“Free inversion” as predication
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1. Goals
It is well known that “free inversion” is one of the defining features of the null subject languages (NSLs) of the rich agreement (Italian) type. Take the following European Portuguese examples:

1) a. A Maria resolveu o problema. b. Resolveram o problema a Maria. c. Resolveu a Maria o problema.
   the Maria solved the problem the M. solved the M. the problem

   The V-initial sentences (1b-c) have an interpretation that is very similar to that of a cleft, equivalent to ‘The one who solved the problem was Maria’, with exhaustive focus on the post-verbal subject. Exhaustivity can be demonstrated using a test provided by Szabolcsi (1981). The test sentences have two versions. In one sentence, the subject is a conjoined DP and, in the other, one of the members of the conjoined DP has been dropped. If the latter version contradicts the former, then the subject is interpreted exhaustively. Bearing this in mind, let us consider (2a,b) with a conjoined subject:

2) a. Resolveram o problema o Pedro e a Maria. b. Resolveram o Pedro e a Maria o problema.
   solved the problem the Pedro and the Maria solved the Pedro and the Maria the problem

   According to the informants consulted, (1b) and (2a) sound contradictory, thus indicating that the postverbal subject is interpreted exhaustively. The same effect obtains in VSO order (1c vs. 2b).

   Even though the literature on “free inversion” is abundant, its proper analysis is still an open issue. One influential analysis (Belletti 2002) assumes that the postverbal subject occupies the Spec position of a FocusP situated to the right of T, above vP. This analysis has shortcomings, as argued in Cardinaletti (1998) and Costa (2004). These authors propose that the postverbal subject remains in situ, inside the VP. VOS order is derived by means of V-raising to T and object scrambling to the left of VP; in this case, the subject is assigned Focus by virtue of being the most deeply embedded constituent. In VSO, focus on the subject is derived via the Contrastive Stress Rule (CSR) (Zubizarreta 1998). Under this analysis, it is not clear why the CSR is obligatory for subjects though only optional in the case of objects. Moreover, this rule appears to be obligatory only when the subject is definite. If the subject is a non specific indefinite or a bare plural, exhaustivity is no longer enforced. (4a,b) are not contradictory and neither are (5a,b):

4) a. Resolveram o problema crianças e adultos b. Resolveram o problema crianças.
   solved the problem children and adults. solved the problem children

5) a. Resolveu crianças e adultos o problema b. Resolveu crianças o problema
   solved the problem children and adults. solved the problem children

   This difference between definites and indefinites/bare plurals does not follow in either of the theories of inversion mentioned. Finally, the relation between the availability of “subject inversion” and the Null Subject Property is not immediately clear on either account. In this talk, we will propose a novel analysis of postverbal subject constructions in the NSLs that aims to capture the problems noted.

2. Analysis
2.1 Motivation
Our analysis takes the asymmetry between definites and indefinites regarding exhaustivity as particularly telling. These patterns are remarkably similar to those that have been described by É. Kiss (2006) for preverbal Foci in Hungarian. Hungarian has a preverbal Focus position which can be filled by any constituent, as illustrated in (6):

6) János EGY KÖNYVET vett. ‘It was a book that John bought.’
   János a book bought

   (6) is equivalent to a cleft. É. Kiss (2006) observes that there is a contrast between definite DPs and (nonspecific) singular or plural indefinites sitting in the preverbal Focus position. While the former must be interpreted exhaustively, the latter do not necessarily express exhaustive identification. In the spirit of Higgins (1973), É. Kiss assumes that the focus interpretation of pseudoclefted/clefted constituents is a consequence of their predicative function. Concerning Hungarian, she argues that the preverbal Focus constituent occupies a predicative position, namely Spec, PredP:

7) [PredP Péter, [ [vP t, olvasta el a levelet]]] ‘It was Peter who read the letter.’

   According to É. Kiss (2006:182), the filler of Spec, PredP must be interpreted as a predicate. Since Péter, a definite DP, cannot be interpreted as a property, it can only be understood as a specificational predicate. As such, it requires an open sentence as its subject, which is provided by the VP. Thus (7) expresses that the set of people who read the letter includes Peter and no one else. Exhaustivity follows
from the specifical role of the nominal predicate. É. Kiss’s theory has the advantage of accounting for the asymmetry between definite DPs and specific indefinites, on the one hand, and bare nominals or nonspecific indefinites, on the other. As discussed in Higgins (1973), a nominal can function as a predicational, identificational or specifical predicate. Any type of nominal can express specification. Predication, however, can only be expressed by a bare nominal or a nonspecific indefinite. Since only specification presupposes exhaustive listing, only definite DPs are necessarily interpreted exhaustively.

Evidence supporting the predicational nature of structural Focus is the following (Szabolcsi (1981)): a DP in the preverbal Focus position allows a nonreferential, “qualitative” interpretation, in which the contrasted DPs can have the same referent. This interpretation is not possible whenever the contrasting DPs occupy any other position (É. Kiss 2006).

(8) AZ ŐREGEMBERNEK, adtam át a helyem, nem A PROFESSZORNAK,

the old.man to gave.1SG over my seat not the professor to

‘It was to the old man that I gave my seat, not to the professor.’

Coming back to Romance V-initial VSO/VOS sentences (1b,c), they have striking features in common with the Hungarian structural Focus. Besides the asymmetry between definite and nonspecific indefinites or bare plurals, the non-referential, “qualitative” interpretation is available to a DP subject in post-verbal position (9a), in contrast to a subject in pre-verbal position (9b).

(9) a. Falou [o velho homem], e não [o professor]. b. #[O velho homem], falou; [o professor], não.

spoke the old man and not the professor the old man spoke the professor not

In our view, these contrasts constitute evidence in favor of an analysis along the lines of É Kiss’s proposal for Hungarian, i.e., in favor of the predicational nature of the DP subject in postverbal position.

In spite of the similarities noted, there are important differences between Hungarian structural Focus and postverbal subjects in the Romance NSLs. First, any constituent can be focused in Hungarian, not just subjects; second, there is a dedicated position for structural Focus in Hungarian. For this reason, we will try to derive the predicative interpretation of postverbal subjects from a different source.

2.2 Proposal

One other key feature of our analysis is that “free inversion” is a corollary of the Null Subject Property. In the spirit of Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998), we assume that what characterizes the NSLs of the rich agreement type is that T contains a D feature (an index) and interpretable phi-features (the basic insight is that subject agreement behaves as an incorporated clitic). For this reason, there is no EPP related movement to Spec-TP and the subject remains in its VP internal position (here we follow Costa 1998 and Cardinaletti 1998). The second key ingredient of the analysis is that the focus interpretation of the postverbal subject in (1b,c) follows from the fact that it must be interpreted as a predicate (a property) applied to (interpretable) D in T. Reconsider the syntax of (1c)

(10) \[ [(\_1 V-resolveu [T <D, i:φ>]] [vP [a Maria]; \_ Λ o problema]] \]

The DP a Maria is merged in subject position within the vP and bears a Case feature. Thus, it is active as a goal. T and the subject enter an Agree relation and their φ-features match. Since the subject and T belong within the same Phase (the CP Phase) both are present when the derivation is handed over to the semantics. At this point, D1 and DP2 are both interpretable, in violation of Full Interpretation. Type shifting applies to the denotation of a Maria yielding the property λx. x=Maria. This property combines with the verbal predicate by Predicate Modification to yield the complex property λx. x solved the problem ∧ x=Maria. This property is applied to the individual variable introduced by D. Crucially, the element that truly saturates the verbal predicate is this variable. We contend that the exhaustive focus interpretation arises whenever the semantic representation is such that the identity statement falls under the Nuclear Scope (or is asserted) and the rest of the material in the clause is presupposed. Thus, in the case of (1b,c), what is being identified with Maria is the set of individuals that solved the problem. This yields the interpretation ‘the entity x, such that x solved the problem is Maria’. Interpreting the verbal predicate as presupposed, as in (1c,d), appears to be a property of V initial sentences containing a transitive verb (in the talk, we will go over other types of sentences).