Three marked theme constructions in spoken English

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Abstract

In this article we draw a distinction between two domains of discourse functions: discourse management functions and discourse content functions. We focus on three marked theme (topic) constructions: Extraposition (XP) (aka. Left Dislocation/Detachment), Object Fronting (OF) (aka. Topicalization, Y-Movement), and Subject Marking (SM). We provide empirical evidence from naturally occurring spoken English texts showing that all three constructions have discourse content functions, and that XP and SM also have discourse management functions. The discourse content functions demonstrated are contrast, similarity, enumeration, listing within the theme, and hedged disagreement. In addition, we found that in the domain of discourse management, XP signals an assertive opening move through which speakers mark the beginning of a new segment of talk around a certain discourse topic, whereas SM signals a sustaining move, through which speakers continue negotiating a given discourse topic despite some informational difficulty (e.g. heavy or new theme).

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1. Introduction

Two pragmatic perspectives of information structure prevail in the literature; sometimes both exist in the text of the same linguist. One is based on a division of the sentence into informational parts, using the terms theme–rheme or topic–comment, and the other assigns specific functions to specific constructions, not necessarily related to the theme–rheme dichotomy. As far as the theme (topic) of the sentence is concerned, the former approach is primarily preoccupied with “referential coherence” (Givón, 1993:201), whereas the latter specifies “discourse functions” (Prince, 1998:282). For example, extraposition (left dislocation) in the first approach may be...
viewed as a “topic establishing device” (Gregory and Michaelis, 2001:1670), a tool “to introduce discourse-new referents” or “to reintroduce a referent” which has “fallen into the background” (Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976:242–243), while in the second approach extraposition may be grasped as a tool to establish “contrast” (Chafe, 1976:34; Givón, 1993:181–184), to “focus the listener’s attention” (Ochs Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976:245), or to gain control over the floor (Duranti and Ochs, 1979:404). There are other approaches to information structure, central among them is the present-day Prague approach of Topic–Focus Articulation, which tackles information structure from a formal–semantic point of view (Sgall et al., 1986; Rooth, 1992; Partee, 1991). Since we are taking a primarily pragmatic stance, we will not discuss this and other approaches in this paper.

Though the object of our investigation is three marked theme constructions, we do not focus, in this article, on the theme–rheme dichotomy, but rather we take the perspective of discourse functions in a narrower sense. This practice will be similar to Kim’s (1995:268) strategy in his analysis of the functions of WH-clefts: “these various interactional uses cannot be explained from the informational perspective alone in terms of presupposition/focus or given/new, because what is crucially involved in them is the speaker’s interactional exploitation of the grammatical form and functions of WH-clefts as a stance-marker”.

We suggest that discourse functions should be divided into two types: discourse management functions and discourse content functions. Despite a seeming similarity between these terms and the pair de dicto–de re (Frajzyngier, 1991:219–221) or between discourse management and metalinguistic, we find our own terms to be more appropriate.

Discourse management has to do with the dynamic segmentation of the text. Chafe (1994:121) points out that naturally spoken discourse is hierarchically segmented: “the most typical kind of topic is probably best regarded as a basic-level unit. There may be supertopics that tie together a group of basic-level topics, which may in turn contain subtopics within them”. In order to delimit such a segment (be it a basic-level unit, a supertopic or a subtopic), linguistic and discursive means are applied to signal whether the next sentence is still within the given segment or starts a new one. Using Eggins and Slade’s (1997:68–71) conversational moves, we will show that within the realm of text segmentation, marked theme constructions can function as “opening moves” (i.e. opening a higher-order segment of talk) or as “sustaining moves” (i.e. sustaining the current higher-order segment while overcoming some informational difficulty).

Text segmentation has been typically attributed to “discourse markers” (Schiffrin, 1987:31), less often to syntactic constructions, such as the marked theme constructions. Indirectly, the notion of “thematic importance” (Givón, 1993:204), the function of “referent introduction” (Geluykens, 1992:153), as well as the function of “topic establishing” (Gregory and Michaelis, 2001:1670) come close to the notion of text segmentation, although they are certainly not the same. The three former notions are all based on a methodology which mechanically keeps track of the referent’s (in)accessibility in prior discourse and persistence in subsequent discourse; and indeed it is often the case that in a new segment a new theme is introduced, which would then be repeated in subsequent discourse. But not all new segments are thus characterized. A marked theme construction may, for instance, signal the opening of a new segment, but the referent of that marked theme does not have to be the one repeated in subsequent discourse. Conversely, a new referent might be introduced without opening a new (higher-order) segment (as often happens when referents of minor importance are introduced into the discourse). Thus, what Givón (1993:201) calls “referential coherence”, namely the calculus of the referents’ activation states and distribution, is no doubt an important mechanism, as is the management of the sequentially ordered identity of referents (“thematic progression” in Daneš, 1974; cf. the notion
of “centering theory” as used by Grosz et al., 1983, 1995, and others stimulated by them), but they are only tools, and not the only tools, used in order to keep track of referential identity and accessibility. To conclude, what makes our work different from others’ is its perspective of not being based on a calculus of activation states but rather on a calculus of text segmentation, while activation states are seen merely as a by product.

In addition to discourse management functions, the marked theme constructions also signal discourse content functions. The latter do not operate in the realm of text segmentation, but in the realm of expressing a small-scale assessment within an ongoing segment, giving the speaker’s take on elements in the world of referents. Two types of assessment come to mind here: logical and modal. The speaker may convey (a) a logical relation between referents, or (b) an attitude towards a referent. The first type of functions involves logical relations such as contrast, similarity, enumeration, and listing within the theme. Two or more referents (two in contrast, more in listing) in the discourse are selected to appear in the marked theme of one or more relatively adjacent sentences, thereby signaling the existence of that logical relation. The exact nature of this relation emerges from the semantics and pragmatics of the context. To express these logical relations, the sentence with the marked theme interacts with other sentences in its immediate vicinity (which might be unmarked or similarly marked), forming a pragmatic construction. For example, in the sequence: “these shoes we never did put on a horse. We just put the shoes that were already made” (example 32 below), the first sentence begins with the object and is therefore syntactically marked (i.e. a marked theme construction), while the second sentence is syntactically unmarked; but the two, together, form a pragmatic construction of contrast.

The other type of content functions, the modal functions, is less frequent: we only have one example of it. In the modal function, the speaker selects a recent referent in order to express a remark that passes judgment about it. In our corpus we found this judgment to be hedged disagreement.

The two domains of functioning – discourse management and discourse content – entail a difference in the textual patterns encoding them. While a discourse management device involves a single move in the unfolding of the discourse and is open ended, i.e. it applies until its effect somehow fades away or until another management signal appears, the discourse content device involves a complex move, a structure with two or more referential entities, put in a local relation in a clearly delimited portion of the broader segment. In other words, when the marked theme construction has a discourse management function of an opening move, the segment that is opened is usually relatively long and no internal structure is implied by the opening move. On the other hand, when a marked theme construction has a discourse content function of expressing logical relations, the syntactic construction inaugurates a local and internally organized pragmatic construction around it.

We suggest that two out of the three marked theme constructions under discussion operate both in the realm of discourse management and in the realm of discourse content. This is not an unusual situation in language. Often a large number of functions are signaled through a limited number of linguistic means. The ambiguity that is built into this economy principle does not confuse the hearer, since the semantics and pragmatics of each occurrence of the marked theme construction support only one of the two kinds of interpretation, either as a content or as a management device.

The three constructions we discuss in this paper are Extraposition (XP) (also known as Left-Dislocation, or Detachment), Object Fronting (OF) (also known as Topicalization, or Y-Movement), and Subject Marking (SM). The latter is a name we have chosen for sentences in
which the subject is marked via prosodic means, namely as a separate intonation unit. An example of each of the constructions (taken from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, Part 1 (SBCSAE1), compiled by Du Bois, 2000) is given below.\(^1\)

(1) \textit{Extraposition:}  
Cathy\(_i\) - -  
She\(_i\)’s not a good friend herself.

(2) \textit{Object Fronting:}  
These shoes\(_i\) we never did put Ø\(_i\) on a horse.

(3) \textit{Subject Marking:}  
... Dad\(_i\),  
... you know,  
Ø\(_i\) has done some of it.

In the XP construction (example (1)), the sentence is divided into two parts: an extraposed referent “Cathy”, which is a marked theme, followed by a full sentence. Within the full sentence there is a resumptive pronoun “she”, which refers back to the extraposed referent. In contrast, in the case of OF (example (2)) as well as in the case of SM (example (3)), no resumptive element is added in the sentence. Rather, in OF the theme is marked by an order alternation; the object of the sentence “These shoes” appears before the subject and thus deviates from the unmarked SV(O) order. In SM the subject “Dad” is the theme of the sentence. Since in English the subject appears anyhow at the beginning of the unmarked sentence, it is impossible to mark the subject by an order alternation; the object of the sentence “These shoes” appears before the subject and thus deviates from the unmarked SV(O) order. Thus, in example (3) the subject is marked by the intonation pattern, i.e. it occupies a separate intonation unit, and, as such, it also bears “primary accent” (as defined in Chafe, 1994:60). In terms of word order, SM sentences are no different from unmarked SV(O) sentences. Likewise, morpho-syntactically, the SM sentence consists of the same constituents as the unmarked SV(O) sentence. What makes the SM construction marked is its prosody. That is, while in the unmarked sentence the subject and the verb phrase occupy a single intonation unit, and the subject lacks specific tune, in SM the subject is prosodically detached and has its own prominent tune. The delimitation into intonation units is affected by several parameters. The main parameters are changes in pitch, duration, intensity, voice quality, and pauses. However, not all these features need to be found at the same time for a unit boundary to exist. Some boundaries may involve several features, while others may involve only one feature (Chafe, 1994:58). Note that we have not conducted a full independent prosodic analysis of the text. We have accepted the prosodic analysis into intonation units in the SBCSAE, where each line in the text represents an intonation unit. However, in the next section we will provide a few prosodic diagrams to substantiate the notion of SM.

All three constructions have a marked theme. However, while OF involves a simple order alternation, and SM a simple prosodic alternation, XP involves a deeper alternation, including a

\(^1\) Each line in this corpus, and in the examples below, represents a separate intonation unit. Zeros and indices have been added to examples 1–3. For full transcription conventions see: http://www.ldc.upenn.edu/Projects/SBCSAE/transcription/sb-csae-conventions.html. In addition, we will provide here and there specific notes on notation to aid the reader when necessary.
morpho-syntactic change, evident by the occurrence of the resumptive element. Thus, the three constructions analyzed here are both similar and different: similar in that they all feature a marked theme, different in syntax and prosody. This study is based on the assumption that by and large, structural similarities entail functional similarities, and structural differences entail functional differences. One might, of course, end up sometimes with synonyms, but synonymy (truth-conditional or otherwise) cannot be the starting point of an investigation. Our aim is to determine the functional similarities and differences between the three constructions.

This work is based on an extensive analysis of naturally occurring oral discourse. The corpus used for the analysis is the SBCSAE1 for XPs and SMs. Due to the scarcity of OF we have used also SBCSAE2 and SBCSAE3 to collect a meaningful number of OF examples. The decision to work on a corpus of spontaneous spoken language stems from our conviction that it is in such naturally occurring discourse that the full potential of language is best manifested (Mathesius, [1961] 1975:9–13; Birner and Ward, 1998:27; Du Bois, 2003:49).

2. Previous studies and discussion

The following discussion of the three constructions covers both their form and their function. In the case of Extraposition and Object Fronting, most of the discussion presents the findings of leading studies conducted on these two constructions. In contrast, in the case of Subject Marking, due to the scarcity of literature, most of the discussion is not a review of the literature but rather a presentation of our own views.

2.1. Extraposition

The term Extraposition was first used (in this context) by Jespersen (1933:95): “A word or group of words is often placed by itself, outside the sentence proper, in which it is represented by a pronoun; we then speak of ‘extraposition’”. Jespersen provides the following example:

(4) Charles Dickens, he was a novelist!

The resumptive element, however, does not have to be a pronoun. It can be a lexical repetition of the extraposed referent, or sometimes even a lexical item which is only pragmatically related to the extraposed referent, as in the following example from the SBCSAE1 (for the reader’s convenience, “@” signifies laughter, and “=” signifies prosodic lengthening):

(5) and like,
my first hoof,
(H) .. that horse would have been,
.. lame,
@ @ < @ like cra=zy.

As for the function of the XP construction, most linguists who have done research on Extraposition in English have approached the issue using the lens of “referential coherence” (Givón, 1993:201). In other words, these researchers have mainly explored the question of the relation of the extraposed referent to preceding and subsequent discourse. Givón (1983:13–16; 1993:202) has suggested a methodology whereby topicality is measured both anaphorically and cataphorically. The main anaphoric measurement offered by Givón (1993:210) is that of
Referential Distance, in which the accessibility of the referent in prior discourse is examined. The main cataphoric measurement is that of Thematic Importance; it is arrived at by counting the occurrences of the referent in subsequent discourse (Givón, 1993:204).

Following Givón’s (1983) anaphoric and cataphoric measurements, Geluykens (1992:153) argues that the main function of XP in spoken English is that of “referent introduction”. He has arrived at this conclusion by analyzing the relationship between the extraposed referent and the preceding as well as the subsequent discourse. Thus, according to Geluykens (1992:154) the extraposed referent tends to be irrecoverable in prior discourse (i.e. discourse new), and to persist as topic in the subsequent discourse. Geluykens (1992:69) rationalizes: “It seems reasonable to assume that speakers, after having gone through the trouble of getting other participants to accept an irrecoverable referent, will do this with a view to developing the introduced referent in the following discourse”.

Following Givón, Gregory and Michaelis (2001) have also used both anaphoric and cataphoric measurements in their attempt to determine the difference between XP and OF constructions. With regard to XP, like Geluykens, they too argue that the extraposed referent tends to be discourse new, and to persist as topic in the following discourse. Therefore, they conclude that speakers use XP as a “topic establishing device” (Gregory and Michaelis, 2001:1670).

Another researcher who has dealt extensively with the XP construction is Prince. Unlike Geluykens (1992), and Gregory and Michaelis (2001), Prince (1998:282) argues that XP and OF (which she refers to as Left-Dislocation [LD] and Topicalization [TOP], respectively) “have nothing to do with topic-marking, at least not in English, but in fact have far more interesting and complex discourse functions”. According to Prince (ibid.), XP does not have a single, unitary function, but rather exhibits three distinct functions. The first is what she refers to as “Simplifying LDs” (Prince, 1998:284). In cases where the topic is new, it would be disfavored to place this topic in subject position. A possible solution, according to Prince (ibid.), is to “simplify the discourse processing of Discourse-new entities by removing the NPs … and creating a separate processing unit for them”. Thus, in such cases, XP is claimed to simplify the introduction of new NPs into the discourse. (The other two functions of XP according to Prince will be discussed later on.)

Thus, researchers dealing with the XP construction tend to agree that XP is generally used for establishing thematicity (topicality) of a (relatively new) referent in the discourse. However, at the same time, many of these researchers also point out that there seem to be cases of XP which do not fit into this unitary function. That is, these researchers report cases in which the extraposed referent is not new in the discourse, and also does not persist as theme in subsequent discourse.

Hence, Geluykens (1992:155) reports: “A small section of the database was found not to be referent-introducing”. Most of these are cases expressing either contrast or listing, which in our terms are discourse content functions. However, note that Geluykens (1992:158) treats contrastiveness and listing as exceptions and concludes that these cases and the referent-introducing XPs could actually be collapsed into a unitary function of “referent-highlighting, i.e. the introduction of a referent which is for some reason communicatively salient”.

Like Geluykens, Lambrecht (1994:183) also points out that there are cases in which the extraposed referent is already active in the discourse. According to Lambrecht (ibid.), in such cases the function of the XP is often “to mark a shift in attention from one to another of two or more already active referents”. In addition, he argues that XPs with pronominal NPs (e.g. “Me, I’m hungry”) “often have a ‘contrastive’ function” (ibid.). However, Lambrecht does not explain the contrast within a broader context. In addition, his analysis is based on constructed examples.
In contrast to Geluykens, and in accordance with Prince (1998), we will argue here that those XPs which do not fit into the pattern of referential coherence (i.e. XPs which involve a given, rather than new, theme) are not insignificant exceptions which should be forced into a general formula, or otherwise ignored. Rather, these sentences exhibit a separate function of XP, which can and should be defined in its own right.

As mentioned above, Prince (1998) indeed argues that XP has three distinct discourse functions. The second function of XP, according to Prince (1998:287), is to trigger an inference of a (po)set relation (i.e. a (partially ordered) set relation) between the extraposed referent and prior referents in the discourse. Prince argues that this is a function which XPs and OFs have in common.

In contrast to Prince (1998), and like Geluykens (1992), Birner and Ward (1998:93–95) argue that XP exhibits a unitary function of referent-highlighting, whereas the function of triggering an inference of a poset relation does not pertain to XP, but rather to OF. Since both Prince (1998), and Birner and Ward (1998) agree that poset relations are characteristic of OF constructions, a further discussion of this issue will be provided in the next section, in which we present previous studies of OF.

The third function of XP, according to Prince (1998:291), is a function motivated by syntactic constraints. In some cases the appearance of a resumptive pronoun in the proposition is a syntactic requirement. Therefore, Prince (1998:291) argues that such XPs are actually “a Topicalization in disguise”. However, we believe that since the difference between XP and OF is neutralized in these sentences, there is not much point in analyzing these cases any further.

2.2. Object Fronting

Several researchers (e.g. Prince, 1998; Gregory and Michaelis, 2001) have tried to work out the functional difference between XP and OF. Employing Givón’s anaphoric and cataphoric measurements, Gregory and Michaelis (2001:1696) argue that unlike the extraposed referent of XP sentences, the fronted object of OF sentences tends to be available in prior discourse, and usually does not persist as topic in subsequent discourse. Gregory and Michaelis (ibid.) conclude that in contrast to XP, OF does not function as a topic establishing device. Similarly, Chafe (1976:49) argues that in contrast to XP, OF is more strongly connected to the preceding discourse.

Prince (1998) argues that OF sentences fulfill simultaneously two different functions. The first is to trigger an inference of a poset relation that exists between the object and prior discourse, in other words, inviting the hearer to make a connection between the object and another item evoked in the prior discourse. According to Prince (1998:292–293) this is a function which some XPs (excluding “simplifying LDs”) and all OFs share in common. The second function of OF sentences, which differentiates OF from XP, is to evoke an open proposition in which the initial NP is marked as given, whereas the stressed element within the clause carries the new information, i.e. the stressed element is the focus of the sentence. Prince offers the following example:

(6) She had an idea for a project. She’s going to use three groups of mice. Onei, she’ll feed themi mouse chow . . . . Anotherj, she’ll feed themj veggies. And the thirdk, she’ll feed [ek] junk food.

In the above example, there are two XP sentences followed by an OF. According to Prince (1998:293), all three sentences trigger an inference of a poset relation. However, only the OF
construction is at the same time structured into a ‘focus frame’, i.e. an open proposition (She’ll feed the third group of mice X), which is given, followed by the instantiation (X = junk food), which is new. Prince (1998:294) argues that if the speaker had used an OF construction instead of the two former XPs, this would have created “subtle differences in either what she [the speaker] was taking to be salient shared knowledge or else in the information structure”.

Birner and Ward (1998) do not focus on OF per se. They claim that Preposing constructions (which includes fronting of any constituent: NP, PP, VP or AP) lean on a poset relation between a given utterance and prior discourse. They offer an extensive analysis of the different types of poset relations, the five most commonly used relations being set/subset, part/whole, type/subtype, greater-than/less-than, and identity (Birner and Ward, 1998:45). As for the function of topicalization (non-focal preposing), they do identify cases of contrast (including examples with OF), but they claim that this function cannot be generalized over all the examples. Then they proceed to offer a new analysis of topicalization constructions, in which they insist again on poset relations exemplified inter alia by OF, but they do not formulate a discourse function for these cases. The only examples that are assigned a discourse function are cases of “proposition assessment”, which involve fronted predicates, not objects (Birner and Ward, 1998:50–77).

We believe that describing the type of relation that exists between a certain entity and prior discourse does not reveal much about the discourse function of such constructions. That is, poset relations specify how referents are related to prior discourse, but not why. The purpose of our analysis is to try and answer why. Poset relations address the identity of the referents, while discourse content functions assess the logical relations between referents. A poset relation reveals that referent A is identical to or may be derived from referent B. A logical relation reveals that between referent A and B there pertains a relation of similarity, contrast, membership in an itemized list, etc. A poset relation has to do with the history of the referent and its roots in the textual past. Logical relations (and modal expressions) have to do with the here and now of a particular juncture in the text.

2.3. Subject Marking

Chafe (1994:57) points out that spontaneous discourse is not randomly divided into intonation units; rather, intonation units are “functionally relevant segments”. Similarly, Hirschberg and Pierrehumbert (1986:137) argue that prosodic phrasing creates prominence. For example, they show that in the sentence “And it eliminates retyping” the conjunction “and” gains prominence when it occupies a separate intonation unit. It follows that the division into intonation units is meaningful. Likewise, when the subject of the sentence occupies a separate intonation unit, such a construction is indeed functionally relevant.

The SM construction is rarely analyzed in the literature. The reason might be that much research in Information Structure is based on written rather than spoken language. In addition, Gregory and Michaelis (2001:1667) comment that “because the preclausal NP is in preverbal position, main-clause subjects cannot be unambiguously topicalized – a clause containing a subject-position gap looks identical to the predicate in a subject–predicate construction”. In other words, Gregory and Michaelis argue that the subject cannot be marked by a word order alternation. However, Gregory and Michaelis overlook the possibility of marking the subject through prosody.

Steedman (2000) (employing Pierrehumbert’s notation; Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg, 1990) indeed proposes a mapping between different tunes and elements of information structure
(e.g. theme, rheme and focus). However, unlike Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg (1990), he does not make a clear distinction between intermediate boundaries and final (intonational) boundaries. Hence, no clear differentiation is made between a sentence with an accented subject; compare Steedman’s example (4), (MARCEL) (proved COMPLETENESS), in which the whole sentence is a single intonation unit (consisting of two intermediate phrases), or rather, the same sentence comprising two separate intonation units (in other words, it is an SM construction). Although his work offers an interesting direction of possible mapping between prosody and information structure, it is not really applicable to our work, precisely because of the lack of clear distinction between intermediate and final prosody, which is at the heart of our definition of SM.

It is argued here that example (7) (taken from the SBCSAE1) and example (8) (a constructed counterpart of (7)) are NOT identical in form.

(7) ... Dad, 
... you know, 
Ø, has done some of it.

(8) ... Dad has done some of it.

In the next chapter we will demonstrate that the two are not only different in form but also in function.

In order to clarify the prosodic difference between SM and unmarked sentences, we will present here prosodic diagrams of SM constructions, contrasting them with diagrams of unmarked sentences. Fig. 1 presents the amplitude (on top) and the fundamental frequency (below) of example (7) above, i.e. an SM construction. Fig. 2 presents the same for example (9), an unmarked sentence (also taken from SBCSAE1), which is semantically as well as syntactically more or less equivalent to example (7). Hence, the difference between the utterances in Figs. 1 and 2 is primarily prosodic.

(9) ... (TSK) So Mom didn’t want me to - -

![Fig. 1. Dad, you know, has done some of it.](image)
Fig. 1 presents a sentence (example (7)) which is composed of three intonation units, the first of which (“Dad”) is the one relevant to our current discussion. Fig. 2 presents a sentence, which is composed of a single intonation unit (example (9)). Note that the subjects in both sentences (Dad and Mom) are monosyllabic, lexical, and also semantically equivalent. The vertical line in both figures separates the subject and the rest of the sentence. Note, however, that only in the SM construction does the vertical line coincide with an intonational boundary. In terms of intonation units, both the transcription and the prosodic diagram show the clear delimitation of the subject of the marked construction. First, there is a relatively long pause following the subject and before the next intonation unit. Second, there is an apparent vowel lengthening in the word “Dad”. Third, the “nonterminal pitch contour” found at the end of the vocalization of the word “Dad” is also typical of intonational boundaries (Chafe, 1994:60). In terms of the amplitude, both subjects are prominent. However, what is most striking is the difference in tune: in the marked case (Fig. 1), we find a sharp rise and fall in the word “Dad”. In contrast, in the unmarked case (Fig. 2) the curve is relatively flat. In other words, the pitch range of the marked subject (Dad) is strikingly wider than is the pitch range of the unmarked subject (Mom).

Actually, Hirschberg and Pierrehumbert (1986:140) “found that a hierarchical segmentation of discourse can be marked by systematic variation in pitch range, which can signal movement between levels in the segment hierarchy”. In the next section we will demonstrate that minor shifts within episodes, such as shifts which introduce new (but usually trivial) themes into the discourse (without a shift in the general discourse topic) are indeed often marked by variation in pitch range, as in the case of SM. However, other higher-order shifts, such as shifts in discourse topic, would most likely be marked with additional elements, as in the case of XP, where the sentence is marked not only prosodically but also syntactically. Furthermore, Hirschberg and Pierrehumbert (1986:142) point out that “contrastiveness or parallelism” can also be marked by accent. This, according to them, accounts for those cases in which given referents are accented. In the next chapter we will indeed show that in addition to segmentation, the SM construction is often used to mark logical relations, such as contrastiveness or parallelism.

It should be noted that SMs are not identical with lexical NPs. Lexical NPs are relatively rare in spoken discourse, e.g. in a segment of the Switchboard corpus of English telephone conversations (Godfrey et al., 1992) only 9% of the subjects have been found to be lexical, and
are therefore viewed as ‘marked’ relative to Lambrecht’s (1994:185) “Principle of Separation of Reference and Role” (Francis et al., 1999). This principle is admittedly open to violations; Francis et al. (1999) discuss these violations in terms of referential coherence, which is not what we focus on here. The SM mechanism prosodically separates the subject from the rest of the sentence, and although most SMs indeed exhibit lexical subjects, not every lexical subject appears in a separate intonation unit. Again, the diagrams for examples (10) and (11) (taken from the SBCSAE1) present the amplitude and fundamental frequencies of each utterance, and illustrate the prosodic difference between an unmarked sentence with a lexical subject (example (10), Fig. 3), and a marked SM construction exhibiting an equivalent lexical subject (example (11) Fig. 4):

(10) and the clerk .. kept trying to keep us interested,

Fig. 3. and the clerk kept trying to keep us interested.

(11) The principal.
    ... (H) doesn’t even tell me.

Fig. 4. The principal. doesn’t even tell me.
Fig. 3 presents an unmarked sentence with a lexical subject (example (10)). Note that the whole sentence occupies a single intonation unit. In contrast, Fig. 4 presents a marked SM construction consisting of two separate intonation units (example (11)). The vertical line in both figures separates the subject and the rest of the discourse. As before, only in the latter example does this line coincide with an intonational boundary, as evident mainly by the terminal pitch contour found at the end of the word ‘principal’ and the relatively long pause following it. As in the comparison between Figs. 1 and 2, we see here once again that the tune of the subject of the unmarked sentence (the clerk) is flat, exhibiting no major changes in pitch. In contrast, the tune of the subject of the marked sentence (the principal) exhibits a pronounced rise and fall. Thus, although both sentences have a lexical subject, only the subject of the SM construction is marked prosodically.

In addition, we would like to point out that not every subject that occupies a separate intonation unit is lexical. The subject of an SM construction may be pronominal, as in the following example, accompanied by its prosodic diagram (example taken from the SBCSAE2):

(12) [(H)] She, (H) . . . would turn around,

Once again, it follows neatly from Fig. 5 that the subject of the SM construction is prosodically marked not only by occupying a separate intonation unit, but also by sharp changes in pitch. Compare the marked pronominal subject of example (12), Fig. 5 with the following example and diagram of an unmarked pronominal subject:

(13) . . . (H) she had this dream of falling off a building.
The vertical line separates the subject and the rest of the sentence. However, note that while in Fig. 5, the subject ("she") and the verb ("would") consist of clearly separate amplitude and intonation contours, in Fig. 6 the subject (she) and the verb ("had") are actually prosodically unified. In addition, the difference in pitch range between the two pronominal subjects is striking, with the marked case exhibiting sharp variation in pitch range, whereas in the unmarked case variation is barely noticeable.

To conclude, we have shown that the SM construction features clear prosodic markedness, regardless of whether the subject is lexical or pronominal.

3. Data analysis

The SBCSAE1 consists of 14 conversations in a variety of everyday life situations, such as casual face-to-face conversation between friends over coffee, between husband and wife in bed, or between family members during a birthday party, as well as more formal settings, such as a business meeting, or a class at the university. Each conversation is 15–30 min long. The corpus consists of altogether approximately 5.5 h (333 min) of recordings. The transcripts in this paper appear in the same format as they appear in the original database, except that we have eliminated the time clues of each intonation unit.

After going over the full SBCSAE1, we found a total of 77 XPs, 90 SMs and 6 OFs. Table 1 summarizes the number of occurrences of each construction in each of the 14 files in the corpus. Note that XPs and SMs are used in similar frequencies in the corpus. However, note also that their distribution seems to vary according to the text genre. For example, in *Tell the Jury That*, which is a preparation session between a lawyer and her client before trial, there are 10 occurrences of XP, and only 1 occurrence of SM. In contrast, in *Bank Products*, which is a recording from a loan meeting, there are 11 occurrences of SM and no occurrences of XP. In other texts, however, XP and SM occur in similar frequencies. These differences in distribution will be accounted for later in this section.

It is also interesting to note the lack of frequency of OF in the corpus. Altogether, only six occurrences of the OF construction were found in Part 1 of the SBCSAE. Therefore, we have decided to include in our analysis of the OF construction also Parts 2 and 3 (which have meanwhile been published). We have found a total of 26 occurrences of OF in all three parts of the corpus.
Finally, note that under the category of XP, we included all occurrences which have a resumptive element within the full sentence. Thus, the extraposed referent could be any sentence constituent: a subject, an object, or an adjunct. However, we would like to point out that 82% of the XPs (63 out of 77) have an extraposed subject, whereas only 9% (7 out of 77) have an extraposed object, and another 9% (7 out of 77) an extraposed adjunct. Thus, the great majority of XPs involve an extraposed subject, and only a small minority of sentences involve an extraposed object. Therefore, it seems that objects are rarely placed in initial position in English, regardless of the occurrence of a resumptive element. This finding serves as further justification for the inclusion of SM in the research. That is, a comparison between XP and OF only (as proposed in Prince, 1998, as well as in Gregory and Michaelis, 2001) is important because of the structural similarity between XP with an extraposed object and OF; however, such a comparison is also somewhat problematic, because the XP construction seems to involve mainly the extraposition of subjects, rather than objects.

The analysis of the data has revealed that the three marked theme constructions display both functional similarities and differences. We would like to argue that there is, on the one hand, a function which all three constructions share in common. On the other hand, there are also discourse functions which are unique to each construction.

Fig. 7 summarizes our findings for the uses of XP, OF and SM in spoken English.
As illustrated in Fig. 7, the three constructions share the discourse content function. We will show how each of the marked theme constructions: XP, OF, and SM can be utilized by English speakers in order to create different local relations at the level of content. However, as expected, we also found functional differences. The main difference is between XP and SM. Eggins and Slade (1997:68–71), in their analysis of spoken language, divide the text into conversational moves (a term used by Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Eggins and Slade argue that there are two types of conversational moves: opening moves and sustaining moves. Through opening moves the speaker “initiates talk around a proposition”. Thus they argue that opening moves “are . . . assertive moves . . ., indicating a claim to a degree of control over the interaction” (Eggins and Slade, 1997:194). In contrast, “sustaining moves keep negotiating the same proposition,” and thus sustaining moves indicate no special control over the interaction (ibid., 1997:195). Using this distinction between opening and sustaining moves, we would like to argue that while XP can function as an opening move through which speakers signal their assertive control over the floor, SM functions as a sustaining move through which speakers merely sustain the current discourse topic and their ongoing control over the floor.

But why do we need a construction that signals sustenance? Is this not what the usual unmarked sentence does? The point is that here we are dealing with cases in which the speaker encounters some kind of informational difficulty that needs to be overcome. Informational difficulty might be, for example, the speaker’s attempt to express a heavy or new theme. It is not surprising that such communicative difficulty is often accompanied by hesitations and disfluencies, such as “filled pauses”, “unfilled pauses”, “repeats” and “false starts” (Maclay and Osgood, 1959:24; see for instance, example 22 below). The issue of disfluencies has received growing attention in the literature (e.g. Clark and Wasow, 1998; Fox et al., 1996; Holmes, 1988). However, none of the studies we are familiar with has focused on the SM construction per se. In addition, disfluency is not a defining factor of SM. That is, an SM can also be fluent (see for instance, example 19 below). The defining factor of SM is the appearance of the subject in a separate intonation unit. It will be shown here that this prosodic feature is interactionally meaningful.

Let us start with the presentation of XP data. Consider the following example of XP functioning as an opening move:2

(14) **SBC0001: Actual Blacksmithing**

LYNNE: .. (H) So we have this frozen horse hoof, that we have to start out on, cause you don’t want to .. cripple up a .. (H) really good horse, and like, my first hoof, (H) .. that horse would have been, .. lame, @ @ <@ like cra=zy.

Example (14) is an excerpt from a face-to-face conversation between Lynne and her mother, after Lynne has just come back from a month’s stay in Minnesota. Lynne is telling her mother about a course she took in blacksmithing. Within this conversation, Lynne wants to open a segment in

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2 Here, as in the following, “(H)” signifies inhalation, “(Hx)” signifies exhalation, and “[]” signifies speech overlap.
which she will tell her mother about her first attempt at blacksmithing. It is argued here that the XP construction is used in order to mark the beginning of this short story.

Also note the discourse markers “and like”, which appear before the XP construction. Schiffrin (1987:31) argues that speakers use discourse markers in order to bracket units of talk; in other words, the markers carry out a discourse management function. Thus, in example (11) the speaker uses a combination of discourse markers followed by an XP construction in order to mark the beginning of a short segment about her first hoof.

The following is another example of XP functioning as an opening move, marking the beginning of a short story.

(15)  
SBC0002: Lambada
JAMIE: [3The3] older cow,  
and then there’s .. (H) the middle cow,  
[and there’s] [2a little2] [3young cow?
PETE: [@@]  
MILES: [2@@2]  
PETE: [3The little baby cow,  
JAMIE: .. The butterball=3]?
PETE: The calf3]?  
HAROLD: Gee[4zh- Zheezhee4].  
JAMIE: [4The @butter- @4],  
PETE: Zheezhee [5the calf5]?  
JAMIE: [5The butter5]ball @@.
HAROLD: @@  
PETE: @  
JAMIE: (H) The butterball.  
They used to have this little butterball,  
=r- --  
when we first moved in,  
he would,  
(H)= .. he’d be running arou=nd,  
... d- in the street with his diapers on.  
... [this butterball of a kid].  
HAROLD: [and then he’d stop and go],  
(H)(Hx)(H)(Hx)(H)[2(Hx)(H)(Hx)(H)(Hx)(Hx)2].

Example (15) is taken from a conversation between four friends. In this part of the conversation, they are talking about a family living in the neighborhood. Jamie wants to tell a short story about one of the boys in the family. She marks the beginning of this story through an XP construction.

Note also that the extraposed referent “The butterball” is not new in the discourse. As pointed out earlier, researchers dealing with marked theme constructions have mainly focused on the question of the availability of the theme in prior discourse. Most researchers have claimed that in the case of XP, the extraposed referent tends to be discourse new. We would like to argue that focusing on the availability of the referent in prior discourse does not reveal much about the pragmatic function of the construction. As is quite evident in the example above, the speaker uses the XP construction as a management device, in order to mark the beginning of a short story about the extraposed referent, irrespective of the question whether this referent is discourse new or given.
The next two examples are both taken from a preparatory meeting between a client and her attorney before the client gives her testimony in court. The client, Rickie, is a young woman, filing a complaint of sexual harassment. (Rebecca is the lawyer; Arnold a bystander is Rickie’s boyfriend)

(16)  
SBC0008: Tell the Jury That  
REBECCA: and then with [3~June3],  
ARNOLD: [3(H)3]  
REBECCA: ..um,  
the woman that just walked out,  
RICKIE: Unhunh,  
REBECCA: um,  
... (H) she was riding on BART,  
.. and,  
... he came and sat near her,  
... she moved,  
... he moved to get closer to her,  
.. (H) she moved again,  
.. and he moved directly opposite her],  
RICKIE: [Mhm].  
REBECCA: and then started masturbating.

(17)  
SBC0008: Tell the Jury That  
REBECCA: (H) U=m,  
.. I was saying to ~June,  
.. that,  
you know,  
a lot of times people are intimidated by the courtroom,  
and they think it’s really formal,  
a[nd it’s] really not that formal,  
RICKIE: [Mhm].  
Okay.  
REBECCA: (H) u=m,  
the jurors that are in there,  
.. there’ll be twelve people seated in the juror box,  
RICKIE: .. [Mhm],  
REBECCA: [(H)] a=n[2d u=2]m,  
RICKIE: [2(SNIFF)2]  
REBECCA: .. you know they could be your family.  
.. They could be your friends.

In both examples, Rebecca, the attorney, uses an XP construction as a management device, in order to mark the beginning of a new segment of talk. In example (16), Rebecca opens a segment about a former case of sexual harassment, and in example (17) she opens a segment describing the jurors.

As pointed out earlier, the entire file, Tell the Jury That, contains 10 occurrences of XP and only 1 occurrence of SM (while the entire corpus contains 77 XPs and 90 SMs). We would like to suggest an explanation for this uneven distribution. We have argued that XP serves to open
segments of talk. In other words, XP plays a role in the segmentation of the discourse. Most of the XPs in the file are due to the attorney. In addition, the topic (sexual harassment) is very sensitive. Therefore, it seems that, given the sensitivity of the topic, and her role as an attorney, Rebecca is trying to be as clear as possible in the discourse structure. By segmenting the discourse, the XP construction endows the text with an apt, straightforward structure. Of course, this is merely a speculation that will need to be corroborated further.

The following is another example of XP functioning as an opening move:

(18)  
   SBC0002: Lambada  
   HAROLD: [Have you heard] these figures.
   that like=,  
   um,  
   ... it's something like forty percent of males,  
   in .. the Bay Area,  
   are supposed [to be infected]?
   >ENV: ((MUSIC_STOPS))
   MILES: [Well,  
   last Ju][2ly=2],
   PETE: [2Oh really2]?
   MILES: .. [3this is what3] --
   JAMIE: [3Of homosexual males,  
   or of males.
   PETE: [Of all males].
   HAROLD: [Of males] [2in general2].
   MILES: [This infectious [2disease2] [3woman,  
   HAROLD: [3Or males under thirty I think it3] is.
   MILES: at San Francisco General3],
   PETE: Mhm,
   MILES: she said that,  
   ... this doesn’t seem like it can be true,  
   but she said that,  
   ... ninety per cent of gay men,  
   ... are HIV positive,  
   ... and fifty percent of all males,  
   ... are HIV positive.
   HAROLD: [Yeah.

What is especially salient in example (18) is Miles’ competition with the other participants over the floor. Conversation analysts have pointed out that speakers normally do not barge into each other’s words, but rather function within a rule governed system of turn taking. One of the more fundamental rules is “Minimize gap and overlap” (Sacks et al., 1974:704). Thus speakers try to avoid moments of silence, as well as moments of overlap. When overlap nevertheless occurs, speakers find themselves competing for the floor. Duranti and Ochs (1979:404), in their analysis of Italian discourse, found that XP is common in such moments of overlap, and therefore they

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3 Speech overlap is represented by square brackets in the transcription.
conclude that speakers use XP as a floor-seeking device. As we can see in example (18), Miles skillfully uses an XP construction and eventually gains control over the floor. Competition for the floor is another context in which XP carries the management function of an opening move.

Thus far, we have shown that XP plays a significant role in the segmentation of discourse. Speakers use the XP construction in order to mark the beginning of different units of talk, such as stories or segments within stories. As such, the XP construction facilitates interaction which will benefit from clear structuring (e.g. a preparatory meeting between an attorney and a client). Furthermore, we have demonstrated that XP is also used by speakers in order to project an extended turn, and gain control over the floor. Finally, we have shown that XP can function as an opening move even when the extraposed referent is given in the discourse. We believe that a quantitative analysis of topicality would not have revealed these intriguing interactional functions of XP.

In contrast to XP, SM does not seem to play a role in the segmentation of speech. Rather, as we will see, the use of the SM construction is much less planned and deliberate. We will show that the SM construction functions as a sustaining move through which speakers generally continue to hold the floor and to talk about the same discourse topic (though not necessarily the same sentential theme), overcoming some informational difficulty.

The following example contains both an XP functioning as an opening move and an SM functioning as a sustaining move:

(19) \textit{SBC0001: Actual Blacksmithing}

\textbf{LYNNE:} (H) Jorgensen’s,
\textit{they have . . . one .. shoer,}
\textit{that comes to their house,}
\textit{all the time,}
\textit{they’ve had him for years and years and years.}
\textit{(H) And I guess like in Minnesota it’s real we=t,}
\textit{.. and stuff you know?}
\textit{So like,}
\textit{.. they really have to watch their shoes,}
\textit{for not coming off,}
\textit{because the hoof wall,}
\textit{is so much softer.}
\textit{(H) It’s like,}
\textit{when you’re down there,}
\textit{your hands are softer and everything you know,}
\textit{and they’re not .. as dry= or anything?}
\textit{(H) When you get back here,}
\textit{we have dry hooves.}

Example (19) is another excerpt from the conversation between the mother and her daughter about the daughter’s course in blacksmithing. As for the SM, we can see that the speaker has no intention to mark the beginning of a story concerning the hoof wall. The SM creates a minor shift, through which the speaker provides a short explanation, but all in all, it functions as a sustaining move, as the speaker continues discussing the same discourse topic: blacksmithing. This stands in contrast to the XP construction presented here, through which the speaker marks the opening of a short story about the Jorgensens.
The following is another excerpt from the text on blacksmithing. Here, once again the SM construction functions as a sustaining move:

(20)  
SBC0001: Actual Blacksmithing
LENORE: [Did they train you-] --
LYNNE: [2yeah2].
LENORE: [2Did2] they train you that --
  X[3X3]*
LYNNE: [3yeah3].
  ... yeah.
LENORE: .. [So you have your] own equipment,
LYNNE: [(H)]
LENORE: but,
LYNNE: .. (TSK) (H) No.
I don’t have my own equipment at all.
... Da=d.
... you know,  
has done some of it.
That’s another thing too,  
is I kinda had a b=- general idea=,  
.. (H). of kinda how to do it,  
just watching hi=m.
or= - -  
and watching,  
.. (H) people come to our place,  
and doing it and stuff you know.

Going back to the question of the referential availability of the theme, it is interesting to note that in example (20) the theme is discourse new. Chafe (1994:88–89) formulated the “light subject constraint,” according to which speakers tend to avoid placing a new referent as the subject of the sentence. In fact, Chafe reports that only 3% of the subjects in his corpus are discourse new (with 81% given, and 16% accessible). As for the 3% that are new, Chafe argues that they tend to be subjects of “trivial importance,” i.e. referents that are not major characters in the discourse. We believe example (20) to constitute such a case. Moreover, the fact that the referent, “Dad”, is of trivial importance, further supports our claim that the speaker had no intention to mark the beginning of a story about this referent. If the speaker had used an XP construction, the sentence would have indicated an opening move, and this would have been contrary to the speaker’s intentions. We would like to stress that although the theme “Dad” is discourse new, and referred to six intonation units later with the pronoun “him”, this does not render “Dad” the discourse topic. Rather, the discourse topic in this segment is the daughter’s training in blacksmithing. “Dad” appears in a separate intonation unit because of the informational difficulty of introducing a new referent in subject position (as follows both from Chafe’s, 1994 “light subject constraint” and from Lambrecht’s, 1994 “Principle of Separation of Reference and Role”). New referents can indeed be introduced without creating a shift in the discourse topic, i.e. without opening a new higher-order segment.

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4 “X” signifies an indecipherable syllable.
The theme of a sentence can be heavy, not only in that it involves new information but also in that it includes adjuncts which add to the semantic and structural load. The analysis of the data indicates that many SM constructions are used as a result of the heaviness of the theme. Consider the following example:

(21) \[ \textit{SBC0014: Bank Products} \]
JOE: \(\text{(H)}\) they’re requesting eighty-four thousand dollars, on a thirty-year Fannie Mae fixed rate loan, … \(\text{(H)}\) this would include the cost of doing the refinance appraisal, .. title work, .. and points.
FRED: .. [Eighty-four]?
JOE: \(\text{[(H)]} \ldots \text{Eighty four even.}\)
.. (THROAT)
.. Their monthly payment of principle interest taxes and insurance, \(\text{(H)}\) would be seven sixty-one eighty-nine, .. based at the current thirty-year rate.
.. (H) .. They estimate the value of their home to be (Hx), one-hundred (Hx) and ten .. thousand dollars.

Example (21) is an excerpt from a bank loan meeting. The theme in this example is notably heavy. In addition to the “light subject constraint”, Chafe (1994:108–109) has formulated the “one new idea constraint”. According to this latter constraint, “an intonation unit can express no more than one new idea” (ibid.). It follows that a heavy theme and a heavy rheme cannot occupy a single intonation unit, and therefore the two must be separated. The result of the separation between the theme and the rheme is an SM construction, as is illustrated in example (21). By using this construction, cognitive processing is simplified: the heavy theme is placed in a separate intonation unit, hence abiding by the “one new idea constraint”. In other words, an unplanned marked theme which results from informational or communicative constraints is no less functional than is a planned marked theme which results from interactional motivations, such as segmentation of the discourse.

It has been mentioned earlier that file SBC0014, Bank Products, comprises 11 occurrences of SM, and no occurrences of XP. It is also interesting to note that the intonation units in this text are notably longer than those in other texts. We would like to suggest – again only as a speculation to be corroborated in further studies – that the relatively high frequency of SMs in this text may be a result of the genre. A business meeting is a less casual and more formal occasion, in which sentences are produced with more judiciousness and forethought, and the interlocutors may anticipate higher cognitive demands in the interpretation of themes. Long intonation units encapsulate complex concepts that are relatively rare in casual talk. This quality of the business meeting yields a high frequency of SM constructions. However, additional texts of this genre need to be analyzed before any clear conclusions can be drawn.

In the following segment there is an SM construction (Ramon’s words) immediately followed by an XP construction (Montoya’s words). We believe the difference between SM and XP is apparent in this sequence⁵:

⁵ “<X X>” signifies uncertain hearing.
(22)  

**SBC0012: American Democracy is Dying**

**MONTOYA:** .. Social status,  
.. position,  
.. right?  
(H) If you’re the chairperson of an IBM, a major corporation?  
.. would you say that that person has some power?

**FRANK:** .. Most definitely.

**MONTOYA:** .. Alright.  
.. Especially if you’re IBM, General Motors, or .. Chrysler Corporation and,

**RAMON:** [I think in some examples, some,  
.. gender and race,  
.. can give you power.]

**MONTOYA:** .. Gender race,  
.. alright.

**RAMON:** [Gender]  
**MONTOYA:** [Let’s deal] with that.

The above segment is taken from a lesson at the university. The teacher, Montoya, is discussing with the students issues of political power. Note the difference between the student’s discourse and the teacher’s discourse. Ramon’s (the student’s) words are hesitant, and come as a response to Montoya’s question. Ramon uses an SM construction as he suggests “gender and race” as a factor that “can give you power”. This is an immediate response within the teacher’s master plan for the lesson. Ramon’s dysfluency is a communicative constraint, signaled by placing the theme in a separate intonation unit. Along with the expression of hesitation, then, the SM has also the management function of a sustaining move. In contrast, Montoya’s discourse is planned and purposeful. Montoya, the teacher, finds the issue of gender and race important enough to devote a separate segment of the lesson to this issue. He marks the beginning of this segment by an XP construction. In sum, XP is used to segment the lesson (in an opening move), while SM is used to offer a hesitant response (a sustaining move). Moreover, it is apparent that XP is an assertive move, indicating the teacher’s control over the floor; in contrast, the SM construction indicates no special degree of control over the floor. We see here once again that both cases of marked theme are functional in the management of communication, though in different ways. We also see that a sustaining move may also be carried out by a different speaker, in which case there is no struggle over the floor, but rather an expected smooth switch of speakers in a question–answer format.

To conclude the discussion thus far, we have shown that unlike XP, SM signifies a sustaining move, which generally does not affect the segmentation of the discourse. In this sense, SM constructions are indicative of unplanned discourse.

We have said above that the three constructions share both similarities and differences. The differences between XP and SM have just been discussed. As for the similarities, we would like to demonstrate now that XP, SM and OF can be used by speakers in order to signal discourse content functions. The following are examples of each sentence type fulfilling this function. We would like to begin with XP.
The most prevalent discourse content function is that of contrast. Contrast is a logical relation between parts of the text, in this case between referents. Consider the following examples:

(23)  
\[ \text{SBC0008: Tell the Jury That} \]  
\[ \text{RICKIE:} \]  
the very first time I reported,  
it was just like this .. dirty old man,  
just that that.  
\[ \text{REBECCA:} \]  
[Yeah].  
\[ \text{RICKIE:} \]  
(SNIFF) And this time,  
it was during the summer and there was lots of kids,

(24)  
\[ \text{SBC0006: Cuz} \]  
\[ \text{LENORE:} \]  
... Why.  
\[ \text{ALINA:} \]  
.. (H) !Cathy - -  
She’s not a good friend herself.  
\[ \text{LENORE:} \]  
!Jawahar’s a really [nice guy].

In both examples above, the speakers use an XP construction in order to convey the contrast. Note that discourse content constructions are clearly planned and structured. The contrast can be conveyed in a structure of two XPs, as in example (23) where “the first time” and “this time” are contrasted, or in a sequence of an XP and an unmarked sentence, as in example (24), where “Cathy” and “Jawahar” are contrasted.

In addition, it is interesting to note that in example (24) the discourse content construction is actually a joint production, as Alina marks the construction with an XP conveying contrast, and Lenore provides its second part. But even if Lenore had not responded at all, Alina’s words would have been a construction expressing contrast. Indeed, Taglicht (1984:47) points out that “Contrastiveness may be explicit or implicit. If it is explicit, both members of the pair of opposites are present in the utterance ... If it is implicit, only one of the pair of opposites is present, but the form of the utterance conveys the implication of something unsaid which would have contained the other member of the pair”. If Lenore, in example (24), had not understood the implied contrast, she would not have been able to complete the construction.

Since contrastiveness is the most prevalent logical relation, it has received the most attention in the literature. However, our analysis has revealed that there are many other discourse content constructions. The following is an example of XP creating a construction expressing the logical relation of similarity, in which a referent is selected and one of its attributes is found to be similar to that of another referent:

(25)  
\[ \text{SBC0001: Actual Blacksmithing} \]  
\[ \text{LYNNE:} \]  
(H) well then once you stretch the shoe out,  
.. well then,  
(H) the two corners,  
they go out,  
too.

The referents compared are “the shoe” and “the two corners” (of the shoe). The common attribute is that they “stretch out” or “go out”. Note that this time the unmarked sentence precedes the marked sentence. In all these cases the construction is local and orderly. As we have
pointed out before, the identification of a poset relation between “the two corners” and “the shoe” merely deals with the historical roots of “the two corners”, while the logical relation of similarity explains what is going on between them at this point of the text.

Example (26) is of XP inaugurating a discourse content construction of listing within the theme, i.e. a number of referents are selected and placed in the marked theme and then there is a sentence that makes an integrating statement about them:

(26) **SBC0012: American Democracy is Dying**

**MONTOYA:**

... Power is relational.
... How can you measure power.
... Power is impossible to measure.
... Alright?
.. In other words,
you cannot break power apart into vi_ __
(H) various ingredients,
.. and say,
... A,
... B,
... C,
... D,
these are the ingredients of power.

Listing within the theme is a construction which recurs several times in the corpus. We have chosen to present this specific occurrence because of its clear structure of a list. “A”, “B”, “C”, and “D” are the hypothetical ingredients of power. Each occupies a separate intonation unit. Together with the resumptive demonstrative “these”, they constitute a multi-componential theme with a list of four items and one reference to the group as a whole. The integrating remark is “... are the ingredients of power”.

Another possible discourse content construction consists of a single extraposed theme followed by two contrasting sentences. Two contradicting, or seemingly contradicting, statements are uttered about one referent. Consider the following example:

(27) **SBC0001: Actual Blacksmithing**

**LYNNE:**

(H) .. And then=,
... (TSK) %_Our job,
is to shape the shoe,
.. to the horse’s foot.
... (H) And that,
it d- it sounds easy,
.. but it’s really hard to do.

Example (27) is similar to a mathematical formula: $X(Y + Z)$ in that the theme “that” is supposedly placed outside of the brackets, and pertains to both items within the brackets. Again note the limited locality and the orderly structure of the discourse content construction.

The following passage exemplifies the second type of content functions, the modal function. The extraposed theme echoes previously mentioned referential material in order to express the speaker’s objection to the content of that statement.
Sharon attributes her difficulties to the fact that she is a new teacher. Carolyn repeats the syntactically nominalized statement “the fact that you’re new” as an extraposed marked theme, to which the disagreeing statement “I would go further than that” is attached.

But there is more to this than just simple disagreement. According to Conversation Analysis, discourse is organized into sequences of turns. The most basic sequence is called an adjacency pair, and it includes two turns of two different speakers. Among the common adjacency pairs are: question-answer, offer-acceptance/refusal, greeting-greeting, and others (Sacks et al., 1974:716–717). Within the framework of adjacency pairs, speakers are aware of the fact that there are preferred and dispreferred responses. For example acceptance of an offer is a preferred response, refusal – dispreferred. When speakers have no choice but to provide a dispreferred response in an otherwise friendly exchange, they normally try to make it as least blunt as possible (Sacks, 1987:60; Ford, 1993:8). We would like to argue that XP “is used in the service of doing dispreferred interactional work” (Kim, 1995:258). Thus, in example (28), Carolyn first echoes Sharon’s words, through the extraposed referent, in order to express her disagreement only later, in the second part of the sentence in what we call hedged disagreement. Note that in the case of this modal function, just as it was with the function of logical relations, the content construction is local and well-structured, unlike the discourse management functions which are open-ended.

SM is also used to convey various discourse content functions. Again, the most prevalent usage of SM in this capacity is the expression of the logical relation of contrast. Consider the following example:

Like in the case of XP, here too the discourse content construction has a clear structure. Again we see that the initial themes stand in contrast to each other, as do the rhemes.

Another discourse content construction which is prevalent with SM sentences is enumeration. Consider the following example:
SBC0010: Letter of Concerns

PHIL: Basically, you know, the publications committee, needs to be more involved than just making decisions on what we publish.

[(H)]

BRAD: [Yeah].

PHIL: You know, .. Yeah.

BRAD: .. They need to become .. somewhat self-sufficient.

.. Collections committee.

PHIL: .. [@]

BRAD: .. [needs],

PHIL: .. you know,

I would like to create .. collections committee to be something where we’re almost matching?

In example (30), two SM constructions are used as the speaker enumerates the different committees and their respective duties.

The following is another example of enumeration:

SBC0006: Cuz

ALINA: .. (TSK) And these three guy=s walk in and,

(H) one guy,

.. was so geeky,

he’s in a suit.

.. Who the hell do you know,

goes to a party in a suit.

(H) I mean who .. is this g=eek.

(H) So anyway,

the .. other guy had a real nice shirt on,

and then there was some other geek.

Note that the marked theme construction is a combination of an SM and an XP. Thus, the theme “one guy” appears in a separate intonation unit. This theme is first followed by a predicate “was so geeky”, and subsequently followed by a full sentence “he’s in a suit”. Also note that in this example only the first referent “one guy” is made prominent by a marked theme construction. The second referent “the other guy” appears in an existential sentence. The third referent “some other geek” appears in an unmarked SVO sentence. Perhaps the first referent is prominently marked because it is the first item in the list. However, this too requires further research.

There is another interesting point to notice about this example. The speaker mentions the first item and then slips into making a lengthy remark about it (“Who the hell do you know, goes to a party in a suit. I mean who .. is this geek?”), but remembering that she is in the middle of a local enumeration construction, not in an open-ended new segment, she utters the discourse marker “so anyway” which aborts this inappropriate start and signals the resumption of enumeration.
Now we turn to the OF construction. As mentioned earlier, due to the relative scarcity of this construction, we have decided to also include in our analysis Parts 2 & 3 of the SBCSAE. Altogether we found 26 occurrences of OF, 24 of them used for creating a discourse content construction of contrast. Here are three of these occurrences, taken from Part 1 of the SBCSAE:

(32) \[ SBC0001: \text{Actual Blacksmithing} \]
LYNNE: .. (H) But,
% --
these shoes we never did put on a horse.
(H) .. We just [put] the shoes that were already made,

Note that in example (32), like in previous examples of contrast created by XP or SM, only the first part of the contrast is marked. Thus, the OF construction stands in contrast to the unmarked SVO sentence. The same is true for the following example:

(33) \[ SBC0006: \text{Cuz} \]
ALINA: .. !Joy I like.
... Cause she's really interesting.
.. But a lot of those other paddlers are idiots.

Another interesting case of contrast is presented in the following example:

(34) \[ SBC0006: \text{Cuz} \]
ALINA: At least that bridge, they weren’t too unhappy about burning.

Some 50 lines before this utterance, the issue of burning bridges was mentioned. Much earlier in the text, Alina said about Cathy and Jawahar:

ALINA: They like having people= having to owe th- –
That’s part of the reason they’re not burning their bridges,

Thus, earlier in the conversation, Alina argued that Cathy and Jawahar were generally unhappy about burning bridges. And the specific bridge referred to in the OF construction stands in contrast to Cathy and Jawahar’s general tendency.

Note that there are more than 50 intonation units separating between the contrasting items of example (34). Givón (1983:13), in his methodology of measuring referential distance, has proposed an arbitrary figure of looking back 20 clauses. Geluykens (1992:54–55) has already pointed out that since spoken discourse involves many false starts and incomplete clauses, counting clauses of spoken discourse is problematic. But in any event, it seems that cases such as the contrast presented in example (34) would not be fully appreciated through Givón’s quantitative methodology, since the previous mention of the object is more than 20 clauses back.

The above examples of OF indicate that OF is used in order to express the logical relation of contrast in the discourse. In one of the occurrences of OF in Part 2 of the SBCSAE, the construction was used for expressing a different relation. Consider the following example, in which OF is used in order to create a discourse content construction expressing the logical relation of summarization:
Example 35 is an excerpt from a lecture on the history and theology of Martin Luther. The lecturer reads Luther’s letter to Erasmus. In this letter, Luther first lists (in full sentences) all the things that Erasmus has done. Then, the marked theme of the OF construction is used in order to summarize this list, and the rheme of the construction is used in order to express his thankfulness for all the issues mentioned in the list (and summarized by the theme).

Another OF not used for contrast appears in the following example. Since this example is situated close to the beginning of SBC0022 (and since all files are excerpts from longer conversations), the context is not fully decipherable in this case. The interlocutors are Randy, an experienced air traffic controller, and Lance, a trainee controller. They discuss Lance’s performance immediately following a training session.6

At the beginning of the example, Randy summarizes a small exchange on pilots who prefer to be on the left, and then – talking to himself – he says the OF sentence “Traffic Watch Eight we
discussed”, and apparently wants to move on to something else, but Lance interrupts him and suggests that the appropriate transmission now would be “radar service terminated” and “call me inbound”, for which he gets corrected by Randy. Since we do not know what Traffic Watch Eight is, we are not sure how these turns are related. It is clear, however, that the OF construction here is not used for contrast. It may be the case here that Randy goes over some mental check list, implementing the logical relation of enumeration.

To conclude, unlike XP and SM, OF does not at all function in the realm of discourse management, but only in the realm of discourse content. The major discourse content construction created is that of contrast. However, we have also demonstrated the existence of a construction of summarization and another non-contrastive function which remains obscure. It stands to reason that additional data will reveal other logical relations which can be expressed with OF. We are not aware of any differences between the three constructions in their common role of conveying discourse content functions. This will have to be left for future research.

4. Conclusions

This paper offers a functional analysis of three marked theme constructions: XP, OF, and SM. We have dwelt at some length on the form and prosodic nature of the latter, since it has not yet received the attention it deserves. Through the lens of two linguistic fields, Information Structure and Conversation Analysis, we have analyzed texts of naturally occurring discourse in an attempt to reveal the functional similarities and differences between the three individual marked theme constructions. Unlike numerous previous studies, this study is not based on written texts or on constructed examples. In addition, unlike most existing studies of these constructions, this study is not based on a quantitative measurement of topicality. Rather, the methodology proposed here is of thorough analysis of the information structure and discourse functions of the constructions, as they arise from the surrounding discourse.

The analysis of the data indicates that in spoken English, XP is used much more frequently than OF. In addition, most XPs involve an extraposed subject rather than an extraposed object. Therefore, we believe that a comparison of XP and OF which were to exclude SM, might be misleading. Furthermore, the data analysis indicates that indeed there is a function which is fulfilled not only by XP and OF, but also by SM, namely the (pragmatic) function of inaugurating a discourse content construction. Discourse content constructions express logical relations between referents or modal relations of the speaker towards a referent. These relations are expressed locally and in an orderly structure, and are therefore claimed to be indicative of planned speech. The most common discourse content function is that of contrast. Other prevalent functions are similarity, enumeration, listing within the theme, and hedged disagreement.

However, under certain discourse circumstances, two of these constructions are used also in a different realm of functions. XP, which involves a “deeper” morpho-syntactic change (fronting and insertion of a resumptive element), signals an assertive opening move through which the speaker marks the beginning of a new segment of talk around a certain discourse topic. On the other hand, SM signals a sustaining move through which the speaker continues to negotiate a given discourse topic despite some communicative or informational difficulty (e.g. hesitation, heavy theme). We have demonstrated that speakers use the XP construction in order to project an extended turn, while limiting the input of other participants. In addition, we have demonstrated that there are cases in which the extraposed referent of an XP construction is given rather than new, and that there are cases in which the subject of an SM construction is new, rather than given. We have further demonstrated that XPs with given referents can nevertheless function as opening
moves, and that SMs with new referents can nevertheless function as sustaining moves. We believe that only a qualitative research as proposed here could have revealed these nuances. We would like to emphasize that the validity of our findings is limited to spoken American English; whether it may be further generalized to other kinds of spoken or written English awaits future research.

References


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