

# CONTRASTIVE INTONATION AND ITS DISGUISES OF SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE IN ITALIAN\*

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If we consider contrastive stress as a mere prosodic feature bearing no relation to syntax we may gain important theoretical advantages in terms of simplicity and generality.

The applicability of contrastive stress to Italian CLLD constructions pointed out by various authors is a starting point in this paper to argue that contrastive Focus, too, could arise from the application of contrastive stress to a simply focalized constituent, leaving its syntactic properties unchanged.

Arguably, the constituent bearing contrastive stress inherits from the replaced constituent the function played by the latter in the assertion structure of the original sentence.

## *1. Introduction*

Studies on the syntax of Left periphery initiated by Rizzi (1997), particularly on the syntax of projections that are relevant to the A(ssertion)-structure of Italian sentences (Frascarelli, 2000; Benincà, 2001; Belletti, 2002; Benincà & Poletto, 2004, a. o.), explicitly assume that the sentence initial N(uclear)F(ocus), generating a marked intonation sentence, allows only a contrastive interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Rizzi's (1997) words, "The focus-presupposition articulation can be expressed in Italian by preposing the focal element (focalization) and assigning it special focal stress:

(4) IL TUO LIBRO ho letto (, non il suo)

*Your book I read (, not his).*

In Italian this structural option is restricted to contrastive focus, i.e., (4) presupposes that you believe that I have read something different from your book, and corrects this belief. It could not be felicitously uttered as conveying non-contrastive new information, i.e. as an answer to the question 'What did you read?'

In this picture, Brunetti (2003) is an exception. She is in favor of the unification of the two kinds of focus both at the semantico-syntactic and at the prosodic level, although she does not question the marginality of noncontrastive initial NF sentences (for which she provides a new

It is well known that contrastive intonation applies to any portion of the verbal string, thus also of single words (and even to functional words; Nespor & Guasti, 2002: 88), whereas the accentual prominence of informative Focus cannot apply across the limit of the word (Donati & Nespor, 2003)<sup>2</sup>. In the past, due to this overwhelming ubiquity, contrastive intonation was excluded from the study of prosodic modalities that determine the A-structure of the sentence, that is, the syntactico-semantic structure in which the Focus-presupposition articulation is represented.

Zubizarreta (1998) reserves the term “emphatic” to this type of intonation confined to a merely metalinguistic function and, at the same time, adopts Rizzi’s (1997) proposal of a FocP projection in Comp dedicated to the emphatic/contrastive Focus, also endowed partially with a “metagrammatical” function. In her analysis, this kind of Focus obeys the *Focus/Contrastive Stress Correspondence Principle*, which I will discuss later.

Now that the review of different prosodic modalities relevant to the A-structure of the Italian sentence appears to be exhaustively outlined (see Nespor & Guasti, 2002, and references), contrastive stress seems to deserve a new attention, at least to verify the correctness of the relevant notions acquired.

The aim of this paper is therefore twofold; namely, to resume recent analyses that have pointed out some peculiar “disguises” of syntactic structure created by contrastive intonation, in order to characterize it in as detailed and general a manner as possible; to clarify and, if necessary, to revise, two interwoven notions – marked intonation vs. contrastive – that we should systematically keep distinct. To my knowledge, these two notions overlap only in the case of sentences with initial NF, where, according to the authors above, marked intonation should be uniquely associated with contrastive interpretation.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I argue that initial NF sentences admit two distinct interpretations normally associated with two types of intonation: marked and contrastive. In section 3, drawing mainly from Benincà (1988, 2001) and Rizzi (2001), I analyze some contrastive intonation examples that can be explained with the application of contrastive stress to various syntactic configurations, and expound the relevant conclusions. Section 4 is devoted to the

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explanation). I must also point out that the survey of the attested forms within medieval romance languages brings Benincà (2004) to postulate a position in CP also for the merely informative focus (see also Benincà & Poletto, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Brunetti (2003) proposes some counterexamples that, however, require an “echo” question context, thus declaring their noncanonical nature. See (i):

- (i) - Hai visto un “cosa”-pardo?  
(Brunetti, 2003, Ch.4, ex. (53))  
(you) have seen a what-pard?
- Ho visto un LEO-pardo  
(I) have seen a leopard

implications of my proposal with respect to language acquisition, along the lines of Nespor & Guasti (2002).

## 2. *The interpretation of sentences with a marked intonation*

### 2.1. *Stress prominence in the two patterns: marked/ unmarked*

Nespor & Guasti 2002 (N&G) report that in all languages, independently from basic word order, unmarked intonation is characterized by stress prominence on the accented syllable of the rightmost phonological phrase (*P*) in the intonational phrase (*I*): “the rightmost *P* of an *I* is strong and its sister nodes weak” (Hayes & Lahiri, 1991). Their *Focus to Stress Alignment Principle* (an interface condition) “requires that the constituent marked [+Focus] in the syntactic tree be aligned with the constituent bearing main prominence in the prosodic tree”. As a consequence, the syntactic structure where the rightmost constituent is the semantic Focus of the sentence<sup>3</sup> is prosodically unmarked in Italian, while the syntactic structure where stress prominence falls on a constituent to the left is prosodically and semantically marked, in particular the pattern where stress prominence falls on the initial constituent. Note that this simple notion of marked intonation implies that the corresponding syntactic structure has a derivational history. And this is indeed the case, if we set aside the special forms of *in situ* focalization associated with destressing of the final portion of the string, on which I return in 3.4.

To the best of my knowledge, nobody has shown yet that in Italian – unlike English or French – the pattern where stress prominence falls on the initial constituent can *only* be contrastive, as assumed in the vast relevant literature (partially quoted in section 1.). If this assumption were true, we would face an undesirable interaction between discourse pragmatic factors on the one hand, and semantico-syntactic factors on the other. The intervention of the speaker merely correcting (a portion of) a given verbal string involves special nonsyntactic and nonsemantic aspects of linguistic communication rather than being an expression of

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<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the unmarked pattern is delicate, particularly in the case of sentence final NF. The example utilized by N&G, in (i)-(ii) below, is not satisfactory, because the perfectly grammatical (i) is not the most natural answer to (ii), as the authors note (a dative clitic, for instance, would improve (i) a lot):

(i) Giacomo ha dato a Tommaso un libro (N&G, (23a))

*Giacomo gave to Tommaso a book*

(ii) Che cosa ha dato Giacomo a Tommaso? (N&G, (23b))

*what did Giacomo give to Tommaso?*

In (i), in order to transmit the NF value, a pause before *un libro* is necessary, and especially a sort of emphasis that, however, I do not call contrastive because I reserve this term to a given pragmatic value (the explicit or implicit correction of a different value for the variable being identified). For the focalizing effect of the complement reordering exemplified in (i) see Belletti (2002).

the regular interplay among different speakers between the Focus-presupposition articulations embodied in their respective utterances.

More terminological clarifications are however in order. From the very definition of marked intonation we may infer that initial stress prominence involves emphasis, but not vice versa: since emphasis can have various implementations and functions, it does not necessarily imply marked intonation, at least in the technical sense outlined above. It is also useful to distinguish between emphasis and contrast, although the latter also implies emphasis (but the reverse is not true) as shown in scheme (1) which is relevant to the interpretation of final and initial NF. (The reader can find some relevant examples in 2.2., under (2), where capital letters mean emphasis throughout).

- (1) (i) final NF, unmarked intonation with no emphasis => noncontrastive value  
(ii) final NF, unmarked intonation with emphasis => contrastive/  
noncontrastive value  
(iii) initial NF, marked intonation with emphasis => contrastive/  
noncontrastive value

From (1), we infer that emphasis is indeed necessarily associated with marked intonation, as in (iii), but is also optionally associated with unmarked intonation, as in (ii) vs. (i); in both (ii) and (iii) the association with emphasis has no predictable consequence for contrastive interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to emphasis, contrastive intonation involves a typical raising of the accentual contour (according to Bocci, 2004: “a remarkable melodic excursion”) concomitant with stress prominence, and the reader can easily verify that this sort of raising is always possible, albeit not necessary, in the relevant examples. As a possible consequence of this phenomenon, another salient property of contrastive intonation seems to be a marked pause respectively before, or after, the final or initial constituent (or element) bearing stress prominence. But the question requires a specific analysis (I defer here to Bocci’s 2004 phonetic investigation and references therein).

As noted above, Zubizarreta (1998) reserves the term “emphatic” for the main stress bearing a merely corrective that is metagrammatical or metalinguistic function, while reserving the term “contrastive” to the stress bearing a partly metalinguistic and partly semantic function; more precisely, a function linked to the semantics of Focus, in the sense that contrastive stress is deemed to introduce the variable relevant to focalization together with its value. Hence her formulation of a *Focus/Contrastive Stress Correspondence Principle*, which essentially states that the element bearing contrastive stress belongs to the Focus constituent.

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<sup>4</sup> Given that an implication relation seems also to exist between contrastive and exhaustive identification value (corresponding to the statement: “Y and nobody else”; see Kiss, 1998), one could inquire whether the latter value does not tend to prevail in an emphatic context, favoring the wrong impression that the relevant form is contrastive.

Here, I use the term contrastive for the prominent stress bearing a corrective function, and reserve the term “emphatic” for other meanings. We will see that the logic of the data at hand favors the conclusion that i) contrastive stress cannot have the function of introducing the relevant variable, and ii) we need not hypothesize a syntactic position dedicated to contrastive Focus. As a consequence, Zubizarreta’s distinction between emphasis: only corrective - and contrastive: partly corrective *and* partly Focus related in the intended sense (introducing a variable and its value) loses its foundation, as well as the relevant principle, at least in Italian.

## 2.2. *The interpretation of sentence initial NF*

Typically, in the case of sentence initial NF with a contrastive value, the speaker shares with the hearer the presupposition (sometimes denoted with P) that there is an “X such that...”, and corrects the value previously assigned by the hearer to the relevant variable (typically, then, the speaker does not correct the P of the relevant sentence but its Focus: if one prefers, the belief of the hearer).

Not surprisingly, the examples to be found in the literature are unambiguously corrective due to the presence of a negative tag and entirely acceptable as such,<sup>5</sup> but others can be provided that exclude the possibility of a contrastive interpretation due to their context, which disambiguates them in the noncontrastive sense: the speaker merely assigns a value to the relevant variable “ex novo”, so to say. See (2):

- (2) a (Ho fatto un’indagine.) MARIA potrebbe accompagnarci  
(*I made an inquiry.*) *MARIA could take you home*  
b (Ho fatto un’indagine.) Potrebbe accompagnarci Maria  
(*I made an inquiry.*) *could take you home Maria*  
c (Ho fatto un’indagine.) Potrebbe accompagnarci MARIA!  
(*I made an inquiry.*) *could take you home MARIA!*

The P in (2) is that (at least) an X exists such that X can take home the hearer. The comparison between the marked intonation sentence (2a), and the unmarked (2b), highlights the fact that marked intonation is obligatorily associated with emphasis but not with contrast, that is, the negation of a given value for X. As already stated, also the marked Focus can simply assign a given value to the variable generated by the P of the sentence, as in the standard analysis of Focalization (Chomsky, 1970, 1976).

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to Rizzi’s (1997) example of footnote 1, see (i), from Rizzi (2001):

(i) Credo che QUESTO avreste dovuto dirgli (non qualcos’altro) (Rizzi, 2001, 289, 6a)

*I believe that THIS you should have said to him, not something else*

(ii) Credo che QUESTO potreste dirgli (per esempio/ è così difficile?)

*I believe that THIS you could say to him (for instance/ is it so difficult?)*

The interpretation of (i) is only contrastive, but (ii) is a natural answer to a simple *wh*-question, for instance to the question: *Che cosa potremmo dirgli?* ‘What could we say to him?’.

As a confirmation of this datum, there are cases in which a marked intonation sentence is a more natural-sounding answer to a *wh*-question than an unmarked one, as we will see below (2.3.).

Note that, keeping the relevant context unchanged, (2c), with sentence final NF hence with unmarked though emphatic intonation, has the same informative value as (2a), that is: (i) identification of a value for *X* without any corrective function, and (ii) emphasis, apparently optional here given the acceptability of (2b). The same can be said with regard to (3a-c) and (4a-c) below, with a more detailed context in (c) that applies also to (a):

- (3) - Mi ha chiamato qualcuno/nessuno?  
has somebody/ anybody called me?  
a - MARIA ti ha chiamato. (Tu chi aspettavi?)  
*MARIA called you. (Whom were you waiting for?)*  
b - Ti ha chiamato Maria. (Tu chi aspettavi?)  
*has called you Maria. (Whom were you waiting for?)*  
c - Ti ha chiamato MARIA! (Te l'ho già detto. Tu chi aspettavi?)  
*has called you MARIA! (I already told you. Whom were you waiting for?)*
- (4) a - (Finalmente!) QUESTO vorrei che tu le dicessi in primo luogo  
*(At last!) THIS I would like that you say to her in the first place*  
*'THIS is what I would like you to say to her in the first place'*  
b - (Finalmente!) Vorrei che tu le dicessi questo, in primo luogo  
*(At last!) I would like that you say her this in the first place*  
c - (Finalmente!) Vorrei che tu le dicessi QUESTO, in primo luogo!  
*(At last!) I would like that you say her THIS in the first place!*  
(Devo sempre ripetermi)  
*(I must always repeat myself)*

Only the context, in (2)-(4), bars the contrastive interpretation for the (a) sentences, but this holds true for the (c) ones too, where the NF is also emphasized. And in both cases the contrastive vs. informative Focus interpretation becomes available if the context is properly modified. The intonational properties that are peculiar of the (b) vs. (c) sentences must be deferred to a specific analysis, as I already made clear for the relevant properties of contrastive intonation.

Although, from the pragmatic point of view, sentence final informative NF virtually excludes other potential values for the relevant variable (see footnote 4), this exclusion must be kept distinct from the specific negation involved by contrastive Focus, which is intended to substitute a given value, whether explicit or implicit. It is easy to see that this kind of final NF could even be followed by expressions like “for instance”, allowing the speaker to continue with a list. The same can be said for sentence initial NF, if occurring in a context that does not select contrastive interpretation.

2.3. *Aspects of the marked pattern: the noncontrastive case*

I would therefore like to maintain, against current opinion, that the notion of marked intonation is necessarily associated with emphasis but not with contrastive interpretation. The latter interpretation derives instead from an intonational feature that somehow “stretches” above the entire element bearing prominent stress, be it sentence initial (marked intonation case) or final (unmarked case), according to the ubiquity of contrastive stress.<sup>6</sup> It would be somewhat strange if the correction involved, which applies to any portion of the verbal string with no structural consequences, could not apply with the same modalities to the mere output of Focalization.

Now, if we take into consideration the patterns given in (1), we can note an interesting phenomenon: (iii) is much more effective than (i) in isolating the NF reading. Indeed, (2b)-(4b), unlike (2a)-(4a), are interpretable not only as final NF sentences but also as B(road)F (or W(ide)F) ones, in particular (3b). As universally acknowledged, unmarked intonation corresponds to an entire range of foci and presuppositions, respectively. Conversely, initial NF sentences are characterized by the fact that they have an unambiguous P.

It is not surprising, then, that an initial NF sentence can be used as an answer to a *wh*- question and is even more natural or acceptable than a final NF one. See, for instance:

- (5) - Chi ha avuto, ieri, uno scontro verbale molto duro con Giovanni?  
*who had, yesterday, a very harsh dispute with Giovanni?*  
a - MARIA ha avuto ieri uno scontro verbale molto duro con Giovanni!  
*MARIA had yesterday a very harsh dispute with Giovanni!*  
b ?\* - Ha avuto ieri uno scontro verbale molto duro con Giovanni, MARIA!  
*had yesterday a very harsh dispute with Giovanni, MARIA!*

The null hypothesis is that the structure of (5a) and (5b) is as sketched in (5a') and (5b') respectively:

(5a')<sub>CP(FocP Maria<sub>i</sub> (IP t<sub>i</sub> ha avuto ieri uno scontro verbale molto duro con Giovanni))</sub>

<sup>6</sup> There are a few exceptions to this ubiquity, which seem to involve certain discourse modalities that are incompatible with the modality of contrast: hanging topic, shown in (i), is one case, and RD, shown in (ii), is another (pointed out in Bocci, 2004). Does this mean that also these modalities deserve a special discourse pragmatic treatment?

- (i) – Giorgio, nessuno gli ha più rivolto la parola  
*Giorgio, nobody to him has anymore addressed a word*  
– \*FRANCO, nessuno gli ha più rivolto la parola  
(Bocci, 2004, Cap.3)  
(ii) – L'ha comprato ieri il libro  
*pro<sub>arg</sub> it has bought yesterday the book*  
– \*L'ha comprato ieri IL RIASSUNTO  
*pro<sub>arg</sub> it has bought yesterday the summary*

In (5a'), as in all analogous cases throughout this paper, the FocP projection is unorthodoxly occupied by a noncontrastive Focus. In (5b'), the focalized DP is preceded by "remnant IP" in Comp (TopP). As for (5a'), also for (5b'), the structure of CP is as in Rizzi (1997), Belletti (2002):

(5b')<sub>CP(TopP)</sub> (IP t<sub>i</sub> ha avuto ieri uno scontro verbale molto duro con Giovanni) (FocP Maria<sub>i</sub> (IP t<sub>IP</sub>...

The peculiarity of (5a) vs. (5b) is that it does not sound redundant as an answer. A reasonable explanation for this datum is that (5a) does not contain a frozen (partial) copy of the question, while (5b) does, due to "remnant IP" in TopP. Since the order V O PP S is permitted if the subject is emphatically stressed – see again Belletti (2002), who assigns it the classical position Spec,FocP in Comp with a contrastive value<sup>7</sup> – the only explanation of the unacceptability of (5b) to which we can resort is at the pragmatic level. Reasonably, a sentence portion that formally, or syntactically, declares that it is the immediate repetition of another sentence portion should be as short as possible: the presupposed part of (5b) in Top is too long for the utterance to be acceptable. The case of (5a) is different, because it is relatively open to all modifications that would preserve its cooperative conversational value, as in (5c) (modifications in italics):

- (5) c MARIA ha avuto ieri uno scontro verbale *abbastanza duro/ un colloquio piuttosto teso* con G.  
*MARIA had yesterday a pretty harsh dispute/ a rather tense conversation with G.*
- d ? \*Ha avuto ieri uno scontro verbale *abbastanza duro/un colloquio piuttosto teso* con G., MARIA

The conclusion to be drawn is that the marked order of constituents in (5a) provides a more natural answer than the unmarked in (5b) to the relevant *wh*-question. I return later to this opposition, which holds even in a contrastive context, as the reader can easily verify.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Belletti (2002), emphasis must be contrastive even to redeem a VOS sentence "somewhat redundant and slightly unnatural" like B in (i):

(i) A: Chi ha capito il problema?

*who has understood the problem?*

B: Ha capito il problema Gianni (=18) in Belletti, 2002)

*has understood the problem Gianni*



3. *The pragmatic function of contrastive intonation*

3.1. *Syntactic ubiquity of contrastive stress*

3.1.1. *Contrastive Focus*

Under this view, the initial NF sentence (6a) below can be said to have a prosodic and assertive structure pragmatically ambiguous between the informative and contrastive interpretations, as appears from scheme (1). Equally ambiguous at the pragmatic level is the corresponding cleft sentence (6b). A proper interpretation for the two can be obtained through the disambiguating context (6c) for the informative, and, respectively, (6d), for the contrastive value:

- (6) a QUELLA MACCHINA non ha rispettato la precedenza  
*THAT CAR did not observe the right of way*  
b È QUELLA MACCHINA che non ha rispettato la precedenza  
*it is THAT CAR that did not observe the right of way*  
c Chi non ha rispettato la precedenza?  
*who did not observe the right of way?*  
d (È) QUEL CAMION (che) non ha rispettato la precedenza  
*(it is) THAT TRUCK that did not observe the right of way*

As usual, (6c) asks somebody to identify X, given the P “there is an X such that X did not observe the right of way”). Therefore, (6a) and (6b), in the simply marked intonation interpretation, must be considered as two possible answers to (6c), with which they share the given P. Instead, in the contrastive marked intonation interpretation, they must be considered as corrections of the putatively wrong assertion in (6d).

Note that in both (7a) (repeating (6a,b) plus the negative tag) and (7b), the explicit negation does not concern the P of the putatively wrong assertion (6d), but rather its focus, as is frequently the case (see §2.2.): the P remains unchanged.

- (7) a (È) QUELLA MACCHINA (che) non ha rispettato la precedenza, non quel camion!  
*(it is) THAT CAR (that) did not respect the right of way, not that truck!*  
b NO (NON È quel camion)!(E') QUELLA MACCHINA (che) non ha rispettato la precedenza!  
*NO (it is NOT that truck)!(it is) THAT CAR (that) did not respect the right of way!*

3.1.2. *Contrastive Topic*

As is implicit in my initial observations, contrastive focus is only an instance among many of contrastive stress. A contrastive intonation sentence can also serve the purpose of correcting the presupposition of its noncontrastively stressed counterpart, and in that case it is the relevant focus that remains unchanged. This

happens, for example, in sentences with a contrastive CLLD constituent in contexts like (8), due to Giulio Lepschy (see Benincà, 1988, 2001):

- (8) a Mi ha detto che il tappeto, lo compra l'anno prossimo  
*told me that the carpet it buys next year*  
*'he/she told me that, as for the carpet, he/she will buy it next year'*
- b No, ti sbagli. IL DIVANO lo compra l'anno prossimo  
*no, you are wrong. THE SOFA it buys next year*  
*'no, you are wrong. AS FOR THE SOFA (he/she told you) he/she will buy it next year'*

In (8a) the P is that the author of the reported speech will buy a carpet at a time X, and the focus is the identification of such an X (*l'anno prossimo*). In (8b) the P is modified, as is always the case in instances of “focalized CLLD”, using Benincà’s (2001) definition. The interesting datum is that the specific informative value of the CLLD, that is, singling out the Topic, is preserved. The correct interpretation of (8b) is something as follows: “It is of the sofa that he/she told ...”. This interpretation is not available with the initial NF (*IL DIVANO compra l'anno prossimo*. “THE SOFA he/she will buy next year”).<sup>8</sup>

Consider now (9b) and, particularly, (10b):

- (9) a Chi vorrebbe quel camion?  
*who would like that truck?*  
*'nobody would like that truck'*
- b Chi vorrebbe QUESTA MACCHINA!  
*Who would like THAT CAR!*  
*'nobody would like THAT CAR'*
- (10) a Quel camion, chi lo vorrebbe?  
*that truck, who it would like?*  
*'nobody would like that truck'*
- b QUESTA MACCHINA, chi la vorrebbe! (=i), ft.12, Benincà 2001)  
*THAT CAR, who it would like!*  
*'nobody would like THAT CAR'*

(9b) is comprehensible (=interpretable) only in the context (9a) with which it shares a large portion of P: “there is no X such that X would like...(that truck)”. This

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<sup>8</sup> Analogous considerations can be found in Bocci (2004). In the “focalized CLLD” – in his terminology TopCE (Echo Contrastive Topic) – the informative value of CLLD is indeed preserved, but a syntactic condition must be met: the presence of a FocP projection in the relevant CP. Capitalizing on Haegeman’s proposal about the truncated Left periphery in event conditionals, control structures and subject clauses (Haegeman, 2004), admittedly deprived of the Force field – that is the projections ForceP, higher TopP, and FocP – Bocci suggests that in these specific environments TopCE is from marginal to unacceptable. Here I do not discuss Bocci’s suggestion, for my position relies on different acceptability judgments.

P justifies the rhetorical question (9a): “for what X, X would like (that truck)?”, and lends it the proper interpretation (Obenauer & Poletto, to appear)<sup>9</sup>. Also in this case, then, contrastive stress allows us to replace or correct a portion of P (‘that truck’) and does not affect what can be considered the focus of the question, that is the *wh*-element. Equally uninterpretable outside the given context is (10b), which shares with (10a) the entire P with the exception of the item subject to CLLD (‘that truck’). As in (9b), the focus of the question is unaffected.

### 3.2. “Echo exclamations” and contrast

For all we have seen so far, it could be suggested that contrastive stress applies *in situ* leaving the A-structure of the relevant noncontrastive counterpart sentence substantially unchanged. As we can form “echo questions” from declarative sentences by *in situ* substitution of a given constituent with a *wh*-element (– *Ieri sono andata a Verona. – Ieri sei andata DOVE?*, ‘Yesterday I went to Verona. – Yesterday you went WHERE?’), in the same way exclamative sentences like (9b)-(10b), which are formed from interrogative sentences by substitution of a given constituent, may perhaps be considered as “echo” exclamations (for independent use of this very term see Bocci, 2004, who calls the contrastively stressed CLLD constituent, “echo contrastive Topic”). The requirement denoted by this term, as usual, is the literal identity of the two strings involved.

Note, now, that there is no interpretation available for (11):

- (11) \*QUESTA MACCHINA chi vorrebbe!  
*THIS CAR who would like!*

The unavailability of an interpretation for (11) is consistent with the notion of contrastive stress proposed here. In this proposal, contrastive stress is effective if the noncontrastive counterpart sentence to which the replaced constituent (/element) belongs is grammatical.

The relevant counterpart, here, would either be (12a), unacceptable without an object clitic pronoun, or (12b), a sentence where, as noted by Benincà (2001), both the focus and the *wh*-element would qualify as operators, with an obvious result of ungrammaticality (see further, 3.3.).

- (12) a \*Quel camion, chi vorrebbe?  
*As for that truck, who would like?*  
b \*QUEL CAMION, chi vorrebbe? (= (ii), fn. 12, Benincà, 2001)  
*THAT TRUCK, who would like?*

All the observations made so far aim to show that the constituent bearing contrastive stress can either be (part of) the focus or (part of) the presupposition,

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<sup>9</sup> The term “rhetorical question” here has the restrictive sense of a “question with an interpretation equal to a negative assertion: ‘does not exist an X such that X...’” (Obenauer and Poletto, to appear).

hence not necessarily focalized. “Contrast” must be conceived as a kind of “echo” substitution. The constituent bearing contrastive stress inherits from the replaced constituent the function the latter plays in the A-structure of the original sentence.

It is therefore predictable that a constituent bearing this type of stress does not necessarily occupy a position resulting from movement (see Benincà, 2002; Frascarelli 1997, quoted in Benincà). If there is no sentence initial NF, as in (13a), it is reasonable to assume that a contrastively stressed initial constituent as in (13b) need not be associated with movement:

- (13) a - (Non preoccuparti per il rumore,) Maria è già sveglia  
(Do not worry about the noise,) Maria is already awake  
b - (Vorrai dire,) GIOVANNA è già sveglia  
(You mean,) GIOVANNA is already awake  
c - (Non è vero. Maria dorme ancora.) GIOVANNA è già sveglia  
(It is not true. Maria is still sleeping.) GIOVANNA is already awake  
d - (Non è vero. Maria dorme ancora.) GIOVANNA, però, è già sveglia  
(It is not true. Maria is still sleeping.) GIOVANNA, however, is already awake  
e - (Non è vero. Maria dorme ancora.) Però, è già sveglia GIOVANNA  
(It is not true. Maria is still sleeping.) However, is already awake  
GIOVANNA

As generally admitted, and as suggested by the bracketed text in (13b), the correction yielded by contrastive stress can be simply of a metalinguistic nature. According to (13b), Maria could even not exist and (13a) would simply contain a mistaken name.<sup>10</sup>

In (13a), *Maria* is the subject of a predicative clause where the predicate represents the focus. In (13c), however, the explicit negation (*Non è vero*, ‘It is not true’) draws attention unambiguously on a process Zubizarreta (1998) incorporates in her *Focus/ Contrastive Stress Correspondence Principle*. This process, in my analysis, goes beyond the limits of contrastive stress phenomena, for the proper analysis of (13c) passes through the P “there is an X such that X is awaken” which regularly introduces the variable to be identified. Whether or not the focus is contrastively stressed in a sentence like (13c) – as it should not be, notably, in (13d-e) – its semantic analysis does not change. Presumably (13c) can have both

<sup>10</sup> Given the context (ia), the sentence (ib) represents the two possible (referential and metalinguistic) interpretive functions of contrastive stress concerning (part of) the focus:

- (i) a - Questo è l'ultimo regalo di mia cognata  
*this is the last gift of my sister-in-law*  
b - No! Questo è l'ultimo regalo di TUA NUORA!  
*no! this is the last gift of your DAUGHTER-IN-LAW!*

In one case, (ib) asserts that the gift has been made by a person different from the one meant in (ia), in the other that the same person has a different kinship relation with the speaker and therefore a different term (or, logically, attribute) is required.

intonations and respective interpretations according to the more general pragmatic environment, that is, according to the intentions of the speaker.

On the other hand, the fact that (13b) vs. (13c-d) cannot be read as an initial NF sentence, suggests that in (13b) there is no movement to FocP, and this datum is in favor of my proposal: contrastive stress must be kept distinct from focus stress.

I have suggested that salient phonological properties of contrastive intonation are a nonvirtual pause after the stressed constituent (in the case of sentence initial NF), and a (possible) complex tone (lowering/raising/lowering). This complex tone raising seems to be appropriate in (13b), but not in (13c). My intuition – to be verified elsewhere – is that in (13c), unless followed by a negative tag, the prominent stress can be emphasized but not raised (and lowered) as much as in (13b). See the experimental analysis concerning the phonetic properties of contrastive focus intonation in Bocci (2004), where interesting aspects of this “remarkable melodic excursion” are detected.

At first sight, if (13c) is contrastively interpreted, a problem arises for my analysis. Contrary to the relevant prediction, (13c) does change the A-structure of the original sentence (13a): the focus of (13a) (*è già sveglia*) is converted into the P of (13c) (“there is an X such that X is already awake”). We have however seen that in (13c) the focus can be of both kinds, informative and contrastive: essentially, it can have both intonations according to the context. The variable cannot be deemed to be introduced by contrastive stress (as in Zubizarreta, 1998) but by a regular focus-presupposition articulation reversal, to which contrast can be added, if needed. Here, I do not reject Zubizarreta’s far-reaching analysis. I note that her *Focus/Contrastive Stress Correspondence Principle* is obviously useless in a framework where contrast is always a superimposed prosodic feature.

### 3.3. Contrastive stress as a mere prosodic feature

#### 3.3.1. On the behavior of focus and *wh*- element in embedded clauses

At the syntactic level, the incompatibility of focus and *wh*- element, hinted at with regard to (12b), is well known, and is explained by the fact that both compete for the same position: Spec of FocP (Rizzi, 1997). This analysis also provides the semantic explanation for this incompatibility: they both act upon the variable that is provided by the P of the sentence: in the former case an assertive sentence (“The X such that X... is...”), in the latter an interrogative one (“for what X...X...?”).

It can be useful to dwell upon the phenomenon observed by Rizzi (2001), shown in (14) below (same numeration in Rizzi, 2001; indices added for clarity), according to which in embedded questions something different occurs, and the incompatibility between focus and *wh*- elements disappears, given certain conditions:

- (14) a \*?Mi domando a chi<sub>j</sub> QUESTO<sub>i</sub> abbiano detto t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>  
I wonder to whom *THIS* they have said (not something else)  
b \*?Mi domando QUESTO<sub>i</sub> a chi<sub>j</sub> abbiano detto t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>  
I wonder *THIS* to whom they have said (not something else)

- c Mi domando A GIANNI<sub>j</sub> che cosa<sub>i</sub> abbiano detto t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>  
*I wonder TO GIANNI what they have said (not to Piero)*
- d \*?Mi domando che cosa<sub>i</sub> A GIANNI<sub>j</sub> abbiano detto t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>  
*I wonder what TO GIANNI they have said (not to Piero)*

According to Rizzi, “the possible cooccurrence shown by (14c) clearly suggests that *Wh*- elements in embedded questions are not forced to move to the Spec of Foc, contrary to main questions; therefore there must be a position lower than Foc available to *wh*- elements in embedded questions”. Then, co-occurrence of focus and *wh*- element becomes possible if the latter stops in a lower position, although, still according to Rizzi, we must explain why (14b) is unacceptable. To this end, Rizzi appeals to Pesetsky’s (1982) *crossing constraint*: the two A’ dependencies are crossed in the unacceptable (14b) and nested in the acceptable (14c). As a rule, a violation of this constraint would be predictable whenever the object is in focus and the PP questioned, not vice versa.

In the light of previous discussion, a different analysis of paradigm (14) is perhaps possible, which could reinforce my proposal to consider contrastive stress as a mere prosodic feature superimposed to a constituent syntactically licensed in that position. I will speculate that in (14c) *A GIANNI* represents a PP that is not focalized but left-dislocated and, furthermore, contrastively stressed as already seen for other constituents subject to contrastive CLLD as in (8b) and (10b) above. The relevant context is something like: *Mi domando, a Piero, che cosa abbiano detto* (‘I wonder, to Piero, what they have said’). In this picture the fact that (14b), the sentence with a focalized object and a questioned PP, is not acceptable, lends evidence in favor of my analysis rather than requiring an explanation, as we will easily see.

In the case that it is the direct object that undergoes CLLD, we can resort to a familiar test: the insertion of the object clitic pronoun, which becomes a sort of detector of this construction, as in the acceptable (14b’):

- (14) b’ Mi domando QUESTO<sub>i</sub> a chi<sub>j</sub> l’abbiano detto t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> (non qualcos’altro)  
*I wonder THIS to whom they it have said (not something else)*

Indeed, (14b’) forms a minimal pair with the unacceptable (14b). In my opinion, this result could have a remarkable theoretical relevance if it could corroborate the assumption that the semantic basis of focus remains unchanged passing from main to embedded clauses, and equally unchanged its syntactic counterpart. If the incompatibility between focus and *wh*- element is semantically grounded, it would be desirable that the empirical data could provide a confirmation, beyond appearance of the contrary generated by the interference of contrastive intonation.

Furthermore, the fact that only contrastive “focalization” is admitted in (14) is consistent with the hypothesis that the relevant structure contains a CLLD.

3.3.2. Evidence in favor of a “focalized CLLD” analysis for the co-occurrence of focus and *wh*- element

In (14), repeated below, we have seen that the opposition between the unacceptable (14d) and a sentence like (14c) where the *wh*- element is lower – indeed a predictable opposition under Rizzi’s hypothesis of a shorter movement of the *wh*- element – does not show up between (14a) and (14b), predictably unacceptable due to a violation of the *crossing constraint* since the “focalized” constituent is the direct object and the lower *wh*- element a PP.

- (14) a \*?Mi domando a chi QUESTO abbiamo detto (non qualcos’altro)  
*I wonder to whom THIS they have said (not something else)*  
b \*?Mi domando QUESTO a chi abbiamo detto (non qualcos’altro)  
*I wonder THIS to whom they have said (not something else)*  
c Mi domando A GIANNI che cosa abbiamo detto (non a Piero)  
*I wonder TO GIANNI what they have said (not to Piero)*  
d \*?Mi domando che cosa A GIANNI abbiamo detto (non a Piero)  
*I wonder what TO GIANNI they have said (not to Piero)*

Now, in order to verify the hypothesis sketched in 3.3.1., according to which the paradigm above could derive from contrastive CLLD, we must check the paradigm resulting from the putative noncontrastive original forms in (15a-d). If, as I have argued so far, contrastive intonation does not affect the grammaticality/ungrammaticality of the noncontrastive original string, the two paradigms (14) and (15) should overlap, and this is what we find after careful examination.

- (15) a \*?Mi domando a chi, questo, abbiamo detto  
*I wonder to whom, this, they have said*  
b \*?Mi domando, questo, a chi abbiamo detto  
*I wonder, this, to whom they have said*  
c Mi domando, a Piero, che cosa (gli) abbiamo detto  
*I wonder, to Piero, what (to him) they have said*  
d Mi domando che cosa, a Piero, (gli) abbiamo detto  
*I wonder what, to Piero, (to him) they have said*

Sentences (15a) and (15b) are as unacceptable as (14a) and (14b), but now the obvious explanation comes from the fact that they lack the obligatory object clitic, see the acceptable (16a-b) below:

- (16) a (- Mi domando a chi, questa cosa, l’abbiamo detta -)  
*I wonder to whom, this thing, they it have said*  
Domandati a chi, L’ALTRA COSA, l’abbiamo detta  
*Wonder to whom, THE OTHER THING, they it have said*  
b (- Mi domando, questa cosa, a chi l’abbiamo detta -)  
*I wonder, this thing, to whom they it have said*  
Domandati L’ALTRA COSA, a chi l’abbiamo detta  
*Wonder THE OTHER THING, to whom they it have said*

(15c) is as acceptable as (14c), but (15d), differently from (14d), is fully acceptable, provided the PP has the typical comma intonation of CLLD constituents. But the latter divergence is only apparent. With the dative clitic, revealing even though optional as in (15c) anyway, we discover that also (14d) is acceptable<sup>11</sup>, see (14'd):

- (14') d Mi domando che cosa, A GIANNI, (gli) abbiamo detto (non a Piero),  
*I wonder what, TO GIANNI, they (to him) have said (not to Piero)*

As already noted for (8b), the correct interpretation of (14d) is as follows: “It is of Gianni that I wonder what they have said to him”. Obviously, (15) is not a relevant context for the application of the *crossing constraint*.

Note that if (14c), which only admits a contrastive interpretation (as pointed out by Rizzi), could only be interpreted with a (contrastively) focalized *a Gianni*, it would represent a potential counterexample to my claim that an initial NF sentence (even embedded) can always function as an answer to a *wh*- question. In fact, the natural answer to the (“echo”) question (16c) below is (16d), not (16e)=(14c):

- (16) c A CHI ti domandi che cosa abbiamo detto? (- Mi domando che cosa  
abbiamo detto a G.)  
*TO WHOM do you wonder what they have said?) (- I wonder what  
they have said to G.)*  
d A GIANNI mi domando che cosa abbiamo detto (non avevi capito?)  
*TO GIANNI I wonder what they have said (didn't you understand?)*  
e \*Mi domando A GIANNI che cosa abbiamo detto (non avevi capito?)  
*I wonder TO GIANNI what they have said (didn't you understand?)*

As desired, the interpretation of the acceptable (16d) is also noncontrastive. In my analysis, then, the acceptability of (14c), requiring a contrastive interpretation, as noted, can be explained by appealing to an original CLLD construction.

To conclude, my proposal utilizes an alternative analysis for the acceptability of (14c), which possibly – and the question cannot be dealt with here – offers more general advantages, in terms of simplicity, for the analysis of the functional structure of Left periphery in Italian. According to this analysis, contrast would not be associated with a specific syntactic position. Although a feature somewhat relevant

<sup>11</sup> By the same token, (ii) below, with a contrastive value, is acceptable in a context like (i):

- (i) - Immagino, a Piero, che cosa (gli) vorrebbero / finiranno per dire  
*I figure out, to Piero, what they (to him) would like to say/ will end up saying*  
(ii) Immagino A GIANNI che cosa (gli) vorrebbero dire/ finiranno per dire  
*I imagine TO GIANNI what they (to him) would like to say/ will end up saying*  
(iii) A CHI immagini che cosa (gli) vorrebbero /finiranno per dire?  
*TO WHOM do you imagine what (to him) they would like to say/ will end up saying?*

We have seen that (ii) is not the proper answer to the “echo”, multiple *wh*- question in (iii). The answer must have the NF in the Comp of the matrix not the embedded clause.



to Force, it is also intrinsically and consistently dependent on the pragmatic environment, a property that can reasonably prevail over any other one.

#### 3.4. Are there instances of “exclusively” contrastive focus?

Before coming to the desired conclusions, I must mention the various phenomena of *marginalization* vs. *right dislocation* (RD), which have been studied by Benincà (1988), Kayne (1994), Cardinaletti (2001, 2002, whose analysis I adopt here), among others. These phenomena concern sentences that seem to involve an exclusively contrastive focus and therefore, at first sight, do not allow us to argue that contrastive intonation applies to a well-formed noncontrastive base structure. See for instance (17), adapted from Benincà (1988: 147, example (126)):

- (17) Porto DOMANI il dolce  
(I) bring TOMORROW the cake

In (17), the adverb is the focus. The marked syntactic order is required or at least favored by various pragmatic factors<sup>12</sup>, so that in the same context the unmarked order appears slightly marginal, even with an emphasis on the final NF as in (18):

- (18) ??(Allora vado.) Porto il dolce DOMANI  
(Then I go.) (I) bring the cake TOMORROW  
'(I will be going, then.) I will bring the cake tomorrow'

The presupposition, in (17), is that the speaker “will bring the cake at a time X”, and the unmarked order in (18) fails to univocally isolate this P, as we already saw with regard to the order with initial NF (§2.3., example (5)). Furthermore, it does not seem tenable to me that the focus is necessarily contrastive here although it can be difficult to build the appropriate *wh*- question context. (The question: *Quando porti il dolce?* ‘When do you bring the cake?’ gives rise to an answer with the object clitic pronoun: *Lo porto domani*, ‘I it bring tomorrow’.) Typically, (17) is pronounced in a situation in which the speaker, about whom there is the expectation described above, has not brought any cake and this fact is implicitly ascertained, but there is no relevant assertion to correct. It is indeed possible to add something like: *sei d'accordo?*, ‘do you agree?’, or: *o è preferibile dopodomani?*, ‘or is it preferable the day after tomorrow?’. This point is crucial for my proposal.

We may conclude that also (17) is an instance of a well-formed sentence, characterized by both a marked syntactic order and a marked intonation obeying the

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<sup>12</sup> For instance, with a more informative verb, and the future tense of standard Italian, the marked order of constituents does not seem to be equally necessary:

- (i) a Decorerò DOMANI il dolce  
    I will decorate TOMORROW the cake  
    b Decorerò il dolce domani  
(ii) a Cambierò DOMANI abbigliamento  
      I will change TOMORROW my dress  
      b Cambierò abbigliamento domani.

*Focus to stress alignment principle* of N&G. Perhaps, it is arguable that while RD enucleates a Topic, as well as CLLD does, *marginalization* enucleates a Focus, following conditions that, in my opinion, still need clarifications, given the scarce predictability of *marginalization* as a counterpart of RD pointed out by various authors. See (19):

- (19) a Lo ha dipinto GIANNI questo  
      *it has painted GIANNI this*  
      b \*Ha dipinto GIANNI questo  
      *has painted GIANNI this*

### 3.5. Preliminary conclusions

The relevant generalizations are as follows:

- i) the initial NF has not an exclusive or primary contrastive value. It can be a merely informative focus, as the *wh*- question context shows clearly, see (5) and (6), and in the logic of my analysis such value is the primary one;
- ii) contrastive stress successfully applies to any element of a well-formed string, hence also to any element in Spec,TopP, see (8) and (10), or, crucially, SpeFocP, see the possible contrastive interpretation of (2a, c)-(4a, c), (5a) and (6a) with the context properly modified;
- iii) if contrastive stress applies to an ill-formed string it does not redeem it, see (12);
- iv) the competition of focus and *wh*- element for the same position (Spec,FocP) has a semantic basis independently of the contrastive function<sup>13</sup>;
- v) contrastive function is determined by discourse pragmatic factors and its conditions are presumably to be spelled out in phonological terms;

## 4. Relevance of prosodic patterns for language acquisition

### 4.1. Nespor & Guasti's (2002) proposal

N&G have proposed that specific prosodic patterns allow infants to assign a positive/negative value to the *pro*-drop parameter (subject *pro*-drop and object *pro*-drop), which could therefore be selected on the grounds of prelinguistic experience.

N&G specifically assume (i) that sentence initial stress prominence is only contrastive in Italian (see also Donati & Nespor, 2003); (ii) that contrastive intonation represents a prosodic property that is accessible to infants and at the same time judged irrelevant by them (an assumption that seems more consonant with my analysis than with the one spelled out in (i)). More precisely, they explicitly assume that infants recognize this kind of intonation and do not utilize it to fix the parameter (N&G p.103, footnote 16). However, if we admit, as I have argued here, that

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<sup>13</sup> The behavior of the *wh*- element in the embedded clauses – studied by Rizzi (2001) and explained with Pesetsky's *crossing constraint* – is a tangential topic here on which I do not want to draw any conclusion.

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contrastive stress must be analyzed independently of the marked/unmarked intonation distinction, since contrastive stress is always distinct from prominent stress even in sentence initial position, it appears that the core of the above-mentioned proposal requires a new account.

N&G set out three relevant prosodic patterns, given in (20) below (where ABCD represent SVOPP, and the focus constituent is boldfaced):

(20)

A B C <b>D</b>	Italian	<i>pro</i> subject/object (N&G, (51))
A B C D/ A B C <b>D</b>	French	<i>pro</i> object only
A B C D/ A B C D/ A B C <b>D</b>	English	no <i>pro</i>

In Italian, the focused subject occupies the rightmost position in the intonational phrase of the type ABCD [*pro* V (O) S]. In a language with no *pro* subject, which by hypothesis cannot place a subject in the postverbal position, the subject can be focused moving the prominent stress from the rightmost to the leftmost position (ABCD): as is the case in English and French. Then the option of the *pro* object is taken into account, which in Italian and other romance languages allows the focalization of the object in postcomplement position, while in English it is the stress that moves leftwards (ABCD).

Now, if the sentence initial NF intonation – which is present in French as well as English – is not reserved to the contrastive value in Italian, the relevant pattern (ABCD) should come into play also in the acquisition of this language, with the result that no difference would be left between Italian and French. In the next section I will tentatively suggest that, if the English exclusive pattern ABCD can really be absorbed in the unmarked pattern (ABCD), the three language models – Italian, French, and English – would present no difference whatsoever, for they would share the same two patterns: that is ABCD/ABCD, whose relevance for the fixation of the *pro*-drop parameter would be lost.

#### 4.2. An alternative proposal

An abstract and tentative solution to this problem might lie in the distributional difference of the two relevant patterns in these three languages, given that infants are sensitive to statistical information inherent in specific linguistic data. There is evidence that the quantitative relation between these patterns must vary from one language to another, and it is this relation that would generate the required values for the parameter, as shown in (21):

(21)

Italian:	ABCD > ABCD	positive value
French:	ABCD = ABCD	negative value (at least for <i>pro</i> subject)
English:	ABCD < ABCD	negative value

I have suggested that ABCD (John has given **a book** to Thomas) could be absorbed in ABCD (in fact ABDC: John has given Thomas **a book**), on the ground

that even in English the unmarked pattern of focalization seems to play a leading role. As it has been recently pointed out (Phillips, 2003), English utilizes some sort of complement reordering, with the concomitant alignment of focus to prominent stress. More importantly, this language has a number of alternating verbs (see Levin, 1989) – of which *Give* Verbs are only an example – that allow prominent stress to fall on the direct rather than the indirect object, since they “allow more than one way of expressing these arguments” (Levin, 1989, 45).

Nonetheless, even if this tentative absorption would prove correct, the prosodically unmarked order could turn out to be less common than the marked one in English, and this could suffice to cause infants to choose the negative value for the parameter.<sup>14</sup>

### 5. Concluding remarks

Initial NF sentences require two distinct interpretations associated with marked intonation (and obligatory emphasis) and with (marked and) contrastive intonation, respectively.

I have assumed that these two types of intonations have different properties, which I have described impressionistically, and on which new evidence comes from experimental analysis (Bocci, 2004). However, the validity of my proposal does not hinge on this assumption. My discussion is grounded on the possible construction of complementary contexts for these two distinct interpretations: in the former case explicit or implicit *wh*- questions, in the latter, explicit or implicit refutations, involving variable portions of the A-structure of other speakers' assertions.

The leading argument of my proposal is the consideration that contrastive stress does not redeem ungrammatical sentences or affect the acceptability of the grammatical ones. Essentially, its value is null with respect to the configuration of the original string, and this conclusion is consistent with my claim that contrastive stress has no effect whatsoever on syntactic structure. As a consequence, even in initial NF sentences, contrastive stress must apply to a noncontrastive NF, in my analysis as marked and emphatic as the contrastive one independently of the prosodic properties specifically differentiating them.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In English, according to N&G, initial stress prominence is only a displacement of the stress obeying the principle of prominent stress alignment to focus. On this, they distance themselves from standard analysis of focalization or “focalized topicalization” (Benincà, 2001) in terms of *wh*- movement (Chomsky, 1977). As for French, it is possible that ABCD must include also the cleft sentence form.

<sup>15</sup> Brunetti (2003) reaches analogous conclusions when she argues that the observable differences between informative and contrastive focus are superficial, and opposite conclusions when she argues that there are no major differences between the two foci, even at the prosodic level.

Adapting an interesting example from Brunetti, one should ask whether it is not at least strange to use (ii) as an answer to (i), with the typical multiple peaks intonation disambiguating between the two possible (informative/ contrastive) readings of a WF

In conclusion, a clear advantage of the interpretive ambiguity of initial NF sentences defended here is that contrastive interpretation can keep a mere discourse pragmatic status, which is both consistent with the status of other contrastive forms studied in recent literature and distinct from the syntactico-semantic status of focalization. Left periphery is the locus of “feature valuation (as is a virtual necessity) and transfer” (Chomsky, 2005), although it is arguable that there is no such movement-driving feature named “contrast”. The FocP projection is independently operative for the quantificational movement of informative focus, which would not be parasitic of contrastive focus as recently suggested (Cruschina, 2005). On the contrary, contrastive focus would be somehow parasitic of informative focus, due to general prosodic and discourse pragmatic properties of contrastivity.

An apparent immediate disadvantage of my proposal is that a suggestive hypothesis concerning the *pro*-drop parameter fixation in language acquisition (N&G) must be revised, as I have tentatively and provisionally suggested in the last section.

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sentence like (ii):

(i) – Stanno bussando alla porta? (Brunetti (2003), Ch.4, (50))

*does someone knock the door?*

(ii) – \*No, stanno piantando un chiodo

*no, they are driving a nail*

Yes-no questions cannot generate answers containing a contrastive focus, given that their pragmatic function is semantically and formally balanced between two different (positive and negative) expectations. A negative answer to a yes-no question is not a refutation, hence (ii) could only be appropriate in a context where, for instance, it has already been pronounced but not properly perceived. In a contrastive intonation environment there must be an assertion literally “refuted”, that is corrected by the element bearing prominent stress, as clearly shown by the standard negative tag where the negation *non*, ‘not’, is in turn contrastively stressed (a phenomenon that I have not expressed graphically, to follow current usage).

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