

Mirative implicature and information structure: Focus Fronting in Spanish

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In this paper I address the question of the special semantic properties that characterize Focus Fronting (FF) in Spanish. FF is traditionally related to a contrastive or corrective effect with respect to a focal alternative *given* in the discourse (Rizzi 1997, López 2009), cf. (1):

- (1) A: *Me han dicho que fueron a las Seychelles.*
‘I was told they went to the Seychelles.’
B: *A las Maldivas fueron, no a las Seychelles.*
‘They went to the Maldives, not to the Seychelles.’

On the basis of experimental evidence, which builds on Bianchi et al. (2015), I show that Spanish may also resort to FF to express a special evaluative meaning, i.e. a mirative import of surprise and unexpectedness (Cruschina 2012, Jimenez-Fernandez 2015), cf. (2):

- (2) *Y yo que pensaba que no tenían ni un euro! Sabes qué?!
A las Maldivas fueron, de luna de miel!!*
‘I thought they were penniless! You know what?!
To the Maldives they went on honeymoon!’

The experimental results show that native speakers accept FF in the corrective and in the mirative context as equally good. Mirative FF of the kind illustrated in (2) is problematic for the traditional analyses of FF because:

- (a) It is not corrective, given that no explicit alternatives are necessary;
- (b) The traditional information-structural articulation of the sentence into a new and a given part is not guaranteed: the background need not be given;
- (c) The meaning associated with mirative FF depends neither on the information structure of the sentence nor on the given context.

In other words, mirative FF shows that neither the givenness of the postfocal material nor the presence of a salient alternative in the context is a necessary condition for FF. It also demonstrates that Spanish FF is not exclusively linked to information-structural conditions. The set of focal alternatives generated by mirative FF is instead exploited in order to support a specific *conventional implicature*, i.e. there exists at least one focus alternative proposition which is more likely than the asserted proposition (Bianchi et al. 2015, 2016).