

‘Focus structure in Acooli’ (abstract)

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Word order is determined by information structural consideration in non-configurational languages, while it is highly restricted but plays a role in identifying topic and focus in configurational languages. Acooli is a non-configurational or a configurational language? It is difficult to decide whether most of African languages are non-configurational or configurational. Word order is relatively flexible in post-verbal position, though it is strictly rigid in preverbal position in Acooli. Word order in post-verbal position is determined by not only syntactic but also pragmatic factors in Acooli.

The sentences (1) and (2) are perfectly grammatical syntactically, but sometimes are not appropriate pragmatically. The sentence (1) has a dative NP preceded by a direct object, while the sentence (2) has a direct object preceded by a dative NP.

(1) a=mí!yó !búk kí latín
1SG=PERF:give book to child

(2) a=mí!yó kí latín !búk
1SG=PERF:give to child book

‘I gave the book to the child.’

When a context is given, however, the sentences (1) and (2) are sometimes not appropriate. For instance, when the direct object búk ‘book’ is referred in the context, the sentence (1) is appropriate but the sentence (2) is not appropriate pragmatically.

1. a=wí!ló !búk lá!wór
1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday

‘I bought the book yesterday.’

(1) a=mí!yó !búk kí latín

(2) #a=mí!yó kɪ latín !búk

On the other hand, when the dative NP latín ‘child’ is referred in the context, the sentence (1) is not appropriate, while the sentence (2) is appropriate pragmatically.

2. ɔnɔŋɔ a=tyé kɪ latín

PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with child

‘I had the child.’

(1) #a=mí!yó !búk kɪ latín

(2) a=mí!yó kɪ latín !búk

Van Valin & LaPolla (1997: 209) says that in English, the unmarked focus position is the final position in the core. The examples cited above show that the unmarked focus position is located in the final position of the core in Acooli. When old information occupies the unmarked focus position, the sentences are not appropriate pragmatically. The direct object búk ‘book’ is belonging to old information because it is referred in the context. Because the old information occupies the unmarked focus position of the sentence (2) in the former case, the sentence (2) is not appropriate pragmatically. On the other hand, the sentence (1) is not appropriate pragmatically because old information latín ‘child’ occupies the unmarked position in it.

In Acooli the unmarked focus position for the core elements is the final position in the core. Moreover, the unmarked focus position for the peripheral elements is the final position in the peripheral. The benefactive NP and the locative NP are belonging to peripheral in the following examples. For instance, because the old information latín ‘child’ occupies the unmarked focus position for the peripheral, the sentence (4) is not appropriate pragmatically.

3. ɔnɔŋɔ a=tyé kɪ latín

PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with child

‘I had the child.’

(3) a=cwá!lǎ !búk kɪ latín ɪ-ɔt

1SG=PERF:send book for child to house

(4) #a=cwá!lǎ !búk ɪ-ɔt kɪ latín

1SG=PERF:send book to house for child

‘I sent the book to the house for the child.’

However, the sentence (4) is appropriate in another context. For instance, it is appropriate pragmatically if the locative NP ɔt ‘house’ is referred in the context. The sentence (3) is not appropriate because the old information ɔt ‘house’ occupied the unmarked focus position.

4. ɔnɔŋɔ a=tyé kɪ ɔt gúl!ú

PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with house Gulu

‘I had the house in Gulu.’

(3) #a=cwá!lǎ !búk kɪ latín ɪ ɔt

(4) a=cwá!lǎ !búk ɪ ɔt kɪ latín

It is clear that word order in post-verbal position is determined by not only syntactic but also pragmatic factors. In Acooli the unmarked focus position for the core elements is the final position in the core and the unmarked focus position for the peripheral elements is the final position in the peripheral. The remaining issue is that the dative/benefactive NPs sometimes behave as a core, sometimes behave as a peripheral.

Acooli has the particular morpheme ayé ‘CFM’ for expressing the contrastive focus. The contrastive focus marker ayé ‘CFM’ is preceded only by NP. The NP marked by ayé ‘CFM’ presupposes someone else that contrasts with it. The NP marked by ayé ‘CFM’ is formalized pragmatically as follows.

(5) $\left. \begin{array}{l} \left[\text{_____ ayé} \right]_{\text{foc}} \\ \text{someone else} \end{array} \right\}_{\text{top}}$

The scope of negation is limited to the NP marked by the contrastive focus marker ayé ‘CFM’.

(6) okélo ayé pé ə=wɪlo búk í-!cók lá!wór

Okelo CFM NEG 3S/P=PERF:buy book at-market yesterday

‘Okelo did not buy the book at the market yesterday (someone else bought it).’

(7) okélo pé ə=wɪlo búk ayé í-!cók lá!wór

Okelo NEG 3S/P=PERF:buy book CFM at-market yesterday

‘Okelo did not buy the book at the market yesterday (he bought something else).’

(8) okélo pé ə=wɪlo búk í-!cók ayé lá!wór

Okelo NEG 3S/P=PERF:buy book at-market CFM yesterday

‘Okelo did not buy the book at the market yesterday (he bought it somewhere, not at the market).’

(9) okélo pé ə=wɪlo búk í-!cók lá!wór ayé

Okelo NEG 3S/P=PERF:buy book at-market yesterday CFM

‘Okelo did not buy the book at the market yesterday (he bought it sometime, not yesterday).’

Acooli uses the particular construction consisting of a gerund for expressing the predicate focus.

(10) okélo pé ə=wɪlo búk á=!wíl=á í-!cók lá!wór

Okelo NEG 3S/P=PERF:buy book GER=buy=GER at-market yesterday

‘Okelo did not buy the book at the market yesterday (he sold it).’

Scope of negation is limited to NP marked by CFM or limited to predicate marked by contrastive focus GER. Scope of negation is limited to topicalized NPs. The NPs marked by CFM function as a topic including a set of referents that contrast with the NPs.

Discussion: The issues on the interface between syntax and pragmatics should be researched more precisely. Next speakers will discuss it.