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Visual Input, Auditory Input and Word Order

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1. Introduction

Despite increasing recognition of the linguistic relevance of context, the pertinent contextual features are far from being fully specified.¹ Most studies involving context-dependent properties of language contain an ad-hoc description of certain apparently relevant contextual characteristics. Thus, questions concerning well-formedness, interpretation and appropriateness of given sentences were all shown to involve a variety of contextual considerations, but so far no principled, non-controversial specification of the features required for a full characterization of the pertinent contextual factors exists. The present paper will not achieve the ultimate goal, of course, but will constitute one step towards exposing certain necessary contextual distinctions, without which no account will be satisfactory.

In this paper I will be concerned with a contextual distinction that seems to be functional in descriptions of word order options in Colloquial Israeli Hebrew (CIH). Specifically, the need will be shown to distinguish visual from non-visual situational contexts. The former will be shown to act somewhat like situationally given information, while the latter will manifest the properties otherwise associated with new (non-backgrounded) information. Suggestions concerning explanations along the lines of iconicity and the predominance of certain sentential positions as correlating with the structure of our memory will be investigated as well.

2. Background

Chomsky's concern with 'the ideal speaker-hearer's linguistic competence' (Chomsky 1965) left 'context' outside of the realm of scientific linguistic investigation for a significant period of time. In theory, then, contextual considerations were not regarded as relevant and hence were neglected. In practice, however, judgements of well-formedness have often been based on the extent to which a given utterance could be contextualized, and accounts had to be provided for the alleged ill-formedness of sentences for which no contextualization seemed plausible.

To take a specific example, consider the following sequence (discussed and analyzed in Mittwoch (1985)»:

(1) I think you should perjure myself.

The sentence in (1) would be judged as ill-formed, violating conditions on anaphora, under the assumption that it was uttered by a single speaker. If, however, the context of utterance is altered and the same sequence is regarded as being uttered by two distinct speakers as in (2):

- (2a) I think you should
- (2b) perjure myself. (I know.)

it would display different acceptability properties and would not be rejected as ill-formed. The contextual information is, thus, involved in the determination of the type of account that is required: syntactic, semantic or pragmatic.

In semantics, too, strict context-independence was advocated and practiced initially, 'context' being conceived of as extra-linguistic (e.g. Katz and Fodor 1964). Context-dependent semantics with variables such as the time and place of the utterance and details about the speaker(s) and the audience currently provide serious alternatives to the context-independent approach (e.g. Barwise and Perry 1983). In the general domain of interpretation it has long been recognized that meaning underdetermines interpretation and that extensive reference to contextual information is required for full interpretation. The relevant contextual contributions, however, have been treated on an ad-hoc basis lacking predictive power and allowing for after-the-fact accounts only.

The problem of specifying the linguistically relevant contextual factors is shared by linguists who admit pragmatic considerations into their linguistic description. Thus, this issue is elegantly avoided in Sperber and Wilson's (1986) account of relevance. Sperber and Wilson stand the whole picture on its head by adopting the presumption of relevance and the consequent search for the most appropriate context yielding the largest number of contextual implicatures at a minimum cost in terms of effort of processing. Still, they state that encyclopaedic knowledge, background assumptions based on the discourse at hand as well as information about the immediately observable environment constitute the kind of context against which the relevance of a given linguistic expression is evaluated. Sperber and Wilson's notion of context, then, is not very explicit.

3. Linguistically Relevant contextual Factors

In their 'Definite reference and mutual knowledge' Clark and Marshall (1981) distinguish a variety of contextual features under the guise of different types of 'mutual knowledge'. The distinctions they draw are between (a) community membership with the accompanying assumption of universality of knowledge, (b) physical co-presence, which is further sub-divided into immediate, potential and prior, (c) linguistic co-presence where potential and prior constitute sub-divisions and (d) indirect co-presence with its physical and linguistic subsets. Clark and Marshall's divisions are offered from a cognitive perspective, in that they are based on the source and strength of evidence utilized by the interlocutors. Their attempt to provide the various linguistic correlates of their particular contextual features indicates that some of their classifications are of no linguistic consequence. Thus, their fourth category, indirect co-presence, is, in fact, a conceptual category based on inferences, or the construction of 'bridges', to use Clark and Haviland's (1977) term, and it is parasitic

on the other three sources of 'mutual knowledge'. The fact that it is based on the so-called community membership and that it may be either physical or linguistic (its two subtypes) is evidence of its non-independent status. It is not surprising, therefore, that it has no particular linguistic realization, unlike the other contextual features distinguished (e.g. proper nouns indicating community membership, deictics indicating physical co-presence and anaphoric pronouns indicating linguistic co-presence).

An alternative characterization of the linguistically relevant contextual factors is provided by Ariel (1985 and forthcoming). Ariel draws on both Clark and Marshall (1981) and Prince (1981) and succeeds in establishing a correlation between the types of so-called 'givenness' (defined in terms of context types) and their potential linguistic manifestations on the one hand, and between the various types of givenness and their cognitive counterparts on the other.²

Thus, she discusses three types of Givenness: Knowledge Givenness (KG) (akin to Clark and Marshall's community membership), Physical Givenness (PG) and Linguistic Givenness (LG), and suggests that the present discourse is criterial in the determination of linear word order, while general knowledge is relevant in accounting for the speaker's decision to introduce a piece of information as Given rather than as New.³ In this paper I will largely adopt Ariel's characterization of the various linguistically relevant contextual features, but I would like to introduce a further distinction concerning situational or physical contexts, one having to do with the visual/non-visual axis. Such a distinction seems to be required in accounting for certain word order options in Colloquial Israeli Hebrew (CIH).

4. Visual vs. Auditory Situational Context and Word Order

The phenomenon under investigation may be subsumed under the general category of presentationals. Presentationals are known to involve constructions where subjects do not occur initially in SVO languages. Various alternatives exist depending on the type of presentational and the particular language concerned (cf. Berman 1980, Firbas 1971, Givón 1976 and 1977, Hetzron 1975, Ziv 1982a, 1982b, 1988 *inter alia* for general discussions as well as specific references to Hebrew).

In the case at hand I wish to discuss a variety of constructions in CIH serving introductory, identifying or reminding functions in the discourse. The common denominator in the present context is the fact that these constructions are used to introduce or identify the entity in question in a particular type of situational context, where no visual clues are available. I will show that in the corresponding situations where visual input is admitted different properties are evident. In the cases where visual input is available the nature of identification or introduction is significantly different. I would like to propose that in such cases we are dealing with establishing a correspondence between visual information, supplied by the situational context, and the details of the particular identity of the entity in question.⁴

In the following I will describe a variety of what I believe to constitute situational contexts where no relevant visual input is available. It will be shown that in each of these cases auditory input is the sole pertinent factor in the discourse context and the introductory statement involves a characteristic word order not evident in related situations showing visual inputs. The first such instance concerns the difference between radio and television reports of on-going sports events with respect to certain word order options when introducing a player performing a particular maneuver. Thus in the television-aired game we witness the canonical SVO

word order in CIH in the report whether the player is introduced on the scene or whether his moves are described subsequent to his introduction. Hence the following

3) miki berkovich totes et hakadur
Miki Berkowich catches acc. mark the ball

can occur in the report either when the player, Miki, appears on the scene (in the sense that he was not present in the focus of attention immediately preceding the reported event) or as a ,description of a non-initial move in a sequence portraying the player's maneuvers.⁵ In the radio-transmitted report of the on-going game, where there are obviously no visual clues, the introduction of the player on the scene does not show the canonical word order, but rather structures like the following, where the constituent denoting the name of the player is non-initial in the sentence, are operative.

(4) tofes et hakadur axshav miki berkovich ⁶
catches Acc. Mark the ball now Miki Berkowich

Such structures cannot be used in non-introductory contexts, where the player in question has been mentioned immediately prior to the current occurrence and his subsequent moves are reported. Rather, the canonical word order structure is appropriate under those circumstances. Before I engage in an attempt to shed some light on the distinction between the two sub-types of situational context, the one involving visual input and the other involving auditory input only, I would like to present a few more instances of auditory and non- visual contexts where introductions are evident.

A context similar to the one just discussed again concerns television vs. radio. In introducing or identifying the announcer or correspondent who is about to read a news item, the radio style in CIH always shows the name of the introduced person non-initially as in:

(5) harey haxadashot mipi yicxak ro'e
here the news from the mouth (of) Y. Ro'e

(6) baulpan Alex Anski
in the studio

The introduction may be performed by self or others. The version where the name of the announcer or correspondent occurs initially, e.g. in subject position, as in

(7) yicxak ro'e kore / makri et haxadashot
Yitschak Ro'e is reading / is reading (caus) Acc the news

is infelicitous in this case. (7) could be used felicitously in reporting the state-of-affairs in the studio, but not in introducing the announcer. In the television version of this situation we witness an interesting corroboration of our observation. Thus, when the anchorperson first appears on the screen no name is provided. In introducing a correspondent who is about to present his news item there are two basic states on television: one where the correspondent is not yet visible and the other where {s}he is. In the instance where the correspondent is invisible at the time of the introduction by

the anchorperson the same pattern holds as is evident in the auditory context on the radio; however, in the case where the reporter is visible the canonical order with the name of the correspondent in initial position (when it is the subject) holds. (8a) and (8b) below may be used in these two contexts respectively:

(8a) medaveax katavenu yarin kimor
 (is) reporting our correspondent Yarin Kimor

(8b) katavenu yarin kimor medaveax
 our correspondent Yarin Kimor (is) reporting

(8b) may also be used in indirectly reporting the content of the relevant news item.⁷

Yet another instance exhibiting the properties in question is evident when upon inviting a performer who is backstage to perform on the stage the M.C. announces

(9) veaxshav yofia lefanenu Mati Kaspi
 and now will perform in front of us Mati Kaspi

thereby introducing the performer. The canonical SVO construction is clearly inappropriate as an introduction in such a case; it may, however, be used as a description of the coming attractions, If the performer is already on the stage, and if he is sufficiently distinct as the entity to be focused on, an introduction like the one in (9) would seem infelicitous. If, however, there is a group of performers on the stage such that the performer in question cannot be reasonably expected to be salient, then an introduction like that evident in (9) would be appropriate.

Closely related to this state of affairs is the following setting from the Jewish tradition. When a person is called to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue during services, the formula used shows a clear VS structure of the type evident in the other cases discussed so far. Thus:

(10a) ya'ale moshe ben shaul
 will come up Moshe son of Saul

(10b) ya'amod NP (= name of a person)
 will stand up NP

The person called upon is a part of the crowd of prayers before he is introduced. So he cannot reasonably be expected to be in the visual focus or otherwise be significantly distinct. Hence the formula in such contexts falls under the same generalization as our other cases. The last two examples seem to force us into a refinement of our criterion of visual input. It appears to be the case that the relevant aspect of the visual input is visual saliency.

We will come back to this property of the visual input shortly. Before we do that I would like to mention one other situational context sharing the lack of visual input and showing identification using the types of structures characterized in this study. I am referring specifically to telephone conversations.

In telephone conversations, where lack of visual input is evident, the caller introduces

himself using such structures as in

(IIa) shalom. medaber rotem.
hi/hello. (is) speaking Rotem (= proper name)

(IIb) shalom. Kan rotem.
hi/hello here Rotem

where the NP subject designating the name of the caller does not introduce the relevant sentence. In fact, the canonical counterparts of these sentences such as the ones in (12)

(12a) shalom. rotem medaber.
hi/hello Rotem (is) speaking

(12b) shalom. rotem kan.
hi/hello Rotem (is) here

are infelicitous in such instances. Rather, (12a) and (12b) can be used to describe the facts portrayed in them. They serve as descriptions by others, as is evident from the lack of first person pronoun as the subject.⁸ Likewise, the sentences in (11) cannot be used in contexts other than self-introductions by callers. In particular, they cannot be used by the caller to confirm his identity in response to the callee's query. Thus the exchange in (13) is impossible.

(13a) Callee: Is Rotem speaking?
(13b) Caller: ken. medaber rotem.
yes (is) speaking Rotem

In such cases the alternative in (12) is an appropriate answer on the part of the caller. An objection may be raised at this point with regard to the relevance of such examples as the ones involving set phrases or formulae to the argument under discussion. I would like to propose in this context that the formulae in question are not as arbitrary as is evident elsewhere, and in fact their pattern is predictable on the basis of our general observation.

The fact that precisely the word order option that they allow is the available one and not the other way around is predictable, or, minimally, follows rather naturally from our generalization.

5. Conclusions

We have observed that in CIH a variety of constructions that serve an identifying or introductory discourse purpose display a non-canonical word order whereby the NP designating the name of the introduced entity does not occur in initial position even when it is the subject of the sentence. Such sentences were shown to function in a particular type of situational context, namely, where visual clues are not available. In addition to the need that these observations suggest to distinguish two varieties of situational contexts in any coherent description of this phenomenon in CIH, and hence presumably in the pragmatics of natural language in general, there seems to be an interesting conclusion that follows from the state of affairs described.

The conclusion has to do with the status of entities that we come to possess knowledge of via visual clues. Such entities appear to act as though they were Physically Given in the sense of Ariel (1985 and forthcoming), and as such behave with respect to word order determination as do other given entities, namely, they favor initial position. The entities mentioned in the situational contexts characterized by auditory input but lacking visual clues apparently function as new, in the sense of non-given physically, and as such indeed seem to favor non-initial, and sometimes even final position, in line with new entities elsewhere⁹. The correlation between the explicit visual clues and physical givenness is intuitively clear, and it is substantiated by the fact that visual clues are perceived at a faster speed than auditory clues. The information perceived visually thus acts as though it were already given, the information expressed verbally does not. Hence, with respect to situational contexts lacking visual input, introductions of entities count as introductions of new material, and follow the linguistic conventions involved in such cases. However, full-fledged situational contexts involving visual input do not seem to call for introductions of new material; the relevant material in them is conceived of as given, and hence the entity in question could function topically, in the 'aboutness' sense of Reinhart (1981). In such cases a match is established between a Physically Given entity and a name; this is not an introduction and as such does not display the properties associated with introductions.

Notes

¹. I. am indebted to Mira Ariel and Rachel Giora for certain comments they made on an earlier version of this paper.

². Prince (1981) draws interesting conceptual distinctions in the context of discussing her scale of assumed familiarity. Not all the detailed properties, however, turn out to be of linguistic consequence.

³. Ariel claims that natural languages do not codify the source of givenness directly, but rather what is being codified by givenness markers is the degree of accessibility of the referent in question to the addressee. KG markers (e.g. proper names and definite descriptions) are associated with the general store of knowledge which is clearly not located in activated memory, but is presumably stored in long-term memory and is therefore not immediately accessible. PG markers (e.g. deictics and demonstratives) depend on the speech situation for their referents and are thus more readily accessible than the KG referents. LG markers (e.g. third person pronouns and gaps) are restricted to highly accessible referents, occurring in the immediately preceding text, and are, in all probability, associated with short-term memory.

⁴. Note that I am discussing non-visual context as an instance of physical or situational context. An objection may be raised to this designation on the grounds that in fact the lack of visual input in the cases at hand renders them non-physical or non-situational. However, it is clear that despite the lack of crucial visual input, the context in question preserves the necessary contemporaneousness and in addition shows attendance to the same circumstances by all interlocutors, a feature which is not self-evident in situational contexts elsewhere. In some situational contexts the attention of the addressee might have to be specifically directed towards attending to the same circumstances (e.g. looking at the same object in the environment).

No classification of the context under examination is possible as an instance of the general knowledge context, neither is it sensible to consider it an instance of linguistic discourse context. Establishing a separate contextual category unrelated to the

existing three seems highly inadvisable in light of the similarity it bears to some of the crucial characteristics of physical/situational context. Supporting evidence might come from considerations of communication between blind people. It is intuitively clear that when blind people engage in verbal interchanges when they are in the same location, it is accurate to attribute to such interchanges the properties associated with physical/situational contexts.

⁵. I would like to point out the problematicity of determining the relevant notion of 'newly introduced entity' in the context of on-going sports games. Thus a player could have been mentioned prior to the report of the current move but still be considered newly introduced or, more accurately, reintroduced, simply because a variety of other players were actively engaged in the game and were mentioned in the report between the two mentions of the player in question. The question here is essentially the same as the one evident in instances of long distance anaphora. ..An answer in terms of Chafe's (1976) notion of 'being in the addressee's consciousness' as well as Prince's (1981) notion of 'saliency' seems to be required.

⁶. I will not discuss the syntactic properties of the construction in question in any detail here. Suffice it to say in the present context that it seems to display properties evident in inversions elsewhere (cf. Green 1980 and 1985 and Ziv 1988).

⁷. The type of utterances under examination should be clearly distinguished from the closing formulae of news items whether they be delivered by television or by radio:

(i) kan yoram ronen Paris
here Yoram Ronen Paris

These represent fixed formulae designating the termination of the piece in question.

⁸Note that the sentences in (11), which are used in self-identification or introduction, do not contain first person pronouns in referring to the speaker. From the pragmatic point of view of the discourse function of the utterance, it is evident that for identification to be successful it has to provide the maximal relevant information such that the entity introduced will, consequently be easy to identify. Clearly, personal pronouns are not sufficiently identifying.

From the syntactic point of view, it has been claimed that the VS order is not an available option when: S is pronominal. (See Givón 1976 but cf. ziv 1988 for systematic exceptions.)

⁹. Attempts may be made to assign an iconic function to the word order in such instances, such as suggesting that the predominance of end position correlates with the structure of our memory and thus entities we need to keep in prominent position notionally would be more effectively presented in a structurally and intonationally predominant position. Such attempts are immature at the current state of our knowledge. More specifically, in the absence of a relatively worked out, principled and predictive theory of iconicity in language, references to iconicity are at best a speculation.

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