

# Word Order in Children's Literature: FSP and Markedness

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Current studies of language as an instrument of communication as well as various recent investigations of literary styles owe a great debt to the Praguian theory of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) with its basic concept of Communicative Dynamism (CD). Although the elementary notions 'theme' and 'rheme' were insufficiently specified in the Praguian writings, they were still shown to be of significance, once they were refined, in characterizing syntactic as well as stylistic phenomena.

In this paper I will be concerned with the word order in a special variety of children's literature in Israeli Hebrew. Under consideration are children's stories (ages 3-8) exemplifying an overwhelming number of instances of VSO in narrative style and the question will be raised as to what the unmarked word order in this type of writing is.<sup>1,2</sup> Considerations of FSP will be shown to figure in an attempt to answer this question.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. BACKGROUND

Early Biblical Hebrew (Genesis) exhibited VSO order alongside pragmatically conditioned SVC, with a drift toward the latter order in the later books (Song of Solomon, Lamentations) (cf. Givón, 1977).<sup>4</sup> The unmarked word order in colloquial Israeli Hebrew (CIH) has long been claimed to show SVC patterns with predictable, pragmatically conditioned, instances of VSO (e.g., appearance on the scene contexts and existentials). However, an examination of certain varieties of children's stories reveals that there is a register in the language exemplifying an abundance of VSO sentences

This is an offprint from:

Yishai Tobin (ed.)

*THE PRAGUE SCHOOL AND ITS LEGACY  
in Linguistics, Literature, Semiotics, Folklore, and the Arts*

John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Amsterdam/Philadelphia  
1988

(Published as Vol. 27 of the series

LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY STUDIES IN EASTERN EUROPE)

ISSN 0165-7712

ISBN 90 272 1537 5 (pb.) / ISBN 90 272 1532 4 (hb.)

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that appear to be violations of the unmarked SVO in that they are not predictable on the basis of the existing characterizations of the systematic exceptions to the unmarked word order. Thus, sentences where no existential, presentational or low communicative dynamism factors are apparent constitute a significant portion of the VSO structures found in the relevant data, e.g.

- (1) *hitragez* Yosi *vene'elav* (*hansika shehaxa*  
got angry (verb) Yosi and was insulted<sup>s</sup> *le'ibud* 87)
- (2) *lakax aba et mici* *haratula* (*hansika shehaxa le'ibud*  
took father def Mitsi the cat 69)
- (3) *hevin* *lolo šenitrape* (*hadubon lolo* 20)  
understood Lolo that (he) got well
- (4) *sagru kol ha'anašim et hadlatot* (*hadubon lolo* 15)  
closed all the people def the doors  
acc.m

There are three logically possible alternative answers to the question of the unmarked word order in this type of writing:

- a. The unmarked word order is the same as that found in CIH, namely, SVO. The peculiar instances of VSO will, thus, be marked and will require pragmatic motivation in accordance with some general principles such as FSP. In the absence of such general pragmatic principles the statement of word order will be arbitrary and ad hoc.<sup>6</sup>
- b. The unmarked word order is VSO. Accordingly, the various occurrences of SV in our data will require non-arbitrary accounts. Such an approach would amount to a claim about a major distinction between CIH with its unmarked SVO and the register under investigation.
- c. There is no marked/unmarked distinction; the word order is unspecified as far as subject position is concerned and its ultimate location depends, in each case, on the relevant contextual and general pragmatic principles. This approach too represents a major departure from the CIH pattern recognized to exist elsewhere in the language.

### 3. CONSTRUCTIONS WHERE NO SUBJECT PRECEDES THE VERB

There are various instances in Literary Hebrew where the subject does not precede the verb. Such are (a) cases where the subject follows the verb and (b) subjectless sentences which include cases of ellipsis alongside some fixed expressions. These instances where no SV is evident contribute to the overall V initial construction effect. A brief comment on these constructions is appropriate at this point.

In general, VS order holds in Literary Hebrew where the complement, whether the obligatory object-type or the optional modifier-type, occurs in sentence initial position, just in case the subject is not pronominal. Thus:

- (5) a. *banirpa'a* in the clinic  
          *nama ha'axot zrika* *ledana*  
          gave the nurse an to Dana  
          injection  
      b. *bašavua še'avur* (*hansika*  
          in the week that passed *shehaxa*  
          last week *le'ibud* 54)
- (6) *higanu!* *cahal* *nik* (*nik vetak* 12)  
(we) arrived rejoiced Tik
- (7) *et ha'even hay(e)kara, et hamargalit, sam* *heasir*  
def the stone the precious def the pearl put the rich  
acc man
- bekova'o* (*Pilon* 171)  
in his hat

This seems like an obligatory order even in otherwise SVO registers in children's literature. When the subject is pronominal in such cases the order is normally SV as in:

- (8) *Ye'az pitom hi nizkera* *batrufo* *haxi*  
and then suddenly she remembered the medicine the  
*tova* (*hansika* 12)  
best

However, there are two instances where VS order is evident with a pronominal subject; the first is when the pronoun is used contrastively as in:

- (9) *ume asita ata? (hanšika 67)*  
and what did you  
(2 sg)

or

- (10) *axšav elex ani lesavia (epaminondas 20)*  
now will go I to grandmother

(9) is uttered when the mother wants to focus on her son's doing and not on somebody else's and (10) occurs in a context where after several unsuccessful trips to grandmother on the part of the child, mother declares that this time it is she who will go to grandmother (and not the child).

The second instance where the pronominal subject may follow the verb is when the predicate is focused on where focus stands for the most prominent part of the clause that co-occurs with the intonation nucleus. Thus:

- (11) *...ki ragil hu la'anoi kax (Muki brogez)*  
because { used to } he to answer this way  
{ accustomed }  
(12) *Yode'a hu ki niḡala! (Pilon 171)*  
knows he that was discovered  
(3 sg.)

Interestingly, many of the stories that I examined have a rather large percentage of non-subject initial sentences where a complement introduces the sentence. In several cases I found that up to 40% of the sentences of a given story had this characteristic structure.

Among the Hebrew constructions which do not exhibit an SV pattern one can distinguish two major types: (a) instances of fixed expressions and structures such as possessives, impersonals (*me'asnim kam = smoke (3 pl) here*), constructions with dative marked experientials (*kaše it = hard to me*), environmental comments (*kar po = cold here*) and modal expressions (*asur le'ašer = forbidden to smoke*) discussed extensively by Berman (1980) and (b) many instances of ellipsis of anaphoric subjects such as in:

- (13) *ušneyhem ravvu leveyto šel muki. bau*  
and both of them rode to the house of Muki. Came  
*lakruša, alu barnadregot (Muki 18)*  
to the entrance went up the stairs  
(14) *hayeled ne'elam ve'eynenu. kanire niher*  
the child disappeared and is no longer. *kanire niher*  
Probably hurried

*la'avoda. (Muki 22)*  
to work.

There is, thus, an abundance of instances where no S precedes V - contributing to the general V(S) conception in this type of writing on the part of the child.

#### 4. UNMARKED WORD ORDER

##### 4.1 Arguments for SVO

In this section I will discuss evidence pointing towards SVO as the unmarked order.

##### 4.1.1 Fixed verbal expressions

The strongest evidence for an SVO comes from the distribution of fixed verbal expressions which occur as discontinuous strings in the constructions under investigation.<sup>7</sup> Consider:

- (15) a. *Vehosif hasoxer ve'amar (hasod babe'er 35)*  
and added the merchant and said  
b. *patax } opened*

and the idiomatic

- (16) *xošev eliezer belibo (ma asaper layeted 1, 32)*  
thinks Eliezer in his heart  
(In CIH: Eliezer xošev belibo)

- (17) *maca hadavar xen be'eyney muki (Muki, 18)*  
found the thing grace in the eyes (of) Muki (Muki liked the thing)  
(In CIH: hadavar maca xen be'eyney Muki)

Under the assumption that fixed expressions, like idioms, represent a semantic and syntactic unit of some kind, the occurrence of a discontinuous string must necessarily involve a movement hypothesis. The discontinuous string must, under these circumstances, have originated from a continuous, uninterrupted sequence. In our case, the movement would probably involve first verbal element fronting over the initial subject. It should be pointed out that the movement analysis counts as evidence for SVO only if

the assumption is made that the relevant expressions cannot be generated as potentially discontinuous entities. This theoretical assumption, however, may be open to challenge on the basis of such instances of indeterminacy of relative order as the verb-particle combination in English, where both

- V d.o. particle (Take the shirt off)  
and V particle d.o. (Take off the shirt)

seem to be unmarked in cases where the object is non-pronominal. If the V d.o. particle sequence, which displays the discontinuous entity *verb + particle*, is not judged as more marked in some sense than its V particle d.o. counterpart, then there is no ground for arguing that the sequence with the discontinuous entity is derived from its counterpart via particle-shift.

Another challenge to the assumption about the derivation of discontinuous sequences may come from McCawley's (1982) proposal concerning parentheticals, whereby discontinuous dependencies may occur underlyingly in the system and need not involve any movements.

Still, the movement hypothesis is the widest held so far with respect to such discontinuous sequences and hence the SVO hypothesis is supported by this type of evidence.

#### 4.1.2 Conjunction

Conjunction may provide additional evidence for the SVO hypothesis. There are two types of relevant constructions in this context:

- a. VS(O) and V(O)  
and b. VS(O) and SVO

We shall consider them next.

##### 4.1.2.1 VP or S coordination

Under the assumption that only like constituents fulfilling a similar function may be coordinated (cf. Chomsky, 1957; Schachter, 1977; see also Grosu (to appear) for interesting counter-examples) the occurrence of coordinate structures like (a) may provide a clue as to the constituency of the coordinated items and consequently shed light on the unmarked word order issue. In the following examples

- (18) *šama haparpar et hadvarim ha'ele veš'al* (Pa'amonim 79)  
heard the butterfly def the things these and asked  
acc  
m.

- (19) *kšta maya et habayit vekatva alav* (*hanšika* 37)  
decorated Maya def the house and wrote on it  
acc  
m.

the order VSO and VO is evident and the question is raised whether there are instances of clausal coordination with obligatory omission of the anaphoric subject in the second conjunct or whether they are examples of VP coordination with a subsequent fronting of the first verbal element in the first conjunct (cf. Section 4.1.1.).

The difference between conjunction reduction and VP coordination is claimed to have intonational manifestation. Thus, instances of conjunction reduction are said to exhibit an intonation pause where the ellipted subject originally occurred, whereas cases of VP coordination show no such pause. In the coordinated structures under investigation there are no designations of intonational pauses, but native intuitions indicate that most instances show either a very brief pause or no pause at all. Cases like:

- (20) *raca elav hadageret venikra lo nekira axat*  
ran to him the chicken and picked to him a pick one  
*berošo (telepele 22)*  
in his head  
(and picked him on his head)

seem to show an optional brief intonational pause between the two conjuncts. It is worth noting that the pause, to the extent that it occurs, does not occur in a position following the verb or the verb and the pronominal object or complement,<sup>8</sup> but rather in initial position. This could be taken as an argument for SVO, if the position of the pause is, as is commonly assumed, indicative of the position of the ellipted element. In the first conjunct then, verbal fronting would be postulated to account for the VS(O) pattern. The instances of coordination under investigation where there are no pauses, just as those instances where the option of a brief pause is not realized, are suggestive of a VP coordination, which is, in turn, explicable within the SVO hypothesis under current assumptions about discontinuous dependencies.

A further argument for an SVO order originates from such examples as:

- (21) *rac lolo verac...* (*hadubon lolo 8*)  
ran Lolo and ran

- (22) *halax lolo vehalax ad šehigia*  
walked Lolo and walked till that (he) arrived  
*habayta (hadubon lolo 23)*  
home

which do not show any relevant intonational pause and seem to point, just as the fixed verbal expressions, towards some verbal conjunction. Again, this may count as evidence under the assumption that the relevant verbal entities must necessarily originate as a continuous string.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.1.2.2 VS(O) and SV(O)

The second type of coordination to be considered in this context is a clear coordination of two clauses where the first clause is verb initial (if the subject is non-pronominal) and the second clause is subject initial. Examples are:

- (23) *halxa ima el savta ve'epaminondas nišar*  
went mother to grandmother and Epaminondas stayed  
*babayit. (Epaminondas 22)*  
at home
- (24) *xikta karmel vecipta šavua šalem vehatnok*  
waited Carmel and waited a week whole and the baby  
*lo nolad (harsika 64)*  
(did) not get born
- (25) *ani be'emet elax lešam veima šivke*  
I really will go there and mother will cry  
*vetictaer (Muki 8)*  
and will be sorry

If we have no account of the initial position of the subject in the second clause then this would serve as evidence for an unmarked SVO with a subsequent verbal fronting in the first clause. However, it will be shown that the initial position of the subject in such cases is predictable on the basis of independently attested principles such as presenting focal or contrastive information (e.g. examples [23] and [24]), introducing a new discourse referent or topic or reintroducing what Givón (1977) calls 'recall topic' (cf. Section 4.2.1.), and establishing a difference between sequential and counter-sequential accounts of states or events, where a counter-sequential account exhibits an SVO pattern. If, as will be shown in Section 4.2.1., such princi-

ples would, among other things, predict the occurrence of the relevant instances of SVO, then the facts of coordination where SVO occurs as the second conjunct would not serve as evidence for an unmarked SVO.

#### 4.1.3 Copular sentences

In our corpus, just as in Early Biblical Hebrew (cf. Givón, 1977), copular sentences exhibit an overwhelming number of SV constructions. This is clearly the case when the subject is pronominal

- (26) *at xola (harsika 56)*  
you sick
- (21) *ani ehye hamaika ki ani yafa*  
I will be the queen because I beautiful  
*vena'a (Pa'amonim 80)*  
and attractive

but it is also true for many non-pronominal subjects:

- (28) *hayeled bari me'od (Harsika 31)*  
the child healthy very
- (29) *simlatex ithye yafa yoter (ma asaper layeled 1, 32)*  
your dress will be nice more

If, as in the case of the SVO conjunct in Section 4.1.2.2., there is no independent motivation for this order, then it may be indicative of SVO as the unmarked order; if, however, the instances of copular SV sentences are pragmatically conditioned, then they would cease to constitute evidence for the SVO hypothesis. In Section 4.2.1 I will attempt to show that in fact the occurrence of the subject in initial position in copular sentences is predictable on the basis of independently motivated principles such as the difference between the expression of states of affairs and the representations of activities. It is worth noting that there are also VS constructions in copular sentences in the register under consideration. These, however, are clearly more marked and occur under highly specified circumstances such as the designation of a marked focus<sup>10</sup> on the predicate as in:

- (30) *acuv me'od haya hagamad (telepele 70)*  
sad very was the dwarf
- (31) *lakekan gadol hu muki (muki 2)*  
"licker" big he (is) Muki

- (32) *yalda tova at (ma asaper I, 31)*  
 girl good you

and the marking of a focal or contrastive subject, even when pronominal as in:

- (33) *smexa hi, smexa ima šela (ma asaper 30)*  
 happy she, happy mother her

#### 4.1.4 Subordinate clauses

Subordinate clauses are claimed to constitute environments where movements of elements are considerably more restricted than in independent clauses. The data under consideration exhibit instances of both SV and VS in subordinate clauses and the question is which is more predictable on the basis of independently motivated principles and which is more arbitrary. It will become evident (in Section 4.2.2.3) that there may be pragmatic motivation for the occurrence of both SV and VS (in at least some of the cases), making any conclusion as to the unmarked order hard to draw on the basis of such evidence. I will come back to this issue later in this paper.

### 4.2 Problems for SVO and arguments for VSO

#### 4.2.1 Predictability of SVO

The worst problem for the SVO hypothesis is the apparent predictability of the S initial constructions on the basis of some general and independently motivated pragmatic principles. The instances of SV where the subject is pronominal are easy to explain on the basis of the principles of FSP, whereby the thematic subject pronoun would precede the more rhematic predicate. The other instances of SV seem to require some additional explanatory principles. Possible candidates are:

a. *Contrastive or emphatic subjects* Subjects which designate counter-to-expectation referents in the given contexts tend to be marked and placed in initial position (cf. Taglicht's [1984] notion of marked focus). Many instances of sentence initial subject co-occur with focusing adjuncts or in contrastive contexts as in:

- (34) *afilu beyt haaxolim lo ya'azor lenir (hansika 12)*  
 even the hospital not will help to Nir

- (35) *verak hamexašefa, šehistatra beyn hasizim, lo*  
 and only the witch, who hid in the bushes (did) not  
*ahava et širat hansixa (hasod babe'er 19)*  
 like def the singing of the princess

acc

m

- (36) *hayehuđi daras et kaspo xazara, ve'ilu juxa*  
 the Jew asked def his money back whereas Jucha

acc

m

*serev... (hasod babe'er 45)*  
 refused

where *afilu* ('even') and *rak* ('only') function as focusing adjuncts and (36) shows a contrast between the Jew's request and Jucha's refusal.

Focalization of an entity by placing it in initial position is a well-established rhetorical device and the account of sentence initial contrastive or emphatic subject thus follows from general pragmatic principles and does not require an ad-hoc explanation.

b. *Counter-sequential narration* In Givón (1977) a distinction is drawn between sequential ('continuity') and counter-sequential ('anterior') narration of events in Biblical Hebrew. In the sequential presentation the events are narrated in the same order in which they occurred in real time, the counter-sequential narration, on the other hand, violates the real-time continuity of the events. The sequential narration is claimed (Givón, 1977) to preserve the same topic of discourse and hence to display a VS order, whereas the counter-sequential narration is claimed to be accompanied by a shift of topic and hence to exhibit an SV order. In the data under discussion there are numerous examples of VS which are indeed instances of sequential narration and various instances of SV which seem to exemplify counter-sequential narration or to relate habitual or a-temporal states of affairs. Examples are:

- (37) *ra'a muki ve'ine ze hayeled mexanut hamakolet...*  
 saw Muki and here this boy from the food store...  
*muki kore lo šma na (muki 16)*  
 Muki calls him "Šma na"

- (38) *axšav hirciš muki bagešem. eyze matar soxef! babayit*  
 now felt Muki the rain. What (a) rain! at home

*ima sogeret et haxalon shegese'em lo yartiv*  
 mother closes def the window that the rain not will wet  
 acc

*et muki sela, upo...* (Muki 12)  
 def Muki her and here...  
 acc

m

In (37) Muki's way of referring to the delivery boy is clearly not sequentially arranged with respect to the events in the story. It describes a state-of-affairs. The same is true of (38), where mother's habit of closing the window whenever it rains designates no activity in the actually occurring sequence of events. It is something that Muki is thinking of while getting wet away from home.

The SV pattern in copular sentences may be regarded as a characteristic instance of a counter-sequential narration. In fact, states, rather than events, are designated by copular sentences and hence no order of events is involved in this context. This type of construction centers on the referential entity in subject position and its properties and not on any activity. Hence counter-sequential SV order seems to agree with copular constructions more than the sequential VS pattern.<sup>11</sup>

c. *New or 'recall' discourse referent* The introduction of a new discourse referent or the re-introduction of what Givón calls a 'recall-topic' (Givón, 1977) seem to favor an SV order. Whether the participant is presented for the first time or re-introduced after some time that it did not function as topic and hence needs to be brought to the listener's/reader's attention again ('recall-topic') seems to be immaterial in this context, in both instances SV is claimed to be motivated by the 'topicality first' principle. This principle is claimed to co-occur in many instances with the sequential/counter-sequential principle. In the sequential narration the same topic has been claimed to persist, whereas the counter-sequential narration is often accompanied by a shift of topic (either new or recall-topic). Examples follow:

(39) *kola haya acuv kol kax. muki ra'a miba'ad lasdaktim*  
 her voice was sad so Muki saw through the holes  
*segam paneha acuvim* (Muki 20)  
 that also her face sad

(40) *ayaf muki vehistare'a al haxol. hu hisin*  
 got tired Muki and sprawled on the sand. He put  
*roso al marpekav hibit lemala vera'a davar*  
 his head on his elbows looked up and saw thing  
*muzar. ha'ananim, sam lemala, osim*  
 strange. The clouds up there (are) making  
*targitey seder.* (Muki 10)  
 exercises.

In (39) the topic of the preceding sentence is mother and then Muki is re-introduced as an active participant. In (40) Muki is the discourse topic first and then the clouds become the topic of the next sentence.

We have thus seen that there are several candidates for independently motivated principles predicting SV order. It therefore seems highly suggestive on the basis of this evidence and despite the incomplete nature of the current statement of these principles that VS is the unmarked order in this type of writing.

#### 4.2.2 Predictability of VSO

##### 4.2.2.1 VSO

Under the SVO hypothesis the various VS constructions which are not instances of presentationals or existentials would be left unaccounted for, unless we come up with some more general principles from which their occurrence will follow. The existing Praguian principles of CD are of little help in this regard, since most of the relevant VS constructions do not open with a thematic element in the Praguian sense, and yet they do not sound odd or marked. Additional, non-ad-hoc principles are called for. Givón's suggestion of sequential narration as an organizing principle dictating VS appears to be a likely candidate. It should be pointed out, however, that it requires modification, since the accompanying assumption that VS order is associated with maintaining the same topic is contradicted by such well-established examples as presentationals and existentials, which, clearly, introduce or re-introduce a discourse referent.

Another suggestion is that VS serves as a backgrounding device.<sup>12</sup> This is supported in part by (a) its occurrence as the first conjunct where the second one may introduce a distinct topic (cf. Section 4.1.2.2), (b) an apparent requirement in several such VS instances that some material follow them, hence, presumably, their non-dominant status and (c) the lower likelihood

of occurrence of some such VS constructions as the prominent part of the sentence, as is evident from

- (41) a. When did it happen?  
 b. It happened *kše aba yaca la'avoda*  
 when daddy left for work  
 c.\* It happened *kšeyaca aba la'avoda*.  
 when left daddy for work.

However, such suggestions have clear counterexamples in their present formulation. (a) seems to be contradicted by the existence of whole segments in stories where only VS structures occur. If the generalization in (a) were correct, then it would predict that such segments of the story would not include any dominant material; they would consist solely of background. Instances where no continuation follows and yet the VS sequence is well formed as in:

- (42) *halax lo haiš hala (hadubon lolo 11)*  
 went to him the man on, further

disconfirm (b) in its present form, and examples like

- (43) a. Can you imagine what Rama's morning was like?  
 b. *uvxer, kšeyaca aba la'avoda, kama rama*  
 so when left daddy for work, got up Rama  
*mimitata...*  
 from her bed

indicate that the generalization in (c), about the impossibility of occurrence of a VS in a prominent position, is incorrect as it is currently stated.

It thus seems that a more comprehensive theory of the pragmatics of word order is required in order to account for all of the instances of VS in our data. In the absence of such a theory the non-predictability of many of the VS constructions, together with the higher predictability of the SV constructions, support the hypothesis that VSO is the unmarked word order.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2 Complement VS

In a framework where SVO is assumed to be the unmarked word order the occurrence of VS following a complement (obligatory or optional) will require an explanation. The existing Praguaian principles as well as the more recent characterization by Giora (1982) only account for some of the data, where the complement is thematic and the subject and part of the predicate

are non-thematic. However, the Praguaian FSP is under-specified, and Giora's claims are too strong with respect to cases where, when a complement opens the sentence, the subject following the verb is still the topic. (Giora [1982] explicitly denies this possibility.) Following are examples which motivate a modification of the existing treatments:

- (44) The rabbit is the fastest of the animals. Its body is light and its legs - strong. No animal could overtake it. *Bemešex*  
 In the course

*hazman hafxa ha'arrevet lega'avianit acuma. (telepele*  
 of time turned the rabbit (in)to arrogant great 19)

- (45) The dwarf went about his way and after he stumbled for some time he sat down under a big pine-tree. But here too he did not find any rest. The pine's needles were falling on the ground and hitting the poor dwarf. *šuv kam hagamad*

again got up the dwarf  
*minkomo* and told the pine-tree... *vekax halax*  
 from his place and so went  
*hagamad hazair ratov umyoaš (telepele 20)*  
 the dwarf the tiny wet and desperate

In (44) the VS structure holds following the temporal adverbial *šuv* ('again') and the subject is clearly topical in both the Praguaian sense of low CD and in Reinhart's (1981) terms of 'aboutness'. The same is true of the little dwarf in (45). In the absence of an overall principle from which the occurrence of CVS follows, the arbitrariness of these VS constructions may be used to support an analysis whereby VSO is the unmarked word order.<sup>14</sup>

The VS hypothesis will, thus, account automatically for both complement VS and all other instances of VS, including those that were not explicit here on general pragmatic grounds (c.f. Section 4.2.2.1), whereas the SVO hypothesis may require at least two different statements, one for complement VS, the other for VSO and, as we have seen so far, the existing principles make the wrong predictions.

#### 4.2.2.3 Subordinate clauses

As has already been pointed out (Section 4.1.4) the subordinate clauses in our data showed instances of both VS and SV, and the question is which pattern is more predictable than the other.<sup>15</sup> On the whole, subordinate clauses are considered more presuppositional than main clauses (cf.



Hooper and Thompson, 1973, *inter alia*), and hence, Givón (1976) suggests, there seems to be less of a rationale for topicalization in such contexts. Givón's prediction is that even in Modern Hebrew these structures will exhibit a more conservative VS pattern. Indeed, the data under investigation contains numerous instances of VS in subordinate clauses, but the question remains what the conditioning factors are for the occurrence of SV, and whether they are predictable on the basis of general discourse functional principles. It should be noted that Givón's suggestion is diachronically oriented, and his point of departure is the assumption that VS represents the unmarked order in such constructions. Although he does not attempt to provide a synchronic pragmatic motivation for the VS, his treatment may, in fact, be taken to imply that background information tends to favor the VS pattern (cf. Section 4.2.2.1).

It is interesting to reconsider (41a-c) and (43a-b) in the present context as exemplifying a potential clue for the difference between SV and VS in subordinate clauses. Thus, (41b), exemplifying SV in a subordinate clause, is well formed in the context of (41a), where the time is focused on, but (41c), showing VS in the subordinate clause, is ill-formed in the same context. The expression in the subordinate clause is clearly not presupposed in this case, and VS seems highly unlikely. It is, rather, the SV that is appropriate in this instance where the content of the subordinate clause constitutes the point of communication. (43b) exemplifies the VS structure in a subordinate clause, the content of which is clearly background or scene-setting. The occurrence of SV in the subordinate clause in (41b) may be explained on the basis of the principle of new or recall-topic introduction. Such facts may provide some support for Givón's suggestion.<sup>16</sup>

A major problem that was alluded to already in Section 4.2.2.1 is the apparent conflict between the principles governing word order in main clauses and those predicting the word order in subordinate clauses. In main clauses VS occurs where the S may, and in several instances must, constitute a new or recall discourse topic (e.g., existentials, presentationals). In subordinate clauses, however, the order VS does not introduce a topic; a new or recall topic is associated with SVO. It remains to be seen whether this difference between main clauses and subordinate clauses is an artifact of the various theories or whether it reflects a real distinction between them.

In conclusion, the evidence from subordinate clauses is hard to assess in light of the likelihood of explaining VS on the one hand and the potential

predictability of SV on the other. A more thorough investigation of the full variety of subordinate clauses is required in order to shed light on this problem.

#### 4.3 SVO and VSO

A careful examination of the evidence in favor of unmarked SVO or VSO reveals that, in fact, it is hard to conclude what the unmarked word order is. The main argument in favor of SVO is based on the occurrence of discontinuous strings of fixed verbal expressions (cf. Section 4.1.1). Under the assumption that fixed expressions originate as continuous strings their surface discontinuity is claimed to be due to movement and hence SVO as the origin. On the other hand, the major argument in support of unmarked VSO is the high predictability of the subject initial constructions when compared with the lesser predictability of many instances of VS structures. It is hard to assess the relative strength of the arguments, especially in light of some of the problems mentioned in the course of this paper, such as the word order in subordinate clauses. It is worth mentioning in this context that if statistical counts constitute any measure of markedness, then it should be recognized that there were a lot more instances of VS than of SV in the data under investigation. Could this suggest VS as the unmarked order?

##### 4.3.1 A diachronic approach

Since the evidence so far points two ways, my suggestion, in view of this state-of-affairs, is that a diachronic explanation might capture the oddities of word order in the register under investigation. Accordingly, the children's literature register at hand seems to display a basic VS order but it has, in addition, acquired some, but not all of the SVO properties of CIH. This suggestion is consistent with the evidence and is supported by the occurrence of VS in both Biblical Hebrew and in Yiddish. Biblical Hebrew (at least the earlier books, cf. Givón, 1977) shows an unmarked VSO and since literary language tends to exhibit the more conservative aspects of language, the children's literature register under investigation may simply reflect this conservative old VSO. In addition, the first writers of children's literature (e.g. Bialik) were native speakers of Yiddish. Since Yiddish exemplifies VS in a variety of contexts it is not surprising that the register at

hand exhibits VS structures as well.<sup>17</sup> The potential influence of Biblical Hebrew, on the one hand, and of Yiddish, on the other, could provide the rationale for the unmarked VS in the register under investigation.

#### 4.3.2 Synchronic utilization

What I would like to suggest at this point is both potentially independent of the suggestions in the previous Section (4.3.1) and potentially a derivative of the state-of-affairs they describe. I am referring to the third logical possibility mentioned in Section 2, whereby there is no unmarked word order. Accordingly, the position of the subject is unspecified and it depends wholly on the relevant pragmatic and discourse functional principles. There would, thus, be instances where SV is predictable (e.g. contrastive focus) and contexts where VS is predictable (e.g. scene-setting). This suggestion is clearly dependent upon a fuller specification of the conditions for the occurrence of SV and VS than we are currently in possession of. The inaccessibility, at this stage, of such fully specified principles should not, however, be indicative of a categorial impossibility. More work is required on this topic for a more exhaustive characterization to emerge.

This suggestion may, of course, be independent of the diachronic approach presented in Section 4.3.1, but it could also be its consequence. What may have come about as the result of a given diachronic process could be interpreted in radically different terms synchronically. In our particular case, a dominant VS in favoured environments with various, newly acquired, SV features is reinterpreted as a free word order system with pragmatic conditioning factors governing the occurrence of VS and SV in the appropriate contexts. It could also be the case that the diachronic state-of-affairs is further utilized synchronically to fit into an overall consistent model.

#### Notes

1. A brief comment about the corpus is appropriate here. The corpus includes 250 stories, most of which were written in Hebrew, but some are translations of classical children's literature. All the stories, whether original, translated or adapted, appeared between 1974 and 1984.
2. There are, of course, also instances of SVO in children's literature in Modern Hebrew. However, they seem to be rarer than the VSO type in question and follow the word order

conventions utilized by colloquial Israeli Hebrew (CIH) elsewhere. Concerning the VSO type of writing, it should be pointed out that the VS word order is characteristic of narrative style and not of direct discourse, which, apparently, reflects CIH conventions.

3. It is appropriate to note in this context that 'markedness' was introduced into linguistics by the Prague school phonologists and into investigations of syntactic and semantic oppositions by Jakobson.

4. Although there are a considerable number of studies of Hebrew grammar from biblical to Modern Hebrew, these works usually include little discussion of word order beyond the statement of the basic order (e.g. Bendavid, 1967; Blau, 1966; 1967; 1976; Gesenius, 1910; Ornan, 1968; Rosen, 1977; Rubinstein, 1968 and Segal, 1936 [see Ornan (1971) for further references]). Among the interesting exceptions is Ewald (1870). (I am indebted to Prof. G. Goldenberg for pointing this fact out to me.)

Givón's contribution is in the adoption of a discourse functional point of view to the problem of SV/VS order. Bendavid (1958) is a detailed study of this issue, but it is conducted within a different theoretical perspective.

5. Since the relevant aspect of the Hebrew data is the position of the subject in the sentence, I will supply a literal translation of the sentences whenever possible.

6. Note that despite the similarity in unmarked word order the register under investigation and CIH differ in that the latter shows SVO order under the pragmatic conditions specifying VSO for the former.

7. This argument is due to Edit Doron.

8. When the complement contains a pronoun immediately following the verb, the subject follows the pronoun as in:

- a. *tafa oto habarwaza (telepele 23)*  
 caught him the duck

9. Support for this hypothesis may come from the occurrence in some CIH registers of the equivalent of 'the girl thought and thought' but the impossibility of the equivalent of 'the girl thought quickly and thought: what to do?'

10. See Taglicht (1984) for a discussion of marked focus.

11. Givón (1977) puts forward what may be regarded as a similar explanation with regard to the historical shift from VS to SV. He predicts that more generic predicates (e.g. habitual tenses, adjectival and nominal predications), which occur, *inter alia*, in copular sentences, will drift historically earlier toward an SV syntax. The rationale he supplies is that the generic predicate is low in referentiality compared with the more referential subject, and accordingly the subject is more topical than the predicate, favoring an SV order.

12. I am indebted to Mira Ariel for pointing out to me some aspects of this suggestion.

13. For a discussion of some more discourse functions of VS see Ziv (forthcoming).

14. It should be noted in this context that the complement VS construction is characteristic of most types of literary Hebrew. Interestingly, several years ago the spoken media switched from CVS to CSV, getting closer — apparently unintentionally — to CIH in this respect.

15. I am simplifying matters considerably by discussing subordinate clauses in general without distinguishing their various types. The only type I will discuss briefly is relative clauses (cf. note 16).

16. At this point I would like to advance a suggestion concerning the VS constructions in relative clauses. This suggestion utilizes the principle of maximum cohesion, which, apparently, is relevant to our manner of processing the discourse. When the subject is relativized it is deleted and the final string consists of a verb following the subordinating conjunction with the antecedent subject occurring just before the subordinating conjunction. The subject and the verb are, therefore, in close cohesion. When an object is relativized as in

- a. *simlat hašabat hazadala ševafra li imo* (nu asaper layveled  
the dress Saturday the new that sewed for me mother  
1, 30)
- b. *ukcal hūbayša bamazma'a šenatna la ha'iza*  
and a little shy (fem) with the compliment that gave to her the woman  
*hazava* (hasod babe'er 19)  
the strange

the occurrence of the VS structure increases the internal cohesion of the string since the object and verb are more closely linked. In such relative clauses where the subject precedes the verb when the object is relativized, this Object-Verb cohesion is lost and the subject intervenes between the verb and its object. The resulting NP object NP subject V seems harder to process for children than the NP object V NP subject construction. It is clear that this is a tentative suggestion at this point and that only psycholinguistic evidence could confirm or disconfirm it. If true, this seems like an interesting principle from which VS order in relative clauses follows, since it differs considerably from the types of motivations for word order provided so far. This approach makes the prediction that the SV structure will be harder to process and hence there need to be solid pragmatic reasons for utilizing it. The problem that such a suggestion raises is that in CIH the relative clauses where the object is relativized display SV even in children's language and the implication would be that CIH structure would be harder in this respect than its literary counterpart.

17. The observation concerning Yiddish was brought to my attention by Zelda Kahan-Newman.

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