



EXPLORING ENGLISH INFORMATION PACKAGING CONSTRUCTIONS IN WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE

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| Abstract

Information structure refers to the relationship between sentence properties and the surrounding discourse: the legitimacy of the sentences may depend on what has been established by the immediately preceding sentences or phrases in the written and spoken language. Passive clauses, extraposition, the existential construction, the 'it'-cleft construction, pseudo-clefts, dislocation, and pre- and post-posing are described as non-canonical constructions. The paper is to characterize the syntactic differences between these constructions and their basic counterparts and to investigate the factors that encourage or discourage the use of one of these constructions as opposed to the more basic counterpart.

| Keywords

Information structure, non-canonical constructions, written and spoken language

| Article Information:

Accepted: 20 June 2023

Published: 30 August 2023

DOI:10.60087/jklst.vol2.n2.p.74

1. Introduction

As writers and speakers, we can present information to readers and audiences in a variety of ways, emphasizing different aspects of its meaning through the use of various word orders and sentence structures. Commonly, this concept is known as information structuring. Specifically, when discussing process terminology, we can recognize that it involves the reordering of elements, while other elements involve the realignment of semantic and syntactic components.

Changing the position of the primary idea, also known as the rheme, in English can be achieved through a variety of packaging strategies. Information packaging in English refers to the practice of rearranging words, phrases, and clauses to highlight specific information or convey distinct meanings.

2. Canonical and Noncanonical Constructions

With its fixed word order, English typically follows an SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) pattern in its sentence construction. For example, in sentence (1) **"My uncle builds a house"**, the word order conforms to this pattern. However, not all sentences in English strictly adhere to the SVO pattern. For instance, sentence (2) **"Hamburger, I ate"** does not follow the typical word order, but it is still considered grammatically acceptable in English. Rather than being ungrammatical, sentence (2) represents a noncanonical construction. In this case, the speaker highlights the act of eating a hamburger, conveying their motivation or emphasizing a particular aspect of the message.

Noncanonical constructions, which involve deviating from the conventional sentence structure, are often used for information packaging. These constructions allow speakers to deliver information according to their needs or motivations. By utilizing these uncommon sentence structures, speakers have the ability to emphasize certain information while downplaying others.

3. Information Structure and Information packaging strategies

Languages are organized to reflect the content and purpose of utterances, particularly the information conveyed through words and sentence structures. This organization is known as information structure or information packaging.

There are two main approaches to information structure. Firstly, linguistic choices often distinguish between information already known or previously discussed (given information) and information new to the conversation. Secondly, certain choices in language reflect the distinction between the topic, which is backgrounded or assumed, and the focus, which is highlighted or emphasized.

The term "packaging" was introduced by (Chafe, 1976) to describe how syntactic structuring serves a pragmatic function. Within the information structure, one category is the distinction between given and new information. Given information refers to what is currently in the forefront of the listener's mind, while new information pertains to what is introduced during the ongoing conversation.

Information packing in spoken language refers to the many meanings sent by accentuating or highlighting particular aspects in various contexts within a sentence. Sentences (a) and (b) serve as examples of this.

"(a) He ate APPLE."

"(b) He ATE apple."

The way these two sentences deliver the content is what makes them different from one another. The word APPLE is highlighted in the first phrase, whereas the word ATE is highlighted in the second. As a result, the two phrases' presentation of their respective ideas differs.

Information packaging refers to non-canonical structures used in written language that differ from their fundamental or canonical counterparts not in terms of "truth conditions," but in the manner in which the content is communicated (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). Huddleston and Pullum (2005) provide illustrative examples of both canonical and non-canonical versions. The non-canonical variants' word order is less common and subject to pragmatic constraints that do not apply to the default versions, rendering them less fundamental than their default counterparts.

Huddleston and Pullum (2005) identifies eight primary information-packing constructions in English from a syntactic perspective. Some of these structures include complement prepositioning, postpositioning, subject-dependent inversion, existential and presentational sentences, extraposition, dislocation, clefts, and passive voice. These constructions are illustrated by (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sample sentences for eight different types of information constructs (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005)

Information Construction	Canonical type	Non-canonical type
preposing	He will become a clever doctor	A clever doctor he will become
Postposing	have read <u>all the articles she has written</u> very carefully several times	I have read very carefully several times <u>all the articles she has written</u>
Inversion	"A solitary woman who spent her days reading and gardening lived in a little wooden house in the middle of a deep forest " (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005)	"In a little wooden house in the middle of a deep forest lived a solitary woman who spent her days reading and gardening". (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005)
Existential	A man is outside	There's a man outside
Left dislocation	My wife doesn't know this	My wife, she doesn't know this
Right dislocation	"The people from next door are still here." (Nhat Nguyen, 2013)	"They're still here, the people from next door." (Nhat Nguyen, 2013)
Cleft	Jack has a secret to tell Ann.	It is a secret that Jack has to tell Ann.
Passive	A bear attacked him	He was attacked by a bear
Extraposition	"That he's guilty is clear." (Nhat Nguyen, 2013)	"It is clear that he's guilty" (Nhat Nguyen, 2013)

While the mobility of clause constituents is generally restricted in English, a change in the position of the rheme can still be achieved through information-packaging strategies (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). These strategies include simple word-order change (reordering) and realignment, which involves the alternative pairing of syntactic functions with semantic constituents in the sentence. These strategies allow for different ways of packaging information within a sentence in order to convey specific meaning or emphasis.

4. Commonly-used Information packaging constructions

a. Clefts

Cleft constructions, in general, involve dividing a sentence into two clauses: a cleft clause and a relative-like clause (Parker, 2003). The purpose of these constructions is to highlight a specific element within the sentence. (Lambrecht K; Ariel, 1996) introduced the fundamental structural types of cleft constructions in English and the canonical sentence. This can be illustrated by the following example:

- a. *Jack has a secret to tell Ann.* [**Canonical sentence**]
- b. ***It** is a secret that Jack has to tell Ann.* [**it-cleft**]
- c. *What Jack has to tell Ann is a secret.* [**wh-cleft**]
- d. *A secret is what Jack has to tell Ann.* [**reverse wh-cleft**]

According to Lambrecht and Ariel (1996), these three types of cleft constructions offer different ways to package information while sharing common pragmatic aspects. The choice between cleft constructions is

influenced by four main factors: the speaker's assumption about the hearer's knowledge in the current context, the end-weight principle, topicality, and construction-specific constraints.

The structure of an it-cleft clause can be further analyzed into three components: the pronoun "it," the copula, and the focused constituent. Placing the focused element at the front of the it-cleft creates a less prominent emphasis in the wh-cleft. This emphasis is connected to the concept that it-clefts convey identificational or contrastive focus. This feature makes the it-cleft appropriate when a pragmatic proposition is highly activated.

b. Preposing or Fronting

Preposing, also known as fronting or topicalization (Chen, 2013; Callies & Keller, 2008), refers to a sentence structure where a constituent that is typically positioned after the verb is instead placed before it (Ward et al., 2001). However, the subject still maintains its preverbal position before the verb. Preposed constituents can belong to various phrasal categories, but it is most common for nominal elements, particularly objects, to be preposed (Callies & Keller, 2008). Complements, which typically occupy an internal position within the verb phrase (VP), can also occur in the front position before the nucleus of the clause.

Examples:

- a. *Twenty-four hours it had taken.*
- b. *Put anything you don't eat back in the fridge.*
- c. *Maybe Thursday I could take off*

In the case of focus complement preposing, the preposed constituent performs two functions. It serves as a link to the prior discourse as well as the value of the variable in the ongoing proposition indicated by the rest of the phrase.

Examples:

- a. *"I made a lot of sweetbreads. [A couple of pounds, I think I made for her.]"*
- b. *"I had two really good friends. [Their names were Damon and Jimmy.]"*
- c. *"I promised my father - [It was on Christmas Eve.] - to write home at my first opportunity."*
- d. A: *"Did you want tea?"* B: *"[No, I ordered coffee.]"*

Another term that is occasionally used to refer to this type of preposing is topicalization.

Example sentence:

"I don't eat many sweet things. I don't like cheesecake. But ice cream, I really like."

The phrase "ice cream" is preposed in this sentence. It acts as the clause's topic and ties to the prior mentions of sweets and cheesecake.

Echoing is a distinctive form of focus preposing that specifically questions the link between echoed words.

Example dialogue:

A: *"Cheeseburger, large fries, and a large Coke"*

B: *"[Large Fries you wanted?]"*

A: *"Diane gets along with all her colleagues"*

B: *"[David she gets along with?]"*

c. Extraposition

There is a linguistic pattern called extraposition in English, where a finite or infinitival clause can be positioned at the end of a sentence. This pattern is illustrated in the following sentences:

- a. *"I made it my objective to settle the matter."* (Kim & Sag, 2005)
- b. *"I owe it to you that the jury acquitted me."* (Kim & Sag, 2005)

In this pattern, an expletive or dummy pronoun "it" is introduced, which does not refer to anything and cannot be assigned a semantic role even though it is morphologically identical to the third-person singular pronoun.

Extraposition involves moving an element of the sentence from its usual position to the end of the sentence, as shown in the example below:

Example 1	Example 2
<p>a. <i>Passing the exam was difficult</i></p> <p>b. <i>He found a treasure.</i></p> <p>c. <i>Teaching Elizabeth is pleasant</i></p> <p>d. <i>To win the prize is hard</i></p> <p>e. <i>What they do does not matter.</i></p>	<p>f. <i>It was difficult passing the exam.</i></p> <p>g. <i>It is said that he found a treasure.</i></p> <p>h. <i>It is a pleasure to teach Elizabeth.</i></p> <p>i. <i>It is hard to win the prize.</i></p> <p>j. <i>It does not matter what they do.</i></p>

In Example 1, the topic is a long main clause. In contrast, in Example 2, the it-extraposition clause has been inserted into the subject position using the it-extraposition movement, and the long main clause has been relocated to the predicate position.

Extraposition, in accordance with (Celce-Murcia, 1987), is a grammatical construction employed for postponement that supports the concepts of "end-focus" and "end weight." Because dominating clauses are more effectively "encoded" and "decoded" in that location, it enables the placement of "heavy" structures near the end of a sentence (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). According to Anderson et al (1998), a phrase is more likely to be extraposed the longer and more complicated it is.

d. Existential there

Most clauses that use "there" as the subject require the verb "be" and are known as existential clauses. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2005) existential constructions with "there" involve using it as a placeholder in the subject position, with "be" as the verb. Typically, existential there-sentences follow the structure: **"There + be + noun phrase."**

Examples:

There is a unicorn in the garden.

There are unicorns in the garden.

Huddleston and Pullum (2005) analyze "there" as a pronoun, rather than a locative there that refers to a specific location.

The term "there" can be divided into two categories: dummy there and locative there. Dummy "there" has no independent or locative meaning. It is always unstressed and pronounced as /ðə r/. Its main functions include serving as a subject or a raised object in interrogative tags. For example, in the sentence "There is something wrong, isn't there?", dummy "there" functions as a grammatical subject rather than an adverbial. Its purpose is to indicate the existence of an entity or entities. In the sentence "There is nothing there, it simply asserts the existence of something " (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005).

In addition to the verb "be," other verbs can be used in existential expressions, although less commonly. Verbs such as "exist," "arise," "occur," and "appear" can also be employed in existential constructions. Consider the following examples:

a. *There exists some difficulties.*

- b. *There arose dark clouds.*
- c. *There occurred certain problems.*
- d. *There appeared a huge shark.*

According to their structural characteristics, existential sentences can be divided into two primary categories: bare existential and extended existential (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). The displaced subject, "there," the verb "be," and these elements alone or with adjuncts enclosed in parentheses, constitute the bare existential. On the other hand, expanded existential also includes the displaced subject in addition to "there," "be," and these other elements.

Examples of bare existentials:

- a. *"There's no food"* (Lee, 2011)
- b. *"There was a short meeting"* (Lee, 2011)

Examples of extended existentials:

- a. *"There's a pen on the table. [Locative extension]"* (Lee, 2011)
- b. *"There's one concert on Sunday. [Temporal extension]"* (Lee, 2011)
- c. *"There were two delegates absent. [Predicative extension]"* (Lee, 2011)
- d. *"There are still a few replies to come. [Infinitival extension]"* (Lee, 2011)
- e. *"There were several people killed. [Participial extension]"* (Lee, 2011)

e. Passive

By using an agented passive construction, one can alter the relationships within a sentence. The subject of this construction is the direct or indirect object of the active sentence. According to (Brinton LJ and Brinton DM, 2010), a periphrase (PV) signifies that the subject is affected or acted upon by the action. This periphrase is formed by a syntactic operation that converts an active sentence into a passive sentence.

Example: *"The jury awarded Jim first prize. -> Jim was awarded first prize by the jury."* (Brinton & Brinton, 2010)

In addition to its role in highlighting the agent, passivization is also used for contrastive purposes. Consider the following example:

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

In (a), the answer to the question "What did John write?" seems to be provided, while (b) addresses the question "Who wrote the whole book?"

5. Conclusion

The information being transmitted determines how language is employed. This diversity includes morphological markers, prosody, word order, and referential form selection. The categories of information that are relevant include the context in which a word or its referent has been used, such as whether it has been used previously or whether it is prominently featured in the current utterance or conversation.

Noncanonical constructions in English allow for flexible placement of information according to the speaker's preferences or needs. Noun phrases (information) are positioned either before or after their typical placements in these forms. Topicalization, cleft/pseudo-cleft constructions, employing "there" as an existential subject, and creating passive constructions using a by-phrase are a few examples of noncanonical constructions in English. In addition, there are left- and right-dislocations, which do not always fall into the preposing or postposing categories.

The restrictions of each non-canonical construction are different. For instance, while left dislocation might dislocate new information, topicalization cannot introduce new information. It is crucial to stress the need

for additional information structure research, with a particular emphasis on noncanonical structures, in order to build on earlier discoveries and permit more thorough discussions of this subject.

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