

THE IMPACTS OF PREPOSING AND POSTPOSING STRATEGIES ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION IN ENGLISH SENTENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the relationship between the various strategies of preposing and postposing on the one hand; and the information structure (given and new), on the other hand . There are seven strategies used to prepose or postpose certain sentence elements.Each of these strategies has its own information structure . Some of them require that given information precede new information , while others require that new information precede given information .

The syntactic reordering of sentence elements may lead to some semantic difficulties for both learners of English and translators.They may find it difficult to produce the precise semantic interpretation resulting from processes of preposing and postposing ;therefore, this study tries to deal with such difficulties.

This study is carried out on the sentential level.Besides,only the written language is taken into consideration .The spoken medium falls outside the scope of this study although there are references to prosodic factors here and there throughout the paper.

1-INTRODUCTION

The strategies of preposing and postposing are linguistic phenomena of communication.These phenomena can be either linguistically determined and/or textually motivated.The former case is positionally characterized by moving certain sentence elements from their canonical unmarked slots either to the front or to the end position.



Many linguists point out to the fact that in order to be effective in discourse, writers have to be aware of their readers' interests; what they know and what they do not know (cf. Clark and Clark 1977:31). They may refer to things their readers know and tell them things they do not know. In other words, they have to let their readers distinguish between given information and new information; which of the sentence elements should be regarded as given and which should be regarded as new. In this respect, Givon (1993:171) states that the grammatical devices in actual communication are in fact a reflection of mental and contextual factors and probably the inner feelings of the producer.

It is known that English does not show much flexibility with regard to word-order especially in written discourse. The arrangement of elements in the English sentence is almost fixed. For that reason, English resorts to certain devices by which some sentence elements can be highlighted. Since it is difficult to represent the prosodic devices in the written language, several syntactic devices are introduced to enable writers to reorder their sentences; to prepose certain elements and postpose other elements to give them emphasis and prominence.

It is assumed that the changes in word-order will affect the distribution of information (given-new) within the sentence. Thus, the distribution of information in an active sentence, for example, will differ when that sentence is changed into passive. Furthermore, the flow of information in its marked pattern runs from given to new, but this arrangement may be reversed as a result of using one of the strategies of preposing and postposing.

2-STRATEGIES OF PREPOSING

The grammatical functions in English are defined positionally; therefore, English imposes constraints on the shuffling of word-order (Verma, 1980:287). However, word-order in English is fixed only in the unmarked normal pattern (Muir, 1973:97). In the marked patterns, we may have preposing and postposing of certain elements.

There are seven strategies of preposing and postposing; two of which are preposing strategies, while the other five are postposing strategies. In

the coming pages we will discuss the two strategies of preposing, namely: thematization and It-clefts.

2-1: THEMATIZATION

English does not have a high degree of flexibility with regard to the order of elements in the sentence. However, it has some devices to change the fixed word-order. Thematization is a process used to prepose a particular sentence element as theme leaving the rest of the sentence as rheme. This process is also called topicalization because the preposed element becomes the topic, while the remainder stands for its comment, i.e., what is said about the topic. The thematized element is not necessarily the subject of the sentence. Other sentence elements can also be thematized. The thematized element in its marked place becomes more prominent than its place in the unmarked pattern (see Palmer 1976:159, Huddleston 1984:454, Quirk et al 1985:1377, Eastwood 2000:55). Chomsky (1964:22) argues that topicalization is a syntactic device which isolates one of the constituents of a sentence as topic and shifts it to sentence initial position. Muir (1972:97) mentions four sentence elements that can be thematized: the complement, the adjunct, the subject and the predicated theme. Consider the following example:

- 1- This man I do not like.
- 2- Over the hill, we declared our love.
- 3- A clever doctor he will become.

Glasse (1962:15) points out that there are certain reasons for moving elements such as to give emphasis to a particular element, to avoid monotony and to avoid obscurity and awkwardness; for example :

- 4- Dogs I love but cats I can't stand.

As far as information system is concerned, the unmarked flow of information runs from given to new information. This means that the theme of a sentence represents given information, while the rheme represents new information (Halliday 1994:60). Kopple (1996:55) argues that we observe the given as an indicator to a direct antecedent in memory and look for it. Once we find it, we relate the new information to it. However, in marked themes, the fronted element may carry the new information, while the deferred element(s) will represent the given information. Let's see the following example:

- 5-(a) : My friend has a lot of books.
- (b) : A lot of books my friend has.

The sentence(5-a) represents the unmarked pattern where the grammatical subject is thematized representing given information, while (5-b) represents the marked pattern where the object is thematized to convey the new information.

2-2:It-Clefts

The process of It-cleft is used to prepose a particular sentence element to give it prominence. It is achieved by cleaving the sentence into two clauses ,each with its own information structure(Khlil 1999:90).The first clause begins with the empty “It” and a form of BE , while the second clause begins with a relative pronoun such as “who” or “that”(Crystal 1990:201).Consider the following example:

6-(a):My father built this house.

(b):It is my father who built this house.

The element following “It” and BE is preposed to be highlighted because it is the most important (new) information.However,not only the subject can be highlighted by this process.Other sentsnce elements can also be highlighted.Consider the following example:

7-It was a short story that George wrote.

8-It was yesterday that my aunt arrived.

9-It was green that we painted the room.

A cleft construction is useful in writing because we can not use intonation or other prosodic devices in written language(Swan 1995:114).Besides,it is of some stylistic value enabling the writer to demonstrate a special or contrastive focus without having to resort to typographical shifts,underlining,bold type,capitals,etc.(Nash 1986:30).Moreover,the cleft construction is a powerful stylistic device for it combines the mechanisms of predication and topicalization.It serves as a deictic category to draw the attention of the addressee to a particular part of the sentence(Verma 1980:29).

The It-cleft construction preposes the new information before the given information.The element used after It and BE is the most important element which carries the highest degree of communicative dynamism while that used after the relative pronoun(who,that) is less important and can be recovered from the context.Kopple(1996:59)argues that the process of It-cleft is used by writers when they are confident that their readers already have the given information in mind but are facing obstacles in

understanding the new information. For example, when readers know that something was done, but they do not know who did it or how it was done. In this case, writers use an It-cleft to focus on the appropriate person or thing (Farhan 1999:59). Consider the following example:

10-It was the minister who welcomed the king.

In (10) the readers already know that the king was received but they do not know who received him; therefore, the writer used an It-cleft to highlight the involved person.

It-clefts reverse the typical arrangement of information in the unmarked pattern of declarative sentences. Kopple (1996:60) states that when writers use this form, the urgency they feel to communicate the new information justifies expressing the new information before the given information, especially that the given is usually very nearly apparent. Jacobs (1995:177) states the following example:

11-It was the bulldozer that destroyed the cottage.

In this example, the addressee knows that the cottage had been destroyed, but does not know who or what destroyed it.

3-STRATEGIES OF POSTPOSING

The other five processes are used to postpone certain sentence elements to the end of the sentence. In all these processes, an element is moved from its unmarked position and postponed at or towards the end of the sentence.

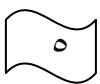
3-1:PSEUDO-CLEFTS

This process is also called wh-cleft because a wh-relative pronoun is used in a nominal clause functioning as one of the sentence elements (subject, object, complement, adverbial). The postponed element is given end-focus and highlighted because it is the most important piece of information. This process also cleaves the sentence into two parts. One of the two parts is put in a superordinate clause, while the other is a subordinate clause. The first part begins with a wh-word, while the second part is introduced by a form of BE; for instance:

12-(a): What she needs is love.

However, this arrangement of elements can be reversed by placing the nominal relative clause (what she needs) at the end of the sentence. (12-a) above can be reordered as follows:

12-(b): Love is what she needs.



Syntactically speaking a pseudo-cleft sentence is essentially an SVC pattern in which the subject or the complement is realized by a wh-clause. Consider the following examples:

13-How he arrived was a mystery.

14-Why they quarrelled is strange.

15-Where they camped is an ancient place.

Fichtner(1993:24) states that the task of the pseudo-cleft construction is to identify the person or the thing that fulfils the specifications set forth in the wh-clause;for example:

16 –What George gave me was a nice pen.

Huddleston (1984: 46) argues that the pseudo-cleft is a special case for the identifying BE construction : the case where the identified role is associated with a fused relative construction .Consider the following example :

17- What they studied is an easy subject.

In (17), BE has the identifying sense , while the relative clause (what they studied) is a fused relative.

Quirk etal (1985: 1388) argue that a pseudo-cleft sentence is less restricted than the It -cleft one because through the use of the substitute verb Do , it more freely permits marked force to fall on the predication ; for instance:

18- What he did was buy a house

In (18) , we have an anticipatory focus on the DO item ; the main focus coming at normal end – focus .

From the above examples, it is clear that the pseudo-cleft construction highlights new information by placing it at the end of the sentence. Unlike It – clefts, pseudo – clefts result in preposing the given information and postposing the new information . The element that comes after BE carries the highest degree of communicative dynamism because it is the new information said about the subject (the wh clause) which constitutes the given information ; for example :

19- What he saw was a wild animal

In this sentence , the subject , which is realized by the wh- nominal clause, stands for the given information , while the complement represents the new information .

Wh –clefts are used when there is a need to give a strong clarification of an issue or a forceful reply to a question . Besides , they respond to the readers' probable questions by showing contrasts (Kopple 1996: 58)

Quirk et al (1985 : 1387) remark that such a construction can make explicit the division between given and new parts of the communication . It is to be noted that the arrangement of the pseudo- cleft sentence elements can be reversed by putting the nominal Wh – clause after BE . consider the following example stated by Jacobs (1995 : 178)

- 20- (a)- What the colonists wanted was freedom from external taxation .
 (b)- Freedom from external taxation was what the colonists wanted .

The distribution of information is also reversed due to the change in word –order. In (20 a) , the given precedes the new information , while in (20 b) , the new precedes the given information .

3-2:PASSIVIZATION

Passivization is a means used for postponing the subject to the end position . The agentive subject here is deferred and turned into an agent carrying end focus , for example :

- (a –) Who painted the picture ?
 21
 (b-) It was painted by my father .

In (21-a) the agent carries the highest degree of communicative dynamism because it is the new information .

In addition to its function in allocating end –focus to the agent, passivization is also used for contrastive purposes . Consider the following example :

- (a-) John wrote the whole book .
 22-
 (b-) The whole book was written by John .

It seems as if (22 a) answers the question:

“ What did John write ?” , while (22 b) answers the question “ who wrote the whole book ?”

(Leech and short 1981 cited in Mohammad 2002 : 42)

Sometimes, passivization gives focus to the verb element if the agent is omitted either because it is unimportant or dispensable ; for instance :

- 23 – The meeting was at last held .

Moreover , the new information may be carried by other elements such as the adverbial . Consider the following examples:

24 – The treaty was signed in 1940 .

25- The party was held in the garden .

Passivization is very useful in contexts where it is irrelevant to state who actually carried out the action (Crystal 1990: 47) . Moreover , we often prefer to begin a sentence with something that is known and then move to the new information (Mohammad 2002 :43.). Besides,passive constructions make the text more cohesive.Consider the following examples:

26- (a):The child ran and was hit by a car.

(b):The child ran and a car hit him.

It is clear that (26-a) is more cohesive than (26-b) because it retains the same subject.The preposed object in passive sentences conveys the given information ,while the postposed subject conveys the new information.Consider the following example:

27-The battle was won by the Indians.

In (27),the readers already know that a battle took place ,but they do not know which of the two parties won it.So, “The battle” is regarded as the given information, while “the Indians” is regarded as the new information.

Passivization is a good choice when the agent is either obvious or unimportant.It helps writers express given information at the beginning of sentences. Besides “the gain in getting given information before new information will usually offset the losses incurred with greater sentence length and with the marked order of goals being expressed before agents.” (Kopple 1996:56). Spender (1997 :13) argues that passive is described as an active sentence in which the agent is ‘superfluous’ and the patient is topicalized by being made into the subject .She adds (ibid:14) that the producer chooses passive voice in order to place a concept, that is the agent in an event, in a position that is more natural for it to receive sentential accent , a position where most new information tends to be located.

3-3 : EXTRAPOSITION

Extraposition means moving an element from its normal position to a position at or near the end of the sentence (Crystal 1990 :131).So extraposition is a postposing strategy which is similar to the process of right-dislocation in the sense that it involves the deferring of a non-final sentence constituent to a final position where it will be more prominent and more highlighted (Fareh 1993:10 ; Khalil 1999:92).

The process of extraposition involves the replacement of the deferred element by a substitute form .This form is known as extrapositive “It “ (Crystal 1990 :13) or anticipatory ‘It ’ (Quirk etal 1985 :1391) . The extraposed element could be either the subject or the object . The clausal subject can be extraposed whether it is realized by a finite or non –finite clause .The normal subject position is filled by the anticipatory ‘It’ which puts the addressee in an anticipative mood for the delayed topic which appears at the end of the sentence (Verma 1980:288) . Thus, we can make a simple rule for the process of extraposition :

Subject + predicate----- It + predicate +subject

Consider the following example :

28-(a) :To see him there astonished me.

(b) : It astonished me to see him there.

The deferred subject which is realized by the non-finite clause(to see him there) bears the new information, while the fronted predicate bears the given information. The subject can also be realized by a non-finite ‘ing’ clause , a nominal ‘that’ clause or a wh-nominal clause.Consider the following examples :

29- It was difficult passing the exam.

31-It is said that he found a treasure.

32-It is a pleasure to teach Elizabeth.

33-It is hard to win the prize.

30-It does not matter what they do.

3-4 :EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

The existential construction is a post posing strategy. It defers an item to end-position to receive end-focus . This strategy is used to avoid beginning a sentence with a completely new element (Swan 1995 : 289).It is formed by starting a sentence with the expletive ‘There’ followed by a simple form of BE; for example :

34- There is a book on the table.

The element used after the BE carries the highest degree of communicative dynamism ;therefore,it is the new information.In (34) above ‘a book’ is the new information , while ‘ on the table’ is the given information .

The word “ there” involves the existence of a particular state of affairs ; therefore , it is called existential ‘there’ . It has no locative meaning as the adverbial ‘there’. Besides , BE is not the only verb used with existential constructions . Other verbs may also be used though rarely . Consider the following examples :

35 – There exists some difficulties .

36 – There arose dark clouds .

37 – There occurred certain problems .

38 – There appeared a huge shark .

Quirk etal (1985 :1403) argue that there is a correspondence between existential constructions and clauses of equivalent meaning as specified in terms of the basic clause patterns on condition that they must have indefinite subjects after BE . Consider the following examples :

a – Something must be wrong .

39 –

b – There must be something wrong .

40- a-Someone was in the house .

b – There was someone in the house .

41- a – A man was waiting .

b – There was a man waiting .

42- a – Many boys were collecting stones .

b – There were many boys collecting stones .

43- a – A man was making us dinner .

- b – There was a man making us dinner .
- 44- a –Someone has painting the house green .
- b – There was someone painting the house green .
- 45- a – A lady was writing a letter inside .
- b – There was a lady writing a letter inside.

It is clear from the above examples that the distribution of information in existential sentences flows from new to given information .

Farhan (1999:54)states that the existential ‘ there’ provides a useful way to announce that what follows is going to be new . He cites the following example :

- a - A unicorn was in the garden .
- 46
- b – There was a unicorn in the garden .

The subject “ a unicorn” represents the new information, while the adverbial “ in the garden” represents the given information .

3-5 :DISLOCATION

Both preposing and postposing can be achieved by the process of dislocation which involves dislocating an element either to the left or to the right in the sentence. Quirk etal (1985 : 1310) call these constructions “ postponed” and “ anticipated” identification respectively .

The postponed identification involves placing a proform earlier in the sentence , while the noun phrase to which it refers is placed finally. This process is called right-dislocation (Mohammad 2002 :51)

Consider the following example :

- 47 – He is a genius , my friend George .

The anticipated identification , on the other hand , is familiar in informal spoken English. It involves putting a noun phrase initially and a

reinforcing pronoun stands ‘ proxy ‘ for it in the relevant position in the sentence. This is called left- dislocation ; for example :

48 : My friend George , I saw him yesterday .

Dislocation , unlike topicalization , does not involve a gap at the extraction place. There is a pronoun linked with the dislocated constituent referring backward or forward to that constituent . Consider the following example :

49 : a – The headmaster , I think he is tough.

b – I think he is tough , the headmaster.

In the process of dislocation , both the pronoun and the dislocated construction to which it refers represent the given information , while what is said about them is considered the new information . Consider the following example :

50 a – He is very quarrelsome , my neighbour .

b- My neighbour, he is very quarrelsome .

In both (50 a) and (50 b) the pronoun ‘ he ‘ and the noun phrase to which it refers (my neighbour) stand for the given information , while the complement “ very quarrelsome” stand for the new information said about the subject .

4- CONCLUSIONS

The following are the main points arrived at in the current paper:

- 1 – English has various strategies and constructions used for the sake of preposing and postposing certain sentence elements . Some of these devices are used for preposing, while others are used for postposing .
- 2-The various strategies of preposing and postposing affect the distribution of given and new information within sentences. Some of these devices result in putting given before new information, while others lead to putting new before given information.

3-Because English does not have a flexible word-order and because the prosodic devices can not be shown in written English, the above strategies can be used to highlight certain sentence elements.

4-The influence of preposing and postposing on thematic organization and information distribution may heavily affect the ideational meanings of the sentence elements. It is discovered that the above strategies affect both the thematic system (theme-rheme) and the information system (given- new information).

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This paper tries to investigate how the different degrees of communicative dynamism (C D) contribute in the distribution of given and new information in English and Arabic on the sentence level . Many linguists argue that in the un marked pattern , the theme always carries the given information because it conveys the lowest degree of CD , while the Rheme carries the new information because it conveys the highest degree of CD . Yet, that may only be in English and other indo- European languages which tend to place the most important- information towards the end of sentences . We shall try to investigate whether Arabic resembles English in this respect or not . We will adopt Firbas's model

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المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث العلاقة بين مختلف طرق التقديم والتأخير من ناحية وترتيب المعلومة (المعلومة الجديدة والمعلومة القديمة) من ناحية أخرى. هناك سبع طرق متبعة لتقديم أو تأخير بعض مكونات الجملة لكل واحدة منها ترتيب معلومات خاص بها بحيث يتطلب بعضها وضع المعلومة القديمة قبل المعلومة الجديدة بينما يتطلب الآخر وضع المعلومة الجديدة قبل المعلومة القديمة.

وقد يؤدي إعادة ترتيب مكونات الجملة إلى بعض الصعوبات التي قد تواجه متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية والمترجمين منها واليها على حد سواء مما قد يجعل من الصعب عليهم التوصل إلى التفسير الدلالي السليم الناجم عن عمليات التقديم والتأخير. ومن هذا المنطلق تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على مثل هذه الصعوبات.

وتتناول هذه الدراسة مستوى الجملة فقط وضمن اللغة المكتوبة فقط أي أن اللغة المنطوقة تقع خارج نطاق هذه الدراسة رغم أن هناك إشارات إليها هنا وهناك في هذه الدراسة.

