A closer look at topic VP fronting in Spanish

Proposal: This study analyses the topic VP fronting in Spanish as shown in example (1).

    (1).Visitar   a Ana,   María suele   hacerlo.

         visit-INF   A Ana,   María HABIT   do-INF-ACC

         'To visit Ana, María usually does it'.

I show that the topicalized VP in Spanish at the left periphery functions as a hanging topic. Thus, it is a case of hanging topic left dislocation (HTLD henceforth), which is argued to be base generated (Cinque, 1977; Villalba, 2000; López, 2000, 2016; etc.).

Theoretical background: In his dissertation, Villalba (2000), using data from Catalan, argues that topicalized VP at the left periphery, like sentence (1), is a case of clitic left dislocation (CLLD), with the left dislocated VP having a clitic *lo* as a resumptive form. Similarly, Lipták and Vicente (2009) study another type of VP fronting, as shown in (2) (i.e., the left-dislocated VP with a strong pronoun *eso* as a resumptive) and argue that the fronted VP, being a topicalized constituent, is derived from movement.

    (2).Visitar   a Ana,   María suele   hacer   eso.

         visit-INF   A Ana,   María HABIT   do-INF   that.

         'To visit Ana, María usually does that' (Lipták and Vicente, 2009)

However, in López (2009), he mentions that every maximal phrase can theoretically be clitic left-dislocated, except when headed by a verb, aux or functional head. However, López does not explain why verbs, auxiliaries and functional projection cannot be clitic left dislocated. This study aims to support what is mentioned by López (2009) and argue that topicalized VP at the left periphery of a sentence in Spanish is not a case of CLLD, but a case of HTLD.

Analysis: Based on previous literature, table (3) below summarizes the generally accepted differences between CLLD and HTLD (Villalba, 2000; De Cat, 2002; Casielles-Suárez, 2003; Shaer and Frey, 2005; López, 2009, 2016; Gupton, 2014; Lee-Schoenfeld and Lunden, 2019; Vallduví, 1988; Escobar, 1999; Casielles-Suárez, 2003; Suñer, 2006; Lambrecht, 2001; Alexiadou, 2008; etc.). I provide empirical evidence to show that topicalized VP in Spanish behave more like HTLD.

    (3).*Differences between Spanish CLLD and HTLD*

	CLLD	HTLD
Category of dislocated phrases	Any maximal projection	DP
Form of resumptive	Clitic	Clitic, strong pronoun, epithet
Number of dislocated phrases	No limit	Usually one
Movement or base generation	Movement	Base generation
Reconstruction effect	Yes	No
Island sensitivity	Yes	No

First and foremost, the resumptive form of the topicalized VP is not only limited to a clitic. It can also be a strong pronoun, as has already been shown by examples (1) and (2). Moreover, the topicalized VP can have an epithet as its resumptive, as shown in sentence (4).

    (4). **Ver**   **la tele**, Juan no suele   hacer   **esa bobada.**

         watch-INF   the tv, Juan no HABIT   do-INF that nonsense

         'To watch TV, Juan isn't usually up to such nonsense'

Second, topicalized VP in Spanish is not sensitive to island effect. In sentences (5) and (6), we have a coordination island, as shown by the bracket.

(5). **Leer libros**, me gusta [**hacerlo** y (también) ver películas].
　　read-INF books, to me please-3SG do-INF-ACC and (also) watch-INF movies
　　'I like to read books and also watch movies'

(6). **Leer libros**, me gusta [hacer **eso** y (también) ver películas].

The grammaticality of both sentences suggests that there involved no movement. Similarly, in sentence (7), we notice a complex noun phrase island.

(7). **Lavar los platos**, no hay [nadie [al que le guste hacer**lo**]]
　　wash-INF the plates, no have.3SG nobody that DAT please-SUB-3SG do-INF-ACC
　　'There is nobody who likes to wash the plates.'

If topicalized VP is derived from movement, this sentence would be predicated as ungrammatical due to the island violation.

Third, the structure of topicalized VP shows no reconstruction effect, as shown by example (8).

(8). Visitar al padre de Juan$_1$, Juan$_1$ piensa que María quiere hacer eso
　　visit-INF A-the father of Juan, Juan think-3SG that María want-3SG this
　　'Juan thinks that María wants to visit his father'

If fronted VP is derived from movement, as indicated by (9), it would be ungrammatical, since the lower copy of Juan, as a R-expression, is C-commanded by the higher Juan in the subject position, which would violate binding principle C. Therefore, the grammaticality of sentence (8) suggests no movement.

(9). *Visitar al padre de Juan$_1$, Juan$_1$ piensa que María quiere hacer eso [~~Visitar al padre de Juan$_1$~~].

Lastly, an interesting point worth mentioning is that for HTLD, what is to the left-periphery is argued to be an NP (or DP). Why VP at the left-periphery can be argued as a hanging topic. Followed by (Pérez Vázquez, 2002; Borsley and Kornfilt, 2000; Berger, 2015), this question can be easily answer since for Spanish infinitives, they argue that there is a DP dominating the infinitive form. In this sense, for the topicalized VP, it is, in fact, still a DP, with a null D head.

Conclusion:

This study analyzes the Spanish topicalized VP in the left-periphery. By unifying the study of Villabla (2000) and Liptác and Vicente (2009), I argue that VP fronting is a case of HTLD, not CLLD, with the topicalized VP being base generated.

Selected references:

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