Preferred Argument Structure in Conversational Reporting

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Abstract: Preferred Argument Structure (PAS) formulated by Du Bois (1987) reveals that there is a set of preferences for certain nominal distribution patterns in terms of the number and type of arguments contained in a clause. They are motivated by the constraints on information flow. This study shows that the PAS holds for the genre of conversational reporting discourse in American English. The clausal objects of verbs of saying, which are low-transitivity clauses, constitute a special kind of objects, but a high number of reporting discourse in a text does not deform but rather even strengthens the distributional pattern proposed in terms of PAS. However, in contrary to Du Bois’ claim about the general patterning of a subject of an intransitive verb (S) and an object of a transitive verb (O), close patterning of S and a transitive subject (A) is suggested as a feature of American English discourse.

1. Introduction

Language use and grammatical structure are closely related. Recent
studies in discourse pragmatics have shown that information management in discourse plays a decisive role in syntactic distribution. Preferred Argument Structure (Du Bois: 1987) offers an insight that there is a preferred syntactic patterning of verbs and arguments in spoken discourse. It demonstrates the “discourse basis” of grammatical patterns.

Preferred Argument Structure (PAS) refers to a relatively fixed syntactic distribution of nominals, motivated by the constraints on information flow. After Du Bois proposed it for Sacapultec, an ergative Mayan language, numerous studies have demonstrated its general applicability across a wide variety of languages (e.g., Durie 1988, Kärkkäinen 1996, Smith 1996, Matsumoto 2000, Du Bois et al. 2003). Yet, there are some unexamined areas, one of which is the distribution of clausal NPs, in particular, clausal objects of verbs of saying. This study investigates whether the PAS holds for conversational reporting discourse in American English.

2. Overview of Preferred Argument Structure

In a study of Sacapultec (1987), Du Bois found that in spoken narratives there exists a set of tendencies that link the grammatical and pragmatic aspects of the language. The tendencies are summarized as “quantity” and “role” constraints. The first grammatical constraint is that speakers tend to avoid expressing more than one lexical core argument in a clause (One Lexical Argument Constraint). The “clause” is a unit consisting of a verb and its “core argument NPs,” i.e., intransitive subject (S), transitive subject (A), and transitive object (O) (Du Bois 1987). The second grammatical constraint says that speakers tend to avoid lexical agents, i.e., lexical A-role arguments in transitive clauses (Non-lexical A Constraint). The first pragmatic constraint is the tendency that speakers avoid more than one piece of new information per clause (One New Argument Constraint). The limitations on the amount of new information within a unit in spoken
discourse have been also noted by Givón (1975) as “one-chunk-per-clause processing principle” and by Chafe (1987, 1994) as “one new concept at a time constraint” or “one new idea constraint.” Chafe (1987: 32) argues that it is a natural consequence of a single focus of consciousness. The second pragmatic constraint indicates that speakers avoid introducing new referents in the A position (Given A Constraint). This is related to the “light subjects” hypothesis for transitive verbs proposed by Chafe (1994). As a logical consequence of these four constraints on information flow, spoken narrative discourse holds a relatively fixed syntactic distribution, which is termed Preferred Argument Structure.

The PAS thus suggests that full noun phrases appear in S and O, but not in A, in a parallel way to that new information appears in S and O, but not in A. The maximum number of full noun phrases per clause is fixed to one, concomitantly with the cognitively oriented principle in information flow that only one piece of new information appears per clause.

Numerous studies have verified that the PAS holds for spoken narrative discourse in many languages with a variety of role marking systems, including Korean (Lee 1984), Chamorro (Scancarelli 1985), Brazilian Portuguese (Dutra 1987), Papago (Payne 1987), Rama (Craig 1987), Spanish (Bentivoglio 1992), French (Ashby and Bentivoglio 1993), American English (Kärkkäinen 1996), modern Hebrew (Smith 1996), and Japanese (Iwasaki 1985, Matsumoto 2000).

While the PAS is universally applicable in spoken discourse, some studies have confirmed its applicability across different genres (e.g., Kumpf 1992, Thompson 1993), others have pointed to its sensitivity to genre (e.g., O’Dowd 1990). In a study of American English conversational discourse, Kärkkäinen (1996: 676) observed that “dimensions of information flow may vary from conversation to conversation and even from one part of a conversation to another.” She found some patterning differences of nominal distribution between narrative and non-narrative data. In addition
to discourse genre, areas remaining to be examined in approaching the PAS include discourse functions of S and O as well as of unattached nominals, locatives, and other obliques; the use of repetition; the distribution of zeros and pronouns, and the use of the clausal NPs (Kumpf 1992: 397). Kumpf (1992: 382) notes that the distribution of the clausal NPs, in particular, is left out of the statistics in her study because the clausal objects of verbs of saying constitute a special kind of object. According to scalar quality of transitivity (Hopper and Thompson 1980, Tao 1996), Matsumoto (2000) categorizes the clausal NPs as low-transitivity clauses, i.e., “clauses with verbs which take two arguments (A and O) and denote some action having relatively little or no effect on the direct object NP” (p. 76), in opposition to high-transitivity clauses. Low-transitivity clauses contain verbs of saying (say), verbs denoting mental activities (think, know), and verbs of possession (have). These clauses show different distribution from high-transitivity clauses in her study of Japanese conversation.

This study investigates nominal distribution in conversational reporting discourse in American English, as a genre that has not been explored in the past studies. In particular, I shall examine if the special characteristics of the clausal NPs, especially of the clauses with the verbs of saying, affect the nominal distribution in spoken narratives. If the nominal distribution in spoken discourse containing more reporting discourse is statistically different from the distribution in other discourse, I shall see how the difference affects the PAS. In the following, before investigating the argument structure in terms of the clause (PAS constraints are formulated in terms of the clause), I shall start with an investigation of the information structure of intonation units that are basic units of discourse production and information flow. Then I shall examine each of the four constraints of PAS (lexical quantity, lexical role, pragmatic quantity, and pragmatic role).
3. Methodology

3.1. Data

This study examines natural spoken discourse of American English conversation. It uses samples of narrative segments that include reporting discourse from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English. The data is taken from part of a speech-event that lasts roughly two hours. In the speech event, two speakers (female and male cousins) in their early thirties are having a conversation in a living room. It is a gossip session about a variety of topics—primarily about family members and friends. It thus includes many sequences of reporting their conversation.

The data is transcribed into a series of intonation units (IUs) (Chafe 1987, 1994). IUs are basic units of discourse production and information flow in spoken discourse. They are produced under a coherent intonation contour. The extracts consist of 393 IUs, 328 clauses, and 498 overt noun phrases (lexical and pronominal).

3.2. Coding

I first identified all the noun phrases including zeros in the texts. I then coded each noun phrase for relevant features, including morphological types (referential form), surface grammatical role types, and referential pragmatic statuses (information statuses). Three referential forms are distinguished: full noun, pronoun, and zero realization of arguments. For the grammatical roles of referents, core arguments (S, A, O) and non-arguments (P, B, L, V, I) are distinguished with the following operational definitions. S refers to the subject of an intransitive verb, subject of a nominal or adjectival predicate, or subject in an existential there-construction. A is the subject of a transitive verb. Although it is termed “agent,” it occurs with the verbs of both high and low in agency, thus occurs in both high and low transitivity.
clauses. O is the direct object of a transitive verb. P is predicate nominals i.e., NPs functioning as predicates. B refers to Oblique NPs, either locative or temporal. I is the indirect object of a transitive verb in a ditransitive clause. L is independent NPs, i.e., free or loose NPs that are detached from the clausal structure. V is vocatives. L and V are clause-external constituents and the rest are clause-internal constituents.

The verbs of saying are specially identified. They are verbs that report someone’s verbal communication, e.g., say, go, and tell. These verbs take two arguments (A and O), although the agents have relatively little or no effect on the direct objects. The direct objects of verbs of saying are typically clausal objects identified as the clausal NPs. All clausal NPs in the texts including the clausal objects of verbs of saying are coded for their grammatical roles first, and the content of the clause was coded as a separate clause.1

As for the pragmatic statuses of NPs, I categorized all nominals into three states of activation, following Chafe (1987, 1994): new, given, and accessible. A new NP (N) refers to a totally new concept which has been previously “inactive.” The new referent is previously unmentioned and is first introduced into the discourse. A given NP (G) is an already “active” concept in a person’s focus of consciousness. The given referent can be whether previously mentioned in the discourse, or given from the conversational context, or previously unmentioned but is part of a previously evoked schema, or is assumed by the speaker to be identifiable to the hearer by situation or shared prior knowledge. An accessible NP (A) is one that is “semi-active” in the focus of consciousness. It is in a person’s background or peripheral awareness, and is inferable. The accessible referents are included in the given referents in some tabulation, if necessary.
4. Results and discussion

4.1. Information structure of intonation units

I analyzed 393 substantive IUs and 328 clauses in the dataset. The IUs are categorized into three subtypes of IUs, following Matsumoto (2000: 68). First, there are 223 IUs that constitute propositionally independent single-IU clauses. For example, in (1), one IU constitutes one single-IU clause. Second, there are 205 constituents of 74 multi-IU clauses.2 In (2), three IUs constitute one multi-IU clause. On average, one multi-IU clause consists of 2.77 IUs. Third, there are 87 detached phrasal IUs that are outside the clausal domain. For example, line 2 in (3) is a vocative; lines 1-2 in (4) constitute a clause-external preposed NP in a left-dislocation construction.3

(1) I did not wanna go.
(2) he’s dropping,
   (H) .. literary terms, 
   and names,
(3) .. <VOX oh, 
   Alina, 
   you look [so ch=ic, 
   in your] suede pants VOX>.
(4) This party I went to Friday night, 
   where Joy was jamming on that harmonica? 
   That was absolute- --

The second type of IU, constituent of multi-IU clause, is prominent in the present data. This is due to the IU structure of reporting discourse. There are two IU types of reporting discourse. First, the reporting part, or dialogue introducer (DI), which consists of A and a verb of saying, is often placed in a separate IU from the reported part that is an object of the transitive verb.4 In (5), line 1 is a DI that introduces a quoted segment in line 2, and I in line 1 is A and the quoted segment yeah I’m married in line 2 is O of the transitive verb said in line 1. Likewise, line 3 introduces lines
4-5, and I in line 3 is A and the quotation in lines 4-5 is O of the transitive verb *said* in line 3. Second, a DI and a reported part are placed in the same IU. In (6), *She goes* introduces a reported segment *well Tommy Spencer opened his big mouth* in the same IU.

(5) And I said,
    yeah I’m married.
    And I said,
    so is he.
    .. [He’s married too].

(6) .. She goes well Tommy Spencer opened his big mouth.

The first type of single-IU DI as seen in example (5) constitutes 61.1% of the whole DIs in the data, while the second type of DI that is placed in the same IU as the quotation as in (6) occupies 35.2%, the rest being zero introduction (3.7%). The prevalence of the multi-IU clause in the data is particularly due to the characteristic IU structures of reporting discourse.

There are 498 overt noun phrases contained in 393 substantive IUs in the present data. Of all the overt NPs, 110 (22%) are New, 364 (73%) are Given, and 24 (5%) are Accessible information. Given and Accessible NPs together occupies high proportion of NPs (78%). Of all the overt NPs in quoted segments in reporting discourse, 20 (15%) are New, 111 (83%) are Given, and 3 (2%) are Accessible information.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 498 Given and New NPs within the 393 substantive IUs. The information structure types involving multiple NPs represent the linear order of those NPs contained in the IU. Table 1 (a) indicates that of the total number of substantive IUs, 46.9% (N=184) contained one NP, 22.7% (N=89) contained two NPs, 8.6% (N=33) contained three NPs, 1.9% (N=7) contained 4 NPs, and only 0.3% (N=1) contained 5 NPs. It also shows that 23.9% (N=94) contained at least one New NP, 70.2% (N=276) contained at least one Given NP; 56% (N=220) contained Given NPs only, 10.2% (N=40) contained New NPs only; and 13.7% (N=54) contained both Given and New NPs. In the whole texts, the
preferred IU information structure types are the IUs with one Given NP (37.7%), IUs with zero NPs (15.5%), and IUs with two Given NPs (14.2%).

Of all the 393 substantive IUs, 24.9% (N=98) are IUs that contain only quoted segments, such as example (5) lines 2, 4 and 5, while 12.7% (N=50) are IUs that contain DIs, i.e., IUs that contain only DIs (example [5], lines 1 and 3), IUs containing both DIs and quoted segments (example [6]), or IUs containing DIs and constituents other than reporting discourse. Table 1 (b) indicates that among the IUs containing only quoted segments, 38.8% (N=38) contained one NP, 28.6% (N=28) contained two NPs, 7.1% (N=7) contained three NPs, and only 1.0% (N=1) contained 4 NPs. Table 1 (c) shows that among the IUs containing DIs, 66% (N=33) contained one NP, 8.0% (N=4) contained two NPs, 10.0% (N=5) contained three NPs, and 10.0% (N=5) contained 4 NPs. Thus, it is clear that the IUs with four and five NPs in all IUs are mostly the IUs containing DIs. Table 1 (b) also indicates that among the IUs containing only quoted segments, the most preferred IU information structure types are the IUs with one Given NP (32.7%); and the IUs with two Given NPs (23.5%) or with zero NPs (23.5%) come next. Table 1 (c) further indicates that when the IUs containing DIs have less than four NPs, they are all Given information. Only those with four or five NPs have New information added (8%). Among the IUs containing DIs, the most preferred IU information structure types are the IUs with one Given NP (66%), and IUs with three Given NPs (10.0%), two Given NPs (8.0%), four Given NPs (4.0%) follow.
Table 1: Distribution of IU information structure types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information structure types</th>
<th>(a) All IUs</th>
<th>(b) IUs containing only quoted segments</th>
<th>(c) IUs containing DIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero NPs</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+G</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G+N</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G+G</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+N+G</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+G+G</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+G+N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+N+N+N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+N+N+N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G+G+G+G</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G+N+G+G</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G+G+N+G</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G+G+N+N+G</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N+G+G+G+G</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+N+G+G+G+G</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+Zero NPs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncodable</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>393</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 further presents the distribution of the Given and New NPs within the 50 IUs that include DIs presented in Table 1 (c). It makes obvious that the NPs in the DIs are always Given, whether the DIs precede quotations in the same IUs (N=15), or they are independent single IUs (N=33), or they follow NPs other than the quotations (N=2). It suggests that since transitive subjects of the verbs of saying are always Given, DIs perfectly conform to the Given A Constraint, which will be discussed in 4.3.2.

Table 2: Distribution of information structure types of IUs containing DIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DI + Quotation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G+GGG</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+GG</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+G</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+NGGG</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+GNN</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG+G</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG+GN</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GGG</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGGG</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+ZeroNPs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To establish what kind of argument structures are preferred in the present data that involves much of reporting discourse, we shall further look at the grammatical and pragmatic dimensions of PAS in the next sections.

4.2. Grammatical dimension of Preferred Argument Structure

4.2.1. Lexical Quantity Constraint

Kärkkäinen (1996: 680) demonstrates that the One Lexical Argument
Constraint (*Avoid more than one lexical argument per clause*) established by Du Bois holds for her American English discourse data. In the present data involving high proportion of reporting discourse, this holds, too. Table 3 shows that in total of 328 clauses, the percentage of clauses with one lexical core argument (S, A, O) is 15.9%, and the percentage of clauses with two lexical arguments is only 0.9%. In the other clauses, the core arguments are pronominal or zero. It suggests that clauses tend to have no more than one lexical core argument.

Table 3: Number of lexical arguments in clause cores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 lexical argument</th>
<th>2 lexical arguments</th>
<th>Total (clauses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>(15.9)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(7) is an example of one lexical argument in a clause. In it, a full NP *a matching set* is an O of a transitive verb *want* in the quoted segment.

(7) I said,

<VOX oh,
you want a matching set VOX>?

Three instances of clauses containing two-lexical arguments are (8) (9) (10). In (8), a transitive subject *Cathy and Jawahar* and a transitive object *this party* are both lexicalized. In (9), *Tommy Spencer* is a lexical A, and *his big mouth* is a lexical O; in (10), *this guy* is a lexical A, and *sentences, .. complicated sentences* is a lexical O.

(8) (H) (Hx) He,

X opens his big mouth to Jonathan,

that *Cathy and Jawahar* are having *this party*.

(9) .. She goes well *Tommy Spencer* opened *his big mouth*.

(10) all of a sudden you’re .. realizing,

*this guy* is stringing *sentences*,

.. *complicated sentences* together,
4.2.2. Lexical Role Constraint

Another constraint on a grammatical dimension of PAS is a Non-lexical A Constraint (*Avoid lexical A*). It constrains the lexical status of grammatical roles, in that the fully lexicalized NPs do not appear in a transitive subject position. Table 4 shows the distribution of lexical mentions (full NPs) over various grammatical roles. Among the core arguments, full NPs occur most likely in O (24.8%) but rarely in A (6.7%); they occur more with Obliques (30.3%) and other roles (P, L, V) (27.3%). On the other hand, Table 5 indicates that pronouns occur frequently in A (40.2%) and S (41.1%), whereas they less frequently occur in O (10.0%) and very rarely in Obliques (5.4%) and other roles (3.3%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>Obl.</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(6.7)</td>
<td>(24.8)</td>
<td>(30.3)</td>
<td>(27.3)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>Obl.</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(10.0)</td>
<td>(5.4)</td>
<td>(3.3)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results indicate that Non-lexical A Constraint is operating in the present data. However, in contrary to Du Bois’ claim that S patterns with O in both ergative and non-ergative languages, it is observed that the same constraint holds for S as for A. This is in conformity with Kärkkäinen’s (1996) finding that S in general patterns with A rather than with O in American English discourse.

There is another observation that among the 133 pronominal mentions in a role of A in Table 5, 69 instances are transitive subjects in low-transitivity
clauses: verbs of saying (say [N=24], go [19], tell [6], ask, start, open up one’s mouth to) and verbs denoting mental activities (think [7], know [6], figure, mean, believe, notice).

As for the eleven instances of lexical mentions in A in Table 4, it is reasonable to account for them as exceptions to the constraint rather than as violations. (Kärkkäinen: 691). First, turtlenecks in example (11) is a general noun with no article and no determiner. Du Bois (1987) suggests that generic and plural nouns with the present tense can be exceptional. Second, some instances are human, tracking, and identifiable NPs. They are my husband in (12) and kinship NPs without kinship terms in (13) (14): Cathy is the speaker’s twin sister, and Jawahar is Cathy’s husband; Hector is the speaker’s husband. Four other instances include human, tracking, and identifiable NPs without kinship relations. Third, there are individual instances in which NPs have to be lexicalized for contextual necessity. In (15), to clarify the pronominal referent of He in line 7, the speaker repairs He set up to the Black guy set up; otherwise He could be interpreted as the Black guy’s father in line 1. There is one instance that is hard to explain as an exception. In any case, all nouns except for the general noun in (11) are Given or Accessible NPs.

(11) [I] said,
    yeah,
    turtlenecks don’t hide everything.

(12) I said I don’t --
    [You know] I really don’t think my husband would appreciate that.

(13) .. Tommy Spencer,
    .. who’s up there,
    who y- .. was Jonathan and Loren’s best friend,
    right?
    (H) (Hx) He,
    X opens his big mouth to Jonathan,
    that Cathy and Jawahar are having this party.
    So Cathy calls me up,
4.3. Pragmatic dimension of Preferred Argument Structure

4.3.1. Pragmatic Quantity Constraint

Pragmatic constraints presented in PAS concern the information status of arguments in a clause. The first constraint is the One New Argument Constraint (*Avoid more than one new argument per clause*). Table 6 shows that in total of 328 clauses, the percentage of clauses that contain one New core argument (S, A, O) is 13.7%, and there was no instance of clauses with two New core arguments. This means that clauses absolutely have no more than one New core argument. Majority of clauses thus have Given or Accessible core arguments only, as Du Bois claims that there is no lower limit on new entities (1987). This is in parallel with the number of lexical arguments in clause cores.

Table 6: Number of New arguments in clause cores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 New argument</th>
<th>2 New arguments</th>
<th>Total (clauses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>(13.7)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.2. Pragmatic Role Constraint

The second pragmatic constraint is about the activation state of nominals: Given A Constraint (*Avoid New A*). Table 7 shows the grammatical role of
new mentions. It shows that most of the newly mentioned NPs fall in O (32.7%) and Obliques (28.2%). The new mentions are least likely to occur in A (1.8%).

Table 7: Grammatical role of new mentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>S</th>
<th></th>
<th>O</th>
<th></th>
<th>Obl.</th>
<th></th>
<th>Other</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Table 7 shows grammatical role of all new mentions, I shall focus on the grammatical role of new mentions that are lexically realized. By adding the grammatical role of lexically realized Given and Accessible NPs, Table 8 show the overall correlation of grammatical role and information status of lexical mention. It indicates the activation states that the lexically realized NPs in each grammatical role take. For instance, out of the 11 full nouns in A position (which occupies 6.6% of all the full nouns in the data), 18.2% are New, the rest are Given (63.6%) or Accessible (18.2%). Thus, New NPs occur rarely in A role. On the contrary, New NPs occupy 40-67% in all the other roles: 45.5% of all the lexically mentioned S, 66.7% of O, 60.8% of Oblique, and 40.9% of other roles (P, L, V). These are all higher than Given or Accessible NPs.

Table 8: Activation state by grammatical role –lexical mention (full nouns) only–

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New</th>
<th></th>
<th>Given</th>
<th></th>
<th>Accessible</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obli.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total full NPs</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All NPs in Text</td>
<td>[110]</td>
<td>[364]</td>
<td>[24]</td>
<td>[498]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The pragmatic tendency to avoid new mentions in A is confirmed in Tables 7 and 8, but there are still two instances of new mentions in A. Both of them are in quotations. In (16), my husband is an A of the embedded clause my husband would appreciate that. It is not a new concept between the speaker and the hearer in the present situation, but since this is in a quotation originally uttered to a man who does not know that the speaker is married, I categorized it as a New NP. The speaker comments on this utterance later, which is shown in (17). The hearer was not prepared for the new information that the speaker is married, thus he was not able to activate the concept “my husband” given in the A position in (16). It is a violation of the light subject constraint (Chafe 1994). As the speaker notes in (17), the hearer thought that it was strategic to use the marked way to introduce the totally new mention of my husband in this abrupt way. It is strategic in the sense that the “unmarried” speaker (the man believes so) brings up her marital status as shared information between herself and the man who is interested in her, in order to refuse him. (18) is another instance of new mention in A. This is a typical exception to the Given A Constraint, as it was to the Non-lexical A Constraint: turtlenecks in A position is a general noun with no article and determiner; they are generic and plural, accompanying the present tense.

(16) I said I don’t --
    [You know] I really don’t think my husband would appreciate that.
(17) .. he didn’t] believe me.
    .. That I was married.
    .. He thought I was giving him the brush-off.
    .. That’s c=ool.
(18)       [I] said,
        yeah,
        turtlenecks don’t hide everything.

There are some other observations made in the data. Speakers use discourse strategies to avoid New A. Left-dislocation is a typical strategy to avoid
New A in the present data. In (19), Tommy Spencer is a new mention to the hearer. It is introduced as an independent NP (line 1) with some comments on who he is (lines 2-4), and it is re-mentioned as an A using a pronominal form He (line 5). As a core argument in a clause, it is a piece of Given information. (20) is not an instance of left-dislocation construction in its exact sense. It is rather a repair, but it still has a similar effect of decreasing activation cost of a new concept. Fletcher in line 3 is an Accessible NP of which the speaker supposes the hearer knows: he is a colleague of the speaker’s husband. But compared to other Accessible human nouns in the conversation, it is not familiar enough to the hearer thus is not easily accessible. After first uttering Fletcher in line 3, the following IU Well see and additional actually help the hearer’s activation of the information.

(19) .. Tommy Spencer,
   .. who’s up there,
   who y-.. was Jonathan and Loren’s best friend,
   right?
   (H) (Hx) He,
   X opens his big mouth to Jonathan,
   that Cathy and Jawahar are having this party.

(20) ... % (TSK) (H) stable.
   .. Yeah.
   .. Fletcher -
   .. Well see,
   actually Fletcher was going to ask Hector to move back to editorial,

5. Conclusion

This study claims that the Preferred Argument Structure (PAS) holds for the discourse genre of conversational American English full of reporting discourse.

I first examined the information structure of intonation units. First, I found that the single-IU DI constitutes majority of the DIs in the data,
which is one of the factors for the prevalence of the multi-IU clause in the whole data. Second, Given NPs are extensively dominant in reporting discourse, and especially in the DIs, the NPs are always Given. This again reinforces the prevalence of Given NPs in the whole narrative text.

Next, I investigated grammatical and pragmatic dimensions of PAS. Each of the four constraints on information flow was tested and proven for the genre. In terms of a grammatical dimension, the first constraint, the One Lexical Argument Constraint, holds that speakers tend to avoid expressing more than one lexical core argument per clause. The second constraint, the Non-lexical A Constraint on the lexical status of grammatical roles, constrains that the fully lexicalized NPs rarely appear in a transitive subject A position. Significantly, it was also noted that S patterns with A rather than with O, which is contrary to the claim by Du Bois (1987), Smith (1996), and others, but which is in conformity with Kärkkäinen’s (1996) finding in American English discourse. Thus, close patterning of S and A is a feature to American English discourse. Rare instances of lexical NPs in the A position were shown as reasonable exceptions to the constraints rather than as violations. In terms of a pragmatic dimension, the first constraint, the One New Argument Constraint, is shown to be perfectly working in the present data that speakers have no more than one piece of new information per clause. The second pragmatic constraint, the Given A Constraint, indicates that speakers least likely to introduce new referents in the A position, whether they are lexically mentioned or not. Some examples for global discourse strategies to circumvent the limitations by the PAS constraints were raised like a left-dislocation and a repair.

Now that the results of the present study of American English conversation full of reporting discourse support or even strengthen Kärkkäinen’s (1996) findings in the study of American English discourse, reporting discourse represents a typical argument structure of spoken discourse in American English. The present data is in conformity to Du
Bois’ PAS except for the role of S, thus it is a question left for the further investigation. In other words, discourse genre is not as much a problem for PAS. Although clausal NPs, especially clausal objects of verbs of saying, have been viewed problematic in the study of PAS, this study demonstrated that they are rather a support for the PAS.

Notes

1 For treatment of the parenthetical clauses such as You know and I mean, I followed Kärkkäinen (1996: 684n): I and you are coded as S if the clause was a separate intonation unit, and as A if the clause appeared at the beginning of a longer intonation unit and seemed to have a closer syntactic connection to the following clause.

2 The same IU is counted multiple times when it is part of multiple clauses. For example:

(i) I said if you invite them up there for a party,
   .. (H) they’re gonna assume,
   that they are staying with you,
   right?

Line 3 is counted as a clausal object of assume in line 2. It is also counted as part of an object of said in line 1.

3 The following symbols are used in the transcripts of the conversational examples:

{carriage return} Intonation unit
-- Truncated intonation unit
- Truncated word
[ ] Speech overlap
. Final
, Continuing
? Appeal
= Lengthening
...(N) Long pause
... Medium pause
.. Short pause
(H) Inhalation
(Hx) Exhalation
% Glottal stop
@ Laughter
<@ @> Laugh quality
<VOX VOX> Voice quality of imitating another’s speech
TSK Vocal sound of a click of the tongue

4 I dare not use the typical terms “reporting clause” and “reported clause” in this paper. As a clause is defined as “a unit consisting of a verb and its ‘core argument NPs,’ i.e., intransitive subject (S), transitive subject (A), and transitive object (O),” the reporting part he said of a sentence he said, “I’m married.” is not a complete clause, since it has an O to complete the clause. This is parallel to the idea that I have in I have a pen is not a clause but is “part” of a clause which has an object.

5 In addition to pronouns, non-lexical mentions include zero forms, which is not calculated here.

6 In my original tabulation, there was one instance that could be interpreted as a two New core arguments clause. However, one of the two New arguments was a pronoun. It was excluded from Table 6, following other studies: “zeros and pronominals are seen as given, and their inclusion would greatly skew the results” (Kumpf 1992: 389).

(i) [I] said,
yeah,
turtlenecks don’t hide everything.

References


of Chibchan Studies 5.
要旨:

崎田智子

 Preferred Argument Structure in Conversational Reporting