

Auxiliary Verbs in the Left Periphery: Spanish *ir* and *venir* as Focus Markers

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1. Spanish standard and non-standard constructions with *ir* ‘to go’ + infinitive

Apart from the well known and fully acknowledged temporal-aspectual meaning of either futurity or prospectivity, the construction¹ with the auxiliary verb *ir* ‘to go’ [*ir a* + infinitive] may be used to convey the two less standard meanings of resultativity and focus, as exemplified in (1) and (2). It must be observed that they are common to all varieties of Spanish, although it seems that in some of these varieties *venir* substitutes *ir* as a focus marker (2c):²

(1) RESULTATIVE *IR*

a. El hombre [...] cerró los ojos, trastabilló y **fue a golpearse** con [...] la campana. [CREA, Vicente Molina Foix, *La quincena soviética*, Spain]³

‘The man closed his eyes, stumbled and ended up hitting himself against the bell.’

b. El vehículo se salió de la cinta asfáltica y **fue a chocar** con el puente Camella. [CREA, *La Hora*, 30/04/1997, Guatemala]

‘The vehicle went off of the road and, at the end, it crashed into Camella Bridge.’

(2) FOCUS *IR* ~ *VENIR*

a. Fíjese que el güey del Aristóteles [...] le **fue a poner** a su hijo mayor Cristo Rey. ¡Pobre cuate! [CREA, Arturo Azuela, *La casa de las mil vírgenes*, México]

‘That guy of Aristoteles had to give his older son the name of Cristo Rey, as if there were no more names. ¡Poor guy!’

b. **Fue a aparecer** en el peor momento. [RAE-ASALE, § 28.8j]

‘He had to appear at the worst moment.’

c. El carro se nos **vino a romper** en el peor momento. [RAE-ASALE, § 28.8j].

‘Our car had to break down precisely at the worst moment.’

In this paper I am going to defend that the constructions in (1) and (2) are different. In doing so, I attempt a more general goal which is to allow for a new approach in the study of the so called

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¹ With the term *construction* I am referring here to the general notion of ‘syntactic string’, and not to the more specific concept of ‘form-meaning pair’.

² Arnaiz and Camacho (1999) have correctly shown that *ir* ‘to go’ functions as a topic auxiliary in the construction with the form *ir* ‘to go’ + *y* ‘and’ + a tensed verb, as in *Juan va y se casa* ‘John goes and gets married’. If there is a topic, *Juan* in the given example, then a focus is also to be expected, namely, *casarse* ‘to get married’ and, accordingly, this *ir* could be considered as a focus auxiliary too—a conclusion which is not in the aforementioned paper. I leave for further research the study of both the grammatical properties of this construction and the possible connections among resultative, topic and focus markers.

³ Glosses are approximate.

‘discourse markers’ periphrases in Spanish. In particular, my aim is to show the relation between this group of constructions involving auxiliary verbs and the left periphery. I am going to argue that in (1) the verb *ir* introduces a result and forms a complex predicate with the infinitive verb and its complement in the syntax; in (2), on the contrary, the verb *ir* is a focus marker lexically specified, hence, as [+focus] [+scalarity]. From now onwards I will refer to this *ir* as IR focus and, following the convention, I will signal the focused constituent with brackets and the subscript letter *f* as in (2b’) below:

- (2) b’. **Fue a aparecer** [_{*f*} en el peor momento].
 ‘He had to appear at the worst moment of all’

I assume as correct that the prosodic prominence with which the abstract⁴ focus feature *f* is expressed in Spanish corresponds to the rightmost constituent (Zubizarreta 1998). I also assume that my analysis applies to VENIR ‘to come’ focus, as *ir* can substitute for *venir* in (2c) without any changes in the meaning.

2. Former accounts

2.1. IR focus as a scalar periphrasis

The most widespread analysis (Fernández de Castro 1999, RAE-ASALE 2009) firstly, identifies IR focus with IR resultative; secondly, it includes IR focus —and, consequently, IR resultative— in the group of the verbal periphrases formed by [*empezar* ~ *acabar* ~ *seguir* + gerund] and its variants (Eng. *begin to*, *end up*, *continue*). These periphrases, called *scalar* or *serial* in RAE-ASALE (2009), present the situation described in relationship to other situations and, for such a reason, are considered as ‘discourse markers’ (see also Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006). In particular, the situation may collocate at the beginning of a series of subsequent events, as with [*empezar* ‘start to’ + gerund], at the end of it ([*acabar* ‘end up’ + gerund]) or in the middle ([*seguir* ‘continue’ + gerund]). In effect, apparently, IR focus, and IR resultative since in this analysis they are the same construction, describes the final endpoint of a previous process consisting itself of a series of events, that may or may not be contextually explicit.

What makes IR focus distinct from [*acabar* + gerund], a terminative periphrasis as well, is that IR focus, in presenting the final event as a result, allows to highlight it. For the RAE-ASALE (2009), IR resultative, indistinct from IR focus, combines only with a reduced number of predicates, namely those that denote contact, either literally as *chocar* ‘hit against’ or figuratively as *aparecer* ‘to appear’, or, in general, a punctual situation (*romperse* ‘to break down’). Conceivably, the restriction has to be a consequence of this resultative meaning of IR resultative.

On the other hand, IR focus expresses perfective aspect, it asserts that the eventuality took place if the verb is in the past and it is not restricted in its temporal paradigm, all of which makes it impossible to consider IR focus as a particular case of IR prospective, against Cartagena 1999, Camus 2006, Melis 2006 and Aaron 2006.

2.2. Problems of former accounts

I will very briefly go over some of the difficulties that these former accounts run into. To begin with, it is obvious that the construction exists and that it is highly productive. Thus, to the examples in (2) we can add the real language examples of (3):

- (3) a. Tengo tanta mala suerte que **fue a nevar** [_{*f*} el único día que [...]]. [Google, October 5, 2012]
 ‘I am so unlucky that (of all of the days of the year) it had to snow precisely the day that...’
 b. ¡[_{*f*} Mal momento] **fue a elegir** [...]! [Google, October 5, 2012]
 ‘He had to choose the worst moment out of all the possible moments.’

⁴ An assumption that is not evident at all. See Gutiérrez-Rexach (2008: 123, fn. 6) and Toosarvandani (2010).

Secondly, both the equivalence between IR focus and IR resultative, on the one hand, and between these two auxiliaries and [*acabar* + gerund], on the other, raise many problems and, ultimately, does not account either for the meaning of IR focus or for its grammar. If the only difference between IR focus and [*acabar* + gerund] is the resultative feature in the meaning of the former, the contrast in (4) is surprising:

- (4) a. *Luis **fue a aparecer**.
 lit. Luis went to appear
 b. Luis acabó apareciendo.
 ‘At the end, Luis appeared.’

Furthermore, making explicit the series of previous events does not turn (4a) into a grammatical sentence, contrary to what might be expected:

- (5) *Después de enviarle varios mensajes y de llamarle a su casa, Luis **fue a aparecer**.
 lit. after of send to him several messages and of call him to his house, Luis went to appear

Crucially, however, this result is obtained reverting the word order in (4a), as (6) shows:

- (6) **Fue a aparecer** [_fLuis].
 lit. went to appear Luis
 ‘It was Luis the one who had to appear.’

In general, IR focus is not interchangeable with [*acabar* + gerund], a fact that can be easily explained if it is assumed that only the terminative periphrasis, but not IR focus, selects as a component of its meaning a domain consistent of a series of temporally previous events with respect to which the event it denotes occupies the last place. IR focus, on its part, selects for other possible alternatives to the event described (see § 3.1. below). In this way the oddness of (7a) can receive a straightforward explanation:

- (7) a.?? Después de darle muchas vueltas, le **fue a poner** [_fCristo Rey].
 lit. after of give to it a lot of turns, he went to put Cristo Rey
 b. Después de darle muchas vueltas, le acabó poniendo Cristo Rey.
 lit. after of give to it a lot of turns, he ended putting Cristo Rey
 ‘After thinking a lot about it, he ended up calling him Cristo Rey.’

If we turn now to the restrictions posited by the RAE-ASALE (2009), it is obvious that they do not give an appropriate account of the facts either. In effect, although *aparecer* ‘to appear’ is one of these predicates of appearance, (4a) is ungrammatical. The reverse situation also holds: *nevar* ‘to snow’ in (3a) does not belong to any of the classes proposed by the RAE-ASALE, and still, the sentence is good. In spite of the fact that the RAE-ASALE tries to present it as a constraint on the semantic selection frame of IR focus, it is not. If it were, a verb not satisfying these lexical requirements should be dismissed, contrary to what really happens:

- (8) Juan **fue a {llamar / caerse / marcharse / vender la casa}** [_fen el peor momento].
 ‘J. had to {call /fall / leave/ sell the house} at the worst moment of all.’

In sum, with regard to IR focus it does not exist either a semantic restriction on the meaning of the main verb or a restriction due to the meaning of the auxiliary verb. When it comes to IR resultative, we will see that things change (§ 4).

Finally, it is not possible to identify IR resultative and IR focus because they differ in their respective semantics. Circular as this statement might seem, if we compare the sentences in (1) with the sentences in (2), it can be observed that the English terms with which these sentences are translated are different. For the former, the terminative expression with *end up* is used; for the latter, it is used a

modal construction with *have to*. In § 4 I will offer some more arguments in favour of analyzing IR resultative and IR focus as different units, both syntactically and semantically.

3. The auxiliary verb *ir* as a focus marker

3.1. Focus marker properties

The claim that the auxiliary verb *ir* in the sentences in (2) to (8) above functions as a scalar focus marker relies on the fact that IR focus presents all the relevant properties that allow to define a unit as a focus marker.⁵ Specifically, IR focus shares with other focus markers, such as *only*, *even...*, at least, the three main properties described below.

Property 1. IR focus has the general function of evoking salient alternative propositions of the same type of the ordinary proposition.⁶ It also presupposes the corresponding sentence without *ir* and is distinct from it. In effect, only in (9a) with IR focus are we obliged to think to other referents to which the proposition may also apply: {Juan, Pedro, Luis}. In fact, if we try to cancel this inference, we cannot:⁷

- (9) a. [...] Aristóteles [...] le **fue a poner** a su hijo mayor [_f Cristo Rey], #porque decía que no había más nombres para escoger.
lit. A. went to name his eldest son Cristo Rey because he said that there were no more names to choose
b. Aristóteles le puso a su hijo mayor Cristo Rey, porque decía que no había más nombres para escoger.
'A. named his eldest son Cristo Rey because he said that there were no more names among which he could choose one.'

In (10) this set of alternatives is explicitly expressed:

- (10) a. Después de tanta sequía fue a llover [_f en la romería de San Cristóbal] [Google, Oct. 20, 2012]
'After a long drought, it had to rain precisely on San Cristobal's *romería* day.'

Likewise other focus markers, IR focus does not attach itself to all phrases (see (11)). The restriction is explained because, in the absence of any modifier, the semantic interpretation of the focused constituent does not allow to obtain a set of proper alternatives (Hoeksema y Zwarts 1991):

- (11) a. Even someone *(from Middletown) disagreed with the speaker.
b. Juan **fue a invitar** [_f a alguien *(de su trabajo)].
lit. John went to invite to someone of his work

Property 2. IR focus shares also with other focus particles the feature of both being scalar and having an evaluative component. It is a scalar unit because it induces an ordering ranking into the set of alternative propositions. This order is such that IR focus locates the referent of the focalized constituent in the lower point of the scale. This feature constitutes its evaluative component. In particular, IR focus orders the relevant propositions along a scale of opportunity, convenience or appropriateness. As the focused constituent ranks always low in the scale, it is interpreted to be the value the less appropriate to fill the open place in the proposition ('It rained in *x*', 'He named him *x*', '*x* appeared'). That is, any

⁵ After Erteschik-Shir (1997), Hoeksema and Zwarts (1991), König (1991) and Rooth (1994).

⁶ Obviously, this set is contextually given, that is, the alternatives are normally restricted to the universe of discourse, which is also another property of focus markers.

⁷ It is not clear to me whether it requires exhaustivity or not as long as for a suitable restricted set of alternatives IR focus does not necessarily imply that none of the alternatives other than the asserted satisfies the open proposition. While this is true for *only* or *exactly*, it raises some doubts with respect to IR focus. Consider, in effect, that other guests besides Luis could have appeared also in *Fue a aparecer* [_f Luis]. I leave this question open.

other value on the scale (any other day, any other name, any other person) would have been a preferable candidate for the variable and, conversely, the focused valued is the more disliked. These two features taken together explicate that IR focus might license some polarity negative items, as long as they do not appear in the restrictor (see also Beaver and Clark (2003) for *only*)

- (12) a. *Juan pegó ojo a las cinco de la madrugada.
lit. John stick.3SG.PAST.PFV eye at the five of the dawn
b. Juan **fue a pegar ojo** [_f a las cinco de la madrugada].
'It was not until five o'clock in the morning that John was able to sleep a wink.'
c. *A las cinco de la madrugada Juan **fue a pegar** [_f ojo].
lit. at the five of the morning John went to stick eye

This evaluative component is explicitly expressed through depreciative morphology in (13a) and lexically both in (13b) and (13c).⁸

- (13) a. **Fue a dar** su dinero a [_f politicuchos].
'There are so many good politicians and he had to give his money precisely to politicians of no importance.'
b. **Fue a pedirle** consejo [_f a un principiante].
'He had to ask a beginner for advice, as if there were nobody else.'
c. **Fue a aparecer** [_f en el peor momento]. (=2a)
'He had to appear at the worst moment of all.'

Property 3. IR focus requires a focus constituent in its domain to associate with; otherwise, the sentence is ungrammatical. To put it in another way, if IR focus is in the sentence, the constituent prosodically most prominent (the rightmost in Spanish) must be processed as a focused constituent with the meaning explained above. IR focus differs, however, from *only*, *even* and other focus markers, in that it requires that the associate be referential, regardless of whether it is an argument or an adjunct and of its grammatical category, as the ungrammaticality of (14) —with the *because* clause focalized— shows:

- (14) *Juan **fue a comprarse** la casa en la playa [_f porque le gustaba el mar].
lit. John went to buy the house in the beach because he.DAT liked the sea

There is a further constraint: IR focus cannot take the whole VP as its associate, which means that the eventuality referred to is always presupposed, and the new information has to be either a participant or a 'circumstance'. This property, however, is shared with the other verbal focus marker in Spanish: the *in situ* focus marker in Caribbean Spanish *ser* 'to be' as in *Juan come es papas* 'What John eats is potatoes' (Camacho 2006). The ungrammaticality of (4a) **Luis fue a aparecer* and the grammaticality of (6) *Fue a aparecer Luis* above follow, hence, from these two requirements: on the one hand, there is no other constituent apart from the whole VP to function as the associate, but on the other hand, the VP does not count as an associate.⁹

⁸ On the relationship between depreciative morphology and focus see Gutiérrez-Rexach and Silva-Vilar (1999).

⁹ In this respect IR focus differs from *ir y + infinitive* (see fn. 3 above). I can't offer a precise explanation for this restriction, but I would like to suggest that it has to do with the grammaticalization path followed by IR focus. In Bravo (2012) I show that IR focus develops out of the lexical verb, through the resultative construction, and not from the aspectual auxiliary of *Va a llover* 'It is going to rain'. If this is the case, the constituent in focus would stand for the Goal argument and consequently no focus over the whole VP can be expected. Nevertheless, this question deserves further research. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing my attention to this particular point.

On the one hand, relative adverbs not inherently gradable, such as *dónde* ‘where’ and *quién* ‘who’, are excluded from exclamative sentences (Gutiérrez-Rexach and Andueza 2011), see (17). Sentences in (18), however, are perfect in any variety of Spanish. On the other hand, (19a), pronounced with the prosodic contour of an exclamative sentence is grammatical, and ungrammatical otherwise (19b):

- (17) a. $??/*; \downarrow$ Dónde nevó!
lit. where snowed
b. $¿?/*; \downarrow$ Quién llamó!
Lit. who called
- (18) a. \downarrow Miren dónde **fue a nevar**, a mucha distancia de aquí! [Google, October 13, 2012]
‘Look where it had to snow, really very far away from here!’
b. \downarrow Mira quién fue a hablar!
‘Look who’s talking!’
- (19) a. \downarrow Lo que le **fue a {suceder ~ ocurrir}**! [RAE-ASALE 2009: 28.8j]
‘What a terrible thing happen to him!’
b. *Pregunté lo que le **fue a suceder**.
lit. asked LO.3SG.ACC.NEUT that LE.3.SG.DAT.MASC went to happen

If IR focus introduces the quantificational feature required by the exclamative operator in the ForceP we can explain for the contrast between (17) and (18).¹¹ Conversely, in (19) the exclamative operator allows IR focus to check its interpretable feature.

In the next section I am going to provide some arguments in favour of keeping apart IR resultative and IR focus.

4. Keeping apart IR resultative and IR focus

My hypothesis is that IR resultative is a semi-lexical verb that requires as part of its semantics a result. This result is introduced by the complement of IR resultative, that is, by the verb and the preposition selected in its turn by the latter. More precisely, IR resultative as a semi-lexical verb selects for a Goal argument and introduces itself a subevent of displacement. Crucially, the predicate of the VP complement of IR resultative combines with a directional or resultative preposition (Zwarts 2010). IR resultative forms a resultative chain in the syntax with the resultative or directional preposition and the main verb, very similar to the T-chain proposed by Guéron and Hoekstra (1988). I also follow Gawron (1986), who argues that, in those cases where the predicate is not a motion verb, as is the case of *chocar* ‘to hit’, both the displacement along a trajectory meaning and the resultative meaning are conveyed by the preposition. The preposition incorporates into the main verb, and the main verb plus the preposition incorporates into *ir*. The syntactic representation, based in Ramchand (2008:cp. 5), is in (20):

- (20) El coche fue a chocar contra el puente. (=2b)
[VPP_{Process} Fue_j [ResultativeP a_j [VP el coche [v_j⁰ chocar [ResultativePP contra_j [DP el puente]]]]]]]

In fact, there is one example of a predicate originally formed as shown in (20) and now almost completely lexicalized: *ir a parar*, lit. to go to stop ‘to end up in’, ‘to finish in’. Thus, *La pelota fue a parar al jardín del vecino* ‘The ball ended up in the neighbour’s garden’, *El dinero fue a parar a manos de políticos corruptos* ‘The money ended up in the hands of corrupt politicians’ are possible sentences in all varieties of Spanish, but $??$ *El dinero paró en manos de políticos corruptos* with the intended meaning of ‘The money ended up in the hands of corrupt politicians’ is not, except for a very few varieties spoken in Venezuela and Mexico.

The superiority of this analysis with respect to the one that identifies IR resultative and IR focus is that it predicts that there exists a semantic relationship of selection between the auxiliary verb *ir* and its

¹¹ Factivity is a property of both exclamatives and sentences with IR focus. I suppose that IR focus allows to check also for this feature in the Exclamative operator. See Gutiérrez-Reach (2008) for further details.

arguments only with IR resultative. In effect, only verbs that select for a directional or resultative preposition can function as complements of IR resultative. This class coincides with the contact verb class stated by the RAE-ASALE (2009) and is quite short: {*chocar ~ dar*} *contra* ‘to hit against’, *caer {en ~ sobre}* ‘to fall into’... If this is so, then the data in (8) above are not any longer problematic.

In addition to this, the examples in (21) and (22) show that IR resultative and IR focus cannot be used in the same syntactic contexts:

- (21) a. Ya han reparado el puente contra el que **fue a chocar** un coche hace dos días. ok IR resul
 ‘The bridge against which a car crashed two days ago is already repaired.’
 b. *La calefacción se estropeó el único día que **fue a nevar**. (=5a) * IR focus
 lit. the heating broke down the only day it went to snow
- (22) a. ¿Contra qué **fue a chocar** el coche? ok IR resul
 lit. Against what went to crash the car
 b. *¿Qué momento **fue a elegir**? (=5b) * IR focus
 lit. what moment went to choose

The distribution is as expected: in the absence of an associate to associate with and which checks the abstract feature of focus IR focus is ungrammatical. Observe, for example, that an exclamative determiner in (22b) turns the sentence into a grammatical one: ¡*Qué momento fue a elegir!* ‘What a moment he had to choose!’.

5. Conclusions and further research

In this paper I have argued in favour of analyzing the auxiliary verb *ir* ‘to go’ in expressions such as *Fue a aparecer en el peor momento* ‘He had to appear at the worst moment of all possible contextually relevant moments’ as a focus marker. This analysis overcomes the shortcomings of previous analyses while permitting, at the same time, to give account of the syntactic and semantic properties of the construction, in particular, the need for a referential associate, its quantificational meaning and the evaluative component. Despite the fact that *ir* as a focus marker shares some features with the focus *in situ* construction with *ser* ‘to be’, I have shown that an analysis along the lines of a focus operator and a FocusP in the left periphery is preferable. In this way, the close relationship between IR focus and exclamative sentences can also be predicted. Still, the following issues still need further research. In the first place, rhetorical sentences with the auxiliary *ir* (¡*Cómo iba a saberlo!* ‘He could not possibly know it’): while there are properties that allow to consider this *ir* as an instance of IR focus (Bravo and Laca 2011), the temporal constraint points towards the opposite direction (*!*Cómo fue a saberlo!* lit. how went to know it). Secondly, the modal meaning of IR focus. Recall that the expression used in the English glosses is the modal verb ‘have to’. Thus, although an analysis in terms of causes and forces (Copley and Harley 2011) would prove adequate, it nevertheless would have to give account for the quantificational meaning. Finally, it has recently been proposed (Carrasco Gutiérrez 2006) to consider the Spanish periphrasis with the auxiliary verb *llegar a* ‘to arrive at’ (*Juan llegó a ser presidente de la empresa* ‘He even become a president of the firm’) as a discourse marker, instead of as an aspectual periphrasis. If this is the case, then two further questions rise: the relationship between inherently directed motion verbs and focus in terms of grammaticalization and the possibility of extending the analysis of IR focus to *llegar a*. In any case, describing IR focus as a focus marker allows for a new approach in the study of the wide area of auxiliaries in the left periphery and, as a consequence, for a better understanding of the whole paradigm of Spanish scalar periphrases.

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