

Syntactic variation of focus marking: The case of the *Focalizing Ser* in Colombia

As it occurs in other languages, Spanish may have topic and focus projections inside CP (cf. Casielles-Suárez 2004). Aside from left dislocation (1), clefting (2) is commonly used in Spanish to focalize arguments within CP. Thus, the affirmative sentence in (3) can be transformed into a cleft sentence as in (4), where the direct object is the focalized element of the sentence, is c-commanded by the copula verb *fue* 'was' (> *ser* 'to be'), and seems to receive a narrow focus.

In some Spanish varieties (i.e. Venezuelan, Ecuadorian, Panamanian, Colombian, and Dominican), an apparently similar sentence to the one in (4) can also be created without the REL PRON and the COMP *que* ('that'), with a structure often called *focalizing ser* (FS), as shown in (5). FS has been previously examined as an incomplete form of a cleft structure (e.g. Sedano, 1990; Toribio, 2002), but later research shows that FS is syntactically unrelated to clefts (e.g. Bosque 1999; Curnow & Travis 2004; Author 2009). In fact, while clefts occur in the external periphery of the clause (at the CP-level), FS is a clause-internal phenomenon. Given the focus-properties of FS, this clearly shows that the interface with the informational structure cannot be confined to the highest periphery (in line with Belletti 2004).

In the present analysis, we show data collected within distinct *communities of practice* (cf. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), from five Colombian cities (Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Cali, and Medellín). A total of 275 participants evaluated 128 sentences containing both FS and cleft structures, presented in two acceptability judgment tests which were given out in both audio and written formats. The sentences were part of mini-dialogues (6) and participants were asked to evaluate the last sentence based on how (un)familiar it seemed to them. The results of these acceptability judgment tests are compared with the results from a similar test conducted in the Dominican Republic in 2013.

Preliminary results indicate that there is no significant variation in the way Colombian speakers' perceive the use of FS. That is, regardless of the city of origin, participants show similar tendencies of acceptability. Thus, sentences with FS-focused prepositional phrases (7), subject (8) and object DPs (9), CPs and IPs (10), and FS structures with *haber* (11) are rendered as the most accepted cases across Colombian varieties. When comparing the results obtained in Colombia with those obtained in the Dominican Republic, we find that Dominicans generally tend to evaluate certain cases of FS at a much higher rate than Colombians. Furthermore, although FS-focused subject DPs (8) have been reported as ungrammatical in Dominican Spanish (Toribio 1992), our data show that Dominican speakers accept them as much as Colombian speakers.

Finally, our study demonstrates that the use of FS is much more accepted by Caribbean speakers (e.g. Barranquilla and Dominican speakers) than we had initially anticipated. Moreover, it is evident that speakers' perceptions of the use of FS vary depending on the type of constituent being focused, pragmatic and prosodic features present in the conversation, and the variety of Spanish observed. We also emphasize on the importance of conducting a more comprehensive corpus study in which we investigate the frequency of use of FS and its correlation with social and linguistic factors that may be determining its use in FS dialects.

- (1) **A:** *¿Quién trajo el vino?*
‘Who brought THE WINE?’
B: [*El vino*-TOP [*lo trajo Julián*]]
‘THE WINE, Julian brought it’
- (2) **A:** *¿QUIÉN trajo el vino?*
‘WHO brought the wine?’
B: [*JULIÁN*-FOC *fue quien* [*lo trajo*]]
‘JULIAN was the one who brought it’
- (3) *Julián trajo VINO*
Juan brought some wine’
- (4) *Lo que Julián trajo fue VINO*
REL PRON that Julián bring-3SG-PAST to be-3SG-PAST wine
‘What Julián brought was wine’
- (5) *Julián trajo fue VINO*
Julián bring-3SG-PAST to be-3SG-PAST wine
‘It was wine what Julián brought’
- (6) Juan: *¿En el patio no había una mesa de plástico?*
‘Was there not a plastic table in the backyard?’
María: *No, allá había era una cama vieja*
‘No, it was an old bed that they had there’
- (7) *Lucrecia y David están es en Caracas*
‘It is Caracas where Lucrecia and David are’
- (8) *Salió fue Lucía*
‘It was Lucía who left’
- (9) *Necesito es la mesa y unas cuantas sillas*
‘It is the table and some chairs that I need’
- (10) *Empezaron fue a tirar piedras por todas partes*
‘What they started to do was to throw rocks everywhere’
- (11) *Había era una cama vieja*
‘What was there was an old bed’

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