with another link, and both are members of the same set (see 6).

Leo and *Ugo* in the answer represent different topics than that of the question (the whole set of brothers). Therefore, they are shifting topics. But this is impossible if they are CLRD → 6B2 results ungrammatical.

- - as a consequence of the fact that a link always represents a shifting topic (see discussion about 7).

3 Tails and sentences with left peripheral focus

Tails are CLRD in Italian.

(14) Li ho prestati a CLARA, **gli appunti**.
them I-have lent to CLARA **the notes**
‘I lent CLARA **my notes**’

A focused expression in Italian is usually at the end of the clause, but it can also be left peripheral:

(15) A CLARA **ho prestato gli appunti**.
to CLARA **I-have lent the notes**
‘It’s CLARA **who I lent my notes to**’

Claim:

Post-focal Background in sentences with a left peripheral focus (PFB) has the discourse function of CLRD, namely it is a tail.

(16) a. Li ho prestati a CLARA, ^{CLRD}*gli appunti*.

b. A CLARA ^{PFB}*ho prestato gli appunti*.

3.1 Tail-like properties of CLRD and PFB

A tail is always discourse old, so an antecedent for it must be available in the previous discourse context or it must be recoverable from the situational context.

Cf. Ziv and Grosz 1994 on English RD, and Mayol 2002 on Catalan CLRD.

3.1.1 The antecedent is recoverable from the situational context

CLRD

LIP corpus. The sentence opens a dialogue between the speaker and a post office clerk. The speaker is presumably holding the ticket she is talking about.

(17) Buongiorno signora, je lo do a LEI *il biglietto?*
good morning madam to-you it I-give to you *the ticket*
'Good morning, madam, do I have to give YOU *the ticket?*'

PFB

LIP corpus. Speaker B is a front-office clerk, and speaker A has given her the wrong document.

(18) A: Questo è il ticket.
'Here is the *ticket*'

B: No, questo non mi interessa; un DOCUMENTO *mi deve dare*, signora.
no this not to-me interests an ID *to-me you-must give* madam
'No, I don't need this; it's your ID *you have to give me*, madam'

The action of 'giving something to the clerk' is implicit in the situational context.

3.1.2 The antecedent has been mentioned in the previous discourse (not recently).

CLRD

LIP corpus. Six exchanges earlier, the speaker's mother is complaining about the speaker touching food without washing his hands. Then the conversation changes, until the speaker utters (19) returning to the previous conversation about washing one's hands.

(19) Mamma, quand'ero piccino come me le lavavo **le mani?**
mum when I-was little how ME_{refl} them I-washed the hands
'Mum, when I was little, how did I wash my hands?'

PFB

Anna and Leo are talking about a certain book. Anna does not remember who gave it to her. Then the conversation is dropped, and after some time, Anna says (20) to Leo as a continuation of that prior conversation:

(20) Ora ricordo! DANTE *mi ha regalato quel libro*.
now I-remember DANTE *to-me has given that book*
'Now I remember! DANTE *gave me that book*'

Cf. Rochemont 1986, Brunetti 2004.

3.1.3 The antecedent has been mentioned in the previous sentence

CLRD

LIP corpus

(21) A: Io se vuoi ti lascio anche le ricevute.
I if you-want to-you leave also the receipts
'If you want, I can also leave you the receipts'
B: No ora non me le LASCI, *le ricevute*.
no now not to-me them you-LEAVE *the receipts*
'No, for now don't LEAVE them to me, *the receipts*'

See also (1).

PFB

(22) A: Leo mi ha fatto proprio un bel regalo.

Leo to-me has done really a beautiful present
'Leo gave me a really beautiful present'

B: Secondo me UGO *ti* ha fatto *un bel regalo*.
according-to me UGO *to-you has done a beautiful present*
'I think UGO *gave you a beautiful present*'

'Frog story' narration

(23) Se la rana è tua allora anche tutto il TRAMBUSTO *è colpa tua*.

if the frog is yours then also all the MESS *is fault your*
'If the frog is yours than also all this MESS *is your fault*'

3.1.4 Non-realized tails

CLRD / PFB are preferably unrealized in an answer to a question.

(24) A: Chi ha comprato il giornale?
'Who bought the newspaper?'

B1: Lo ha comprato CLARA (*?il giornale*).
it has bought CLARA *the newspaper*

B2: CLARA (*?? ha comprato il giornale*).
CLARA *has bought the newspaper*
'CLARA bought the newspaper'

Cf. Brunetti 2004.

3.1.5 Contrastive focus

When a CLRD (see 1, 17?, 21) or a PFB (see 18, 22) are present in a sentence, the focus often has a *contrastive interpretation*.

(25) Ora non me le LASCI, *le ricevute*.
now not to-me them you-LEAVE *the receipts*
'For now, don't LEAVE them to me, *the receipts*'

(26) Un DOCUMENTO *mi deve dare*, signora.
AN I.D. *to-me you-must give* madam
'YOUR ID *you have to give me*, madam'

What is contrasted must have been mentioned earlier in the discourse or at least implicitly assumed by the situational context.

Thus, when a sentence has a contrastive focus, the background has an antecedent. This is always the case when the background is a tail.

Cf. Brunetti 2004, 2006, Wedgwood forthcoming.

A note on syntax

The parallelism between CLRD and PFB favors 'background-oriented' syntactic analyses of PFB (e.g. Vallduvi 1992 for Catalan and Samek-Lodovici 2006 for Italian) where the PFB occupies the same right-dislocated position as CLRD (see 27b), over 'focus-oriented' analyses (e.g. Brody 1990 for Hungarian, Rizzi 1997 for Italian), where the PFB is the result of movement of the focus to a left-peripheral, dedicated syntactic position (see 27c).

(27) a. A CLARA *ho prestato gli appunti*.
to Clara I-have lent the notes
'It's CLARA *who I lent my notes to*'

b. [_{IP} A Clara t_j] [_{TopP?} ho prestato gli appunti]_j. ←

c. [_{FocP} A Clara]_j [_{IP} ho prestato gli appunti t_j].

4 Conclusions on Italian background

Links

Links are CLLD or preverbal (non-focused) subjects.

Links can be discourse old or discourse new.

Links are always shifting topics.

A link is interpreted as contrastive when explicitly compared with another link, or as a result of an accommodation that allows the hearer to interpret the topic as shifting.

Tails

Tails are CLRD or post-verbal (non focused) subjects. They are also PFB in sentences with left peripheral focus.

Both CLRD and PFB are discourse old, namely an antecedent for them is recoverable from the discourse context (either in the preceding sentence or earlier in the discourse) or from the situational context.

Tails can be continuous topics, but never shifting topics. As a consequence, a tail never has a contrastive interpretation.

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