A Brief Analysis of Information Packaging Based on Examples from *Animal Farm*

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Abstract: *This thesis offers a concise analysis of information packaging in written discourse using examples from George Orwell's "Animal Farm." It examines various constructions such as preposing, inversion, existential, it-cleft, and passive voice, drawing from frameworks proposed by linguistic scholars like Huddleston & Pullum, Quirk et al, and Chafe. The research underscores that diverse packaging constructions can coexist within a single clause, offering writers flexibility in conveying nuanced meanings. By comprehending these syntactic mechanisms, writers can adeptly regulate information flow and enhance reader comprehension in written texts.*

Keywords: *information packaging; Animal Farm; syntactic constructions*

1. Introduction

As Huddleston & Pullum[5] has pointed out, information-packaging constructions are a number of clause constructions 'which differ syntactically from the canonical constructions, have a syntactically more basic counterpart differing not in truth conditions or illocutionary meaning but in the way the informational content is presented.' The term 'packaging' is first used by Chafe[2] due to the fact that the phenomena he wants to describe have primarily to do 'with how the message is sent and only secondarily with the message itself'[9]. Information-packaging is also termed as 'information processing'[8] or 'information structuring'[1] and there are indeed some differences between these concepts. Despite of all the disputations, Huddleston & Pullum and Quirk *et al* both agree that there are at least eight ways to package or process information syntactically: preposing, postposing, inversion, existential, extraposition, dislocation, clefts and passive voice, but due to the limited space here I will just focus on the constructions that can be found in the given text.

In this essay, I will look into five clause constructions respectively based on examples from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In order to facilitate comparison, both the original clauses and their basic counterparts (admissible or not) will be listed below. During the analysis I will pay special attention to some major concepts employed to regulate information-packaging constructions: familiarity status (given and new information) and weight, end-weight & end-focus. By classifying the sentences into different clause construction types and discuss them from the perspective of familiarity status and end-weight & end-focus, I will try to find out some basic methods to process written information syntactically and discuss some major concerns of writers when packaging information that is intended to convey.

2. Research Methods

The research method involves a detailed analysis of clause constructions and information packaging strategies in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The method comprises the following steps:

Text Selection: Select relevant excerpts from *Animal Farm* that exemplify various clause constructions, including preposing, inversion, existential, it-cleft, and passive voice.

Data Collection: Compile a corpus of sentences and passages from *Animal Farm* that showcase different information packaging constructions.

Annotation and Classification: Annotate and classify each sentence according to its information packaging construction, familiarity status (given and new information), and weight (complexity and importance of information).

Comparative Analysis: Conduct a comparative analysis between the original sentences and their basic counterparts to identify syntactic and semantic differences in information packaging.

3. Discussion

3.1 Familiarity status (given and new information)

Familiarity status refers to the status of information about whether they are new (unfamiliar) or old (familiar/given). It is a courtesy to receivers that we provide enough contexts for the new information, making the message identified clearly and understood unambiguously[8]. Hence the old information tends to be placed before new information in message composing. Huddleston & Pullum have also divided familiarity status into discourse-familiarity status and addressee-familiarity status[5] but due to several reasons I will just focus the discussion on discourse level.

3.2 Weight, end-weight & end-focus

When talking about the weight of a constituent, one always refers to the length and complexity of the information that the constituent conveys. The weight of a constituent often affects its position in the clause[5]. Linguists refer to the principle of locating important information at the end of the clause as 'end-weight' or 'end-focus'[3]. End-weight is explained by Quirk *et al* as an organization principle which shows a preference to place the new information (often the 'focus' of the message) at the end of the information unites[8]. The relation between weight and end-weight is that an end-weight constituent is often the heavy constituent which has considerably weight. Quirk *et al* talk about 'end-focus' which is about 'process the information in a message so as to achieve a linear presentation from low to high information value'[8].

The correlation between familiarity status and end-weight & end-focus is that new information is more likely to be a heavy constituent and to be put on the end of the clause than old information, but it is not necessarily the case that a heavy constituent stands for new information.

3.3 Information Packaging Constructions

3.3.1 Preposing

As the name suggests, preposing 'involves putting an element before the subject of a clause when its basic position would be after the verb'[6]. Quirk *et al* call it 'fronting' and argues that the reason for fronting may be either to echo what has been contextually given or to highlight the fronted item[8].

Here is the first sentence of the given text.

(1) a. *On Sundays* there was no work.

   b. * No work was *on Sundays.*

(2) a. and *after breakfast* there was a ceremony which was observed every week without fail.

   b. *and someone observed a ceremony every week without fail *after breakfast.*

Both (a) clauses in (1) and (2) are the original sentences with their italic parts preposed. Instead of being in their basic positions indicated in the italic part of (b), the adjuncts are located in a prenuclear position. According to Huddleston & Pullum, the complement should be old information in complement preposing and should link to the prior discourse[5]. Here in (1) 'on Sundays' can be assumed as old information because it is a common sense that there is no work on Sundays. And in example (2a) 'breakfast' is mentioned in the previous sentence. Meanwhile, in example (1a) 'there was no work' is not exactly new information for the reason that the previous texts are talking about working in the farm, but it is the heavy constituent of the sentence. However in example (2a), 'a ceremony' is definitely new information as well as a heavy constituent of the clause. Thus by preposing the complements, end-focus falls on the most important part of the message, and a direct connection with preceding text is provided.

3.3.2 Inversion

'Inversion involves constituents exchanging places in a clause, sometimes involving minor syntactic adjustments.'[1] Here we will only talk about subject-dependent inversion as 'in the great

majority of cases the preposed element is a complement'[5].

(3) a. *First* came *the hoisting of the flag.*

b. *The hoisting of the flag* came *first.*

In (3a) the subject 'the hoisting of the flag' occurs in postposed position while the dependent of the verb 'first' is preposed. Being in the end of the clause, the subject receives greater phonological prominence than in its basic position; being a heavy constituent of the clause, the subject represents new information, thus the principle of end-focus is applied. The dependent is discourse-old since there is a salient connection between 'first' and preceding information. Therefore the inversion is felicitous and natural, so is the basic counterpart.

3.3.3 Existential

Existential construction contains dummy pronoun 'there' and has 'be' as the verb. As the name suggests, existential construction is usually employed to express propositions concerning existence but it is not always the case. There are two kinds of existentials: bare existential and extended existential. Except for possessing the basic 'there' and 'be', bare existentials are alone or accompanied by adjuncts that are of no syntactic significance to the existential construction, while extended existentials contain extensions that are of relevance to the existential construction[5].

(4) a. On Sundays *there was* no work.

b. *No work was on Sundays.

(5) a. and after breakfast *there was* a ceremony which was observed every week without fail.

b. *and a ceremony which was observed every week without fail was after breakfast.

Example (4a) is a bare existential with initial space adjunct 'on Sundays'. There is no internal complement for verb 'was' therefore the basic counterpart (4b) is infelicitous. Clause (5a) is an extended existential with a relative clause extension. The relative clause leaded by 'which' modifies 'ceremony' and the sentence asserts the existence of 'a ceremony observed every week without fail'. 'The existential construction is characteristically used to introduce new information into the discourse, and for this reason the displaced subject NP is usually indefinite.'[5]

3.3.4 It-cleft

It-cleft construction is formed by pronoun 'it' as the subject and verb 'be', with a relative clause in extranuclear position at the end. It is generally agreed that it-cleft structure is used to focus attention and the 'it' pronoun is inessential to the meaning of the sentence[4].

(6) a. *It was* always the pigs *who* put forward the resolutions.

b. The pigs always put forward the resolutions.

The (6a) sentence here is an it-cleft with an NP 'the pigs' as forgrounded element and a VP as backgrounded element. The NP serves as subject in the corresponding non-cleft clause and the VP serves as predicate in it. The effect of backgrounding is to make the information presupposition. As the backgrounded element in example (6a) presuppose that someone put forward resolutions and assert that someone is 'the pigs'. In the same time the discourse-new information 'the pigs' is highlighted.

3.3.5 Passive Voice

According to OED[7], passive construction usually consists of an auxiliary and the past participle of the verb and usually denotes, relates to or uses a voice of a transitive verb where the subject undergoes the action of the verb.

(7) a. there was a ceremony which *was observed* every week without fail.

b. * …*someone* observe a ceremony every week without fail.

(8) a. Here the work of the coming week *was planned out* and resolutions *were put forward* and *debated.*

b. * Here *someone* planned out the work of the coming week and put forward and Debate resolutions.

Here the passive clauses (a) in both example (7) and (8) are short passives with no internalised complement, thus there is no grammatical basic counterpart for them. The short passives enable us to

leave out things, in the former examples subjects of corresponding actives, which would otherwise be obligatory in the active clauses[5]. Therefore we do not have to say who observe the ceremony and who plan out the work. In regard to weight and end-focus, (7a) applies to the principle since the both new and important information is put at the end of the clause. Whereas in example (8a), the heavy constituent of the clause before 'and' is placed at the beginning of the clause to form consistency in structure with the latter part of the sentence. Both of the subjects are discourse-new in (7a) and (8a) and the constraint that 'subject must not be less familiar in the discourse than the internalized NP'[5] in long passives does not apply here since there is no such NP present.

4. Conclusion

In this essay I have discussed how information has been processed in the given text from the perspective of information-packaging constructions. Five types of clause constructions have been applied to the give nine sentences where the combinations of different constructions can be found in both example (1a) and example (2a). Judging from the combined constructions, we can draw a conclusion that different information packaging constructions can be applied into one clause as long as there is no grammatical restriction. Combination usually makes clauses more complicated semantically yet succincter syntactically. While dealing with the clauses, the familiarity status of information as well as the weight of the constituents must be considered so that the intended information can be conveyed in a both understandable and grammatical way. But it has to be pointed out that it is more of a tendency than an obligation to follow the principles stated before.

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