Word order in French, Spanish and Italian:
A grammaticalization account[1]

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This article provides a comparative analysis of word order in Spanish, French and Italian. We first consider word order in general, and show that Spanish has all types of word order except SOV (i.e. SVO, VOS, OSV, VSO and OVS), while Italian lacks SOV and VSO, and French lacks SOV, VSO and OVS. Taking a constructional view on grammaticalization and language change, we argue that the different word order patterns can be accounted for in terms of grammaticalization. We provide evidence for a continuum from Spanish → Italian → French, Spanish being the least grammaticalized, and French the most grammaticalized language. In the second part of the article we provide further evidence for our claim by focusing on the distribution of a particular type of word order shared by all three languages, VOS, where the subject is typically narrowly focused. VOS occurs in four discourse contexts in Spanish and Italian, but it is subject to additional restrictions in Italian. In French it appears only in one of the four discourse contexts of Spanish and Italian. Our hypothesis is that this is a case of progressive grammaticalization with respect to the interface between grammatical structure (the VOS word order) and information structure. Independent evidence for our claim comes from the distribution of clefts in Romance, which are a functional variant of VOS. This phenomenon, which developed in Romance as an innovative mechanism used to narrowly focus a constituent, shows the reversed pattern as the one observed for VOS: it is most developed in French, least in Spanish while it is progressing in modern Italian.

Keywords: Romance, French, Spanish, Italian, word order, grammaticalization

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1. Introduction

Our article is devoted to word order in three Romance languages, viz. French, Spanish and Italian. In the literature on word order in Romance, much attention has been paid to the phenomenon of 'free' inversion, which occurs in Spanish (1a) and Italian (1b), but not in French (1c):

(1) a. *Llega*   *el* *tren.*
     b. *Arriva*   *il* *treno.*
     c. **Arrive*   *le* *train.*[2]
              arrive-3SG:PRES the train
              'The train arrives.'

Free inversion has often been linked with the fact that Spanish and Italian are pro-drop languages, in contrast with French (see among others Burzio (1986), Rizzi (1982) and the references cited therein):

(2) a. Sp. *Llega.*
     b. It. *Arriva.*
     c. Fr. **Arrive.*
              arrive-3SG:PRES
              'He/she arrives.'

On the basis of data concerning word order in general and the distribution of one particular type of word order, viz. verb-object-subject word order (VOS), we will argue that the radical opposition between Spanish and Italian on the one hand, and French on the other, suggested by examples (1) and (2), does not hold, or should at least be fine-tuned. We will show that Italian occupies an intermediate position between Spanish and French, and that this continuum has to be understood as a grammaticalization path, French being the most and Spanish the least grammaticalized language, Italian being in between:

Spanish   Italian   French
less   more grammaticalized

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[2] Note that in French, this type of word order, where the verb is not preceded by any overt element and which is called 'absolute inversion', is possible in some very specific contexts, such as scenic indications in theater plays:

(i) *Entre le censeur.*
     enters the censor
     'The censor enters.' (Lainé, cited in Jonare 1976: 41)

See Le Bidois (1952), Jonare (1976), Fuchs (1997) and Lahousse (2011) for more examples.

In what follows, we will thus provide evidence for a double hypothesis: (i) taking a constructional view on grammaticalization (Bergs & Diewald 2008, Trousdale 2008, 2010, Gisborne & Patten 2011), we argue that changes in word order can be accounted for by grammaticalization theory,[3] and (ii) the Romance languages under consideration grammaticalize at a different pace (Lamiroy & De Mulder 2011, De Mulder & Lamiroy, forthc.).

We will show that this holds for word order at a macro level as well as on a micro level. At the macro level, French lost certain word-order types which were common in older stages and which still are available in the other Romance languages (section 2). At the micro level, we will show that French VOS is more restricted than VOS in Italian, which is also more restricted than VOS in contemporary Spanish, where it occurs in a wide range of discourse contexts (section 3). Finally, in section 4 we will show that French has developed an innovative or 'extravagant' (Haspelmath 2000) focus marking strategy, viz. clefting, which makes up for the heavy restrictions that weigh on VOS in modern French.

A methodological note is in order here. A cross-linguistic description of the evolution of word order, in particular regarding specific structures such as VOS or clefts, should ideally be based on statistical data.[4] However, such an analysis is beyond the scope of this article, being very difficult to carry out for practical reasons. First, the frequency of different word orders in several languages can be compared only if the analysis is based on extensive corpora in each language: since some of the word-order types under analysis (especially VOS) are far from frequent, very large data sets would be required in order to retrieve enough examples of every type in each of

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[3] Although word order is not a particular structure (in the sense in which causatives or auxiliaries enter into particular structures), and has not traditionally been associated with grammaticalization phenomena, it is of course a matter of syntactic construction. Note that scholars such as Heltoft (1996) account for word-order patterns in terms of grammaticalization. While Fischer (2010) argues that word-order change may trigger grammaticalization, Marchello-Nizia (2006: 81) convincinly argues that fixation of SVO in French was the result of a larger grammaticalization process. In fact, Haspelmath (1998) and Lehmann (2002) take a similar 'constructionalist' stand when they argue that grammaticalization also applies to syntactic structure in general: "Grammaticalization is the gradual drift in all parts of the grammar toward tighter structures, toward less freedom in the use of linguistic expressions at all levels." (Haspelmath 1998: 318). "Those who are familiar with my earlier work on grammaticalization will notice that this implies a slight extension of the concept. (. . .) What I propose here is to apply the criteria of paradigmatic and syntagmatic autonomy to a construction, regardless of whether it contains a constituent in which the symptoms of grammaticalization crystallize." (Lehmann 2002: 7–8).

[4] This was rightly pointed out to us by an anonymous reviewer.

the languages under consideration. Moreover, to prevent the comparison from being biased, these corpora should be highly comparable: given that word order is largely dependent on the type of document in which it is used, exactly the same genres would have to be represented in the corpora.[5] Note that parallel (i.e. translated) corpora do not suit for such an analysis, as the translator is likely to be influenced by the source language (especially if the word-order type exists in both languages). To the best of our knowledge, there are no corpora available which would allow for a thorough comparative statistical analysis of word order in French, Spanish and Italian.[6]

Nevertheless, independently of their relative frequency, the simple fact that some types of word orders exist in one or some, but not in all Romance languages, provides strong evidence for an on-going evolution (see section 2). Similarly, even if a statistical analysis is impossible, our qualitative analysis of both attested and constructed data on VOS in Romance allows us to achieve our goal, which consists in establishing the different discourse contexts of this construction.

2. The macro level: French, Spanish and Italian word order

2.1. The data

In Latin (Touratier 2008: 260), VOS was one of the six possible word orders, next to SVO, OSV, SOV, OVS and VSO (all examples from Kienpointner 2010):

(3) a. SVO
         Ac veteres quidem philosophi (S)   . . . *fingunt* (V)[7]
         and old   really philosopher-NOM:PLUR   evoke-3PLUR:PRES

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[5] For the same reason, we think that frequency indications provided by different authors on word order in different languages (cf. nn. 8 and 9) are also hard to compare.

[6] Note that even if such a corpus existed, it would be extremely difficult to retrieve the different word-order types, because word order involves a specific ordering of syntactic functions rather than any specific lexical material software tools can look for. An automatic detection of different word-order types would thus suppose the corpus to be tagged for syntactic functions, yet such corpora are very rare. However, we hope that technical advances and the constitution of new and larger corpora will allow for a statistical analysis in the future.

[7] In all examples the underlined NP corresponds to the subject of the sentence.

qualis futura sit   *vita*   *sapientium* (O)
how   future be-3SG:SBJV life-NOM:SG wise-GEN:PLUR

'And the old philosophers really suggest what the future life of wise men will look like.' (Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, 5.19.53)

b. VOS
Transit (V)   *Melitam* (O)   *Romanus* (S)
cross-3SG:PRES Malta-ACC:SG Roman-NOM:SG

'The Roman crosses Malta'. (Naevius, *Bellum Punicum*, frg. 39 from Morel, w. *Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum*. Leipzig 1926)

c. OSV
Provincias (O)   *praetores* (S)   *nondum sortiti*
province-ACC:PLUR praetor-NOM:PLUR not yet   attributed by fortune

sunt (V)
be-3PLUR:PRES

'The praetors have not yet obtained the provinces by fortune.'
(Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 1.13.5)

d. SOV
Terentia (S)   *magnos*   *articulorum*   *dolores* (O)
Terentia-NOM:SG big-ACC:PLUR joint-GEN:PLUR pain-ACC:PLUR

habet (V)
have-3SG:PRES

'Terentia badly suffers from pain in the joints'.
(Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 1.5.8)

e. OVS
Idem (O) *facit* (V)   *Caesar* (S)
the same do-3SG:PRES Caesar-NOM:SG
'Caesar does the same'.
(Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum*, 1.15.1)

f. VSO
Miserat (V)   *enim ei*   *Pharnaces* (S)
send-3SG:PLUQPRF indeed him-DAT:SG Pharnaces-NOM:SG

coronam   *auream* (O)
crown-ACC:SG gold-ACC:SG

'As Pharnaces had sent him a golden crown.'
(Caesar, *Bellum Alexandrinum*, 70.8)

The same holds for Old French (all examples are from Marchello-Nizia 1999: 108–109) (for statistical data see Marchello-Nizia 1992: 329–333):

(4) a. SVO
     Car   je croi   qu'elle soit morte   de   duel
     because I think-1SG:PRES that she die-3SG:SBJVPERF from pain
     'Because I think that she died from sorrow.' (Mort Artu)

  b. VOS
     En sum puing tint   le   cartre le   Deu serf
     in his fist   hold-3SG:PAST the letter the God servant
     'The minister of God held the letter in his hand.' (Vie de Saint Alexis)

  c. OSV
     Sire,   fet   il, amistié   grande Mesire Guillaume
     my Lord do-3SG:PRES he friendship great   Lord   William

     vous   mande (Huon le Roi)
     to you send-3SG:PRES

     'My Lord, he says, Lord William sends you his best wishes'

  d. SOV
     Elle colpes non avret
     she guilt   not have-3SG:PAST
     'She was not guilty.' (Cantilène de Sainte Eulalie)

  e. OVS
     Dis blanches mules fist   amener Marsilie
     ten white   mules do-3SG:PAST bring   Marsilie
     'Marsilie ordered to bring ten white mules.' (Chanson de Roland)

  f. VSO
     N' asemblereit jamais Carles   si   grant esforz
     not would rally ever   Charles that big   effort
     'Charles would never gather such a big army.' (Chanson de Roland)

Spanish too displays all word orders: [8]

(5) a. SVO
     Ayer   mi padre compró   una casa
     yesterday my father buy-3SG:PAST a   house
     'Yesterday my father bought a house'

  b. VOS
     Ayer   colgaron   la bandera en el   mástil los alumnos de
     yesterday hang-3PL:PAST the flag   up the pole   the pupils   of
     la primaria
     the primary school
     'Yesterday the pupils of the primary school hoisted the flag up the
     pole.' (Zubizarreta 1999: 4235)

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[8] For further examples and statistical data, see Delbecque (1987: 102, 232).

   c. OSV
Manzanas <u>Pedro</u> come   cada día.
apples   Peter eat-3SG:PRES every day
'Peter eats apples every day.' (Zubizarreta 1999: 4217)

   d. SOV
<u>Mi padre</u> una casa   compró.
my father a   house buy-3SG:PAST
'It is a house that my father bought.' (Gili Gaya 1973: 81ff, Zubizarreta 1999)[9]

   e. OVS
Manzanas compró   <u>Pedro</u> (y   no peras)
apples   buy-3SG:PAST Peter (and not pears)
'It is apples that Peter bought (and not pears).' (Zubizarreta 1999: 4239)

   f. VSO
Acaba   de romper   <u>el   niño</u> una jarra de cristal
finish-3SG:PRES of break-INF the boy a   bowl of glass
'The boy has just broken a glass bowl.' (Zubizarreta 1999: 4217)

Italian is more restrictive than Spanish: according to Zubizarreta (1998), Belletti & Shlonsky (1995) and Sornicolà (1994), it does not allow VSO (see 6f), and according to Renzi, Salvi & Cardinaletti (2001: 142), OVS (6e), is used in a *stile elevato o antico*, that is, it sounds archaic or literary. We indicate this by +/− in Table 1, below.

  (6) a. SVO
<u>Mio figlio</u> ha scritto   una poesia.
my son write-3SG:PERF a   poem
'My son has written a poem.'

      b. VOS
Porterà   la   macchina <u>Mara.</u>
drive-3SG:FUT the car   Mara
'It is Mara [and not someobody else] who will drive the car.'

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[9] As the translation of the example shows, the Spanish sentence is acceptable only when the object *una casa* has a contrastive focus interpretation. The same holds for SOV in Italian (see 6d). Note that, because of the pro-drop nature of Spanish and Italian, such examples could also be analyzed as structures in which a left hanging topic (*mi padre* in 5d; *mio figlio* in 6d) is followed by a contrastive focus (*una casa* in 5d; *una poesia* in 6d) and the verb (preceded by a null subject pronoun).

c. OSV

Un discorso   simile   il   capitano aveva fatto   *anche a*
a   discourse similar the captain   make-3SG:PLUQPERF also   at

Natale.
Christmas

'The captain had made a similar speech at Christmas also.'
(Renzi et al. 2001: 142)

d. SOV [10]

Mio figlio una poesia ha scritto.
my   son   a   poem write-3SG:PERF

'It is a poem that my son has written.' (Renzi et al. 2001: 144)

e. OVS [11]

Un braccialetto ha regalato   a Maria Giorgio per il   suo
a   bracelet   give-3SG:PERF to Maria Giorgio for the her

compleanno.
birthday

'It is a bracelet that Giorgio gave to Maria for her birthday.'
(Renzi et al. 2001: 146)

f. VSO

*Aveva fatto   il   capitano un discorso simile   anche a
make-3SG:PLUQPERF the captain   a   similar   speech also   at

Natale
Christmas

Compared to Italian, Modern French is even more restrictive, as only VOS, and marginally OSV,[12] are allowed besides SVO:

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[10] Sornicolà (1994) points out that according to her corpus data, in the SOV and the OVS type, O is most often a pronoun rather than a full NP. This obviously suggests a further restriction in these two types of word order since clitics do not stand as O's in their own right but are rather incorporated into the VP.

[11] Renzi et al. (2001: 142) mention the following example in which not only word order but also the form of the verb (past simple tense of *avere*) may sound archaic to many speakers of Italian:

(i)   *Uguale sorte   ebbe   il   vicepresidente.*
      equal   destiny have-3SG:PAST the vice-president
      'The vicepresident underwent the same fate.'

[12] Modern French displays OSV sentences such as (ii) (Abeillé et al. 2008: 306–307, Zribi-Hertz 1984, 1986, 1996, Sabio 1995, 2006):

(ii) *Le chocolat   j'adore.*
      the chocolate adore-1SG:PRES
      'Chocolate I LOVE.'

(7)   a.   SVO
      J'adore   *le   chocolat*
      adore-1SG:PRES the chocolate
      'I love chocolate.'

   b.   VOS
      Paieront   *une amende tous les automobilistes en*
      pay-3PLUR:FUT a   fine   all   the drivers   in

      infraction.
      breach-of-the-law

      'All drivers in breach of the law will pay a fine.'
      (Marchello-Nizia 2008: 109)

   c.   OSV (cf. 6c)
      *Un discours   pareil   le   commandant avait fait   à
      a   discourse similar the captain   make-3SG:PLUQPERF at

      Noël.
      Christmas

      'The captain had also made a similar speech at Christmas'

   d.   SOV
      *Un homme ces   mots   a écrit
      a   man   these words write-3SG:PERF
      'A man wrote the following words'

   e.   VSO
      *A écrit   un homme ces   mots.
      write-3SG:PERF a   man   these words

   f.   OVS
      *Ces   mots   a écrit   un homme
      these words write-3SG:PERF a   man

2.2. Analysis of the data

Table 1, which summarizes the above data, shows that, with respect to word order, French is the most restrictive of the Romance languages under analysis: besides SVO, only VOS and OSV are (marginally) possible.

These sentences are however restricted to very specific contexts and could be analyzed as structures with a left hanging topic: on this account, (ii) is a SV type sentence. In this view, only two word orders are available in French, the non-marked SVO and the marked VOS.

Table 1. Word-order types in Latin and Romance

	Latin	Old French	Spanish	Italian	French
SVO	+	+	+	+	+
VOS	+	+	+	+	+
OSV	+	+	+	+	+
SOV	+	+	+	+	−
OVS	+	+	+	+/−	−
VSO	+	+	+	−	−

The history of French word order has been extensively studied (Fournier 1998: 33–36 and 91–93, Marchello-Nizia 1999: 329–336, 2006, 2008, Buridant 2000, Prévost 2001). According to the standard assumption, the progressive fixation of SVO is the result of the fixation of the nominal object in post-verbal position, which started around the thirteenth century and which in turn led to the progressive fixation of the subject in preverbal position from the fourteenth century on. The fixation of the subject position went obviously hand in hand with the progressive loss of pro-drop in French, that is, with the increasing expression of the subject which originated in the twelfth century and was virtually completed at the end of the sixteenth century.

Fixation is one of the grammaticalization mechanisms according to Lehmann (1995). We argue here, following Marchello-Nizia (2006: 81), that the fixation of word order in Middle French has to be analyzed as the result of a pervasive grammaticalization process. As our data overwhelmingly show, French differs from Spanish and Italian in that it virtually reduced its word order to a single type, viz. SVO. Therefore it has to be analyzed as the most grammaticalized of the Romance languages under analysis with respect to word order.

In the next section we will zoom in on a particular word order, VOS. We concentrate on this type of word order because it is, besides the canonical SVO word order, the only type of word order that is shared by French, Italian and Spanish.[13] As argued by Lahousse (2007), VOS order in French, Spanish and Italian shares syntactic and semantic properties and has to be considered as one construction with different discourse functions.

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[13] We do not consider OSV here because the analysis of O (direct object or loose hanging topic) is unclear (see n. 13).

3. VOS in Spanish, Italian and French

In the literature on information structure (among many others, Lambrecht
1994), the reconstruction of a question(s) which can prompt a given utter-
ance is accepted as a means of representing possible discourse context(s)
in which the utterance can occur. Thus most authors studying VOS word
order provide made-up examples as the ones we present here, which alleg-
edly show that VOS can appear only as an answer ('A') to a question ('Q')
about the subject, that is, in a context with narrow focus on the subject, and
that VOS order is not allowed as an answer to a question such as *What hap-
pened?*, that is, in an all-focus context (as indicated by the '#'-sign):

(8)   Spanish
      Q: *¿Quién ganó   la lotería ayer?*
          who   win-3SG:PAST the lottery yesterday
          'Who won the lottery yesterday?' (Ordóñez 2000: 29)

      #Q: *¿Qué pasó?*
          'What happened?'

      A: *Ayer   ganó   la lotería Juan.*
          yesterday win-3SG:PAST the lottery John
          'Yesterday, it was Juan who won the lottery.'

(9)   Italian
      Q: *Chi ha scritto   questo libro?*
          who write-3SG:PERF this   book
          'Who wrote this book?' (Pinto 1997: 228)

      #Q: *Che è successo?*
          'What happened?'

      A: *Ha scritto   questo libro Dante.*[14]
          write-3SG:PERF this   book Dante
          'It was Dante who wrote this book.'

(10) French
      Q: *Qui a mangé   les gâteaux?*
          who eat-3SG:PERF the cakes
          'Who ate the cakes?' (Kesik 1985: 60)

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[14] Sentences like these may not sound totally natural to certain speakers because the answers
to the questions in (8), (9) and (10) in spontaneous speech are likely to be the subject alone.
In what follows, we will however provide attested examples of VOS in all three languages.

#Q: *Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?*
      'What happneed?'

 A: *Ont mangé   les gâteaux Marie, Pierre et   Stéphanie.*
      eat-3PL:PERF the cakes   Marie Pierre and Stéphanie
      'Marie, Pierre and Stephanie are those who ate the cakes.'

Although we lack detailed information on the frequency of VOS in the three languages,[15] all authors studying it seem to agree that, while this word-order type is relatively frequent in Spanish, it is rare in French and Italian, where it is subject to various constraints. Moreover, although (8), (9) and (10) may suggest that VOS has similar discourse properties in the three languages, we show in the next sections that the actual situation is more complex than it looks like.

3.1. Spanish

Qualitative corpus research on data retrieved from the *Base de Datos Sintácticos del Español Actual* (henceforth: BDS; see www.bds.usc.es) has shown that VOS in Spanish occurs in a wide array of discourse interpretations (Lahousse 2007). In a first set of examples, as in (11), both the VP and the subject together provide the new information in the sentence and constitute the *new information focus* (in Lambrecht's 1994 sense):

(11)   [verb phrase + subject = new information focus]

Siempre me   ha producido   la   mayor   admiración
always   to-me produce-3SG:PERF the greatest admiration

ese que se   declara   de modo   tan explícito y   enfático
he who himself declare-3SG:PRES of manner so   explicit   and emphatic

'rabiosamente español'.
'furiously   Spanish.'

'I have always been most surprised by those whose declare themselves "furiously Spanish" in such an explicit and emphatic way.'

In a second set of examples, the subject is in narrow focus, i.e. the subject alone conveys the new information of the sentence, while the verb phrase provides discourse-old information. Three subcases can be distinguished

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[15] Only an extensive corpus study of the structure in the three languages could answer this question but see section 1 and n. 6.

here: the postverbal subject can simply convey the new information of the sentence, without being in contrast with another entity in the discourse, as it is the case in (12), or the postverbal subject can have a contrastive (13) or an exhaustive (14) interpretation.

(12)   [subject alone = new information focus, without contrastive reading]

Se   vuelven   a oír, más altos también, los golpes en
REFL-3PLUR turn-3PLUR:PRES to hear more high also   the blows in

la   pared.
the wall

'You can hear the blows on the wall again, even louder.
Y   de   pronto traspasa   el tabique <u>*el palo   de una*</u>
and suddenly break through-3SG:PRES the partition the handle of a

<u>*escoba*</u>.
broom

And suddenly the handle of a broom breaks through the partition.'

(13)   [subject alone = new information focus, with contrastive reading]

Cris: *¡Rafa, no empecemos   con tonterías!*
        Rafa   not begin-1PLUR:SBJV with stupidities

        ¿Cuánto   necesitas?
        how much need-2SG:PRES
        'Rafa, don't be silly! How much do you need?'

Rafa: *Cinco duros.*
        five   five-peseta coins
        'Twenty-five pesetas.'

Cris: *¡Pues ya   tienes   los de mi primo!*
        but   already have-2SG:PRES the of my cousin
        'But you already have those from my cousin!'

Rafa: *Esos son otros. Ahora me   tiene   que dar los suyos*
        these are others. Now   to.me have-3SG:PRES to   give the hers

        <u>*Laura*</u>.
        Laura

        'These are others. Now Laura has to give me hers.'

(14)   [subject alone = new information focus, with exhaustive identification reading][16]

En la competición liguera, detrás de Bellido está Juan, que disputó completos los nueve encuentros, sumando 810 minutos, pues en la copa intervino en poco más de medio tiempo en el campo del Huesca.
'In the football league, behind Bellido is Juan, who played nine full-time matches, totaling 810 minutes, and in the cup match, he came onto the pitch at Huesca a little after half time'.

Junto   con estos tres, jugaron   los nueve partidos ligueros
together with these three play-3PLUR:PAST the nine   matches league

Cortés, Moure y   Lucas.
Cortés, Moure and Lucas

'Together with these three, Cortés, Moure and Lucas played the nine league matches.'

3.2. Italian

VOS in Italian displays the same discourse contexts as VOS in Spanish:

(15)   [verb phrase + subject = new information focus]

Prende la parola Jean Todt in un fluente italiano. Dice che «le parole servono a poco, meglio badare ai fatti». Non promette niente salvo una cosa: «Lavoriamo per vincere, se ci riusciremo lo diranno i risultati». Bravo, un basso profilo sincero e onesto. Dopo due anni di proclami e di beffe tremende all'ultima gara, meglio aspettare i risultati. E poi altre sorprese. Prende il microfono il direttore tecnico Ross Brown, da un anno a Maranello. Parla in italiano, con accento in inglese ma in un buon italiano.
[on-line corpus La Repubblica]
'Jean Todt takes the floor in fluent Italian. He says that "words are of little use, better concentrate on facts". He doesn't promise anything, except this: "We're working to win. If we succeed you'll see it from our results". Very well, a low profile, sincere and honest. After two years of claims and last minute disappointments, it's better to wait for results. And then another surprise. The technical manager Ross Brown, after one year in Maranello, takes the microphone. He speaks Italian with an English accent, but it's correct Italian.'

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[16] In the examples (14) and (15), the first part of the example is only mentioned here in order to understand the context in which the VOS structures occur. For obvious space restrictions, we only provide a translation, and no full gloss, of this part of the example.

Prende   il   microfono   il direttore tecnico   Ross Brown.
take-3SG:PRES the microphone the director technical Ross Brown
'The technical manager Ross Brown takes the microphone.'
(Lahousse 2007)

(16)   [subject = new information focus, without contrastive reading]

Ha scritto   la   lettera una studentessa.
write-3SG:PERF the letter a   female-student
'It was a female student who wrote the letter.' (Zubizarreta 1998: 247)

(17)   [subject = new information focus, with contrastive reading]

Ha capito   il   problema Gianni (non Maria).
understand-3SG:PERF the problem John   (not Maria)
'It is John who understood the problem (not Maria).'
(Alexiadou 2006a, b)

(18)   [subject = new information focus, with exhaustive identification reading]

Riceveranno   una scheda per votare gli studenti e   il   personale
receive-3PLUR:FUT a   card   to vote   the students and the staff
accademico.
academic
'Students as well as academic staff will receive a ballot paper.'

At first sight, VOS in Italian seems to behave exactly as VOS in Spanish. However, it needs to be stressed that, according to most scholars, VOS in Italian exhibits some additional constraints. Belletti (2004) thus points out that "to the extent that VOS sequences are possible in Italian, (. . .) they are only marginally so and only appear to allow for a special interpretation." The author judges all the sentences as unnatural (the question marks in the examples below are hers):

(19)   a.   ??*Capirà   il   problema Gianni.*
            understand-3SG:FUT the problem Gianni
            'It is Gianni who will understand the problem.'

       b.   ??*Ha chiamato Maria Gianni.*
            call-3SG:PERF Maria Gianni
            'It is Gianni who called Maria.'

       c.   ??*Ha letto   il   romanzo Gianni.*
            read-3SG:PERF the novel   Gianni
            'It is Gianni who read the novel.'
            (Belletti 2004)

According to Belletti (1999: 15, 2004), VOS in Italian is acceptable only when the VO sequence denotes a "typical situation (. . .) taken from a given list of possibilities", as in (20a), or when the object is *tutto* 'everything' (20b):

(20) a. *Protegge   l'uscita   del   portiere   il terzino*
         protect-3SG:PRES the coming out of the goal keeper the left

         sinistro.
         back
         'To make the goalkeeper's movements safe, there's the left back.'

     b. *Capirà   tutto   Maria*
        understand-3SG:FUT everything Maria
        'Maria is going to understand everything.'
        (Belletti 2004)

Moreover, some authors argue that an indefiniteness constraint holds for VOS, on the subject and/or the object (Calabrese 1992, Cinque 1993: 261, Rizzi 1996: 82–83, Zubizarreta 1998, 1999: 4234, Renzi et al. 2001: 139, Belletti 2004), as suggested by the contrasts in (21) and (22):

(21) a. ?*Ha mangiato la   torta la mamma.*
          eat-3SG:PERF the cake the mother
          'It was mother who ate the cake.'

     b. *Ha mangiato la   torta un gatto.*
        eat-3SG:PERF the cake a   cat
        'It was a cat who ate the cake.'
        (Renzi et al. 2001: 139)

(22) a. ?*Ha scritto   la lettera Gianni.*
          write-3SG:PERF the letter   Gianni
          'It was Gianni who wrote the letter.'

     b. *Ha scritto   una lettera Gianni.*
        write-3SG:PERF a   letter   Gianni
        'It was Gianni who wrote a letter.'
        (Zubizarreta 1998: 224)

Others argue that VOS is subject to an (ill-defined) pragmatic constraint (Calabrese 1992, Bonvino 2005, Lahousse 2007). Thus, VOS in Italian occurs in the same range of discourse contexts as VOS in Spanish, but its distribution is nevertheless more restricted as it is subject to additional constraints.

3.3. Modern French

VOS in French appears in formal (administrative) texts,[17] and is possible only when the postverbal subject has an exhaustive identification reading, i.e. when the postverbal subject identifies all and only the referents that satisfy the predicate (Lahousse 2006, 2007), as in the following examples:

(23) [subject = new information focus, with exhaustive identification reading]

    a. *Recevront   un bulletin de vote les étudiants*
        receive-3PLUR:FUT a   card   of vote the students

        et   le   personnel académique
        and the staff   academic

        'Students as well as academic staff will receive a ballot paper.' (Lahousse 2007: 385)

    b. *Paieront   une amende tous les automobilistes en*
        pay-3PLUR:FUT a   fine   all   the drivers   in

        infraction.
        breach-of-the-law

        'All drivers in breach of the law will pay a fine.' (Marchello-Nizia 2008: 109)

Made-up examples where the verb phrase and the subject convey the new information (24), or where the subject alone is the new information focus, with (26) or without (25) a contrastive reading, are completely unacceptable:

(24) [all-focus: verb phrase + subject = new information focus] (cf. 15)

    **Prend   *le   microphone le   directeur technique.*
    take-3SG:PRES the microphone the director technical

(25) [subject = new information focus, without contrastive reading] (cf. 16)

    **A écrit   *la   lettre une étudiante.*
    write-3SG:PERF the letter a   student

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[17] Though further research is needed here, the survival of VOS in French in this context might be related to a particular *genre*, viz. that of administrative or legal texts which tend to preserve archaic (both lexical and syntactic) elements, and which typically stipulate actions applying to particular individuals, often listed as members of a whole.

(26)   [subject = new information focus, with contrastive reading] (cf. 17)

*A compris   le problème Jean (et   pas Marie).
    understand-3SG:PERF the problem John (and not Mary)

3.4. Summary

The data concerning the distribution and discourse interpretation of VOS in Romance show that Spanish is the least restrictive of the three languages under analysis. Spanish VOS is allowed in four different discourse contexts and with apparently no additional constraints. French is the most restrictive language, because VOS can occur only when the postverbal subject has an exhaustive identificational meaning. The VOS pattern in Italian represents the intermediate case: it occurs in the same discourse contexts as in Spanish, but is subject to additional distributional and pragmatic constraints (indicated by +/− in Table 2), which native speakers sometimes find hard to pinpoint.[18] Table 2 summarizes these data.

The data show that VOS in French and, to a lesser extent, in Italian, is characterized by fewer discourse options when compared to VOS in Spanish: the same structure occurs in the three languages, but can appear only in particular discourse contexts, thus with fewer options with regard to information structure. We argue that this progressive decrease of the number of discourse options can be accounted for as the result of a grammaticalization process which is more advanced in French than in Italian, and more in Italian than in Spanish.

Table 2. Discourse contexts of VOS in Spanish, Italian and French

	Spanish	Italian	French
Wide focus			
VP + S = new information focus	+	+/−	−
Narrow focus			
S alone = new information focus without contrast	+	+/ −	−
S alone = new information focus, with contrast	+	+/ −	−
S alone = new information focus, with exhaustive interpretation (see Kiss 1998)	+	+	+

$\longrightarrow$

_____

[18] We believe that this unsteadiness of acceptability judgments by native speakers and the uncertain formulation of the constraint by linguists could be the result of the on-going grammaticalization process in Italian.

It is important to note that our analysis of VOS slightly differs from Lehmann's (2008) view of grammaticalization of information structure, according to which "grammaticalization means that pragmatic relations loose [*sic*] their specificity", differences between pragmatic components being 'leveled out'. In Lehmann's (2008) view, a structure with various information structure interpretations may gradually lose its multiple interpretations to become a *passe-partout* structure, without any specific function related to information strucure. If the overall loss in French of different word-order possibilities, each of which used to correspond to a particular pragmatic function, indeed amounts to leveling out a contrast between different types of information structure, what happened to VOS is rather a restriction of the number of discourse options, and hence a specialization (rather than a leveling out) with respect to information structure: VOS lost a number of its former possible discourse interpretations, but survived in a highly particular pragmatic context, that of exhaustive identification of the subject NP.

We would like to argue that independent evidence for our hypothesis regarding grammaticalization of word order is provided by facts related to cleft sentences. As is well known ever since Meillet (1926), if language change is based in part on grammaticalization, which entails semantic bleaching of lexical elements, it is also due in great part to an opposite innovative mechanism, *expressivity* (called *extravagance* by Haspelmath 1998, 2000). Our claim here is that clefting, which can be analyzed as a functional variant of VOS, is such a mechanism. The prediction then from the preceding sections is that French, which is most restricted in its use of VOS, will be the greatest 'consumer' of this structure. We will now verify whether this prediction is borne out.

4. Clefting

That clefts[19] constitute functional variants of VOS word order is suggested by the fact that the only possible way to render most Spanish or Italian examples of VOS word order in French is by using a cleft, as shown by examples such as (21b) repeated here:[20]

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[19] There is an extensive literature on clefts, see Van Peteghem (1991), Davidse (2000), Declerck (1988), Lambrecht (2001) and references cited therein.
[20] Obviously translations are no proof-of-principle, but they may disclose functional correspondances between structures.

(21)   b.   *Ha mangiato la   torta un gatto.*
            eat-3SG:PERF the cake a   cat

            C'est un chat qui a mangé le gateau.
            'It is a cat that ate the cake.'

Moreover, a comparison of our data on the different discourse interpretations of VOS in Romance (see Table 2) with Lambrecht's (2001) cross-linguistic typology of clefts shows that VOS in Romance and clefts share exactly the same discourse purposes (see also Lahousse 2007, 2009).

If clefts are the most obvious functional variant of VOS word order in French, and if VOS is more restricted in French than in Spanish and Italian, as we have seen in section 3, then we expect clefts to be more frequent in French than in Italian and Spanish. In section 4.1. we show that this is the case. Moreover, we show in section 4.2. that clefts display more formal grammaticalization properties in French than in Spanish, and, to a lesser extent, than in Italian. Both observations confirm our hypothesis of a grammaticalization path Spanish → Italian → French.

4.1. Development of clefts in Romance

According to Marchello-Nizia (1999: 53), clefts appeared at first in Old French (cf. ex. 27) but did not become common until Middle French :

(27)   *A! biaus dous fieus, laissiés ester, ch'est   des bigames*
       ah nice sweet son, leave   be,   it be-3SG:PRES of bigamists

       k'il   parole.
       that he speak-3SG:PRES

       'Ah my dear son, don't worry, it is about bigamists that he is talking.'
       (Adam Le Bossu, Jeu de la Feuillée, 12th c.; Marchello-Nizia 1999: 53)

Data provided by Gil (2003) and Dufter (2008) on the other hand show that there is a significant increase in the frequency of clefts from Latin to Modern French. Note that Dufter (2009) also observes a considerably higher frequency of clefts in French than in Spanish and Italian. Interestingly, Spanish and Italian normative grammarians used to criticize clefts because they considered them as a French *calque* (Dufter 2009):

> En la lengua francesa hallamos frequüentemente muchos rodeos de palabra para expresar lo que nosotros declaramos de modo mas directo.   (Capmany y de Montpalau 1776: 65–66, quote Dufter 2009)

'In French we often find expressions which use many words to say what we say in a more direct way.'

I Francesi fanno larghissimo uso di questo rinforzamento, estendendolo anche all'oggetto e a' complementi tutti quanti della proposizione (. . .) Ma ciò è assai disforme dall'indole della nostra lingua.   (Durante 1982: 205, quote Dufter 2009)

'The French use this reinforcement very often and do so even for objects and for all kinds of complements in the sentence (. . .) This is however quite in disharmony with a language like ours.'

The virtual loss of VOS in French and, to a lesser extent, in Italian, thus seems to be compensated by the increasing use of clefts in modern French, which in turn parallels a beginning increase of the same structure in Italian.[21]

4.2. Formal properties

Formal properties of clefts also suggest that clefts are more grammaticalized in French than in the other two Romance languages.

The contrast between the Spanish example (29) and the French example (30) shows that, in Spanish, the copula agrees in person with the clefted element, whereas in French, the copula remains in third-person singular, whether the clefted element is first-, second- or third-person singular:[22]

(29) a. *Soy/*Es*   *yo quién propuse   esto.*
          be-1SG:PRES/*be-3SG:PRES me who   propose-1SG:PAST this
          'It is me who proposed this.'

      b. *Eres tú/*Es*   *tú quién propusiste   esto.*
          be-2SG:PRES/*be-3SG:PRES you who   propose-2SG:PAST this
          'It is you who proposed this.'

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[21] Worth noting is the fact that neo-standard Italian (Berruto 1987) seems to be developing a use of clefts in which the NP no longer has a contrastive reading, the structure being rather used as a syntactic tool for thetic sentences (Fiorentino 1999, Aureli 2003), e.g. *Ci sono dei giovani che partono* (there are youngsters who are leaving) simply means 'Some young people are leaving'.

[22] Note however that Old French used to construct its clefts with person agreement between the copula and the clefted element, as modern Spanish still does:

(i)   *Sire, Sire, ço sui   jo que ai   pecchied.*
      Lord, Lord, it am-1SG:PRES I   who have sinned
      'Lord, Lord, I am the one who has sinned.' (BFM, 1190, w3.ens-lsh.fr)

(30) a. *C'est   moi qui   ai péché.*
          it be-3SG:PRES me who sin-1SG:PERF
          'I am the one who has sinned.'

      b. *C'est   toi qui   as péché.*
          it be-3SG:PRES you who sin-2SG:PERF
          'You are the one who has sinned.'

Note that even with plural NPs, the verb may remain in third-person singular in the French cleft (*c'est des Français qui disent cela* 'it be-3SG:PRES Frenchmen who say that'), whereas it necessarily agrees in number in Spanish (*son/*es franceses quienes dicen esto*: be-3PLUR:PRES/*be-3SG:PRES Frenchmen who say that). French clefts are thus morphologically more paradigmatized (Lehmann 1995) and hence, more grammaticalized than their Spanish counterparts (see also Meulleman 2012).

   Italian represents, once more, an intermediate case with respect to the agreement of the copula, as both the French and the Spanish type of agreement is found in neo-standard Italian: the copula agrees or not with the clefted element, depending on the context (examples from Renzi et al. 2001: 199):

(31) a. ?*Sei   tu   che Maria sta cercando.*
           be-2SG:PRES you that Maria is   searching

      b. *È   te   che Maria sta cercando.*
          be-3SG:PRES you that Maria is   searching
          'You are the one Maria is looking for.'

(31) a. *Sei   tu   che tutti dicono che Maria sta cercando.*
          be-2SG:PRES you that all   say   that Maria is   searching

      b. *È   te   che tutti   dicono che Maria sta cercando.*
          be-3SG:PRES you that everybody says   that Maria is   searching
          'Everybody says that you are the one Maria is looking for.'

However, the exact conditions of this alternation seem unclear (Renzi et al. 2001: 199). Our hypothesis here is that the co-existence of alternating forms of the copula in neo-standard Italian may be a case of an 'overlap stage' (Heine 1993), thus suggesting an on-going grammaticalization process. Note that the copula normally agrees in number with the clefted NP in Italian (*ci sono/* c'è degli Francesi che dicono questo*: it be-3PLUR:PRES/*be-3SG:PRES Frenchmen who say that) and that its tense–mood–aspect options are also less restricted in Italian than in French, both facts suggesting that

the Italian structure is less grammaticalized than the French because it shows a lower degree of *obligatorification* (Lehmann 1995).

5. Conclusion

The data presented in this article, concerning different types of word orders in Spanish, Italian and French (section 2), the distribution of the VOS word order in these languages (section 3), as well as the frequency and the formal properties of clefts (section 4), all point to the same conclusion: Spanish is the least grammaticalized of the three languages, while French is the most grammaticalized one, Italian occupying an intermediate position:

Spanish   Italian   French
less   more grammaticalized
—————————————————▶

Interestingly, a similar conclusion about French being far more grammaticalized than the rest of the Romance languages has been drawn from facts belonging to totally independent domains, viz. auxiliaries (Lamiroy 1999, Abeillé & Godard 2007), mood (Loengarov 2005, 2006), determiners (Carlier 2007), word order (Marchello-Nizia 2006: 81), prepositions (Lamiroy 2001) and existential sentences (Meulleman 2012: 260).

Our hypothesis of course immediately raises a question: why is this so? Obviously there is no ready answer to this question. However, following Keller's (1994) 'invisible hand' theory, we hypothesize that the extent to which a language is grammaticalized is not determined by one overriding factor, but is the joint result of several factors that enhance each other. Thus grammaticalization of French word order is probably the result of various clustering processes that originated in Middle French, isolating it from Spanish and to a lesser extent, from Italian: (i) the fixation of VO and the subsequent fixation of SV (Prévost 2001, Marchello-Nizia 2008); (ii) the progressive loss of pro-drop; (iii) the loss of word accent in the sixteenth century and hence, of the possibility of focus marking *in situ*, which went hand in hand with the emergence of clefts.

Abbreviations

A	answer		PERF	perfect
ACC	accusative		PLUR	plural
DAT	dative		PLUQPRF	pluperfect
FUT	future tense		PRES	present tense
GEN	genitive		S	subject
INF	infinitive		SG	singular
NOM	nominative		SBJV	subjunctive
NP	noun phrase		SBJVPERF	subjunctive perfect
O	object		V	verb
PAST	past tense		VP	verb phrase

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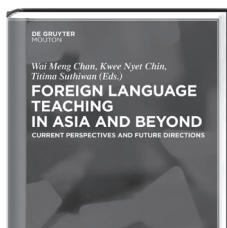
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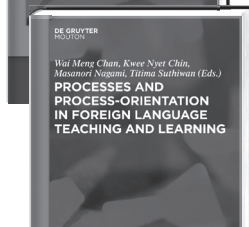*Ed. by Wai Meng Chan, Kwee Nyet Chin, Titima Suthiwan*

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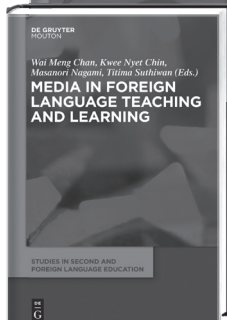*Ed. by Wai Meng Chan, Kwee Nyet Chin, Masanori Nagami, Titima Suthiwan*

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