The discourse function of right-dislocation in Catalan¹
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1. Introduction
All languages have the means to express the same propositional content in many different ways. Although truth-conditionally equivalent, these variants are often not felicitous in the same contexts. Instead, they impose different constraints on the kind of context they may appear in and encode some non-truth-conditional meaning, some “informational component” (Vallduví, 1994). By structuring the information in a particular way, the speaker is instructing the hearer about how to process and interpret the utterance, especially in relation to the givenness status of the entities. This paper presents a corpus study of right dislocation (RD), the non-canonical construction in which a clitic pronoun in the main clause is coreferential with a final peripheral noun phrase, and is aimed at describing its main discourse functions. I argue that RD in Catalan is clearly a means to structure information in a coherent way by displacing old information from the main clause.

2. Previous approaches to right dislocation
RDs have not received as much attention in the literature as other non-canonical constructions since they have been regarded by some authors as performance errors, as “afterthoughts”. However, more recently, most accounts agree that RDs genuinely contribute to the packaging of the information. According to Vallduví (1994), in Catalan, RDs are tails, pieces of old information not maximally salient at the moment of utterance that establish how the new information must be updated. RDs are different from left-dislocations in that only the latter encode links, which may be contrastive and which indicate where the information must be updated. RD constructions are different from sentences with pure pronominalization in that, in the latter, there is no mention of how the information must be updated.

For English, Ziv and Grosz (1993) note that the use of RDs is proscribed to refer to an entity which has just been mentioned unless it adds some attributive meaning, as (1) shows. According to them, the RD is felicitous in English when referring (i) to an entity present in the discourse situation but not mentioned or (ii) to entities textually evoked only when (a) they have been mentioned in discourse, but not recently or (b) the NP adds some attributive meaning (as in 1b).

(1) a. I took my dog to the vet yesterday. # He is getting unaffordable, my dog
b. He is getting unaffordable, the old beast

3. Data
My corpus consists of 93 naturally occurring instances containing RD in Catalan: 67 instances are transcriptions of a famous comedian’s shows and the rest were taken from radio, television,

¹ I wish to thank Enric Vallduví for advice and encouragement and to the Penn’s Semantics Reading Group for many useful comments.
press, novels or conversations\(^2\). The data has been analyzed according to the following parameters (the percentage of instances falling in each category is indicated in parenthesis):

1. Status of the detached NP
   a. Mentioned in the previous sentence (60.2%)
   b. Previously mentioned, but not in the previous sentence (23.6%)
   c. Non-textually mentioned, although may be situationally implicit (16.2%)

2. Consequences of eliminating the right-dislocated constituent of the sentence:
   a. ok  the sentence is still fully acceptable (23.7%)
   b. *  the sentence is not acceptable (47.3%)
   c. ?  the sentence is worse than the original, but still acceptable (29%)

3. Consequences of restoring the canonical order:
   a. ok  the sentence is still fully acceptable (10.7%)
   b. *  the sentence is not acceptable (47.3%)
   c. ?  the sentence is worse than the original, but still acceptable (42%)

Table 1 shows the data broken down according to the first parameter (boldface indicates the highest value in each category).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of detached NP</th>
<th>Eliminating RD</th>
<th>Canonical order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a 60.2</td>
<td>ok 32.1</td>
<td>ok 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* 25</td>
<td>* 60.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>? 42.9</td>
<td>? 37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b 23.6</td>
<td>ok 18.2</td>
<td>ok 13.6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* 72.7</td>
<td>* 36.4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>? 9.1</td>
<td>? 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c 16.2</td>
<td>ok 0</td>
<td>ok 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* 93.3</td>
<td>* 13.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>? 6.7</td>
<td>? 46.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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4. Data analysis: Status of the dislocated information
The data resulting from parameter 1 backs up the claim that right-dislocated elements encode discourse-old information: in 83.6% (60.2% from 1a plus 23.6% from 1b) of occurrences of RDs, the detached element had been mentioned in the previous discourse. RD is a good strategy to mention old information and also to displace it from the main clause. However, it seems that the constraints Ziv and Grosz identify for the use of RD in English do not hold for Catalan. Recall that they claim that an NP cannot be right-dislocated if the entity to which it refers has been mentioned in the previous utterance, unless it adds some attributive meaning. However, 60.2% of RDs in Catalan belong to this category (1a in Table 1). In the following sections, I analyze some examples that fall under each of the categories of parameter 1.

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\(^2\) The full corpus is available at http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~laia/papers/dd.pdf
4.1 Detached NP refers to a discourse-old but not recently mentioned entity
In 23.6% of our examples (1b type), the RD refers to discourse-old information which had not been introduced in the previous sentence, but at some earlier point. This fits very well with Vallduví’s definition of tail and with function (iia) of Grosz and Ziv. (2) is an example of this situation (the sentence with the RD is glossed in 2c)³:


b. If you are on a diet, you must have special willpower. Not like Gallardo. I met him the other day and I asked him: “How are you doing?” And he answered: “I’ve been on a diet for three weeks”. And I said: “Really? How much have you lost”. And he said: “Three weeks”. And he’s right. **I don’t have the willpower either.** When I am on a diet, I have a very bad time.

c. Jo tampoc en tinc, de voluntat
   ‘I neither part-pr have, of willpower’

In this example, the RD is used to refer to an entity which had been introduced at some previous utterance. Therefore, it is a way of referring to an entity which was not accessible anymore and make it highly salient. In these cases, the RD cannot be eliminated in 72.7% of the instances, since it would not be clear to which entity the pronoun is referring. If the RD were not there in the last example, the pronoun would probably be interpreted as referring back to *setmanes* (weeks). Also, if we restore the canonical order, 50% of the instances are still acceptable, but their degree of acceptability decreases. That is, since the entity had not been introduced in the previous utterance, it is possible to refer to it with a full NP in its canonical position. However, the sentence is less felicitous since it does not make explicit that the speaker intends to refer to a discourse-old entity. In the last example, it would not be clear that the speaker, after telling us about his conversation with a friend, intends to go back to the topic of having willpower to be on a diet. Thus, the RD accomplishes two functions: unambiguously picks the entity to which the speaker wants to refer, while marking it as a discourse-old entity.

4.2 Detached NP had not been explicitly mentioned
This category of RDs (1c type) would fulfil function (i) of Ziv and Grosz (1993): that is, either the referent of the NP was situationally present but never mentioned or it was inferable from another mentioned entity. (3) is an example of such a case⁴.

(3) L’oració Diga trenta y tres mereix una reflexió.
   ‘The sentence Say thirty-three deserves some thought.’
   Realment la fan servir tant, els metges?
   ‘Really do-pr do use much, the doctors?’
   “Do doctors really use it that much?”

³ I use the following abbreviations: part-pr (partitive clitic pronoun), do-pr (direct object clitic pronoun), io-pr (indirect object clitic pronoun).
⁴ There is no clitic in the main clause because Catalan has no subject clitics. However, (3) has a clearly different intonation pattern than a sentence with a postverbal subject.
After mentioning the sentence “Say thirty-three” (which is stereotypically used by doctors when they want to examine their patients throats), the entity the doctors is directly inferable and, therefore, detachable. Since the entity to which the RD refers had not been previously been mentioned, if the RD is eliminated, the sentence is no longer acceptable (this is the case for 93.3% of the instances in our corpus). The canonical order is, in these cases, either acceptable (40%) or dubious (46.7%). However, the canonical order fails to make explicit the link between the displaced entity and the situation or the other entity from which the RD is inferable.

4.3 Detached NP had been mentioned in the previous sentence

In most instances of our corpus (60.7%), the detached NP refers to an entity which had been mentioned in the previous utterance of the discourse (1a type). According to Ziv and Grosz (1993), this use is proscribed in English, unless the RD adds some attributive meaning. There are four examples in our corpus in which the RD seems to fulfill this condition or some similar condition (rather than adding attributive meaning, the RD is used to refer to the same entity using a different noun, therefore characterizing it in a different way):

(4) (during a power outage) Les famílies de sobte s’han de parlar. Mires els teus germans i tenen una altra cara

“Suddenly, families must talk. You look at your brothers and you almost don’t recognize them”

Jo què li dic, a aquest tio?

“I what io-pr say, to this guy?”

“What can I say to this guy?”

In this case, the RD is a good strategy to refer back to a discourse-old entity (your brothers) with another NP, which can provide additional meaning. In this case, it provides a humorous way to refer back to the same entity. However, this explanation does not account for the great majority of cases, in which the displaced entity had just been mentioned, as the example in (5) shows.

(5) A: A mi el Phil Collins em sembla una mica hortera

“I find Phil Collins a little bit tacky”

B: Doncs a mi m’agrada, el Phil Collins

well to me please, the Phil Collins

“Well, I like him/Phil Collins”

In this instance, the dislocated NP (Phil Collins) refers to an entity just mentioned in the previous sentence. The detached NP does not add any attributive meaning to the referred entity and, still, is perfectly natural. Therefore, either the attributive meaning restriction does not hold for Catalan or the notion of “attributive meaning” is different for both languages and must be redefined. Also, these RDs do not fit very well into Vallduví’s notion of tail, since the RD conveys information which is salient at the moment of utterance. Also, this is the type of RD which seems less necessary: if the RD is removed, the sentence is still felicitous (32.1%) or dubious (42.9%).

However, in all examples involving a RD that refers to an entity just mentioned, the RD does indeed add some meaning, some “emotional content”. For instance, in the previous examples, it helps to make explicit the contrast between A and B’s opinion regarding Phil Collins. The sentence would also have been felicitous only with the pronoun, but the contrast would not have been as forcefully stated. It is also worth noting that this kind of RD appears frequently in
interrogative (23.2%) and exclamative sentences (12.5%), in which the speaker tends to express a higher degree of subjectivity. Lambrecht (1981) also claims that some examples of RD in French transmit a certain feeling of “camaraderie”: a stronger link between speaker and hearer is conveyed, since the speaker is making it clear that there is some information that both know. If the RD is omitted, this link disappears.

Therefore, in Catalan, an element mentioned in the previous utterance is a candidate to be right-dislocated, not only if the RD adds some attributive meaning, but also if the speaker wants to convey some additional emotive content: emphasis, opposition or camaraderie. Unlike the other two types, this type of RD is not strictly necessary to signal how the information must be updated. However, by doing so, the speaker signals to the hearer that he wishes to communicate some extra meaning. We could think of this process as a type of implicature: the speaker could have used a simpler structure (i.e. could have omitted the RD, since the referent of the pronoun is perfectly clear), but has chosen not to do so, because he wants to convey an extra meaning.

5. Conclusion
To sum up, I argue that RD in Catalan is clearly a means to structure information in a coherent way by displacing old information from the main clause. It is not as constrained as in English and it can appear in broader contexts than those described by Ziv and Grosz (1993). We can find three main kinds of NPs in the detached phrase, which have different discourse functions:

(1) NPs referring to an entity mentioned some utterances back. In this case, the RD is a necessary strategy to accomplish two tasks: to activate an entity which was not accessible anymore and make it highly salient, while still marking its discourse-old status.

(2) NPs referring to entities never textually mentioned, but which were implicitly present in the situation. As in (1), the RD also has a twofold function: it makes explicit the implicit referent and it places it in a discourse-old information position.

(3) NPs referring to entities mentioned in the previous sentence. In Catalan, most cases of RD fall under this category and only a small part add some attributive meaning. However, such RDs do convey an additional meaning, some “emotional content”, having to do mainly with expression of opposition or emphasis.

References


5 Gundel et. al. (1990) also invoke implicatures to explain unexpected uses of referring expressions: i.e. definite noun phrases used in situations where the referent is in focus and a pronoun would have been sufficient.