Deriving the availability of fronting constructions

Noncanonical syntactic constructions involve a change in the basic word order of a sentence and were the object of many generative analyses since Ross (1967) dissertation. However, one issue that has remained largely unexplored until nowadays is the issue of their crosslinguistic distribution. This work aims at working with the constructions with a fronting constituent: Contrastive Left Dislocation (CLD), with a demonstrative pronoun as the resumptive – (1); with Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD), with a personal pronoun as the resumptive – (2); and with Topicalization (TOP), with a null pronoun as the resumptive – (3).

Regarding their availability, CLD and CLLD are incompatible: if the language has one structure, it will lack the other one; on the other hand, the distribution of TOP is less clear, except if we consider a difference between TOP triggering VS order, as in German, and TOP allowing SV order, as in English and Portuguese, where TOP exists, but not CLD.

In order to explain these facts, we put forward a proposal in the line of Boeckx (2003), where resumptives are copies left by movements over islands. However, considering Den Dikken’s (2007) notion of phase extension, where head movement extends a phase, we will propose that a resumptive will be created only if it crosses the phase edge, as a last resort operation.

First, noticing that V2 languages such as German and Dutch have CLD, a resumptive will be required only if the fronted XP moves even higher than Spec,FinP, to verify an interpretable feature [Contrast]. On CLLD languages, the verb moves up to T, and the fronted XP moves to the periphery. We also consider that the expression of the copy of the moved constituent will vary according to its position, and that TopP is a phase (cf. Oshima 2001/2002).

Second, the case of TOP languages such as English and Portuguese, where this construction does no imply VS order, is incompatible with CLD because it essentially represents the same strategy, but without a resumptive. The lack of this element is to be connected to phase extension from Top to Force, as can be noticed in the displacement of a topic from a relative clause - (4).

(1) \textit{Diesen Mann, den kenne ich nicht.} \hspace{1cm} \text{(German)}
This man, RES.ACC know.1SG I not

(2) \textit{Este hombre, no \textit{lo} conozco.} \hspace{1cm} \text{(Spanish)}
This man, not RES.ACC know.1SG

(3) \textit{Esse homem eu \textit{não} conheço \_}. \hspace{1cm} \text{(Portuguese)}
This man, I not know.
‘This man, I don’t know him.’

(4) \textit{Isso você \textit{não} perguntou \_ \text{[ForceP quem \_ \text{[TopP \_ quer \_}].} \hspace{1cm} \text{(Portuguese)}
This you not ask.past who wants
‘As for this, you did not ask who wanted (it).’