Contrastiveness and New Information: a new view on Focus[1]

Introduction

It is a fairly accepted view that word ordering phenomena are, to a certain extent, determined by the informational import of constituents, loosely their contextually known or new status. Since the introduction of information structure in the inventory of projecting categories in transformational theories of syntax (cf. Horvarth, 1986; Kiss, 1987; Brody, 1990), the label *Focus* has been applied to phrases performing two discourse functions, roughly the introduction of new information and the introduction of a contrast[2]. A number of linguists have argued, more or less explicitly, in favour of a clear-cut distinction between the two types on the basis of syntactic, phonetic, phonological and pragmatic factors (cf. Kiss, 1998; Zubizarreta, 1998; Nespor and Guasti, 2002; Donati and Nespor, 2003; Benincà and Poletto, 2004). Others (cf. Frascarelli, 2000; Brunetti, 2004; Lonzi, 2006; Stoyanova, 2008) have claimed that the two are not syntactically distinct. As far as contrastiveness is concerned, it has been analysed in binary [+/-] terms, much on the lines of newness of information, reflecting the traditional dichotomy 'focus-topic', 'new-old'.

Investigating cases of 'hybrid' focal elements that simultaneously express new information and a contrast, this article addresses a neglected area within the transformational tradition of grammar: the pragmatic and psychological import of discourse salient phrases. It is clear that an interface phenomenon such as information structure simply cannot be captured fully relying solely on its syntactic properties. Given that contrastiveness is a relational property, its specification must be expressed taking into account the *status* of the element with which the contrast is established: by this we mean the level of consciousness at which it is held in the mind of speaker and hearer[3].

Drawing on the notion of 'activeness' of a referent introduced by Chafe (1987) and elaborated by Lambrecht (1994), this article argues for the following:

i. there is more to contrastiveness than a simple [±] distinction;
ii. degrees of contrastiveness obtain from the treatment of a piece of discourse 'in terms of cognitive processes dynamically unfolding through time' (Chafe, 1987:48);
iii. newness of information and contrastiveness are not mutually exclusive properties of phrases: we view contrastiveness as *orthogonal* to both new and old information, and as such able to combine with both;
vi. whether the further distinctions between contrastive phrases that we advocate for here are expressed at the syntactic level is subject to great cross-linguistic variation.

The observation that the two types of focus, new information and contrastive, are not mutually exclusive nor incompatible, is by no means new (cf. Bolinger, 1961:87;

and, more recently, Frascarelli, 2000:91): the novelty of our approach is in the way this idea is implemented, with the inclusion of properties pertaining to non-linguistic[4] dimensions in the make-up of constituents and their potential expression at the syntactic level.

After a brief overview of the syntactic representation of Focus in section 1, data from a North-eastern Italian variety are analysed and discussed in section 2. This leads, in section 3, to the identification of some basic features which, combined, provide a way of capturing the breakdown of the properties of the two types of contrastive focus; section 4 investigates whether these features find expression at the syntactic level, and addresses some remaining issues. Some of the prosodic properties of the two types of contrastive focus are examined in section 5, and in section 6 we present a few concluding remarks[5].

1 – New Information and Contrastive: different types of Focus?

The notion of *focus* has been extensively discussed and defined from various perspectives, pragmatic, semantic, phonological and syntactic. On a pragmatic level, the information in focus is what is perceived by the speaker to be the most important part of their utterance, and the one that provides the hearer with essential elements of knowledge (cf. Dik, 1989; among others). The 'focal' status is assigned to at least one syntactic constituent, be it a smaller part or the whole clause, and it generally expresses new information. Semantically, focus is defined as the non-presupposed (i.e. not known, not shared by both speaker and hearer) information in a sentence (cf. Bolinger 1954:152; Halliday, 1967:204ff; Jackendoff, 1972:230, among some of the earlier scholars), which has scope over a set of possible alternatives. At the phonological level focus is generally fore-grounded by means of stress. Syntactically, as a result of an increased interest in the syntactic encoding of information structure (cf. Brody, 1990; Kiss, 1995, 1998; Puskás, 2000, among others) combined with the formulation of an articulated CP (cf. Rizzi, 1997), focus has come to be interpreted in the transformational tradition of grammar as a syntactic projection, Foc(us)P(hrase), to which focalised phrases move and where they receive the relevant interpretation.

Within the Cartographic approach, the further distinction between N(ew) I(nformation) F(ocus) and C(ontrastive) F(ocus) also finds expression at the syntactic level, with the introduction of two separate projections, NIF P(hrase) and CF P(hrase) respectively, which are either assumed to be located in the same syntactic space (cf. Benincà and Poletto, 2004) or not (cf. Rizzi, 1997; Belletti, 2004).

It is significant that NIF and CF are analysed as projecting distinct phrases: in a system such as the one proposed by Benincà and Poletto (2004), which, crucially, does not admit recursion of syntactically and semantically identical material, the two

are implicitly assumed to be distinct, and the existence of 'hybrid' types, simultaneously expressing new information and a contrast, is excluded a priori.

Interestingly, the original reasons behind the syntactic distinction between CF and NIF proposed by Kiss (1995, 1998) for Hungarian, have been shown not to hold cross-linguistically (cf. Frascarelli, 2000). While Kiss distinguishes between the operator-like Identificational Focus (which loosely corresponds to what we call CF here[6]) and Information Focus (our NIF) which does not involve movement, Frascarelli (2000) points out that in Italian, for example, NIF, just like CF, is subject to weak cross over as well as parasitic gaps effects. The two seem to be, therefore, syntactically indistinguishable; yet, they are undeniably different. It therefore seems that such differences must find expression in dimensions other than syntax. What remains to be established is the exact nature of the information related to CF and NIF that is (or could potentially be) encoded at the syntactic level, and a way to capture its variation across languages.

2 – Focus in Triestino

One of the so-called Italian dialects, Triestino, a variety spoken in the north-eastern corner in the city of Triest, offers an interesting term of comparison with the standard language. While in Italian (cf. 1) a phrase expressing the narrow focus of a sentence needs to be placed post-verbally when the VP is repeated in the answer, Triestino (cf. 2) admits its fronting to a sentence-initial position[7]:

1 a. Sp. A: Cosa comprano a Marina i tuoi genitori?   *Ita*
            'What are your parents buying Marina?'

   b. Sp. B: (Le comprano) UNA MOTO.
            'They are buying her a motorbike'

   b'. Sp. B: *UNA MOTO le comprano.

2 a. Sp. A: Cossa   i   ghe   ciol   a   Marina tua   *Ts*
            what   scl   to-her   they-buy to Marina your
            mama e tuo papà?
            mum and your dad
            'What are your parents buying Marina?'

   b. Sp. B: (I   ghe   ciol)   UNA MOTO.
            scl   to-her   they-buy a   motorbike
            'They are buying her a motorbike'

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b'. Sp. B: UNA MOTO i ghe ciol.

What is of immediate interest here is the nature and status of the fronted element *UNA MOTO* 'a motorbike' in (2b'). Clearly, it is not an instance of CF as it is usually conceived: firstly, it simply provides the value for the x in the preceding turn, '*which x are your parents buying for Marina*'; secondly, its pitch accent is audibly different from the typical L+H* that marks contrastive elements, followed by a noticeable rise and fall on the element negated. Yet, given the grammaticality of (2b), and assuming that direct objects are generated post-verbally, *UNA MOTO* in (2b') is visibly not in its canonical position.

The organisation of the elements in main, declarative clauses in Triestino and Italian is not different: the unmarked position for a verbal complement is post-verbal, and the overt subject of transitive verbs occurs pre-verbally. In thetic sentences (answers to the question '*What is happening?*'), both Italian (cf. 3a) and Triestino (cf. 3b) require SVO word order, and disallow other variations (cf. 4):

3   a.   Quel tizio   dice sciocchezze.   *Ita*
         S   V   O

    b.   Quel mato   (el) dizi   monade.   *Ts*
         S   V   O
         that guy   scl he-says idiocies
         'That guy is talking rubbish'

4   a.   *Sciocchezze dice quel tizio.   *Ita*
         O   V   S

    b.   *Monade el   dizi   quel mato.   *Ts*
         O   V   S
         idiocies scl he-says that guy

The ungrammaticality of (4b) clearly suggests that the fronted element in (2b') is not in its canonical position; it is therefore plausible to imagine that it occupies a pre-verbal position dedicated to discourse-prominent elements. The near ungrammaticality of (5b) in Triestino, showing the ill effects of trying to co-index the fronted element *Marina* with a post-verbal possessive adjective, *sua / suo* 'her', confirms that the phrase is interpreted as an operator:

5   a. Sp. A: ?*Chi$_i$ i   vedi   sua$_i$ mama e   suo$_i$ papà?   *Ts*
             who   scl they-see her mum   and her dad
             'Who$_i$ do her$_i$ parents see?'

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b. Sp. B: ?*[MARINA]$_i$ i vedi sua$_i$ mama e suo$_i$ papà.
Marina scl they-see her mum and her dad
'Her$_i$ parents see Marina$_i$'

The evidence afforded by the licensing of parasitic gaps also points in the same direction: the fronted phrase in Triestino displays operator-like properties, suggesting that it occupies a scope position at LF.

6 a. Sp. A: Cossa$_i$ la ga ciolto senza pagar [e$_i$]?
what scl she-has taken without to-pay
'What$_i$ did she take without paying [e$_i$]?'

b. Sp. B: [I POMIDORI]$_i$ la ga ciolto senza pagar [e$_i$].
the tomatoes scl she-has taken without to-pay
'She has taken tomatoes without paying for them'

In view that the fronted element in (2b')
  i. does not contrast with any other element present in the overt discourse,
  ii. expresses the narrow focus of the sentence,
  iii. is subject to weak cross-over effects (cf. 5),
  iv. and licenses parasitic gaps (cf. 6),
it would seem natural to conclude that the constituent is an instance of NIF. Indeed, it is a well-attested fact that other varieties, of which Sicilian and Sardinian are primary examples, license NIF in a sentence-initial position:

7 a. Sp. A: Chi cci ricisti?   *Sic*
what to-them you-said
'What did you say to them?'

b. Sp. B: A VIRITÀ cci rissi.
the truth to-them I-said
'I told them the truth' (adapted from Bentley, 2007:53)

c. Sp. A: Ue l' as postu?   *Sard*
where it you-have put
'Where have you put it?'

d. Sp. B: SUPRA SA MESA l' appo postu.
over the table it I-have put
'I have put it on top of the table' (adapted from Jones, 1993:18)

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In both (7b) and (7d) the pre-verbal constituent is analysed as occupying a position in the leftmost portion of the clause, NIFP: it represents the narrow focus of the sentence and it provides Speaker A with the information they are seeking.

Analysing the cases of fronting in Triestino in an analogous way to the Sicilian and Sardinian examples would, nevertheless, fail to capture and account for some important facts.

3 – An interpretation

The lack of contrast with another element previously introduced in the discourse does not necessarily mean that the cases of fronting in Triestino are instances of *pure* NIF, defined as a referent[8] newly introduced into the discourse. There are subtle, yet significant differences between the responses in (2b) and (2b'). The response with the canonical SVO order is the most neutral (communicatively speaking) and natural one, in which *UNA MOTO* 'a motorbike' simply provides the new information sought by Speaker A. By instead fronting the object in (2b'), *UNA MOTO i ghe ciol* 'A motorbike they are buying her', Speaker B performs two communicative tasks: they provide the new information and, based on their knowledge of A's expectations, they signal that such information will be unexpected. This could be due to a variety of reasons: perhaps Speaker A knows that Marina's parents do not like motorbikes, or they usually do not buy such expensive gifts as birthday presents, etc.

Cross-linguistic evidence shows that, indeed, factors such as surprise for an unexpected event can be encoded morphologically by languages: Cinque (1999:84-85, 201 note 21) mentions the Korean suffix *-kwun-*, the Menomini verbal suffix *-asah-* and the sentential particles in the Tibeto-Burman language Akha. These are all analysed by Cinque as expressions of Evaluative Mood, one of the highest projections in his hierarchy, placed in the Mood field between the highest Speech Act and the lower Evidential. The Turkish suffix *-mIş* also marks unexpectedness; from a very preliminary investigation it appears that the suffix can express equally speaker- and hearer-oriented surprise, something that has gone unnoticed so far (cf. Slobin and Aksu, 1982; DeLancey, 1997 among others). Compare the following, from Slobin and Aksu (1982:187):

8   a.   Kemal   gel-di.
         Kemal   come-past
         'Kemal came'

    b.   Kemal   gel-mIş.
         Kemal   come-*mIş*
         'Kemal came (imagine!)'

(8a) simply communicates[9] the event that Kemal, some time prior to the utterance time, came. In its mirative use, (8b) expresses the same event but using the affix *-mІş* it adds that such an event was unexpected. Interestingly, the same sentence could also be used as an answer to the question 'Who came?' when the speaker knows that the information they are about to provide will be unexpected by the hearer: the context offered was that Kemal had not been to visit for a long time[10].

It is the notion of lack of *explicit* contrast, and more generally of contrastiveness as a *gradable concept*, that we set to investigate in order to account for the Triestino cases.

3.1 – Contrastiveness as a scalar notion

That contrastiveness may not be a matter of a simple binarity is not a new idea. Bolinger (1961:87) for example, sees CF and NIF as the end points of a continuum: when for the value assigned to a variable x there is an unlimited number of alternatives, the reading is not contrastive; the narrower the number of alternatives, the more likely the contrastive interpretation[11]. This view of contrastiveness does not assume a discrete step between [-contrastive] and [+contrastive]; moreover, it relies on its *semantic* properties, more precisely on the scope of the variable over a set of possible alternatives. Our position is different with respect to two crucial points: firstly, we view contrastiveness in *discrete* terms, assuming that there is a clear separation between a non-contrastive and a contrastive reading. What we suggest is that within the contrastive interpretation there are varying degrees of strength of contrastiveness. Secondly, in order to express these degrees of strength, we draw on its *pragmatic* rather than semantic characteristics: the necessity of separating the pragmatic from the semantic-quantificational level in the understanding of the notion of contrastiveness has been convincingly argued for in Molnár (2002).

There seems to be solid cross-linguistic evidence to motivate further refinement within the category CF: a comparison of Finnish and Hungarian data (cf. Molnár, 2002:152, Molnár and Järventausta, 2003), suggests the existence of two distinct types of CF. Both involve movement, but while one (the Hungarian type) requires both movement to the left-periphery *and* adjacency to the verb, the other (the Finnish type) simply requires movement to the left-periphery. A similar distinction is also witnessed in Basque (Etxepare, 1997; cited in Molnár, 2002:152), which reserves the verb-adjacent position in the left periphery to cases of 'emphatic focus', and allows non-verbal-adjacent movement to instances of 'contrastive focus'[12]. The clear differences in word order and adjacency requirements of the Finnish, Hungarian and Basque data make a strong case for identifying further types of CF at the syntactic level. This may not be, however, a property shared cross-linguistically, and other languages may not express syntactically the difference between different types of CF.

3.2 – Pragmatic scalarity

Let us focus on the pragmatic nature of the degrees of contrastiveness. Contrastiveness is clearly a *relational* property, being the result of the interaction of two elements: no individual item may be contrastive on its own. It therefore makes sense, and it is indeed necessary, to take into consideration the status of the element with which the contrast is established. This is precisely what the meaning of explicit contrastiveness introduced in the previous section refers to. CF traditionally assigns a new value to the variable whose (incorrect) value has already been assigned, in the form of 'It's X, not Y'. Thus, crucially, the element with which the contrast is established is *already present in the discourse*; and not simply present, but *active*. We refer here to the notion of *activeness* used by Chafe (1987:22ff) and re-interpreted by Lambrecht (1994:99ff). According to Chafe any event of transmitting information does not only involve knowledge, but consciousness, too: given the size of the knowledge and information that our minds hold, it is only natural that at any given point, only a small amount can be focused on or is, in Chafe's words, *active*. Within the state of activeness, Chafe identifies three possible levels:
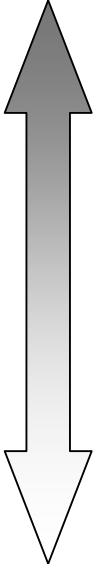
9   a. the referent is *active*: it is the focus of consciousness at a given moment;
     b. the referent is *semi-active* (accessible): it is in a person's awareness, in their peripheral consciousness, but not directly focused on;
     c. the referent is *inactive*: it is either not present at all or held in a person's long-term memory, neither focally nor peripherally active.

Within these three levels there are also a number of further specifications that could be identified. In the case of an active referent, it may be *textually* (i.e. present in the discourse) or *situationally* (i.e. deictically present) active; an inactive element may be so by virtue of not being present in the person's knowledge at all or by having been demoted from a previously accessible status. In the case of a semi-active referent Lambrecht (1994:100) adds that the accessible state could be due to one of three factors:

10   i.   deactivation from an earlier active state (textually accessible);
     ii.   inference from another active or accessible element (inferentially accessible, either from the linguistic or extra-linguistic contexts)[13];
     iii. deictically present in the text-external world (situationally accessible).

The levels of activeness, although clearly boxed as discrete values in the following summarizing table, are to be interpreted as *points along a continuum*:

Level of activeness	Characteristics	Referent is
1. Active	Focus of consciousness.	a. Linguistically active, hence explicitly mentioned in the conversation;
		b. Extra-linguistically active, and not (necessarily) mentioned in the conversation;
2. Semi-active (accessible)	In peripheral consciousness, speaker has background awareness of it.	a. Demoted from an earlier active state;
		b. Inferrable (either linguistically or extra-linguistically);
		c. Deictically present, hence situationally accessible;
3. Inactive	Neither focally nor peripherally active.	a. Demoted from an earlier accessible state, in long-term memory;
		b. Never present, hence completely new.

Table 1: *Levels of activeness*

On the basis of this classification, we propose that the varying degrees of contrastiveness obtain by establishing a contrast with referents that are at different levels on the activeness scale. In order to implement this further distinction in a manageable way, we propose an array of 'proto-[14], cross-dimensional' features, expressing properties that encompass the psychological, the pragmatic, the semantic, the prosodic as well as the syntactic domains. These are the building blocks into which constituents of interface phenomena such as discourse saliency can be broken down. Identifying an [active] feature which can combine with [+contrastive] enables us to derive explicit and implicit contrast: in section 4 we discuss whether such a feature can find expression at the syntactic level.

Before moving on to applying these distinctions to the Triestino cases, a few more words of explanation of the 'active' status of a referent are in order. As Chafe points out (1994:73ff), if language is to perform its communicative function successfully, the speaker needs to take into account the addressee's mind: clearly, if the speaker thinks that the referent *Mary* is active in the consciousness of their interlocutor, they will be able to refer to her with the pronoun *she*. If the speaker's judgement were only based on the state *Mary* held in their own mind, the use of such a pronoun may cause a breakdown in communication. In a similar fashion, the

treatment of a referent as active or inactive is a consequence of the speaker's monitoring of what is happening in the addressee's mind.

With specific reference to Triestino, and with a view in mind to identify feature combinations that could readily, if needed, be expressed at the syntactic level, we simplify the ternary distinction proposed by Chafe to the binary [+active] and [-active], collapsing the semi-active and the inactive ones into the single [-active][15]:

Feature	Level of activeness
[+active]	1. Active
[-active]	2. Semi-active (accessible)
	3. Inactive

Table 2: *Mapping of levels of activeness onto features*

Although our primary interest here is on the permutations of [± active] and [+contrastive], the combination of [active] and [new] is also possible[16], hence offering a way of further distinguishing within the NIF category (cf. the distinction suggested within the inactive status, between (3a) and (3b)). In spite of obvious scope for overlap between [±active] and [±new], their existence as independent features is justified: a newly introduced element is necessarily inactive in the sense that being introduced at that very precise moment it cannot already be 'lit up' in the listener's mind, but so could be an element that has been introduced at some earlier point in the discourse, and therefore is not new, but has been pushed in the long term memory and is, therefore, inactive. Thus, while [±new] refers to the properties of a referent with respect to its *status in discourse*, [±active] reflects the *level of consciousness* at which it is held in the mind.

3.3 – Application of these distinctions

The proto-, cross-dimensional features suggested here as well as their combination, are by no means exhaustive nor definitive: this is an attempt at including in a manageable fashion (hence the choice of binary values for the features) important properties that refer to the mental status of referents which need to be taken into account when discussing contrastiveness in a comprehensive and exhaustive way. Although transformational approaches to grammar allow for discourse properties to have a determinant role in accounting for word order phenomena and have adopted them as syntactic projections, their integration and use in the system has been done in a selective way. The concepts of contrastive focus, new information focus and even topic have been included in a rather sterilised

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fashion, that is to say without taking into account the complexity of their properties, especially of their psychological and pragmatic import. The identification and introduction of these cross-dimensional features as the building blocks of different types of CF is a first step towards allowing the incorporation of the whole range of properties of information structure into the various computations.

Focusing on the interaction of [±active] and [+contrastive], we obtain the following two types of CF:

	[+active]	[-active]
[+contr]	Explicitly Contrastive Focus	Implicitly Contrastive Focus

Table 3: *Degrees of contrastiveness*

E(xplicitly) CF is the well-known type that corresponds to the syntactic structure 'It's X, not Y': Y has been introduced in the discourse and is still active in the mind of the participants. I(mplicitly) CF corresponds to a 'new' type, a contrast established with an element that is not in the active consciousness of the speaker but is part of the peripheral focus of knowledge of the participants. Imagine A and B are talking about a recent visit of a friend of theirs, John. Both A and B know that John has been a vegetarian for a long time; yet, there is no linguistic mention in the current discourse of this. In this context, the utterance 'John had A CHUNKY STEAK for dinner (imagine!)' would express something unexpected on the basis of the state of affairs that can be inferred when talking about John, i.e. among other things, that he is a vegetarian. The contrast is implicit because the fact that John is a vegetarian, has not been explicitly mentioned in the conversation: it is, nevertheless, accessible when talking about John[17].

As well as exemplifying degrees of contrastiveness, the cases of Triestino fronting also point to the possibility of an element expressing simultaneously new information and a contrast. If we allow for the combination of the two types of CF and the feature [+new], we obtain further specifications, shown in Table 4:

	[+contr, +active]	[+contr, -active]
[+new]	Explicitly Contrastive, New Info, focus	Implicitly Contrastive, New Info, focus

Table 4: *Newness and contrastiveness*

Although the feature [active] can indeed combine with [new] as discussed in note 16, in Table 4 it is a property of contrastiveness, in other words a secondary feature for which contrastiveness is further specified. This needs to be indicated with the introduction of further bracketing:

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Type of focus	Feature specification
Explicitly Contrastive, New Info, focus	{[+new], [+contr, +active]}
Implicitly Contrastive, New Info, focus	{[+new], [+contr, -active]}

Table 5: *Formal representation*

The type {[+new], [+contr, -active]} is the representation of the cases of fronting in Triestino: the fronted element is not only an instance of ICF but also expresses new information. The other type, {[+new], [+contr, +active]}, refers to an ECF phrase which also expresses new information. Not immediately obvious, which perhaps questions its legitimacy, this would be the case of a conversation carried out by three people. A makes a statement, B questions it, C replies correcting the information provided by A:

11 a. A: Mary had steak for dinner.
    b. B: What did she have for dinner (sorry I didn't hear you)?
    c. C: She had FISH.

Let us now turn to the discussion of another aspect of contrastiveness. We have seen how contrastiveness can derive from an unexpected state of affairs. Interestingly, a similar effect is obtained when a given situation is so totally obvious that its explicit mentioning would be unnecessary (possibly violating Grice's, 1975 Maxim of Relation 'Be relevant'), and hence, contrary to expectation. Consider the following:

12 a. Sp. A: What are you fishing for?
        Sp. B: I am fishing for FISH!! (what do you think, duh!)

    b. Sp. A: What are you doing with that vase?
        Sp. B: I'm PUTTING FLOWERS in it!! (what do you expect??)

These examples are particularly effective in Italian, especially (12a). The reaction to a completely superfluous question is a contrast, given that the information can be implicitly inferred from the shared world knowledge. The contrast can therefore derive both from an assertion that goes against what is expected, but also from an assertion that is exactly what is expected and hence not in need of being spelled out. In terms of features, this case would fall within the ECF, with the further specification that the referent is extra-linguistically active[18].

4 – Further reflections

4.1 – Cross-linguistic variation

Intuitively, it makes sense to recognise the cross-dimensional nature of interface phenomena and allow its expression through a range of cross-dimensional features. Whether these features are 'translatable' onto the syntactic level is not immediately apparent, and as mentioned in section 3.1, the degree of cross-linguistic variation is remarkable. The view of what it means to be expressed at the syntactic level that we take here is rather simplistic: a feature is syntactic if it causes word re-ordering phenomena.

The reason for including [±active] as a further specification of [+contrastive] is clearly motivated by the data at hand: the difference it marks, though, need not be interpretable at the syntactic level. In the Triestino cases the specific type of contrastiveness does not seem to have a correlate at the syntactic level: the triggering force behind these cases of fronting is the [+contrastive] specification, irrespective of its implicitness or explicitness. An object that expresses NIF can only be found post-verbally: it can be licensed sentence-initially only when it also expresses a contrast. It therefore seems that in Triestino [+contrastive] is a syntactic feature in that it causes re-ordering phenomena[19], while [+new], on its own, is not. This is certainly not the case cross-linguistically: indeed, the syntactic expression of [+new] and [+contrastive] features is subject to considerable variation.

It was mentioned above that a syntactic position dedicated to NIF in the left edge of the clause is endorsed by Benincà and Poletto (2004), who on the basis of examples such as (13) from Italian claim that NIF can indeed target a position within the left periphery, but this becomes available only in the presence of a CF phrase:

13 **A GIORGIO**, QUESTO LIBRO,   devi   dare.
    to Giorgio   this book   you-must give
    'It is to Giorgio that you must give this book'

Since the direct object *questo libro* 'this book' cannot be resumed by an object clitic, i.e. it is not left-dislocated, they conclude that it must therefore be an instance of Focus, more specifically, NIF. It is not clear that (13) is equally acceptable throughout the Italian peninsula. It must be stressed that Italian is subject to strong regional variation with the consequence that the 'standard' language yields widely differing grammaticality judgments depending on the geographical origin of the speaker. Given the interpretation of (13), the possible question that could elicit it, *Che cosa devo dare a Mario?* 'What do I need to give to Mario?', does not seem to produce it: a less awkward answer[20], which is by no means completely felicitous,

would be (14), in which the direct object expressing new information necessarily appears post-verbally.

14 ?**A GIORGIO**,   devi   dare   QUESTO LIBRO.
       to Giorgio   you-must give   this   book
       'It's (actually) to Giorgio, (and) you must give him this book'

The ability of Italian to license phrases expressing NIF at the left edge of a clause is at least questioned by the evidence in (14)[21]: it seems that such position is not uniformly available across the peninsula. As mentioned above, the acceptability of (14) may be a matter of regional variation, depending, in other words, on the underlying influence of the individual dialects that the various speakers have.

It was mentioned earlier that Sicilian and in Sardinian (cf. Bentley, 2007; Jones, 1993), allow constituents expressing new information sentence-initially (cf. 15a, Sardinian from Jones, 1993:18; 15b, Sicilian) without the need for the Focus field to have been activated by a CF phrase. In such varieties, a functional projection associated with NIF, NIFP, has been assumed:

15 a. CUSSU LIBRU   appo   lessu.   *Sard*
          this   book   I-have   read
          'I have read this book'

     b. CARNI   mangiai.   *Sic*
          meat   I-ate
          'I ate meat'

Although CF and NIF cannot co-occur, Bentley (2007: 53, from which the following examples are taken) notices that in Sicilian CF (cf. 16c), unlike NIF (cf. 16b), can be separated from the verb phrase, on the lines of the distinction encoded in the Finnish, Hungarian and Basque data mentioned earlier. This suggests that the element expressing contrastive focus occupies a higher position than the one encoding new information:

16 a. Sp. A: Chi   cci   ricisti   a   tò   niputi?
                  what   to-them you-said to   your   nephews
                  'What did you tell you nephews?'

     b. Sp. B: A   VIRITÀ   (*a mè niputi) cci   rissi.
                  the   truth   (*to my nephews) to-them   I-said
                  'I told them the truth'

     c. **NA LITTRA**,   a   Pina,   cci   scrissi   (no nu pizzinu)

a letter to Pina to-her I-wrote (not a card)
'It's a letter that I wrote to Pina, not a card'

The new information direct object *A VIRITÀ* 'the truth' cannot be separated from the verb: the same restriction does not apply to the contrastive **NA LITTRA** 'a letter' in (16c).

The conclusion that can be drawn from this, is that, clearly, [+contrastive] and [+new] do not have the same status cross-linguistically: while in some varieties they are both responsible for re-ordering phenomena (as in Sicilian), in others only one of them triggers overt movement (cf. [+contrastive] in Triestino). The encoding of such variation may be subject to parametrisation and linked to other properties of the language. Furthermore, the discussion in Bentley (2007) seems to suggest that in those languages in which both [+new] and [+contrastive] are syntactic features, there are distinct and ordered functional projections associated with them: in Sicilian the position dedicated to CF appears to be higher than the one occupied by NIF.

We therefore conclude that both [+contrastive] and [+new] *may* be syntactic features, but certainly need not be; the same can be said of the feature introduced in this article, [±active], and the evidence to motivate the choice is to be found in each individual language. If examples such as (13) are indeed acceptable with the interpretation of the higher phrase as contrastive and the lower one as new information, the uniqueness of Focus (cf. Rizzi, 1997) needs to be restated in less constrained terms.

With respect to the debate on whether CF and NIF are syntactically distinct, the evidence discussed here points to great variation. Our understanding of Focus as a syntactic space follows Benincà and Poletto's (2004) idea of a *field*, which could indeed be internally articulated in two projections, CFP and NIFP, in those languages in which both [+contrastive] and [+new] features are expressed syntactically. This would include Sicilian and (possibly) Sardinian. In Triestino and perhaps Italian, it would be a space hosting only elements carrying the feature [+contrastive] and displaying the other properties associated with quantificational elements.

Summarising the evidence discussed so far, this is the distribution and nature of the features [+new] and [+contrastive]:

	Italian		Triestino		Sicilian		Sardinian	
Features	[+new]	[+contr]	[+new]	[+contr]	[+new]	[+contr]	[+new]	[+contr]
Syntactic status	?	✔	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Table 6: *Cross-Linguistic variation*

4.2 – Are [±active] features syntactic at all?

Let us now return to the question of whether [+active] is a syntactic feature or not. Consider the following asymmetry in Triestino: with a factive verb such as *preocuparse* 'to worry', [+contrastive], [+active] phrases (in bold capitals) can equally target the main or the embedded left periphery (cf. 17 a and b), while only the left periphery of the main clause is readily available to [+contrastive], [-active] elements (cf. 18 a and b).

17 a. [**UNA MOTO** me   preocupa   [che i   ghe   cioghi   a
        a motorbike   to-me   it-worries   that scl   to-her   buy   to
        Marina,   no   una bici]].
        Marina   not   a bike
        'I am worried that they buy a motorbike for Marina, not a bike'

    b. [Me preocupa [che **UNA MOTO** i ghe cioghi a Marina, no una bici]].

18 a. Sp. A: Cossa te   preocupa che i   ghe   cioghi   a Marina?
               what   to-you   it-worries that scl to-her   buy   to Marina
               'What are you worried that they buy Marina?'

    b. Sp. B: [UNA MOTO me   preocupa   [che i   ghe   cioghi]].
               a motorbike   to-me   it-worries   that scl   to-her   buy
               'I am worried that they buy her a motorbike'

    b'. Sp. B: [?Me preocupa [che UNA MOTO i ghe cioghi]].

Interestingly, this asymmetry disappears when the selecting predicate is an epistemic verb such as *creder* 'to believe', and both the main and embedded left peripheries are readily available to both [+contrastive], [+active] and [+contrastive], [-active] phrases (cf. 20b and b'):

19 a. [**UNA MOTO** credo   [che i   ghe   cioghi   a Marina,   no
        a motorbike   I-believe that scl   to-her   they-buy   to Marina   not
        una bici]].
        a bike
        'It's a motorbike that I think they are buying Marina, not a bike'

    b. [Credo che [**UNA MOTO** i ghe cioghi a Marina, no una bici]].

20 a. Sp. A: Cossa te   credi   che i   ghe   cioghi   a Marina?
               what   scl   you-believe that scl to-her   they-buy to Marina
               'What do you think they will buy Marina?'

b. Sp. B: [UNA MOTO credo   [che i   ghe   cioghi]].
         a motorbike   I-think   that scl to-her   they-buy
         'I think they are buying her a motorbike'

b'. Sp. B: Credo [che UNA MOTO i ghe cioghi].

Summarising the distribution of the two types of CF:

| | Factive | | Epistemic | |
	ECF	ICF	ECF	ICF
Main	✔	✔	✔	✔
Embedded	✔	✘	✔	✔

Table 7: Summary of main vs embedded left periphery available

This asymmetry in the licensing of elements in the embedded left periphery has been analysed by Poletto (2000:121ff) as a reflection of the different selecting properties of the two classes of verbs. Epistemic verbs (which she terms 'bridge verbs') select a 'fuller' CP than factive verbs (her 'non-bridge verbs'): the structure embedded under the latter appears 'poorer' (see also, Benincà and Poletto, 2004:61), in the sense that there are fewer positions available.

The fact that there does not seem to be a position available for the [+contrastive], [-active] element in 'reduced CPs' selected by factive verbs may suggest that a position for ICF elements is not constantly accessible: it is only available in a 'larger' CP. We re-interpret Benincà and Poletto's 'reduced' CP to mean a CP in which only the primary features are realised, but not their further specification. In this case, [+contrastive] would be expressed, but its further distinction [-active] would not: so an ECF but not an ICF phrase would find expression in a reduced CP.

5 – Some evidence from prosody

Let us now turn to a brief investigation of the prosodic properties of the two types of CF identified. Consider the following minimal pairs (21b) and (22b), ECF and ICF respectively:

21. a. Sp. A: La   polizia   ga   fermà   Marina.
              the police   it-has stopped Marina
              'The police have stopped Marina'

    b. Sp. B: MANUELA i   ga   fermà   (no Marina).

```
                          Manuela      scl they-have      stopped not Marina
                          'It is Manuela that they have stopped (not Marina)'
22.  a.   Sp. A:   Chi ga       fermà    la    polizia?
                          who it-has    stopped  the   police
                          'Who have the police stopped?'

      b.   Sp. B:   MANUELA    i     ga                   fermà!
                          Manuela      scl   they-have        stopped
                          'They have stopped Manuela!'
```

The context of (22b) is that Manuela is a very careful and observant driver, and it is hence unexpected that she should be stopped by the police. These are the pitch tracks of two token utterings obtained using Praat: each track also indicates the Hz values of the beginning, the peak(s) and the after-peak. As they are, these figures are not significant in absolute terms, but are useful in their relative values.
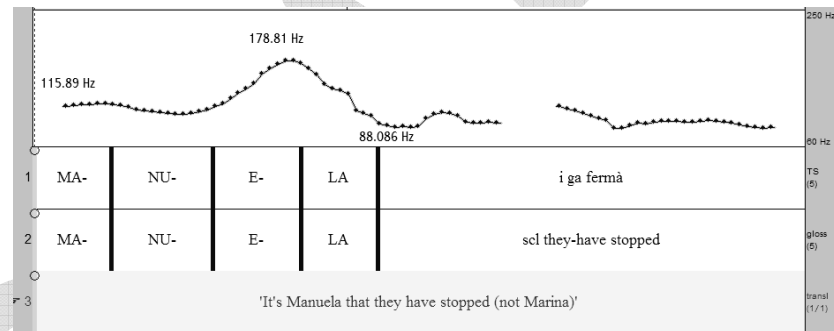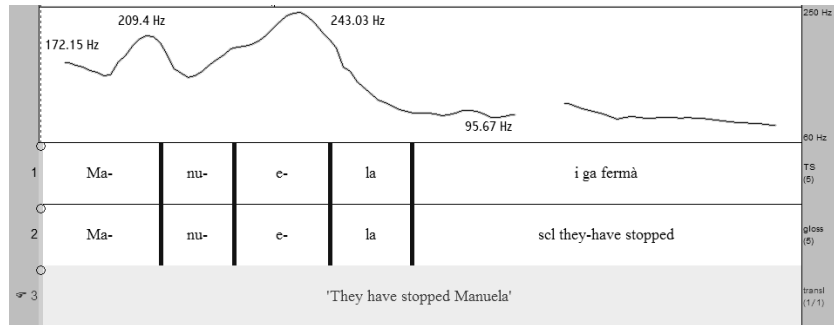

Figure 1 – Pitch track for (21b)

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	172.15 Hz	209.4 Hz		243.03 Hz		250 Hz

(pitch track with values: 172.15 Hz, 209.4 Hz, 243.03 Hz, 95.67 Hz; scale 250 Hz / 60 Hz)

1	Ma-	nu-	e-	la	i ga fermà	TS (5)
2	Ma-	nu-	e-	la	scl they-have stopped	gloss (5)
☞ 3				'They have stopped Manuela'		transl (1/1)

Figure 2 – Pitch track for (22b)

In addition to the sharp rise and fall (which do not figure in the pitch track in figure 1) on the second half of (21b), *... no Marina*, '… not Marina', the two prosodic contours also differ in the initial and maximum values. ICF starts at a higher value than ECF, and reaches a higher peak on the stressed syllable of *Manuela*. Figure 3, superimposing pitch tracks for ECF (dashed line) and ICF (dotted line) to one extracted from an instance of a neutral uttering of *Manuela* (in a continuous line) shows this clearly:

(pitch track comparison chart, Pitch (Hz) axis from 60 to 250; values labelled 172, 243, 179, 116; Time (s) axis 0, 0.79038, 1.25428)
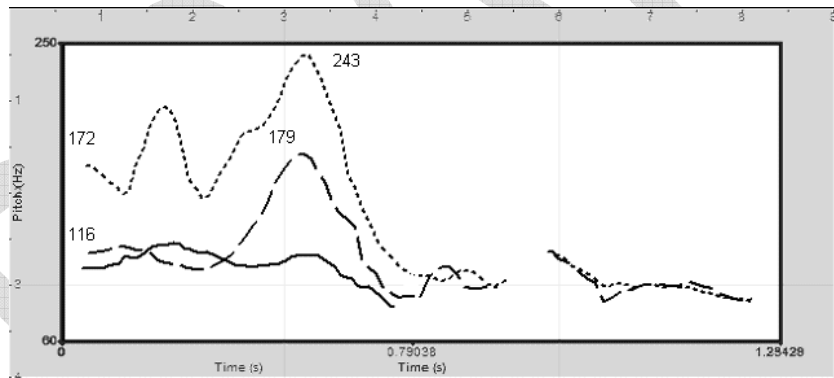
Figure 3 – Comparing pitch tracks

Not only are both (21b) and (22b) clearly not uttered with neutral intonation, but there are noticeable differences between their respective tracks: the curve associated with ICF is much more pronounced than the one produced by ECF. This feels somehow counter-intuitive: explicit and implicit should parallel with a higher

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and a lower contour, respectively. Nevertheless, this may find a plausible explanation in cognitive terms.

Notice that it is more 'costly', cognitively speaking, to activate something that is not in the focus of consciousness than it is to keep active something that is already active. In order words, something that is already present in the discourse (i.e. given) requires less mental effort to become active than something that is not. This is what Chafe (1994:73) defines as 'activation cost'. As ECF establishes a contrast with a referent that is given and active, it will be less costly than ICF, which, expressing a contrast with a semi-active referent, will on the other hand involve more cognitive energy. There may well be a link between the extra cost and the higher intensity of the pitch tracks. A similar observation can be made on the syntactic level. While an answer to a simple question naturally excludes the VP, in the cases of Triestino fronting that we have discussed here, the VP is preferably repeated (cf. 23b). Furthermore, the fronting of the constituent is needed to obtain the unexpected reading: the same reading is not available when the ICF phrase occurs post-verbally cf. 23c), differently from ECF (cf. 23d). Compare the following to (22):

23 a. Sp. A: Chi ga   fermà   la   polizia?
                 who it-has   stopped   the   police
                 'Who have the police stopped?'

    b. Sp. B: ?Manuela!

    c. Sp. B: ?I   ga   fermà   Manuela!
                 scl   they-have   stopped Manuela

    d. I   ga   fermà   MANUELA   (no Marina).
        scl   they-have   stopped Manuela   not Marina
        'It is Manuela that they have stopped (not Marina)'

This idea that the higher cognitive cost may also be expressed prosodically (in terms of higher hertz values) and syntactically (in terms of more syntactic material and necessary movement) is purely speculative at this stage, however appealing it may be. It clearly needs substantial further investigation, and we propose to do this in future work.

Concluding with an evaluation of the evidence discussed in this section, ICF appears to be uttered with a non-neutral intonation: the sharp rise and fall resemble the contour produced by ECF, possibly linked to the presence of a contrast. Yet, the pitch track produced by ICF starts and peaks at higher values than ECF, suggesting that the two are different at the prosodic level. This lends further support to our claim that the two are pragmatically, and to a certain degree syntactically, distinct.

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6 – Conclusions

The information structure of a sentence is clearly contributed by a number of different dimensions: psychological, pragmatic, syntactic, semantic, prosodic. If we are to take it seriously and express its import accurately, it is necessary to identify its complexity and to allow the expression of such complexity within grammar. As a first step in this direction, we have introduced in the form of a feature the notion of 'activeness'. By conceiving a feature specification breakdown applicable to Focus that aims at expressing its multi-dimensionality, we have introduced the concept of 'cross-dimensional features', traits that may also find expression at the syntactic level.

In this article we have suggested that:

- contrastiveness is a scalar notion: there is more to it than a simple [±] value;
- the varying degrees of contrastiveness can be obtained through establishing a contrast with a referent that is held at different levels of the activeness scale in the listener's consciousness;
- in order to do this, the feature [±active] has been introduced;
- [±active] can combine with both [±contrastive] and [±new];
- [new] and [contrastive] can combine with each other;
- the features [+contrastive] and [+new] *can* be syntactic: we assume that this is the case in those languages in which they trigger word re-ordering phenomena; in those languages in which they do not, the phrases that carry them are simple instances of the syntactic category of Focus;
- when both [+contrastive] and [+new] are expressed at the syntactic level, the two are hosted in distinct and ordered projections, with CF being higher than NIF;
- only the primary values of the syntactic features [+contrastive] and [+new] can find expression in 'reduced' CPs; full CPs are able to host both primary and secondary;
- whether the cross-dimensional features identified in this article are expressed at the syntactic level is subject to great cross-linguistic variation, and it depends on the strategies employed by a language to express information structure.

The system suggested here, and only roughly implemented, is not the final product, but a first step towards trying to solve the tension between syntax and pragmatics witnessed in the understanding of information structure.

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[1] The implementation of the ideas presented here has greatly benefited from conversations and discussions with Louise Mycock and from comments on an earlier version by Mary Dalrymple. Special thanks go to Wallace Chafe, for taking the time to read this piece and to highlight any points at which his ideas had been misunderstood, and for his willingness to have the conversation in spite of the theoretical divide. A heart-felt 'Grazie' to Paola Benincà and Nicola Munaro for their support. The full responsibility for any shortcomings rests solely with the author.

[2] The term *focus* has been used widely, in different and contradictory ways, to the extent that often it is not clear what it is meant by it. Although it is vital to address these discrepancies and bring some much needed clarity and transparency, it lies outside the immediate scope of this article to undertake such a task.

[3] Cf. section 3.2 for a specification of whose consciousness is relevant to the discussion.

[4] Intended here in its lose meaning of 'grammar-driven'.

[5] Part of the data presented in this article was first discussed in Paoli (2010), which adduces to a more complex system of Focus projections by referring to degrees of contrast expressed in terms of explicitness and implicitness. The current contribution is an elaboration of the idea of degrees of contrastiveness, and it offers a more in-depth and expanded analysis, allowing for further-reaching theoretical considerations.

[6] An investigation of the relation between Kiss's Identificational Focus and CF is, however, not relevant to the current discussion.

[7] The following abbreviations are used throughout the examples: scl (*subject clitic*, a weak pronominal form found in Northern Italian and Tuscan dialects); *Ita* (Italian), *Ts* (Triestino), *Sard* (Sardinian), *Sic* (Sicilian). If no specification is made, the languages in the examples should be clear from the previous text. The narrow focus of the sentence is indicated in SMALL CAPITALS and purely CF in **BOLD CAPITALS.** As a simplification, the Triestino fronting cases are written in SMALL CAPITALS.

[8] The term 'referent' here is used to indicate the element that corresponds to the specific linguistic expression under examination, be it an individual or a state of affairs.

[9] Sirin Tufan, p.c.

[10] A recent article by Zimmermann (2008) independently makes a similar link. He makes a case for analysing elusive phenomena such as contrastivity and emphasis in terms of *hearer expectation* or *discourse expectability*.

[11] A number of other linguists (cf. Halliday, 1967; Chafe, 1976; Rooth, 1992) claim that the contrastive reading only obtains when the variable operates on a closed set of entities as opposed to an open one. For arguments against such a distinction, see, for example, Brunetti (2004).

[12] No further information is given by the author about the distinction between these two types of Focus. What is of interest here is the fact that they have a syntactically different behaviour.

[13] A referent that is inferentially accessible on an extra-linguistic basis is possibly one that is part of shared knowledge between the speaker and hearer, be it specific to their own environment, or culture, or universal, in other words the shared *world knowledge* of speaker and addressee.

[14] Further research may reveal that the atomic features identified here are not atomic after all. Their introduction in the system is an attempt to incorporate extra-grammatical properties in the feature specification of these categories: their atomic nature is not essential, but a starting point.

[15] The need for Chafe's three-way distinction may indeed prove necessary when extending the investigation of Focus to other languages. The simplification to two suggested here does not theoretically preclude it.

[16] Not all permutations would be pragmatically possible: an element could not simultaneously be [+active] and [+new]; the combination of [-active] and [-new] would correspond to the case of (3a) in Table 1, representing an inactive element that has been demoted from an earlier active state, and is not, therefore, new. In the two remaining possibilities, [+active], [-new], and [-active], [+new], the [active] feature does not add significantly to the status of newness of an element: in the former case the referent is the focus of consciousness, and hence not new, and in the latter, being new, it is not. This highlights a degree of overlap between [±active] and [±new]. A significant difference in the way [±active] interacts with contrastiveness and newness of information falls out of the relational nature of contrast mentioned above: while combined with [+contrastive], [± active] can only refer to the level of consciousness pertaining to the element with which a contrast is established, when combined with [±new], [± active] refers to the degree of consciousness of the referent itself.

[17] This concept of inferrability is very similar to the idea of file-cards (Heim, 1982, Vallduví, 1992): a knowledge store in which every referent is associated to a card with the relevant information about it.

[18] This distinction may make a case for allowing the further specifications of the referent described in Table 1 to be also included in the array of features: here we simply add this observation to make the point of the complexity of contrastiveness.

[19] Cf. Lonzi (2007) for an interesting discussion of the syntactic status of contrastiveness: cross-linguistic considerations clearly point to a great degree of variation.

[20] This is based on the intuition of a small group of speakers including both North-eastern and North-western Italian informants.

[21] Cf. Stoyanova (2008:40ff) for a discussion of the availability of more than one focus position to Italian, and its link with the formation of multiple wh-questions.