

Background encoding in conversational Catalan

Núria Alturo and Neus Nogué
Departament de Filologia Catalana
Universitat de Barcelona



**First International Conference
on Functional Discourse Grammar
Lisbon, 2-4 June 2010**

Contents

1. Aims and data.
2. Formulation: IL, RL.
3. Encoding: Morphosyntactic.
4. Encoding: Phonological.
5. Discourse dynamics: the role of combinations of Background and other pragmatic functions.

Background encoding in conversational Catalan (1)

1. Our aim: to account for the role of Background encoding in conversational Catalan.
2. We are NOT interested in the encoding of Background through verb affixes and bound pronouns (grammatical).

Background encoding in conversational Catalan (2)

3. We look at the encoding of Background by means of insertion of lexical material in **extra-clausal positions**.

(1) La policia mateixa **el- s** mat-a |
The police themselves ACC- PL kill- PRS.3SG

el- s **nen- s** (#82, COC05-493-494)
the- PL child- PL

‘The police themselves kill them | the children’

Background encoding in conversational Catalan (3)

4. The data:

- 5 hours of informal spoken conversation (*Corpus Oral de Conversa Col·loquial*, <http://www.ub.edu/ccub>)
- Only Discourse Acts with DECL illocution
- 112 post-clausal Background units
- 29 pre-clausal Background units

Formulation: IL (1)

Background is typically assigned to R:

(1) La policia mateixa **els** mata | **els nens**

(The police itself kills them | the children)

$(A_i: \text{DECL } (P_i)_S (P_j)_A (C_i: [(T_i) (R_i) (\mathbf{R_j})_{\text{BACK}}] (C_i)) (A_i))$

Not surprisingly, 56% of Background units in our data refer **deictically** to entities that are recoverable from the context.

Formulation: IL (2)

Assignment of Background to T is only possible if Topic function is also assigned:

(2) **de llençar-lo** | no es llença

(#123, COC01-807)

(Throwing it away | you don't throw it away [the sandwich])

$(A_i: \text{DECL } (P_i)_S (P_j)_A (C_i: [(\mathbf{T}_i)_{\text{BACK+TOP}} (R_i)] (C_i)) (A_i))$

Formulation: RL

All semantic entities formulated in a Subact R can be backgrounded: individuals, locations, times, **states of affairs**, and so on.

(3) **ja ho sé | que ho passes malament**

(#132, COC01-1208)

(I know [it] | that you're having a bad time)

Encoding: ML (1)

1. Coreferent pronominal clitic in all syntactic functions that allow it.

(4) **lo que em digui l'Anna Mari** | jo no **l'hi** cobraria
(#66, COC07-1410)

(What Anna Mari orders | I wouldn't charge it to her)

(5) els jesuïtes també **en** fan | **de reformes**
(#5, COC01- 215)

(Jesuits also do them | renovations)

Encoding: ML (2)

Subject: verbal affixes agreement, without clitic (Catalan, pro-drop language).

(6) **és** d' agrair | **això**
be.PRS.3SG of thank.INF | this

(#3, COC01- 215)

(It is to be thanked | this)

Encoding: ML (3)

2. Two extra-clausal positions.

PRE-CLAUSAL

(4) **lo que em digui l'Anna Mari | jo**
no l'hi cobraria (#66, COC07-1410)

(What Anna Mari orders | I wouldn't charge it to her)

Encoding: ML (4)

POST-CLAUSAL

(5) els jesuïtes també **en** fan | **de reformes**
(#5, COC01- 215)

(Jesuits also do them | renovations)

(6) **és** d'agrar | **això** (#3, COC01- 215)

(It is to be thanked | this)

Encoding: ML (5)

3. A variety of syntactic structures.

Np

(7) com va anar ahir | **el partit de futbol**

(#91, COC01-1304)

(How was it yesterday | the football match)

Adp

(8) quan m'he despertat **hi** he pensat | **en això**

(#55, COC07-558)

(When I woke up I thought it | about this)

Encoding: ML (6)

Np instead of usual Adp

(9) **l'ofici** a Igualada i a Valls_

se'n digué_

blanquer\

(#160, CORCULT1-675-677)

([of] **the job** at Igualada and Valls | people called **it**
| tanner)

Encoding: ML (7)

Vp

(10) **saber-ne** | no en sé

(#77, COC05-214)

(Knowing it | I don't know it [how to use Internet])

subordinated Clause

(11) ja **ho sé** | **que pots**

(#79, COC05-558)

(I know it | that you can)

Encoding: ML (8)

4. Recursivity.

(12) **si ja no s'hi estan | aquí | aquelles
monges** (#127, COC07-168)

(They are not staying here | here | those
nuns)

(13) **tot això | ja no ho sé | jo**
(#61, COC07-1049)

(All this | I don't know it | I)

Encoding: PL (1)

1. Coded by means of *Phonological Phrases*.
 - a) Light separation between phrases.
 - b) No pause required (but possible).
 - c) Pitch inflection at the end (rising, falling, flat, or complex).
 - d) Flexibility (sensitive to morphosyntactic complexity, intra/extra-clausality, distribution of stress).

Encoding: PL (2)

POST-CLAUSAL (1)

1. Pitch inflection at the end of preceding clause.

1a. Rising.

(14) n'**hi** ha més d'un litro | **allà** | eh:\

(#13, COC07-490)

(There is more than one litre | there | eh)


$$(f \text{ IP}_i : [(PP_i : \text{njá} (PP_i)) (r \text{ PP}_j : \text{mezďunlítru} (PP_j)) \\ (f \text{ PP}_k : \text{Á} (PP_k)) (r \text{ PP}_l : \text{Š} \text{ PP}_l))] (IP_i))$$

Encoding: PL (3)

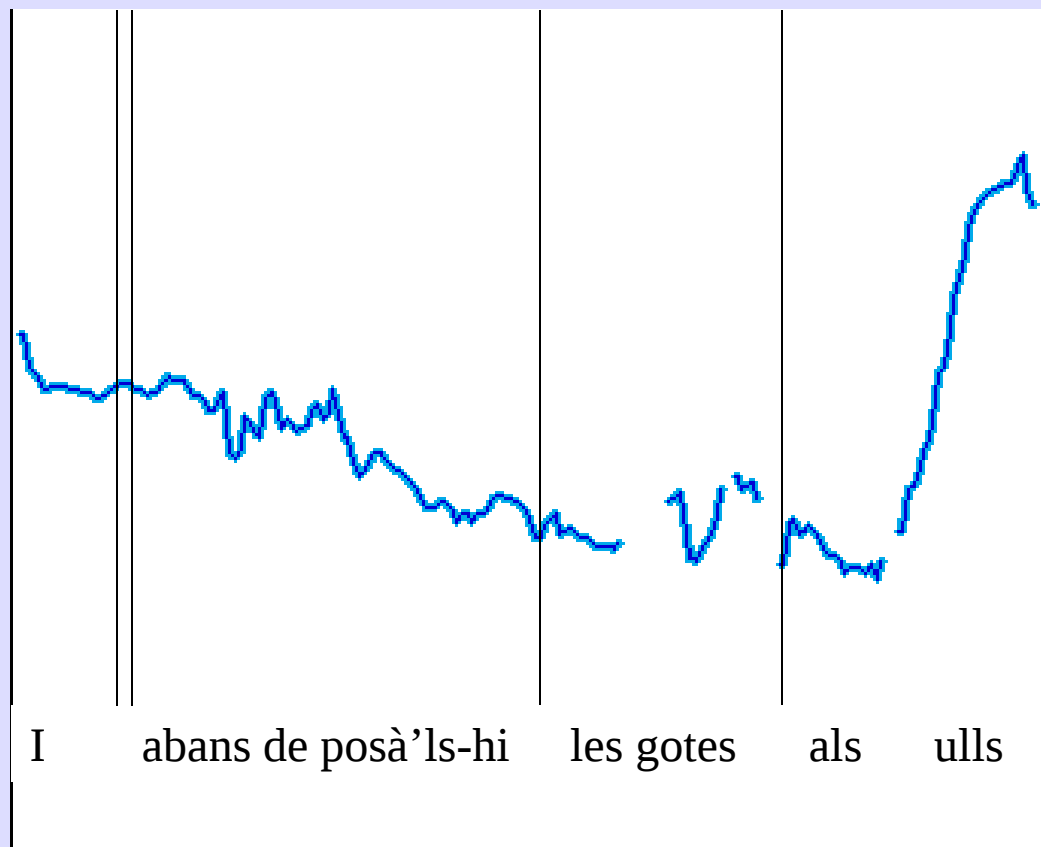
1b. Falling.

(15) i:_

abans | de posà'**ls-hi** | **les gotes** | **als ulls_**

(#1, COC07-18-19)

(And before dropping them there, the drops, into
the eyes)



$(IP_i: (PP_i: i (PP_i)) (IP_i))$

$(f IP_j: [(PP_j: \text{əβánZðəpuzálzi} (PP_j))$

$(l PP_k : \text{ləzɣótəz} (PP_k)) (r PP_l: \text{əlzúʎs} (PP_l))]$

Encoding: PL (4)

2. Lower pitch contour of post-clausal background.

(16) [l'altre dia] dissabte | **hi** era | **allà a la**
parròquia

(#27, COC07-837)

(Last day Saturday | there he was | there at the
parish)



(f IP_i : (PP_i : laltəðiaðisáptə (PP_i)) (IP_i))

(f PP_j : jérə (PP_j)) (l PP_k : əlálapərɔkja (PP_k)) (IP_i))

Encoding: PL (5)

PRE-CLAUSAL

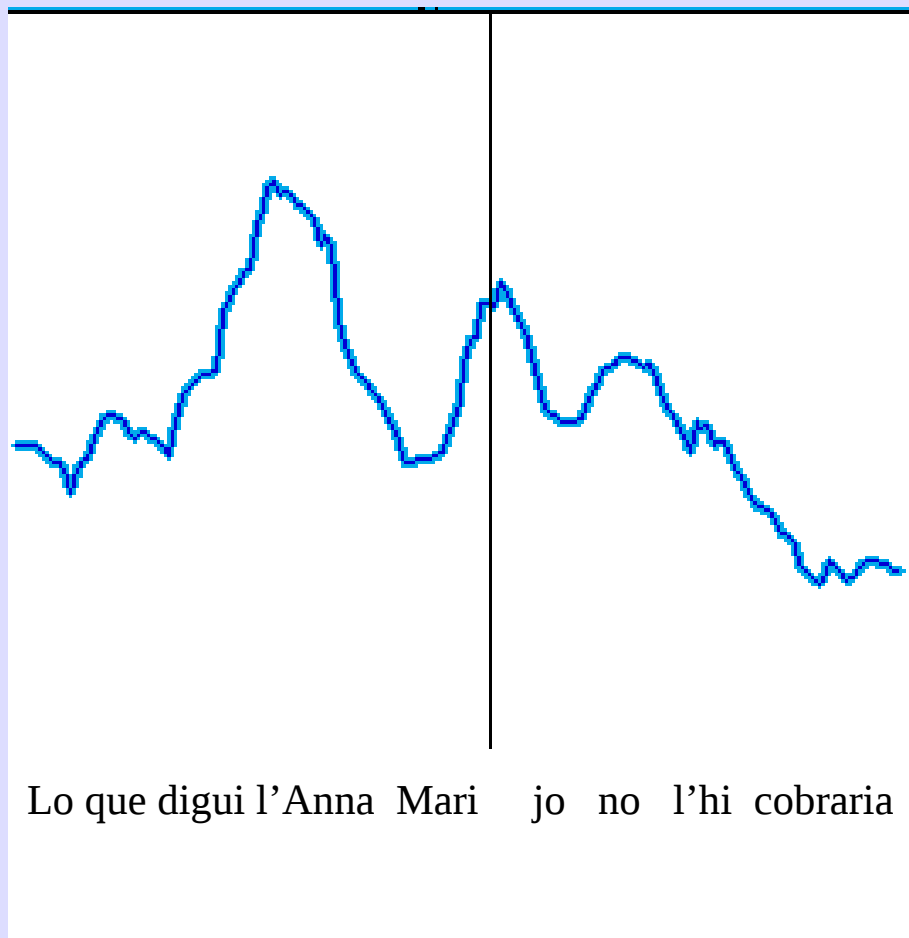
1. Rising pitch inflection at last syllables of sound segment in pre-clausal position.

(17) **lo que em digui l'Anna Mari | jo no l'hi**
cobriria—

(#66, COC07-1410)

(Whatever Anna Mari orders | I wouldn't charge it
to her)

(f I_{Pi}: [(r P_{Pi}: lo que em digui l'Anna Mari (P_{Pi}))
(P_{Pj}: jo no l'hi cobriria (P_{Pj}))] (I_{Pi}))



(f IP_i : (r PP_i : lokəməðíʎilanəmafi (PP_i)) (IP_i))
 (PP_j : jónoʎikuβsafia (PP_j)) (IP_i))

Combinations of Background and other pragmatic functions

1. With **Topic** function.

(18) **am aquest senyor | li** han d'haver donat la la: jubilació anticipada\

(#178, COC07- 1052)

(To this man | they must have given him the early retirement.)

Combinations of Background and other pragmatic functions

2. With **Contrast** function.

(19) **a l'Anna Mari | no l'hi cobrem**

(# 67, COC07-1414)

(To Anna Mari | we don't charge it to her)

Differences between pre-clausal and post-clausal units

1. Pre-clausal Background:

- It favours encoding of Background + Topic.
- It favours encoding of Background + Contrast.

Roles:

- (a) To direct the attention of the hearer towards the referent that is also a Topic. This allows to add new information concerning this referent.
- (b) To place a contrast between a backgrounded referent and another referent in the context.

Differences between pre-clausal and post-clausal units

2. Post-clausal Background:

- Usually encodes Background only.

Role:

It anchors the referent to the new information provided by the Focus.

However:

Background+Topic also occurs.

Need of further research.

Thank you

Obrigada

Dank u wel

Gràcies

Gracies

Merci

Gracias

...