

# Some information-structure properties of Negative Preposing in English and Spanish

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## 1 Introduction

In this squib I explore some discourse properties of a controversial operation, namely Negative Preposing. My interest on this issue is clearly and crucially marked by Liliane Haegeman's research on it.

Negative Preposing (hereafter, NPr) is open to discussion because there are two main lines of research; for some linguists it is a subtype of Contrastive or Corrective Focus, whereas for others it is an instance of Verum/Polarity Focus Fronting (VFF). While for English there seems to be some consensus on the phenomenon, in Spanish there is a hot debate as to the specific information-structure status of this type of preposing. Based on the particular kind of focus of the fronted constituent, I hope to contribute to throwing some light on the topic. In Section 2 I discuss some properties of English NPr, taken and implemented from Haegeman (2000, 2012). In Section 3 I address the focus reading of Spanish NPr and suggest that in some discourse contexts Spanish is similar to English, whereas in other contexts it is different from an information-structure perspective.

## 2 English Negative Preposing

Negative Preposing has been defined as a subtype of focus fronting in the English literature (Haegeman 2012, Emonds 2004, De Clercq 2010), which involves

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movement of a negative or non-assertive constituent to the left periphery of the sentence, by means of which the polarity of the sentence is affected yielding a negative sentence, as in (1):

- (1) a. [On no account] could she move to Paris. (De Clercq 2010)  
b. [Not a bite] did he eat. (Green 1976: 384)

Both adjunct PPs and argument DPs can be fronted in this type of constructions. Among the defining properties of English NPr are the subject-auxiliary inversion attested in (1) and the emphasis on the negative polarity of the sentence. The first trait has been claimed to be common to all types of focus fronting, which has led linguists to argue in favour of an analysis of NPr as triggered by a focus feature. However, clear cases of focus fronting in English do not require subject-auxiliary inversion:

- (2) THIS BOOK I don't need (but that one I do). (Haegeman 2012: 8)

Note that if no subject-auxiliary inversion takes place in NPr, the result is fully ungrammatical (though see Haegeman 2000 for a topic reading of negative elements when they exhibit no inversion):

- (3) a. \*[On no account] she could move to Paris.  
b. \*[Not a bite] he ate.

The second property that describes the phenomenon under study is the emphasis on the negative polarity of the relevant sentence caused by the fronting of the negative constituent. Sentence negation is involved in NPr. Haegeman (2000) and De Clercq (2010) argue that if a negative tag can be added to a sentence it is because this particular sentence is negative. If this is correct and sentences with NPr are negative, cases of NPr are expected to accept a *neither*-tag (since *neither*-tags are only compatible with negative clauses). This prediction is borne out in light of the data in (4):

- (4) On no account could she move to Paris, and neither could Jane. (adapted from De Clercq 2010)

Haegeman (2012) provides an analysis of NPr based on the movement of the negative constituent to a designated Focus Phrase in the left periphery. This movement is triggered by a focus feature. Since what is emphasized is the negative polarity, I assume for English that this focus feature is connected with a neg-

ative feature. In other words, the triggering featural array is [+focus, +negation], in the spirit of decomposition in features of discourse categories proposed in Jiménez-Fernández (2015).

Support for the claim that English NPr involves focus comes from the fact that it can be used as an answer to a question satisfying its information request. This is clearly stated in Culicover (1991) and Haegeman (2000), and illustrated in (5):

- (5) A: Did you see anyone?  
B: No, NOT A SINGLE PERSON did I see. (Culicover 1991)

Note, however, that this is a polar question and the answer fulfills the information request on the polarity, so it is interpreted as negative. A couple of examples involving a *wh*-question follow, which can perfectly be replied by a NPr construction (Culicover 1991):

- (6) A: When did you ever see such a thing?  
B: NEVER have I seen such a thing.  
(7) A: When would you ever have agreed to visit Robin?  
B: AT NO TIME would I ever have agreed to visit Robin.

Importantly, what is clear is that the fronted negative constituent has some sort of focus interpretation, based on the licit marking of it as Information Focus (IF) in (6)–(7).

Alongside the IF reading, the relevant literature associates NPr with Contrastive Focus (CF) in English (Haegeman 2012). I have shown evidence that NPr can be interpreted as IF. Next question is whether evidence can be found supporting a possible interpretation of NPr as CF. Since Jespersen (1937), it is widely acknowledged that CF can be developed by means of clefting (É. Kiss 1999, Frascarelli 2000, Belletti 2005, Haegeman et al. 2014, Cruschina 2015). In some languages there is the option of developing CF either via fronting or via clefting, as illustrated for Italian, English and German (examples taken from Cruschina 2015):

- (8) [Context: I have met Charles]  
a. GIANNI ho incontrato / È GIANNI che ho incontrato. (Italian)  
b. JOHN I met / It was JOHN that I met. (English)  
c. HANS habe ich getroffen / Es war HANS, den ich getroffen. (German)

If NPr is a subtype of CF, the prediction is that the fronted negative element should be possibly used in a cleft. Examples in (9) confirm the contrastive flavour of negative constituents, either adjuncts (9a) or arguments (9b)-(9c).

- (9) a. It is AT NO TIME that I would ever have agreed to visit Robin.  
 b. It is NO INTEREST that they show in syntax.  
 c. It is NO ONE that I saw.

From this empirical reasoning it can be safely concluded that English NPr has two possible interpretations, namely either that of purely information focus or that of contrastive focus. Both interpretations favour an analysis in which the fronted element undergoes movement to the specifier of the designated category FocP in the left periphery.

### 3 Spanish Negative Preposing

Next I turn to Spanish. NPr in Spanish has not been studied in depth. Bosque (1980) notices a type of fronting which yields a negative interpretation of polarity in Spanish. The author calls these fronting operations *anteposiciones negativas* 'negative preposing', which I illustrate in (10a) for adjuncts and (10b) for arguments, from Bosque (1980: 34–35):

- (10) a. En modo alguno se puede tolerar tal actitud.  
 in way some SE can-PRES.3SG to.tolerate such attitude  
 'By no means can such an attitude be tolerated.'  
 b. De ninguno de esos problemas trató la reunión.  
 of none of those problems treat-PAST.3SG the meeting  
 'None of those problems did the meeting discuss.'

These are cases of adjunct or argument NPr, which clearly induce a negative interpretation of the sentence polarity, given the corresponding sentences in (11) with no fronting but with the explicit occurrence of the negative adverb *no* 'not':

- (11) a. No se puede tolerar tal actitud en modo alguno.  
 not SE can-PRES.3SG to.tolerate such attitude in way some  
 'Such an attitude cannot be tolerated by any means.'  
 b. La reunión no trató de ninguno de esos problemas.  
 the meeting not treat-PAST.3SG of none of those problems  
 'The meeting didn't discuss any of those problems.'

This trait supports the idea that sentences involving NPr are marked as negative in Spanish. In the absence of fronting, some other mechanism such as insertion of the negative adverb is obligatory. The rule is known as Neg-shift (for discussion on this rule in different views, see De Clercq 2010, Haegeman 2000, Bosque 1980, Tubau 2008, Zeijlstra 2004). The test of *neither*-tags provided by Haegeman (2000) for English is easily extended to Spanish, thereby showing that negation in NPr applies to the whole sentence:

- (12) En modo alguno se puede tolerar tal actitud, ni  
 in way some SE can-PRES.3SG to.tolerate such attitude not  
 tampoco tu respuesta.  
 neither your answer  
 'By no means can such an attitude be tolerated, and neither your answer can.'

The fact that a *but*-tag can be added to a NPr construction also suggests that the sentence is negative, given that *but*-tags are only compatible with a previous negative polarity sentence (Etxepare & Uribe-Etxebarria 2008); it may have a bound focus reading, suggesting that this is a subtype of CF:

- (13) A NINGÚN ESTUDIANTE me encontré por la facultad, sino a  
 to no student me find-PAST.1SG by the faculty but to  
 profesores.  
 professors  
 'I found no students at the faculty, but I found professors.'

Concerning the formal analysis of NPr in Spanish, there are two main lines of research. On the one hand, Gallego (2007) and Battlori & Hernanz (2014) argue that this type of fronting are cases of mild focalization or weak focus fronting, suggesting that there is a focus feature triggering movement of the negative constituent and affecting the sentence polarity. Properties such as obligatory subject-auxiliary inversion are taken as evidence for their analysis.

On the other hand, Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal (2009, 2010) and Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti (2014) claim that NPr is a subtype of Polarity or Verum Focus Fronting which makes polarity negative (illustrated in (14), alongside cases of Quantifier Fronting (Quer 2002), Resumptive Preposing (Cinque 1990), etc. (see Jiménez-Fernández 2015 for a classification of types of foci in Spanish)).

- (14) Nada tengo que añadir a lo que ya dije en  
 nothing have-PRES.1SG that to.add to it that already say-PAST.1SG in  
 su día.  
 its day  
 'I have nothing to add to what I said at the time.'

For Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti there is no information-structure partition in these constructions and no contrastive focus of the fronted element is involved. Rather, it is the sentence polarity that is emphasized. In particular, NPr highlights the sentence negative polarity, whereas Quantifier Fronting and Resumptive Fronting makes affirmative polarity more prominent (see also Hernanz 2006). This is why I am taking the three phenomena as different.

To throw some light on the possible solution for the type of focus which Spanish NPr instantiates, I will test whether it may have an Information Focus and/or a Contrastive Focus interpretation. Starting with the IF reading, Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti (2014) explicitly address the impossibility of using NPr as reply to information-seeking questions, providing an example with QP-fronting:

- (15) A: ¿Crees que tengo interés?  
 think-PRES.2SG that have-PRES.1SG interest  
 'Do you think I have interest?'  
 B: #Mucho interés tienes tú...  
 much interest have-PRES.2SG you  
 'A great interest you have...'

Extrapolating the IF interpretation to NPr, note the following natural dialogue, suggesting that QP-fronting and NPr are distinct phenomena, sharing some properties such as the emphasis on the sentence polarity, but also showing distinct features:

- (16) A: ¿Qué tienes que añadir a lo que expusiste  
 what have-PRES.2SG that to.add to the that present-PAST.2SG  
 ayer?  
 yesterday  
 'What do you have to add to what you presented yesterday? '  
 B: NADA tengo que añadir.  
 nothing have-PRES.1SG that to.add  
 'I have to add nothing.'

This confirms that NPr may have an IF reading in Spanish as well, similar to English.

As regards the CF interpretation, let's check whether NPr alternates with clefting. Clefting in Spanish has been held to express either IF or CF. Following Moreno Cabrera (1999) and, more recently, Feldhausen & del Mar Vanrell (2015), at least one of the interpretations of a cleft sentence is that of CF, as illustrated in (17), from Feldhausen & del Mar Vanrell (2015), adapted from Moreno Cabrera (1999: 4251):

- (17) Es [CF JUAN] el que viene (y no Sebas).  
 be-PRES-3SG Juan the that come-PRES.3SG (and not Sebas)  
 'It is Juan that will come (and not Sebas).'

The question is whether clefting or pseudo-clefting is possible with the constituents which are fronted via NPr. It must be noted first that clefts behave like monoclausal sentences as far as negation is concerned and the negative element requires the adverb *no* 'not' to be inserted in initial position (Bosque 1980). In doing so, the results of clefting in Spanish are fully grammatical, confirming the possible use of NPr with a corrective flavour:

- (18) A: Seguro que te encontraste con algún vecino, ¿verdad?  
 Sure that you find-PAST.2SG with some neighbour true  
 'For sure you met some neighbour, right?'  
 B: No fue A NINGÚN VECINO a quien me encontré  
 not be-PAST.3SG to no neighbour to whom me find-PAST.1SG  
 en la entrada, sino a tu novia.  
 in the hall, but to your girlfriend.  
 'It wasn't any neighbour at all who I met in the hall, but your girlfriend.'
- (19) No fue DE NINGUNO DE ESOS PROBLEMAS de lo que  
 not be-PAST.3SG of none of those problems of the that  
 trató la reunión.  
 treat-PAST.3SG the meeting  
 'It wasn't any of those problems that the meeting discussed.'

Just in passing, Herrero (1992: 207) states that in contexts of special expressivity such as replies or rejections negative elements can be focalized in a (pseudo-)cleft. In this connection, correction and contrast also represent especially expressive discourse situations; note that the cleft alternates with NPr in (B-B'):

- (20) A: Habrás aprobado todo, no?  
 have-FUT.2SG passed all, no?  
 'You have passed all your exams, haven't you?'
- B: NADA es lo que he aprobado.  
 nothing be-PRES.3SG the that have-PRES.1SG passed  
 'It's no exam that I have passed.'
- B': NADA he aprobado.  
 nothing have-PRES.1SG passed  
 'No exam that I have passed.'

From the discussion on Spanish NPr it can be drawn the conclusion that this phenomenon can be interpreted as either IF or CF, exactly as in English. This does not mean an exhaustive list of interpretations. To the contrary, Spanish NPr may also have a VFF reading. To accommodate the data, Spanish NPr involves movement of a negative element to the left periphery.

Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti (2014) mention the possibility that this movement is not motivated by any triggering feature, but they do not elaborate on this. I assume that there is a feature causing the fronting operation. This feature is similar to the one proposed for English, but differs in that the [+focus] feature is diminished to just [+emphasis] in those cases where the NPr phenomenon is interpreted as VFF. Thus Spanish NPr displays a [+emphasis, +negation], a combination in charge of emphasizing the negative polarity of the whole sentence. The precise syntactic position targeted by the negative element is a pending issue in my current research on the topic (see Jiménez-Fernández 2018).

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