

The Italian locative *lì* as a Topic head and the typology of Topics

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1. **Background.** Several analyses exist of structures in which a demonstrative co-occurs with a locative deictic adverb in Romance and Germanic (e.g. Questo N qui (proximal) Quel N lì (distal) in Italian and This here N, that there N in English; Bernstein (1997), Aboh (2004), Leu (2007) a.o.). While implementations differs greatly, all these approaches are based on two underlying assumptions: a. the locative adverbial *qua* 'reinforcer' is parasitic on the presence of the demonstrative b. the locative 'reinforcer' is DP-internal. This is illustrated by cases like (1), ungrammatical in the Dem-less version, under the relevant non-locative interpretation.

(1) a. Ho letto {*/il/questo/quel} libro {qui/lì} b. I read {*/the/this/that} {here/there} book
Italian however allows for structures where the locative adverb *lì* can surface without an associated demonstrative, even when it is clearly not interpreted spatially.

(2) Il tipo lì...il fidanzato di Maria, l'ho alla fine conosciuto

The guy there... the boyfriend of Maria, him.have at.the end met

'That specific guy we both know about...Maria's boyfriend, I have finally met him'

The DP 'il tipo lì' refers to a specific referent which is assumed to be part of the shared encyclopedic knowledge of speaker and hearer, but which the speaker doesn't want to or can not identify using a rigid designator.

2. **Proposals & analysis.** I propose that the locative adverbial *lì* in structures like (2) is not DP-internal: it clearly does not 'reinforce' a Dem, as there is no Dem in the structure, but it rather realizes the head of a Topic projection in the left periphery. Supporting evidence:

A. Dem-less structures like (2) are only grammatical when the relevant DP is left-dislocated (3a vs. 3c), contrary to Dem-Reinf DPs, which are grammatical in non-Top positions as well (e.g. object position (3d))

(3) a. [_{TopP} Il libro [_{Top°} lì]]... l'ho alla fine letto b. [_{TopP} Quel libro lì [_{Top°} Ø]] l'ho letto

The book there...I have finally read it That book there, I have read it

c. *Alla fine ho letto il libro lì d. Alla fine ho letto quel libro lì

Finally I have read the book there Finally I have read that book there

B. While Dem-Reinforcer structures are grammatical with both a proximal (*qui*) and a distal (*lì*) reinforcer in all cases, Dem-less structures are only grammatical, in the desired interpretation, with the distal adverb *lì*. Under the present account this immediately accounted for: *lì* encodes a Top head in (4a), it is not a reinforcer/deictic element, thus no alternation with *qui* is expected.

(4) a. Il libro {*/qui/lì}...l'ho alla fine letto b. Ho letto {questo/quel} libro {qui/lì}

the book {here/there} I have finally read I read {this/that} book {here/there}

Crosslinguistic support for this analysis comes from Saramaccan, which encodes Top heads overtly in most cases. Aboh (2006: fn.8) shows that the Topic marker is overtly realized in this language as *dɛ̀* which is interestingly homophonous with the nominal locative adverb *dɛ̀* 'there'. Moreover, much like in the Italian cases discussed above, it can be used as a DP-internal 'reinforcer'. In the latter case it alternates with the proximal locative *akì* ('here')(5a). However, the Topic marker can only be realized by the distal locative marker *dɛ̀*(5b) and not the proximal *akì* ('here'), exactly like in Italian (see (4a)).

(5) a. Dí máu bakúba akì/dɛ̀ b. Dí bakúba dɛ̀ mi táki táa Amato bói en

Det hand banana here/there

Det banana Top 1sg say that Amato cook 3sg

'The bananas here/there'

'As for that banana, I said that Amato cooked it'

C. The facts in A and B suggest that there are two different classes of Topics in Italian; a class which allows recursive stacking (6a) (Rizzi (1997), Benincà (2001), Benincà and Poletto (2004), a.o.), and the type headed by 'li' discussed above, which strongly disallows stacking (6b):

- (6) a. A Gianni, il libro, in giardino, glielo darò senz'altro
 To Gianni, the book, in the garden, to him I will give certainly
 b. *A Gianni li...il libro li...glielo darò senz'altro
 To Gianni there, the book there, to him I will give certainly

It is important to stress that '*li*-Topic' cases like (2), (3a), (6b), etc. can not be analyzed as Hanging Topics, which also can not be stacked (Cinque (1990)); in fact, a '*li*-topic' can follow a bona fide a Hanging Topic; the structure is grammatical as long as there is only one '*li*-topic', and only one HT.

- (7) Gianni, il libro lì..lo darò senz'altro a lui
 Gianni, the book there, I will certainly give it to him

While this state of affairs is surprising under the assumptions that Topics are always recursive in Romance, this is a familiar situation in languages in which Topic heads are typically overtly realized. Aboh (2006) shows that topics in Gungbe are moved to the left periphery where the Topic head is realized by the topic marker *yà*. Exactly like in the Italian cases in (7), Gungbe also bans topic recursion.

- (8) *gólù ló yà àgbá l ó yà Kòfì zè'è dó é mè
 gold Spf_[+def] Top box Spf_[+def] Top Kofi put-Perf-3sg Loc 3sg in
 'As for that gold, as for that box, Kofi put it in it'

D. One last piece of evidence illustrating the difference between the two Topic classes concern their different ability to refer back to 'old information'. I propose that stackable Topics are sensitive to 'old information' already introduced in discourse, while '*li*-Topics' are not; they are only sensitive to shared encyclopedic knowledge between speaker and hearer. Consider the following dialogue:

- (28) A: Ho letto “La Morte a Venezia” e mi è molto piaciuto
 I read “Death in Venice” and I like it a lot
 B': Quel libro di Mann lì, non l'ho mai letto
 That book by Mann there, I have never read
 B'': #Il libro di Mann lì, non l'ho mai letto
 The book by Mann there, I have never read

A introduces the DP “La Morte a Venezia” in discourse, which thus becomes 'discourse old information'. The only natural reply to A is B': the topicalized DP in B' can refer back to the DP “La morte a Venezia”; however the one in B'' can not. Structures like (28B'') pick out a specific referent which is assumed to be shared knowledge between speaker and hearer. Such knowledge is 'encyclopedic' background knowledge, as opposed to knowledge already introduced in discourse, thus the ungrammaticality.

References

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