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FOCUS/RHEME IN A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Abstracts

Jirasak Achariyayos, Paris 3, CNRS-LACITO, jirasak.achariyayos@gmail.com:
Focus constructions and discourse particles in Thai

Thai is known as an isolating language with a relatively strict SVO word order type. This presentation is to show which strategies Thai, as a language without any morphological inflection, uses to mark « focus ». There are at least three strategies to do so : 1/ word order 2/ morphological means and 3/ with special construction. It seems that Thai usually adopts the morphological mean to mark focus – by adding a particle.

According to Lambrecht (1994), there are three major types of focus constructions : predicate focus (topic-comment sentences), argument focus (identificational sentences) and sentence focus (thetic sentences). This talk will show that some particles and their combinations are used to mark focus in Thai : *nà si* is used in both predicate and sentence focus constructions while interpersonal particles and *là* can mark argument focus construction. In addition, *ná* particle is also used to mark in event-reporting, presentational and existential sentences.

[What happened to your car ?]
a.	It broke DOWN.		predicate focus
b.	man	sĭa	*nà sì*
	3sg	broke	PART

[I heard your motorcycle broke down]   argument focus
a.	My CAR broke down.	
b.	rót	*khràp*
	car	PART

[What happened ?]   sentence focus
a.	My CAR broke down		
b.	rót	man	sĭa	*nà sì*
	car	3sg	broke	PART

References
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Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information Structure and Sentence Form.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Danh Thành Do-Hurinville, INALCO-MODYCO, dhdthanh@yahoo.fr :
Focus Particles in Vietnamese
After briefly presenting the points of view on the focus information of Halliday (1967), Lambrecht (1994), Dik (1997) and Nølke (2001), I will examine the following Vietnamese

particles: *cai, chinh, chi, la, ma, ngay, nhung, thi, toi* which are used in Vietnamese focus structures such as "argument focus", "predicate focus" and "sentence focus".

Nomi Erteschik-Shir, Ben-Gurion University, "shir"@exchange.bgu.ac.il :
Canonical Information Structures
Canonical Information Structure - the unmarked alignment of word order and information structure – plays a role in constraining syntactic dependencies and scope: Whereas dependencies are strongly constrained by Canonical Information Structure, scope is only weakly constrained and therefore non-canonical scopal interpretations are possible albeit marked. Since Canonical Information Structure varies cross-linguistically constraints on dependencies and scope also vary from language to language. The English canonical information structure, for example, requires isomorphism between syntax and IS with Subject, VP aligning with Topic, Focus. In Danish it suffices for the topic to be preverbal and the focus to be postverbal. The seeming absence of the superiority effect in Danish as opposed to English is shown to follow. I explore the view that the reason canonical alignment plays such an important role in grammar is due to the fact that such isomorphism facilitates processing.

Ricardo Etxepare, CNRS-IKER, Bayonne, retxepare@gmail.com :
The focus landscape of Basque
In this paper I will provide an overview of some of the fundamental syntactic properties of focus constructions in Basque, by reviewing a number of classical observations (see Etxepare and Ortiz de Urbina, 2003 for an introductory work): (i) the adjacency between the focused constituent and the verb; (ii) the parallelism between focused constituents and wh-words; (iii) the existence of possibly different focus positions and of multiple focus contructions; (iv) the involvement of focus in quantificational constructions of a distributive nature. I will then use those data as a basis to compare two broad lines of analysis that have been applied to Basque focus constructions in syntactic theory: the idea that focus constructions are operator constructions targeting a given syntactic position in the clause structure (the so-called "syntactocentric" or derivational analysis, see recently Irurtzun 2007 for Basque); (ii) and the idea that focus is an interface phenomenon, whose syntactic distribution follows from comparison between representations pertaining to different modules of the linguistic faculty (for a recent proposal in this sense, Arregi 2003).

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M.M.Jocelyne Fernandez-Vest, CNRS-LACITO, Paris 3 & Paris 4, fernvest@vjf.cnrs.fr :
Focus/Rheme as the MCU
This talk will concentrate on Responses as primary elements of Information Structuring. Relying upon a functionalist methodology initially established for Northern Sami (a prototypic orality language), that distinguishes three types of R (simple / complex / multiple R), I will show the role in impromptu speech of the **MCU** (Minimal Communicative Utterance), a Rheme marked by a terminative intonation : generally preceded by a repetition of the Q Theme and followed by a post-Rheme (or "Mneme" – see also Lambrecht's 1994 Antitopic) which repeats one or several constituents of the Q, the MCU is the pivot of the 2 main binary information strategies (1/ Th – Rh, 2/ Rh – Mn).

After discussing some of the main types of "focus" defined by IS theoreticians, I will take examples of QR pairs from different discourse genres – French-Finnish-Estonian drama dialogues, French political debates and interviews – and claim that Responses, natural declarative utterances of ordinary conversation, make it possible to tackle // context / co-text /

sentence combining // and even Word order more clearly than the structuralist tradition's s.c. "neutral" utterances.

Karl Erland Gadelii, Paris 4, CELTA, k.gadelii@wanadoo.fr :
Discourse functions of the clause-initial constituent in Germanic vs. Romance languages

It has long been pointed out by Scandinavian linguists that the sentence-initial position in Scandinavian languages can host a number of different constituents with varying grammatical functions. In an earlier parallel corpus study (Gadelii 2008) it was found that the number of non-subjects in initial position was significantly higher in Scandinavian languages than in English and French. This is interesting in itself since it casts some doubt upon the generally held opinion that Scandinavian languages are strictly SVO. The current study analyzes these cases in more detail, and suggests that the initial constituent in Scandiavian belongs to one of the following categories (cf. also Engdahl 1999): (i) linking conjunctional or frame-creating light adverb, (ii) non-contrasted topic ("continued topic"), (iii) contrasted topic, (iv) rheme. It is hypothesized that the differences between Scandinavian on the one hand and English and French on the other are largest when it comes to fronted non-contrasted topics and rhemes, which are not easily fronted in the latter languages, whereas Scandinavian languages display all four types above in equal proportions.

Pablo Kirtchuk, INALCO, CNRS-LACITO, kirtchuk@vjf.cnrs.fr :
Internal hierarchy of the message in the context of language as a biological device
Information structure is to my mind an inadequate term.
First, we do not transmit pre-existent information but create it. What we communicate is not objective information but a subjective choice of impressions that we share with more or less conspecifics and which are more or less in adequation with an external reality that we are able to grasp only indirectly, partially and imperfectly.

Secondly, when communicating a Focus (and often, but not always, a Topic) we are in the pre-grammatical, pragmatic mode: it is not syntactic structure we're dealing with but pragmatic hierarchy.

Indeed, the term structure is both too connoted and too narrow. Internal Hierarchy of the Message (IHM) is what it is about. It is one of the various mechanisms that reflect the biological nature of language.

I intend to briefly dwell on some other manifestations of this biological nature, in order to show that IHM is all the more relevant as it is part and parcel of a larger puzzle.

The biological aspects of language I will briefly treat are:
Intonation, onomatopoeia, reduplication, iconicity, deixis, context, epigeny, emergence of concrete (nouns) before abstract (ones), pragmatics as first and foremost condition of communication, communication as the first and most important end and language as an excellent means to attain, evolution of language out of communication.

Brenda Laca, Paris 8, CNRS-SFL, brenda.laca@linguist.jussieu.fr:
On the influence of Focus-structure on the interpretation of generic sentences and article distribution in Spanish
The influence of Focus-Background structure on the interpretation of indefinites in generic/habitual sentences contributed to consolidate a « quantificational » approach to English-like Bare Plurals in the 90's. This approach, which goes hand in hand with the assumption that BPls are ambiguous (kind-denoting versus indefinite expressions), has an unwelcome consequence for languages like Spanish, in which Bare Plurals do not exhibit generic readings: the definite article comes out as ambiguous between a family of iota-based operators, on the one hand, and a function as « theme/background-marker », on the other (see Krifka & al. 1995). Concurrent approaches advocating a uniform treatment of BPls (Dobrovie Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003, Cohen & Erteschick-Shir 2002) treat them basically as property-

denotations, which in English-like languages can be covertly type-shifted into kind-denotations. The latter require overt marking by the definite article in Spanish. The distribution of generic and existential readings is, according to Cohen & Erteschick-Shir 2002, regulated by Focus-structure in the following sense: Topic Bare Plurals are necessarily type-shifted, because properties cannot be Topics. Together with the requirement for every sentence to have a Topic, this assumption is able to account for most of the distribution. There remain, however, at least two problematic cases: the exclusion of existential BPls as arguments of some verbs –regardless of their informational status (1a-c), and the possibility for Spanish BPls to appear as Left-Dislocations (2a-b), which are usually assigned Topic status. I will argue that pragmatically determined maximality effects play a role in the first case, whereas the second case provides additional evidence for the distinction between two different Topic positions in Spanish, of which only the first is subject to the ban against property denotations.

1. a. *Pedro detesta *(las) telenovelas*.
      'Pedro hates soap operas'
   b. *Los chistes tontos divierten a *(los) niños*.
      'Silly jokes amuse children'
   c. *La luz del sol arruina *(los) cuadros*.
      '(Exposure to) the sunlight ruins paintings'
2. a. *Turistas siguen viniendo, pero no gastan mucho*.
      'Tourists still come here, but they do not spend much'
   b. *Manzanas, Pedro come todos los días*.
      'Apples, Pedro eats every day'

Asuka Matsumoto (松本 飛鳥), Paris 4 & Warsaw, CNRS-LACITO, ascarpine@hotmail.com
   ***Ga/Wa* as a Focus strategy in Japanese**
      A persistent debate in the Japanese linguistic literature has concerned the function of the post-nominal particles *wa* and *ga*, which are generally considered to be topic and nominative markers respectively but also play a role in focus structure.
      As is illustrated in Lambrecht (1994), alongside the unmarked predicate focus (X *wa* Y: focused element underlined), X *ga* Y is analyzed as expressing either sentence focus, i.e. an entirely rhematic phrase (X *ga* Y), or argument focus (X *ga* Y). But the choice between the sentence focus interpretation and the argument focus interpretation is not always easy in the absence of prosodic information or sufficient context on the Information Structure level.
      In this talk, I will examine within the framework of Information Structure the different focus strategies available in Japanese, such as word order change (OSV instead of SOV), "detopicalization" with *ga* (X *ga* Y or X *ga* Y) and theme/rheme inversion (Y *wa* X cf. the argument focus mentioned above), the last of which involves the topicalization of the predicate with *wa*, accompanied in the case of verbal predicates by nominalization in *no* (Y^V *no wa* X).

Maria Polinsky, Harvard University, polinsky@fas.harvard.edu :
   Focus and Word Order in Polynesian languages
This paper investigates correlations between focus structures/wh-questions and word order in several Polynesian languages. In Polynesian, focus and wh-questions are expressed in similar ways.
      Languages distinguish four strategies for forming *wh*-questions, illustrated by the French examples below: (i) WH-FRONTING, in which the wh-phrase is displaced to a privileged position in the beginning of the sentence, (1); (ii) SUBSTITUTION, in which a *wh*-phrase substitutes for a non-wh argument or adjunct in its ordinary position, (2); (iii) CLEFT, in which the wh-phrase occupies the pivot position of a biclausal impersonal construction,

(3); and (iv) PSEUDOCLEFT, in which the wh-phrase functions as the predicate of the sentence, (4).

(1)   Qui vois-tu ce soir?
(2)   Tu vois qui ce soir?
(3)   Qui est il que tu vois ce soir ?
(4)   Qui est-ce que tu vois ce soir?

Turning to word order, Polynesian languages are predominantly verb-initial (VSO or VOS). Recent research has demonstrated that verb-initial languages do not form a single class typologically or structurally (Chung 1998, 2006, papers in Carnie and Guilfoyle 2000, papers in Carnie, Harley, and Dooley 2005, and others). Three routes to verb-initial word order are (a) VERB RAISING, in which the verb fronts to a left peripheral position; (b) PREDICATE FRONTING, in which the whole verb phrase fronts to a left peripheral position, and (c) RIGHTWARD SUBJECT, in which the subject of the clause simply appears at the end. Although the Polynesian languages are verb-initial we do not expect that they will necessarily all represent the same kind of verb-initial behavior. The paper will thus analyze the route to verb initiality in several Polynesian languages.

Peter Slomanson, Aarhus Universitet, engps@hum.au.dk:
Focus change as a precursor to morphosyntactic change

Contact linguists have claimed that highly analytic contact languages do not develop ostensibly non-salient contrasts, and that the contrasts that *are* morphologized or remorphologized are in some sense predetermined or at least favored, due to universal semantic requirements. In this view, explicit finiteness contrasts, for example, which involve the marking of non-matrix verbs as non-tense-bearing, following or accompanied by the development of tense morphology for matrix verbs, should not develop.

I claim that the development of new functional contrasts is not the product of a universal functional-semantic hierarchy, but can be triggered by the information-structural demands of a specific discourse culture. The development of a finiteness contrast illustrates this claim well, precisely because it is unexpected under the universal functional-semantic view. Finiteness contrasts are not functionally homogeneous across languages, but serve different types of information-structuring function. Using evidence from Sri Lankan Malay, I will show that predicate-focusing is a plausible trigger for the development of a grammaticalized finiteness contrast, with non-finite verbal and adjectival predicates supporting the focal status of the tense-marked predicate.

In Sri Lankan discourse culture, the most recent event in a series of related events is tense-marked, whereas subsequent events appear in chronological order, as adjunct clauses. It is possible to alter the linear order in which the most recent event ordinarily appears farthest right in a left-branching structure, in order to focus a non-primary event, but the (non-)finiteness status of the focused clause, typically a participle, must not be affected by its displacement to the right of the tense-marked clause.

These facts have had a robust effect on Sri Lankan Malay negation morphology, which obligatorily reflects the finiteness contrast. In Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil, the relevant model language, contrastive tense morphology is structurally suppressed under negation. This is reflected in Sri Lankan Malay, whose tense morphology cannot co-occur with negation morphology and in which not all tense distinctions are recoverable in negation contexts. Nevertheless, non-finite complement clauses and adjunct clauses must display distinctive non-finite negation morphology, suggesting that the finiteness contrast is more salient than tense contrasts in the Sri Lankan discourse culture. This is attributed to the salience of contrastive focus, which impinges on the distribution of predicates, as it does on the distribution of their nominal arguments.

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