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THE CONTEXT OF SYNTACTICALLY MARKED STRUCTURES IN THREE CONTEMPORARY BRITISH MOVIES

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**ABstract**

This dissertation is a corpus based study of three contemporary British films. The aim was to determine the specific contexts in which syntactically marked structures are used. The assumption is that these structures would occur in contexts that have been identified in the specialized literature. The findings, however, reveal that these structures are more common in contexts typically associated with unmarked word order.

**rESUMEN**

Este estudio corresponde a una investigación de corpus textual de tres películas británicas contemporáneas con el objeto de determinar los contextos específicos en los cuales son utilizadas las estructuras sintácticamente marcadas. El supuesto era que estas estructuras ocurrirían en contextos que han sido identificados en la literatura especializada. Los resultados, sin embargo, muestran que estas estructuras son más comunes en contextos tipicamente asociados a configuraciones no marcadas.

**DEDICATION**

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This dissertation is dedicated to three people who I love the most: my grandmother, my mother and my sister. They have always believed in me and given me their love, support and encouragement throughout these years. Their constant help has enabled me not only to successfully conduct my studies to become an English teacher but also to complete them in the representation of this work.

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**- CHAPTER 1 -**

**INTRODUCTION**

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Probably one of the most important reasons behind the fact that Chilean people have a hard time learning English is that they are normally exposed to language that is not authentic. In other words, maybe we pretend to be teaching something that not teaching English at all.

Most textbooks devoted to teaching English contain adapted texts (see, for example, *Teens Club* or *Global English*, which are textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education). However, the English that is used by native speakers, particularly in colloquial contexts, is characterised by a complexity, and a same time a simplicity, that is not present in most pedagogical material. I am aware that there has been an increasing debate as to what authentic English is, and whether the norms previously accepted by the academia as ‘correct’ or ‘native-speaker’ English’ are now under scrutiny (see, for example, Mansfield and Poppi 2012).

However, I will assume that, despite this debate, there is something called ‘authentic English’, which is the type of English that comes from the English speaking world and that we, as Chilean people, are exposed to in the form of films, songs, TV shows and series, books, the Internet, and so on.

This type of English has been described by several authorities in the areas of linguistics, grammar, phonetics, and other related disciplines. The contributions of Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), Carter and McCarthy (2006) are reliable sources in terms of the grammatical description of the English language, in general, and of its varieties and levels of formality. There is consensus nowadays that English varies according to the speakers, the audiences, the contexts, the genres, and the purposes for which it is used.

Nevertheless, there is still a tendency to analyse the language in terms of sentences in isolation. The tendency to isolate sentences from texts or discourse seems to be widespread not only in the materials used to teach the English language but also in English as a Foreign Language Initial Teaching Training (EFL ITT). This criterion has been used over decades to train teachers in Chile, which leads to a view in which teachers do not see the English language as text.

Considering the English language as text implies to conceive it as a whole and not as the string of isolated bits. It also implies thinking of the English language as connected with a context (for detailed account of English as text or discourse, see for example, Halliday and Hasan (1976), Widdowson (1984), Hewings (2005), Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), Keizer (2015), Green (2017). It is assumed in this dissertation that this perspective is crucial if we really want to improve the level of English in the Chilean classrooms. Having students engaged in tasks involving meaningful authentic English will certainly lead to better English.

The present study is an attempt to look into authentic English. Specifically, it intends to explore the behaviour of syntactically marked structures in this type of English. To do this, a sample of authentic English, comprising three movies in which British English is used, has been selected and analysed. The aim is to find out the discourse function that these structures perform in the selected texts.

The type of English that is examined in this thesis is one, which we could call colloquial conversational British English, which is characterised by mainly dialogues comprising two or more participants, turn taking, plenty of implied information, irony and suspense, abrupt topic shifts, among many other characteristics. In terms of the grammatical features present, the texts contain relatively short sentences, some of which are definitively incomplete, elliptical constructions, plenty of coordination, a wide use of imperatives, among others (for samples of natural English conversation see, for example, Melvin 2016).

The choice of British English is simply related to the fact that it is a type of English that is widely used around the world, not only in Britain. It is also a variety that this author finds appealing.

In Chile, many textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education offer an extensive number of examples of English sentences, but they fail in showing students real world natural texts, dialogues and contexts. As a consequence, we can assume that earning and teaching authentic English are not necessarily something that is taken into account in Chilean classrooms.

The importance of learning authentic English mainly relies on the fact that we should be preparing students for the world of "real" communication. That is to say, we should be using the type of English that is actually employed by the users of the language, whether native speakers or non-natives. Teaching authentic English can also lead to motivating learners to communicate because the language becomes "real", and not simply a sequence of isolated elements.

The remaining of this chapter contains the general objectives and the hypothesis of the investigation. In Chapter 2 the theoretical framework, which was used as the basis for this study, is presented. Chapter 3 describes the study and illustrates the steps followed while carrying out the investigation, as well as the description of the corpus. In Chapter 4, the results of the study are displayed, explained and interpreted. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and suggestions for further study. The references are found on page 34. Finally, the corpus, the analysis of the texts on a spreadsheet and partial results are attached.

**1.1 General Objective**

The study tries to determine the specific contexts in which syntactically marked structures occur in a corpus of three contemporary films in which British English is used.

**1.2 Specific Objectives**

* To select a British oral corpus representative of a contemporary variety.
* To identify the syntactically marked structures and their context.
* To correlate such structures with the identified contexts.

**1.3** Hypothesis

The hypothesis underlying the investigation is that syntactically marked structures are related to identificational contexts, i.e. contexts in which a presupposed open proposition is filled by either a totally new referent, an emphatic referent, or a contrastive referent.

**- CHAPTER 2 -**

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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n this section I present an overview of the main concepts that serve as the basis for the present study. The section is divided into three main parts: the first part concerns the notion of grammatical sentence structure; the second part deals with the function of sentences in context, i.e. information structure; and, finally, section three is about the relationship of the given sentence patterns with their corresponding discourse function/s.

**2.1  Grammatical Sentence Structure**

The grammatical sentence structure corresponds to its word order. This term is applied to refer to the order of the functional elements within a clause. In mainstream grammar (see, for example, Quirk et al, 1985, Biber et al 1999, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Carter and McCarthy 2006, Aarts 2011), it is assumed that the sentence contains two types of word order: unmarked and marked word orders. Unmarked word order is detailed in section 2.1.1. (see below), which differs from marked word order, the object of this study, not only in terms of the sequence of the elements but fundamentally in terms of the functional role such sentences perform in the text, i.e. its information structure: ‘the pairing of propositions with lexico-grammatical structures in accordance with the mental states of the interlocutors who use and interpret these structures as units of information in given discourse contexts’ (Lambrecht 1994:5).

A variety of diverse contexts may affect the order of the elements in a clause. Moving elements from one position to another has to do with the need of making a clause fit a certain context more appropriately. The choice of the arrangement of the elements in a sentence depends on many factors such as: the type information (given or new information, or the state of activation of the referents), emphasis or focus, or contrast, and so on.

In order to improve the understanding of the nature of these arrangements, I am going to take a look at the unmarked word order first.

**2.1.1 Unmarked Word Order**

In English, the canonical or the unmarked word order in a declarative indicative sentence corresponds to what Quirk et al. (1985) established as the ‘seven major clause types, based on the permissible combination of the seven functional categories’ (Quirk at all 1985:720). The clause types are the following:

1. SV (Subject – Verb)
2. SVO (Subject – Verb – Object)
3. SVC (Subject – Verb- Complement)
4. SVA (Subject – Verb - Adverbial)
5. SVOO (Subject – Verb – Object – Object)
6. SVOC (Subject – Verb – Object – Complement)
7. SVOA (Subject – Verb – Object – Adverbial)

This type of unmarked word order has been acknowledged, with minor nomenclature adjustments, by practically all mainstream grammarians (see, for example, Quirk et al, 1985, Biber et al. 1999, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Carter and McCarthy 2005, Aarts 2011). Biber et al (1999) speak of Predicative rather than Complement, Huddleston and Pullum 2002, of Predicator rather than Verb or Verbal, and Adverbials are often referred to as Adjuncts.

The only sentence elements that may accompany these patterns are optional adverbials, either at the beginning or at the end of the clause, without any other alteration.

**2.1.2 Marked Word Order**

Marked word-order

Grammarians agree that the canonical order described above may suffer variations ‘to create various kinds of focus, i.e. special emphasis on particular elements for a variety of purposes’ (Carter & McCarthy 2006: 778). This is made manifest in particular when using sentences in context or in connected discourse.

I will refer to some of these variations or rather ‘transformations’, to use a more Chomskyan term, which are listed below:

**2.1.3 Passive Voice**

Passive voice consists of a transformation in which the canonical object becomes the subject. The structure of this type of transformation can be illustrates as [subject + be + ed participle], followed by an optional ‘by-phrase’, which includes the canonical subject, as in the example below:

Some letters were sent (by Mario).

**2.1.4 Elliptical Constructions**

Elliptical constructions occur when we do not mention some elements that we usually expect to appear in a sentence. These elements are omitted as they can be retrieved from the context. As such, ellipsis is widely recognised as one of the most important cohesive devices contributing to textual meaning (Halliday and Webster 2014). They are very common in informal conversation.

Authors, following the seminal contribution of Halliday and Hasan (1976), have agreed that there are two kinds of elliptical construction:

**2.1.4.1 Elliptical constructions comprising subject ellipsis**

Carter and McCarthy (2006) explain that ellipsis is the omission of elements that can be recovered from the immediate context. In situational ellipsis the elements are generally omitted at the beginning of a sentence, as in the example below:

 Ø Don’t know.

Some elliptical constructions are labelled as response tokens, which are adjectives or adverbs that stand alone and are ‘many times more common in spoken language that in written language because of their frequent use’ (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 188). Their function in elliptical terms is that of referring to an entire preceding statement. Some response tokens are *absolutely, certainly, definitely, fine, good, great, indeed, really, excellent, right, lovely, precisely, possibly, sure, exactly, really.*

**2.1.4.2 Elliptical constructions comprising predicate ellipsis**

With the same reasoning, Carter et al. (2000) state that this category implies the dropping of elements after the verb. When auxiliary and main verbs are used in short replies to questions, the most important verb is frequently ellipted, when this one can be recovered from the context.

 I never will Ø.

The precise nature of ellipsis is still unknown. At UMCE, some interesting findings regarding the phenomenon have been revealed. Flores and Reyes (2009) proposed that the extralinguistic context has an impact on the textual expression of ellipsis. Similarly, Esperidión and Ziehe (2016) concluded that ellipsis is in the majority of the cases an emphatic device used to highlight information.

**2.1.5 Cleft-sentences**

In a clef-sentence the information is divided into two clauses, each with its own verb. This type of realization allows us to concentrate on the new information. There are different types of cleft- sentences; however, we will focus on the two major types*: Wh-cleft sentences* and *It-cleft sentences*.

**2.1.5.1 Wh-cleft sentences or pseudo-clefts**

The structure of these realizations can be illustrated as [wh-clause + be + focused referent]. The activated information is in the *wh- clause* and the new information is placed at the end:

What I like the most about summer is swimming with my friends.

**2.1.5.2 It- cleft sentences**

The structure of these sentences can be illustrated as [It + be + filling referent + relative clause]. In cleft- sentences, the attention is on the *it*- clause (new information).

It was his voice in the classroom.

In written English (see Biber et al. 1999), frequent resort is made to cleft-sentences, i.e. a dislocated proposition that has been broken up into two clauses:

**2.1.6 Fronting**

The structure of this realization can simply be illustrated as [O, SV]. It consists of moving an entire sentence element, particularly the object, to front position with no other alteration in the clause.

A ticket to Brazil, I will buy.

According to Lock (1996) fronted objects are typically contrastive, i.e. their function is to fill an open proposition. On the other hand, their unusual occurrence in written discourse (see Lock 1996: 224, 234) may be an indication that writers tend to reject these constructions due to the predisposition to interpret initial constituents as topics.

**2.1.7 Inversion**

Inversion happens, as expressed by Carter et al. (2011), when we reverse the normal

word order of a structure from SVC to CVS.

An English teacher am I.

**2.1.8 Existential Sentences**

AN existential sentence can be illustrated by the following formula: [there + (modal) + be + indef NP (+ subordinate clause)]. A wide range of existential sentences are presented in (24).

There is

There could be

There happens to be

someone staring at us.

There tends to be

There appears to be

There is said to be, etc.

 Taken from Corvalán 2007: 18

**2.1.9 Extraposition**

An extraposed construction involves the resort to anticipatory *it,* which consists of the replacement of a postponed element (usually the subject) by a substitute form (usually an empty *it*). According to Corvalán (2007), the formula for extraposition can be illustrated as [It + copular verb (+ C + ) Clausal Subject] as in the following example:

The government denies there is and education funding crisis. And *it is true that, overall, spending has increased sharply*. Yet many schools across England and Wales still face insecurity from threatened job cuts.

(Taken from Corvalán 2007: 19)

The same author argues that the principle of information is not necessarily responsible for such constructions. The principle of end-weight, as mentioned by Quirk et al. 1985 and Biber et al. (1999) is probably responsible for the occurrences of such sentences.

**2.2 Sentences in Context**

The textual function of a grammatical construction, whatever this may be, is normally studied within the domain known as Information Structure. This corresponds to a sub-branch of linguistics, or rather to the interface between grammar and pragmatics. Information Structure tries to determine the specific contexts in which a given sentence or grammatical construction occurs. These sentences in context are reffered to as Units of Information (IU) or discourse acts (Lambrecht 1994, Keizer 2015).

According to Lambrecht (1994), cited in Corvalán (2007), sentences may perform one out of four units of information:

**2.2.1 Topic-Comment**

The topic-comment information unit, according to Lambrecht (1994) is realised by a sequence of two elements: a topic, a referent that has already been activated in the interlocutors’ minds, and a comment, which is what is said about the topic. The comment typically contains the focus, i.e. an element in the IU that is salient or prominent, as seen in B below:

 A: Where did Jane go last night?

 B: She went to the club.

**2.2.2 Identifications**

Lambrecht (1994) states that idendificational information units occur when a relationship is established between a referent and a previously evoked open proposition. The presupposed element is the proposition or part of it, and what is provided when uttering the sentence is a referent which is usually inactive in the interlocutors’ minds. Again this is observed in B’s response.

 A: Who went to the club?

 B: Jane did.

According to Corvalán 2007, sentences which are ‘contrastive’ or ‘emphatic’ correspond to identificational units.

 A: Was it Jane or Paul who went to the club?

 B: Jane did.

**2.2.3 Presentations**

Presentational IU’s occur when a proposition is neither linked to an already established topic nor to a presupposed open proposition, i.e. they present an entirely new set of information. In other words, nothing is presupposed, or the most relevant portion of information is new.

 There were drunkards everywhere.

**2.2.4 Scene Setters**

Scene setters consist of a presupposed proposition which serves as a background establishing device for any of the other types of IU’s. In the example below, the scene is set by the adverbial clause.

 When she reached the club, her friends were already there.

**- CHAPTER 3 -**

**THE STUDY**

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In this chapter, I present a detailed account of the steps taken to carry out the investigation. The section contains a description of the procedures employed during the investigation, the characteristics of the corpus, and the criteria for analysing the corpus.

**3.1 Procedures**

This research originated in a tutorial given by Mr. Pablo Corvalán during 2015 to students who were studying the 8th or 9th semester of the English teacher training programme at UMCE. The tutorial was granted to students who lagged behind with the subject entitled English Text Grammar. The activity consisted mainly in a theoretical review of the main concepts underlying the subject matter to then apply these concepts to the analysis of a corpus of authentic English. The students were divided into 3 small groups, each of which was assigned a British movie to analyse. The students had to spot cases of unmarked word order in the scripts and provide a proposal for analysis for each case.

Before the groups started analysing their respective assigned movies, the whole group agreed on the criteria while analysing extracts of only one film containing various cases of unmarked word order during tutorial sessions. This caused discussion among the group, suggestions of possible interpretations by each member and finally compromise. This enabled us to work with exactly the same criteria while analysing the movies in the respective pairs. Sufficient time was given to each group to analyse the movies and, as questions or problematic cases arose, the tutorial gathered whenever necessary to come to a mutual agreement.

A spreadsheet was devised to visually display the analysis, including the cases to be analysed on the vertical axis and each criteria of the analysis on the horizontal axis. This electronic means was very useful to process the data.

On completion of the tutorial and for the purposes of my dissertation, I resumed the unfinished task of assessing the analysis, obtaining results and reporting the findings of the investigation. During this process, I realised that there had been certain imprecisions in the analysis carried out by the pairs. This led me to re-analyse the whole corpus and refine the criteria of analysis before obtaining the final results.

**3.2 Corpus**

The corpus on which this dissertation is based consists of three film scripts corresponding to the films: *The King’s Speech* (2010), *The Imitation Game* (2014), and *The Theory of Everything* (2014), taken from the following web pages:

* http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/King's-Speech,-The.html
* http://www.benedictcumberbatch.co.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/ScreenplayTIG.pdf
* http://focusguilds2014.com/workspace/media/the-theory-of-everything-screenplay.pdf

The texts were retrieved in August, 2015.

The corpus was chosen taking the following features into account:

1. The type of English spoken in the films corresponded to standard contemporary British English.
2. The scripts indeed reflected the language used in the films, which was verified by contrasting the scripts during viewing sessions in the tutorials.
3. The texts were all written presumably by native speakers for a native-speaking audience.
4. The type of language was judged to be authentic, exhibiting natural conversation between the characters.
5. The scripts were all relatively similar in length, containing approximately from 20000 to 22000 words each.
6. The contents of the texts dealt with the events and themes portrayed in the films.

**3.3 Criteria of Analysis**

Once cases of marked word order were found in the scripts, these were numbered and proceeded to be analysed. The analysis was carried out on the basis of grammatical and contextual features.

**3.3.1 Grammatical Analysis**

The grammatical analysis comprised the allocation of the cases to a type of construction as one of the ones mentioned in chapter 2, i.e. elliptical construction, passive voice, clef-sentence, etc. Additionally, a syntactic analysis of the elements in the sentence was performed, using Quirk et al’s (1985) conventions, as [SV]O, SVC, (A) SVO, etc. Square brackets were used to indicate elliptical elements (elements which were regarded to have been omitted in the sentence) and round brackets or parentheses were used to indicate optionality.

Note that conditional sentences were not included in the investigation. Even though traditionally analysed as sentences starting with an optional adverbial i.e. the conditional clause, these constructions were regarded unmarked word order. The reason for this is that conditional clauses typically occur at the beginning of the sentence.

**3.3.2 Contextual Analysis**

The contextual analysis included a breakdown of the sentences in terms of the status of information the syntactic elements contained, i.e. their degree of activation exhibited in the movies. This led to the internal configuration en each unit, for example, A ref + I elem, A prop + emph ref, A prop + contrast ref, A background (see below) and thus the labelling of each case as one of the four types of units of information proposed by Lambrecht (1996), i.e. topic-comment, identification, presentation or scene-setter. The assignment to one of the units was done on the basis of the characterization by Lambrecht (1996). The following table explains the nomenclature used in the study.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Nomenclature** | **Explanation** |
| A ref | Activated referent  |
| I elem | Inactive element |
| A prop | Activated proposition |
| Contrast ref | Contrastive referent |
| emph ref | Emphatic referent |
| A background | Activated background |
| SA | Semi-active element |
| I prop | Inactive proposition  |
| anch  | Anchored element |
| TC | Topic comment IU. |
| ID | Identificational IU |
| PRES | Presentational IU |
| SS | Scene setter |

 |
|  |

The term ‘element’ was used to label anything that was not considered a proposition or a referent, such as negative particles, modal verbs, adverbs, etc. By ‘anchored element’, I mean any portion that is attached to the main information conveyed by a sentence constituent.

The following examples (A11, A12, A33) are used here to illustrate the way the cases were analysed.

A11 Something with machines.

This case corresponds to an elliptical construction analysed as [SV] C , where only the complement of the sentences is actually uttered in the film; the subject and the verb are ellipted. From a textual point of view, the case was labelled as TC as it contained an activated referent followed by the uttered inactive complement. The case is uttered in the context of a response to a question (What the hell is that?), which has already activated the subject and the verb.

A12 Drink did.

This example represents an elliptical construction which was analysed as SV [C], where the complement is ellipted and the subject and the verb are expressed. From a textual point of view, the case was labelled as ID since the utterance provides a referent completes an already activated proposition. The example is expressed in the context of directly addressing someone who is feeling insulted. One of the speakers argues that what keptthe other interlocutor up was alcohol (Drink did) and not something else. Thus, emphasis is produced.

A33 There’s a photograph of you

This case illustrates the realization of an existential sentence which was analysed as SVC, where none of the elements were omitted. From a textual point of view, the case was labelled as PRES because the proposition conveys mostly new information. The prepositional phrase ‘of you’ is anchored to the main message. The context in which this case is uttered corresponds to one of the characters telling one of the interlocutors that somebody has been observing him. To prove this, the speaker shows him a photograph. Therefore, the fact of uttering this sentence and showing the picture makes it possible to present a new set of information.

**3.4 Problematic cases**

During the analysis of the corpus, some cases posed problems, as they were not easily classified. Here, I present two of them. Example 1 in bolt below, from *the Imitation Game*, script A, though clearly an elliptical construction, is not easily determined in terms of its grammatical analysis, as the underlying proposition may be ambiguous.

Good. This is going to go very

quickly now. If you are not

listening carefully, you will miss

things. (1) **Important things**. You’re

writing some of this down? That’s

good.

The initial proposal was to formulate fronting for the sentence underlying the elliptical construction, i.e. an O SV type of construction, as would have been *Important things, you will miss*. However, as we were only concerned, at this point, with a mere grammatical analysis of the utterance is question, irrespective of its textual functioning, the neutral SVO constructions, as in *You will miss important things*, was postulated. This analysis was corroborated after making enquiries with native speakers, who agreed to the neutral construction. The textual analysis was reserved for the discourse functioning of the utterance in question, which was indeed analysed as an activated proposition (A prop) followed by an emphatic referent (emph ref), and thus the utterance (in this case the elliptical construction) was view as an Identificational IU.

Example 85 of text B also presented problems. Even though the realization was undoubtedly a passive voice construction from a grammatical point of view, the contextual analysis was difficult to decide. In this way, the passive constructions required for its full interpretation a revision of the whole co-text, which is given in the following page.

 **BERTIE (CONT'D)**

 Let's stick to medical history please. I'm

 naturally left handed, which was considered

 inappropriate.

 **LIONEL**

 And?

 **BERTIE**

 I was punished. Now I'm right handed.

 **LIONEL**

 (82) Anything else?

 **BERTIE**

 (83) Bandy legs. (84)Also considered

 inappropriate.

 Lionel waits.

 **BERTIE (CONT'D)**

(85) **Metal splints were made**...(86) worn night and

day...(87) very painful. Now I have straight legs. This

is so...tawdry! I need your services as a Speech Therapist,

not Grand Inquisitor. Are you available? Or will it be:

"Myrtle says no?"

Example 85 was analysed as a passive SVC construction whose textual analysis required an examination of the wider co-text. Thus, while reading the corpus, it could be seen that the referent *metal splints* had not been completely activated, i.e. the topic is only partially accessible in the interlocutors’ minds. The speakers are talking about strange medical procedures used in the past for left-handed people, like *bandy legs,* and therefore the assumption isthat *mental splints* is part of that main topic. Consequently, from a contextual point of view, the case was labelled as a semi active referent (SA ref) followed by an inactive element (I elem) after the revision, and thus a topic-comment unit.

* 1. **Processing of the corpus**

After defining the criteria and spotting every case of marked structures in the films, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was devised to statically process the corpus and obtain the results.

Firstly, numbers (1, 2, 3) and letters (A,B,C) were assigned to every realization of marked word order. In this way, the numbers of each case were listed on the vertical axis of the spreadsheet and the criteria used in the analysis on the horizontal axis (see Appendix B).

Once the analysis was carried out, the indicators were correlated to see the way in which the syntactically marked structures were associated with given contexts.

Results were initially calculated in terms of the whole corpus and subsequently in term of the types of constructions. Filters were applied to obtain the frequency of occurrences and the correlations between contextual and grammatical indicators.

**- CHAPTER 4 -**

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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This chapter presents the results obtained during the investigation. In all, 462 realizations of marked word order structures were found in the corpus. Most of the cases comprised elliptical constructions, which led to re-assessing the results in terms of considering elliptical constructions on their own compared with all the other types of constructions. Once this was done, a specific appraisal was made of only the other types of constructions. Only then did I look at the behaviour of the textual analysis, which enabled me to come to the correlations between the structures and their respective units of information.

Thus the chapter is divided into 5 sections:

* 4.1 General Results
* 4.2 Elliptical constructions compared with other types of constructions
* 4.3 Other Constructions only
* 4.4 Units of Information
* 4.5 Final Discussion

**4.1 General results**

This section presents the general results of the research. The total number of examples of marked word order spotted in the corpus made 462 realizations. As can be seen (pie chart 1), all nine types of constructions were used in the films. They appear below with their corresponding percentages.

Chart 1

It is possible to appreciate that among all the types of syntactically marked structures, the most frequent configurations (83 %) correspond to elliptical constructions. Far lower in frequency appear both fronted adverbials and existential sentences which together reach the second place of the realizations with 5% each of them. Subsequently, 3% of the constructions are sentences containing passive voice and 2% are pseudo-cleft sentences. Finally, 1% corresponds to extraposition and cleft sentences each. Other constructions are so rare in the corpus that they do not even reach a digit.

One of the first striking results of the study has to do with the difference in frequency regarding elliptical constructions, as opposed to the other types of constructions. One possible explanation for this has to do with the nature of the corpus, i.e. film scripts that reflect spoken language. It is generally observed by grammarians that spoken English, as that exhibited in conversation, is prone to ellipsis. On the contrary, such structures as cleft-sentences, fronted Objects, extraposition are more common in prototypically written texts (see, for example Biber et al 1999, Downing and Lock 2006, McCarthy and Carter 2006, Carter et al 2011).

**4.1.1 Units of information**

In terms of percentages, chart 2 below illustrates the proportion of each of the units of information found in the corpus.

Chart 2

The chart above reveals that within the categories, the one that is found in most of the cases, with 58% of the preferences, is the topic-comment unit of information. This is followed by identificational constructions, which take the second place with 27% of the sum total. These categories are followed far below with 9% of the samples which were analysed as presentational structures. Finally, the less common type of unit of information spotted in the corpus is the scene-setter with only 6% of the sum total.

The results here are quite unexpected, as we would have thought that marked structures occur in texts precisely to indicate units of a different kind to topic-comment, which according to Lambrecht (1996) are the most neutral textual configurations. Texts are typically construed about topics and, therefore, unmarked structures are typically related to them. These results, however, indicate that marked structures are also frequently used for such purposes, at least in this kind of texts. One possible explanation has to do with the consideration of elliptical constructions as marked structures. It is necessary to look into elliptical constructions more in depth to reveal the precise nature of these constructions.

Notwithstanding, the frequency of the other types of units of information is remarkable (almost 40% of the cases). This is quite in line with our expectations. The high number of identificational units is in accordance with the relationship between marked structures and such units.

**4.1.2 Elliptical Constructions and Units of Information.**

The bar chart below presets the correlation between elliptical constructions and other types of syntactically marked constructions with the units of information analysed in the study.

Chart 3

As can be seen, there is a gradient observed that declines for elliptical constructions, as we move from topic-comment information units to scene setters, with identifications and presentations in between. Topic-comment units exhibit a frequency of over 250 cases, identifications one of approximately 100 cases, presentations less than 25, and no cases for scene setters. On the contrary, this gradient increases with the other types of constructions, starting with a very low frequency with identifications, to progressively augment with topic comment units, presentations to about 30 cases of scene setters.

Again, we observe the need to gain further insights into the behaviour of elliptical constructions, as they may indeed be coding, in most cases, unmarked, rather than marked word order. The findings regarding the other types of constructions reveal a consistent association between them and the less common units of information having to do with the notions of emphasis, contrast, presentations and setting the scene.

**4.1.3 Other Constructions**

As explained above, the high frequency of elliptical constructions made it difficult to observe the behaviour of the other types of marked constructions. That is why, I decided to group the latter independently of the former. Chart 4 shows the correlation of the other types of marked constructions only with the units of information they convey.

Chart 4

As can be seen, just over 10 cases of passive voice constructions convey topic-comment IUs, with only an insignificant number identificational units and scene setters. The 4 cases of cleft sentences all correspond to identifications, presentations being solely realised by existential sentences. Fronted adverbials are typically scene setters, which are also realised by extraposition in 5 cases.

From the findings above, it can be clearly inferred that only passive constructions are used for the regular topic-comment configurations. The other constructions are very much in line with Corvalán’s (2007) proposal regarding the realisation of units of information. Perhaps the only novelty here is given by extraposed constructions, which occurred on 5 occasions as scene setters. This may be due to the fact that these configurations contain a heavy load of information, which has to be associated as background information with other discourse acts. The reason for this may also be related to psycholinguistic constrains, which lead interlocutors to focus the attention to the more neutral configurations to be properly processed in their minds. On the whole, further investigation is required in this respect to give more conclusive evidence to assert this.

**- CHAPTER 5 -**

**CONCLUSIONS**



The study reported here was an attempt to examine authentic English. Specifically, it intended to explore the behaviour of syntactically marked structures in a corpus of authentic British English taken from three films.

The research, which originated in a tutorial, consisted of a corpus-based investigation that looked into syntactically marked structures occurring in the films, which were related to the contexts in which they were used.

The hypothesis underlying the investigation was that syntactically marked structures are related to identificational contexts, i.e. contexts in which a presupposed open proposition is filled by either a totally new referent, an emphatic referent, or a contrastive referent, as deduced upon the examination of the specialised literature.

The remarkable finding of the research is that the hypothesis proposed was disconfirmed. As a matter of fact, the results show that syntactically marked structures are mostly related to topic-comment units of information, typically associated with unmarked word order. Identificational units of information occurred in a much lower frequency.

The results seem to be affected by the high use of elliptical constructions, which are commonplace in spoken English. In fact, it becomes debatable whether the presence of ellipsis poses marked word order. The precise nature of ellipsis, nevertheless, remains uncertain. The behaviour of the other types of constructions, if ellipsis is disregarded, was quite consistent with identificational information units, related to the notions of emphasis and contrast. To a lesser degree marked structures conveyed presentations and scene setters.

Further studies are required to unveil the precise nature of ellipsis. We still are uncertain whether or not elliptical constructions are actually syntactically marked configurations. They can probably be interpreted as reduced forms of unmarked word order.

Similarly, it would be interesting to carry out analogous investigations with a different corpus or without taking elliptical constructions into account. This study considered only grammatical aspects. Other areas of knowledge, such as phonetics or pragmatics, may look into marked configurations from their respective perspectives.

The results of this study also stress the importance of considering authentic language as the target to be used in classrooms. As observed at the beginning of this dissertation, in our country, textbooks devoted to teach English to students in primary or secondary education frequently lack authentic English, which may partly be the cause for the low levels of proficiency exhibited by the Chilean population. Taking authentic English as the source of our input to students may have long-term improvements in the teaching of English in Chilean classrooms.

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**Appendix A**

**Analysis**