

Preverbal indefinite subjects

In languages with Subject Verb word order, preverbal subjects tend to be definite rather than indefinite (e.g. Givón 1976, 1978; Prince 1981, 1992; Leonetti 1998). However, the acceptability and frequency of preverbal indefinite subjects (henceforth PIS) varies cross-linguistically. For instance, it is reported that PIS are hardly acceptable in spoken French (1) (Lambrecht 1988, 1994; Van De Velde 2005; Cappeau & Deulofeu 2006; Cappeau 2008; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012), whereas they are much less problematic in English (see translation in (1)).

- (1) ? *Un ami m'a apporté ce livre.*
'A friend brought me that book.'
(Cappeau & Deulofeu 2001:4, our translation)

The awkwardness of (1) may be related to the fact that in French (as in other discourse-configurational languages), preverbal subjects are usually discourse-given and topical in the sense of 'that which the sentence is about' (Givón 1976). Indefinite constituents, however, generally refer to discourse-new referents and are dispreferred as topics (Beaver et al. 2005). As a consequence, speakers of French make extensive use of 'presentational constructions' such as the *il y a* cleft in order to introduce discourse-new, indefinite constituents (Lambrecht 2002; Karssenbergh 2016, 2017; Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2017).

- (2) *Il y a une voiture qui se fait remorquer par une dépanneuse dans le parking...*
'There's a car that's getting towed by a tow truck in the parking lot.'
(Karssenbergh 2017:183)

In a similar vein, although PIS are acceptable in Dutch when accompanied by prosodic stress (3a), other presentational constructions, such as "er is + NP + VP" can also be used in order to introduce discourse-new indefinite referents (3b).

- (3) a. *IEMAND heeft koffie over haar arm gemorst.*
SOMEONE has coffee over her arm spilled.
"Someone spilled coffee over her arm."
b. *Er is een trein ontspoord.*
There is a train derailed.
"A train has derailed."
(Belligh 2016)

Turning to English, Irwin (2014, to appear) argues that syntactic structure plays a role in the felicity of indefinite subjects that establish persistent discourse referents. The role of argument structure in this phenomenon is illustrated with contrasts like those in (4), where (4a) is analysed as containing an existential proposition, informally paraphrased as "there was a lady who waltzed in."

- (4) a. A lady waltzed in. She was wearing pink.
b. ??A lady laughed. She was wearing pink.

Other licensing conditions have also been reported. For instance, Cheng & Downing (2014) argue that PIS in Durban Zulu (5) can be accounted for in terms of the presence of a presupposition of existence rather than the opposition topical/non-topical.

- (5) *úúma áma-nye áma-phutha á-bálúlékiile, ngéké sí-khíphe lencwáadi*
if 6-some 6-error 6SUBJ-be.major.TAM never we-publish this.book
'If (some) mistakes are major, we will never publish this book.'
(Cheng & Downing 2014:20)

The goal of this workshop is to bring together insights about PIS in different languages with SV word order, in order to come to a better understanding of the acceptability, frequency, and licensing conditions of PIS. Questions we intend to address in this workshop include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Which types of PIS are acceptable in languages with SV word order (e.g. indefinite pronouns, partitive or quantified NPs...)?
- What is the distribution of PIS across different genres/usage contexts (e.g. newspaper vs. online forum, spoken vs. written) of a given language?
- Which are the (morphosyntactic, semantic, pragmatic, information structural, discourse functional) licensing factors for PIS?
- To what extent do licensing conditions for PIS vary cross-linguistically?
- How can cross-linguistic differences in the acceptability and/or frequency of PIS be explained?
- How can different theoretical and methodological approaches (e.g. corpus linguistic methods, experimental methods) be combined to gain a deeper and more complete insight into PIS?

We welcome contributions from all theoretical frameworks on spoken and signed languages with SV word order; we are particularly interested in analyses that incorporate insights from corpus work and experimental studies.

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