

snippets

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Contents

1. Paul Marty. *A note on Schlenker's Translucency.*
2. Carlos Muñoz Pérez. *Island effects with infinitival hanging topics.*
3. Rint Sybesma. *Raise is rise+v (rather than rise+Voice).*



Island effects with infinitival hanging topics

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Romance hanging topics are uncontroversially analyzed as constituents that are base-generated above the matrix CP level (e.g. Cinque 1977, 1990; Alexiadou 2006; López 2009). This account assumes that there is no narrow syntactic operation connecting the hanging topic to the position where it is interpreted within the clause; instead, this connection is taken to rely on an anaphoric relation with a resumptive element, and on discourse-related mechanisms.

One property of hanging topics that motivates this approach is their insensitivity to island restrictions. As the following Spanish examples show, the clause-internal correlate of the hanging topic can be within a relative clause, e.g. (1c), or an adjunct, e.g. (1d).

- (1) a. Con respecto a la canción, la escucho todos los días.
with respect to the song it listen.1SG all the days
'As for the song, I listen to it every day.'
- b. Con respecto a la canción, sé que la escuchas todos los días.
with respect to the song, know.1SG that it listen.2SG all the days
'As for the song, I know that you listen to it every day.'
- c. Con respecto a la canción, conozco al hombre que la compuso.
with respect to the song, know.1SG to.the man that it composed
'As for the song, I know the man who composed it.'
- d. Con respecto a la canción, suelo bailar mientras la escucho.
with respect to the song, be.accustomed.1SG dance while it listen.1SG
'As for the song, I usually dance while I listen to it.'

As shown above, hanging topics in this language may be introduced by prepositional expressions like *con respecto a* 'with respect to' (Zubizarreta 1999). Elements like these may also introduce infinitival topics, as in (2). In this new paradigm, the sentences in which the correlate of the hanging topic is within an island do exhibit degradation.

- (2) a. Con respecto a cantar, lo hago todos los días
with respect to sing it do.1SG all the days
'As for singing, I do it every day.'
- b. Con respecto a cantar, sé que lo haces todos los días.
with respect to sing know.1SG that it do.2SG all the days
'As for singing, I know you do it every day.'
- c. ?? Con respecto a cantar, conozco al hombre que lo hizo.
with respect to sing know.1SG to.the man that it did
'As for singing, I know the man who did it.'

- d. ?? Con respecto a cantar, suelo bailar mientras lo hago.
 with respect to sing be.accustomed.1SG dance while it do.1SG
 ‘As for singing, I usually dance while I do it.’

The contrast between (1) and (2) shows that the traditional observation that hanging topics do not display island restrictions must be qualified: it seems to hold for nominal hanging topics, but not for infinitival ones. In particular, the pattern indicates that sensitivity/insensitivity to islands is not a property of the hanging topic construction *per se*, but of the type of phrase functioning as a hanging topic.

In principle, the unacceptability of (2c) and (2d) suggests that some constituent moves when the hanging topic contains an infinitive. A potential analysis along these lines, however, faces the problem that island sensitivity in these constructions seems to be selective. For instance, the sentence in (3b), in which the correlate of the hanging topic is within a complex NP, is acceptable if the infinitive is interpreted as a contrastive topic (for completeness, note also the acceptability of (3a)); an account of (2c) and (2d) in terms of movement restrictions fails at predicting this.

- (3) a. Con respecto a la canción, escuché el rumor de que Madonna no la compuso.
 with respect to the song heard.1SG the rumor of that Madonna not it composed
 ‘As for the song, I heard the rumor that Madonna didn’t compose it.’
 b. Con respecto a cantar, escuché el rumor de que Madonna no lo hará más.
 with respect to sing heard.1SG the rumor of that Madonna not it will.do more
 ‘As for singing, I heard the rumor that Madonna won’t do it anymore.’

In conclusion, further research is necessary to determine why adjuncts and relative clauses trigger island effects with infinitival hanging topics. If a movement-based account can be successfully implemented, the phenomenon makes a case against the assumption that no narrow syntactic operation is involved in licensing hanging topics.

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