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BASIC CONFIGURATIONS OF PRAGMATIC STRUCTURING

Robert A. Dooley

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Pragmatic functions and configurations
- 3 Topic-Comment in Mbyá Guaraní
- 4 Comment-Topic in Hixkaryana
- 5 Focus-Presupposition in Xavante
- 6 "V-only" languages
- 7 Toward universals of pragmatic structuring
- 8 Conclusion

1 Introduction

In this paper, I present evidence for basic or unmarked pragmatic configurations in three languages of Brazil: Topic-Comment in Mbyá Guaraní, Comment-Topic in Hixkaryana, and Focus-Presupposition in Xavante. In doing this, I present a framework for the description of pragmatic functions and configurations, and discuss as well certain possible universals which can be stated in this framework.

In language, as in many other human activities, when a set of choices is presented often enough, there is often one option which comes to function as the unmarked choice; that is, it is chosen in the absence of factors that would strongly indicate another. Thus, many languages have a "basic word order" stated in terms of grammatical relations such as S(ubject), O(bject), and V(erb). In English, for example, the statement that the basic order of these elements is SVO is fundamental, at some level, for the description of sentence syntax.

Alongside the kind of structure that is stated in terms of grammatical relations, there is also a kind that is stated in terms of pragmatic functions. Hockett, following Sapir (1921), was the first to use the terms "Topic" and "Comment" in pointing out that English has a basic configuration of Topic-Comment. He described it as a "favorite sentence-type" for the language, which usually, but not always, corresponds to the grammatical constituent structure of subject and predicate (Hockett 1958:201ff; cf. also Hockett 1966:23).¹

The Topic-Comment configuration is apparently common in languages, so much so that basic characteristics of human information processing have been adduced to account for its preponderance. Keenan, in attempting to explain the scarcity of languages with subject-final word order, cites prototypical topic-like properties of subjects, and then comments that "topics in general come first because they determine the relevance of what is said for the addressee" (1978:305). Similarly, Mallinson and Blake (1981), in stating as a general cross-linguistic principle that "more topical material tends to come nearer to the

beginning of the clause (to the left) than non-topical material" (151), claim that this ordering is found "in mediums other than language. In mime and dance this is true, and it is true of at least some types of visual display ... Normally comments do not make sense without topics" (156).

If human cognition were no more complex than that, a language universal could probably be stated in more or less the following terms:

- (1) "The ordering Topic-Comment is the only basic pragmatic configuration in human languages; other configurations only occur as marked choices."

But statement 1 is not the case. Hockett, in positing a weaker universal ("Every human language has a common clause type with a bipartite structure in which the constituents can reasonably be termed 'topic' and 'comment'"), goes on to add that "the order of the constituents varies. Typically in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, and many other languages, one first mentions something that one is going to talk about, and then says something about it. In other languages, the most typical arrangement is for the comment, or part of it, to precede the topic" (1966:23). Similarly, Mallinson and Blake state that "it is not impossible for a topic to appear to the right of the comment. This happens some of the time in any language and it is not altogether surprising that a few languages regularly put the subject to the right, e.g. Malagasy, Tzotzil and Houailou" (1981:156). But neither Hockett nor Mallinson and Blake actually claim Comment-Topic as the basic ordering of these functions in any particular language; the basic OS order in the languages cited by Mallinson and Blake, for example, could possibly be explained in terms of a disassociation of Subject and Topic.

In this paper, I will be making a small exploration into the question: What variety is present in human languages in regard to a basic, unmarked pragmatic configuration? After presenting some preliminary notions (Sect. 2) and the evidence for Topic-Comment in Mbyá Guaraní, Comment-Topic in Hixkaryana, and Focus-Presupposition in Xavante (Sects. 3-5), I will discuss the problem of V-only languages (Sect. 6), and then some considerations regarding a universal framework for the study of pragmatic configurations (Sect. 7).

It should be admitted at the outset that the identification of a language's basic pragmatic configuration is fraught with many of the difficulties that plague investigations of basic orderings of grammatical relations: conflicting results between such criteria as frequency counts and simplicity of "movement" rules; the scarcity of sentences with a full complement of the elements under investigation; and the interaction of grammatical and pragmatic phenomena in the structuring of sentences (Brody 1982). Certain difficulties are perhaps more acute in establishing a basic pragmatic configuration: pragmatic functions such as Topic and Focus, in general, have even fewer generally agreed-upon distinguishing features in surface structure than S and O. On the other hand, the task at hand can be considered simpler in the

sense that the distinction between surface and underlying orders is less relevant to pragmatic functions than to grammatical relations, in the sense that the identification of pragmatic functions closely follows surface signals.

2 Pragmatic functions and configurations

In this paper I will be using a framework for pragmatic functions and configurations which was developed first for the description of Mbyá Guaraní (Dooley 1982). In conceptualizing the general notion of pragmatic function, I begin with a definition from Dik's **Functional grammar**: "By pragmatic functions we understand functions which specify the informational status of the constituents involved within the wider communicative setting in which they occur" (Dik 1978:128). I go beyond Dik, however, in the following: When an overall pragmatic configuration for a sentence is involved, especially one which is prominent in the language, I view the pragmatic functions as syntagmatic relations, parallel to subject and object in grammar, not merely as categories parallel to noun phrase. For example, I view Topic as a syntagmatic relation that only has meaning in a configuration such as Topic-Comment, and in syntagmatic relation with the Comment. In this paper, I refer to five pragmatic functions: Core, Topic, Setting, Presupposition, and Tail.

I use **Core** as a cover term to include the two common notions **Focus** (in a Focus-Presupposition configuration) and **Comment** (in a Topic-Comment configuration). As such, Core can be characterized as a pragmatic function comprising the part of a sentence which, in the context, has the highest informational value (cf. "Focus" in Dik 1978:130, 149ff and Comrie 1981:57). In many languages, the Core component of a sentence regularly receives the intonation center (Daneš 1967(1972):225f; Mallinson & Blake 1981:152), but this is not the case in some tonal languages (Watters 1979:138), nor even in non-tonal Hixkaryana, where "there is no special stress or emphasis on constituents" that are fronted for focus (Derbyshire 1985:146). However, I make the assumption that all pragmatic configurations will have a Core in some form as one of their pragmatic functions.

Topic is usually described as that entity which the sentence (or Comment/Core) is "about" (Dik 130, 141ff; Andrews 1985:77); it can perhaps better be described as that entity (when any such is indicated) whose "address" in the hearer's memory is the principal place at which the information in the sentence is to be attached or "filed" (cf. Reinhart 1982:24). This amounts to a cognitive explication of the notion of "aboutness". When such an address is explicitly named as Topic, the hearer must be able to find the address in his own cognitive inventory. For this reason, two properties of Topics follow from the above characterization: (i) Topics, as names of cognitive addresses, are prototypically nominals; and (ii) Topics, as hearer-recognizable addresses, are definite (Li & Thompson 1976:461). (It is understood that generic classes are definite in this sense.) In the sentence **Cats, I can't stand, cats** is the Topic and **I can't stand** is the Comment/Core.

I distinguish between "inner Topics" and "outer Topics": an **inner Topic** fills one of the nuclear grammatical relations in a clause, whereas an **outer Topic** is grammatically an adjunct or satellite to the clause. What I call outer Topic, Dik refers to as Theme (1978:130). But his characterization of Theme as presenting "a domain or universe of discourse with respect to which it is relevant to pronounce the following Predication" is, to me, indistinguishable from certain characterizations of Topic, such as Chafe's comment on Topics in Mandarin: "What the topics appear to do is to limit the applicability of the main predication to a certain restricted domain ... the topic sets a spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds" (1976:50). The following sentence, similar to one in Dik (1978:141), illustrates the difference between inner and outer Topics:

- (2) ---OTopic--- (-----ITopic----- ----Comment-----)
As for Paris, the Eiffel Tower is breathtaking.

The bracketing in 2, indicated by parentheses around the inner Topic and its Comment, indicates that this comprises the semantic scope of the outer Topic **as for Paris**. By means of the term Core, we can say that the Core of the outer Topic is itself structured into a Topic-Core configuration. Thus, different layers of pragmatic structuring are possible in a single sentence (Dooley 1982; Andrews 1985:80).

The pragmatic function **Setting** is like Topics in providing "a spatial or temporal framework within which the main predication holds" (see reference to Chafe above), but differs in that it is prototypically an adverbial rather than a nominal. That is, Settings and Topics have much in common functionally, but there are certain formal differences. In comparing English and Mandarin in this regard, Chafe mentions the sentence

- (3) ----Setting----- -----Grammatical nucleus-----
In Dwinelle Hall people are always getting lost.

(my parsing, RAD), and then says that "Chinese would not require the **in**" (1976:51). In the terms of this paper, we could say that Chinese prefers outer Topics where English prefers Settings. Like outer Topics, Settings tend to be adjuncts or satellites to the grammatical nucleus of the clause. Typically, this is manifested in a separate intonation contour, or at least an intonation break, from the grammatical nucleus.

The pragmatic function **Presupposition** is describable as a propositional framework within which the filler of a certain "slot" is missing, that is, representable only as a variable. This pragmatic function occurs only in the Focus-Presupposition configuration, and in that configuration the missing content of the slot in question is furnished by the Focus component (Chomsky 1971:199ff). The characterization of Topic as a nominal and Presupposition as a propositional framework generally serves to distinguish these two pragmatic functions which occur with the Core. The content of a

Presupposition component "represents a situation with which the hearer is presumed to be familiar" (Andrews 1985:79). Typically, a Presupposition component consists of given information in the sense of information "which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance". Although it might include certain types of downgraded new information, that information is not being differentiated from given information by linguistic means (Chafe 1976:30,34). In line with this, I adopt a pragmatic rather than formal interpretation of "presupposition", as "assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge" (Givón 1979:50). There may be many such presuppositions associated with a given sentence, but the pragmatic function Presupposition is a linguistically encoded unit, occurring syntagmatically with Focus. In the present paper, Focus-Presupposition as a pragmatic configuration refers to a binary division of a sentence in which these two components are continuous and occur in the order given. The cleft sentence 4 illustrates this configuration:

- (4) --Focus- Presupposition
 It's you that I love.

A fifth pragmatic function I will be referring to is what Dik calls **Tail**: "A constituent with Tail function presents, as an 'afterthought' to the Predication, information meant to clarify or modify (some constituent contained in) the Predication" (1978:130); "the Tail will characteristically be set off from the predication by means of a break in the intonation pattern" (153). The following example is also from Dik:

- (5) Grammatical nucleus ----Tail----
 He's a nice chap, your brother.

(I am using the term "grammatical nucleus" in place of Dik's "predication".)

In summary, then, of the five pragmatic functions that I have mentioned, three occur within the grammatical nucleus of a clause, and can accordingly be referred to as **nuclear pragmatic functions**: Core (including Comment and Focus), inner Topic, and Presupposition. Pragmatic configurations made up of nuclear pragmatic functions can be referred to as **nuclear pragmatic configurations**. It would be premature to claim that Core, inner Topic, and Presupposition constitute an exhaustive inventory of nuclear functions that occur in language. But it does appear to be the case that, crosslinguistically, there is a very small number of nuclear pragmatic functions and configurations. Andrews mentions three such "articulations": Topic-Comment, Focus-Presupposition, and Presentational (77). I would add two further ones: Comment-Topic and Focus-only. This last configuration would cover such sentence types as interjections (**Wow!**) and ideophones, but probably not types involving ellipsis (Q: **Who's speaking?** A: **John.**), since ellipsis can alternatively be analyzed as having other pragmatic functions (Topic or Presupposition) implicitly present. The Presentational or Existential

configuration is a special-purpose one to "introduce a new entity into the discourse...: **Once there was a king with three children**" (Andrews 1985:80). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the Presentational configuration introduces a new major entity. It may be possible to parse the Presentational configuration into inner Setting (a nuclear function corresponding to inner Topic) plus Core, often in that order (Givón 1983:34f).

- (6) Inner setting ----Core---
In the brush was a snake.

In a Presentational configuration, the Core contains a reference to the entity being introduced or brought into the scene.

With nuclear configurations, a certain amount of layered bracketing is possible. Thus, we might find Topic-(Focus-Presupposition) (Andrews 1985:80), Focus-(Topic-Comment), or even Focus-(Topic-(Topic-Comment)); all of these possibilities are illustrated for Mbyá Guaraní in Dooley (1982:317). It appears that only Comment and Presupposition can be restructured as embedded pragmatic configurations in this way. Accordingly, we might call Topic and Focus **simple** functions, and Comment and Presupposition **potentially complex** ones. Note that one form of Core is simple (i.e. Focus), and another is potentially complex (Comment). The difference between the simple and the potentially complex functions is probably a consequence of the number of grammatical relations they typically comprise; the simple ones are composed of only one grammatical function, but the potentially complex ones can be, and often are, made up of more.

In some or even most languages, it may be the case that layered bracketing is limited to a single level of embedding. In Mbyá Guaraní, however, two levels of embedding have been found in natural discourse. With Theme and Tail as adjunct functions occurring outside the pragmatic nucleus, we can get such additional configurations as outer Topic (inner Topic-Comment), as illustrated in 2 above, and Focus-(Topic-Comment) Tail.

Linguistic signals of pragmatic configurations are typically found among such phenomena as word order, intonation (especially breaks and peaks), occurrence of non-obligatory items (especially nominals), morphemic markers whose meaning indicates pragmatic functions or configurations, and cliticized elements serving positionally as boundary phenomena "in the cracks" between pragmatic functions. In general, a particular configuration will be recognizable to the extent that its component pragmatic functions: (i) satisfy prototypical notional features, such as definiteness for Topics, and (ii) appear as sharply delineated constituents of the sentence, by means of signals such as those listed above.

The following table summarizes the various types of pragmatic functions that are discussed in this paper:

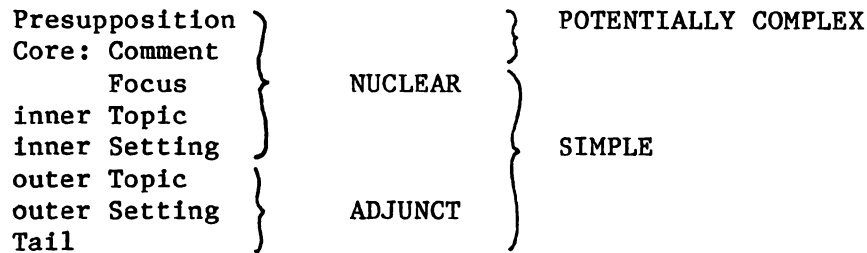


Figure 1: Pragmatic functions

In the framework being presented here, most if not all languages will have one of the nuclear pragmatic configurations as basic or unmarked. This basic configuration may have adjunct functions, such as (outer) Setting, outer Topic, or Tail, attached to it without taking on the status of a marked configuration. Marked configurations in a given language normally involve nuclear functions. These are the configurations which are used for special-purpose discourse functions. In addition, the Presentational configuration can be expected to be nonbasic (marked) in every language in which it occurs, because of its special discourse function.

Not every sentence will exhibit an overall pragmatic configuration. This is especially true for two classes of sentences: nondeclaratives and sentences in written or otherwise "planned" discourse. Nondeclaratives, such as the interrogatives **Is fat meat greasy?** and **Where is the nearest service station?**, commonly have special word orders which signal mood, thereby diminishing the coding devices available for pragmatic structuring. Planned discourse as well is characterized by, among other things, a heightened use of grammatical as opposed to pragmatic structuring. In these and similar cases, there may emerge no recognizable overall pragmatic construction for a given sentence. But in all languages, we can expect to find many sentences having an overall pragmatic configuration, with pragmatic functions occurring in a syntagmatic relationship. It is among these sentences that we search for a basic pragmatic configuration.

Pragmatic and grammatical structuring vie for the use of coding devices (principally word order, intonation, and morphological signals) that a language might have. There are at least four ways that a basic pragmatic configuration might relate to a basic ordering of grammatical relations in a given language:

- (i) It may be that a given language has a basic pragmatic configuration but no clear basic ordering of grammatical relations. An example of this is provided by the Brazilian Indian language Xavante (Ge family), which will be discussed in Sect. 5. In Xavante there is no clear basic ordering of grammatical relations, but there is strong evidence for Focus-Presupposition as the basic pragmatic configuration. In such a language,

pragmatic configurations form the principal means of structuring sentences, especially in regard to the order of constituents.

- (ii) It may be that for a given language, a basic configuration of pragmatic functions coexists with a basic ordering of grammatical relations. The "languages in which word order functions pragmatically" discussed in Thompson 1978:20f (Russian, Mandarin, and Spanish) are all of this type. English, for example, may be described as both an SVO language and a Topic-Comment language, with S typically encoding Topic (Hockett 1958, 1966; Tomlin 1985). When a language has both of these types of basic configuration, they are necessarily mutually supportive of each other in some sense, due to limited coding resources. There are sometimes special constructions which help keep these two basic kinds of structuring simultaneously operative; English passivization has this function, since it involves a topicalized Patient becoming a preverbal S (Givón 1981:168ff).
- (iii) A given language may have a basic configuration which is a composite of the two types of structuring, defined partly in terms of grammatical relations and partly in terms of pragmatic functions. This is exemplified by Nandi, a Nilo-Sharan language: "In Nandi, the unmarked position for the verb is sentence-initial, but the position of the nouns in a multi-participant sentence is determined by their pragmatic values", with the more rhematic (Comment or Focus) item preceding the more thematic one, in Prague School terminology (Thompson 1978:24f, citing Creider 1975).
- (iv) A given language may have a basic ordering for grammatical relations, but no basic ordering for pragmatic functions. I do not know whether there are languages of this type, but the S-medial languages (VSO or OSV) are especially interesting in this regard. This point will be discussed further in Sect. 7.

We now turn our attention to three Brazilian Indian languages which illustrate three different basic pragmatic configurations: Mbyá Guaraní with Topic-Comment, Hixkaryana with Comment-Topic, and Xavante with Focus-Presupposition.

3 Topic-Comment in Mbyá Guaraní

Mbyá is a dialect of the Guaraní language, which in turn forms part of the Tupí family. Mbyá has approximately 2500 speakers in seven states of southern Brazil, and is spoken in northern Argentina and eastern Paraguay as well. It is distinct from the Avañeé dialect spoken by the general population of Paraguay.

Mbyá has subject prefixes and object prefixes. When the object is higher than the subject on the person hierarchy 1 > 2 > 3, the subject prefix does not occur. Neither free subjects nor free objects are grammatically obligatory, and are absent from many sentences in natural discourse. There is no case marking for subject and object.

Mbyá has a basic SVO word order, with a high degree of word order freedom being utilized for purposes of discourse-pragmatic structuring. This structuring is described in Dooley (1982), from which the following citations and data are taken. In this language, "pragmatic structuring is realized primarily through a type of constituent structure" whose components are pragmatic functions; particles and pauses often occur "in the cracks" between such components to help delineate the configuration. Although most sentences have just one layer of pragmatic structuring, it is possible for the rightmost component to be itself structured into a binary configuration, and so on. In this way, three distinct levels have been found (307f).

These notions are illustrated in the following two examples which, in a narrative, were spoken by a young lady on two different occasions in order to indicate her choice of a husband; she, along with her sisters, was going to do this by throwing a flower at the one she wished. (The intonation center is indicated by capitals; an acute accent, when present, indicates a secondary peak of intonation; intonation breaks are indicated by a comma.)

(7) Topic (-----Focus----- Presupposition)
 Xeé, peva'e ae re riVE 'rǎ a-mombó.
 LSG that only at merely FUT LSG-throw²
 'As for me, merely at that one I will throw it.'

(8) ----Focus-----
 Peva'e re riVE 'rǎ ko
 that at merely FUT opinion

(Topic (Topic Comment))
 xeé yvotý a-mombó.
 LSG flower LSG-throw

'Merely at that one I will throw the flower.' (317)

In 7, the Comment component of the Topic-Comment configuration is in turn structured as Focus-Presupposition, and in 8 the Presupposition component itself has two layers of Topic-Comment structuring.

In Mbyá, the Focus-Presupposition configuration has been found in two common types of discourse-pragmatic conditions: (i) contrast (examples 7 and 8 above), and (ii) added-detail restatements, in which the Presupposition is restated from the preceding sentence (Dooley 1982:328f). Thus, it is a special-purpose configuration, occurring only under special discourse-pragmatic conditions.

Topic-Comment in Mbyá is much more common. In fact, given a prototypical association of Topic with grammatical subject in Mbyá and the basic word order SVO, Topic-Comment is the basic, unmarked pragmatic configuration (310):

- (9) Topic -Comment-
 Xe-ro o-kyty-PA.
 1SG-house 3-drip-completely
 'My house leaks completely.'

Under certain conditions there occur marked, especially informative Topics, but the order again is Topic-Comment. These occur (i) when there are new (sub)topics being introduced, (ii) when a pronominal expression is used to refer back to an entity which was just introduced, and (iii) in what Chafe (1976:35) refers to as double-focus contrast (his "focus" is not the same as the pragmatic function Focus). Marked Topics are recognizable by a sharply delineated Topic-Comment constituent structure, often with particles or pause "in the cracks" between the two components and a secondary peak of intonation on the Topic, as a counterpoint to the intonation center on the Comment. The first of the three types of marked Topic is illustrated by the glossed and labelled sentences in the following segment of procedural text:

- (10) a. 'From (material from) the woods I make a bow.
 b. I bring from the woods, wood which I will work.
 c. --Topic--
 I-para-rã,
 3-decoration-FUT
 -----Comment-----
 a-jou guembe PI, takua reMBO.
 1SG-find guembe strip bamboo protrusion
 For its decoration, I get strips of (the tendrils
 of the climbing plant) "guembe" and a type of fine
 bamboo with thorns.
 d. ----Topic---- -----Comment-----
 Guyrapa xã-rã, a-ke'o piNDO guive.
 bow string-FUT 1SG-cut:down palm also
 For the bowstring, I cut down a palm tree also.'

Based largely on data from English and Mbyá Guaraní, in Dooley 1982 I speculated on the possibility that Topic-Comment would turn out to be the unmarked pragmatic configuration in all languages. In the light of data about to be presented, that hypothesis no longer appears to be tenable.

4 Comment-Topic in Hixkaryana

Hixkaryana is a language of the Carib family with some 350 speakers (in 1979) who live about halfway between the Amazon and Guyana

(Derbyshire 1985:xiii). The verb is prefixed for agreement with subject and, when transitive, with object as well:

- (11) W-ama-no.
 1S:30-fell-IMM:PAST
 'I felled it (a tree)' (1985:3f).

(In certain of the Hixkaryana examples cited below, the gloss is for the word as a whole instead of morpheme-by-morpheme.)

Hixkaryana is the first carefully documented OVS language (see Derbyshire 1979a). In both Hixkaryana and other related Carib languages, Derbyshire (1981) attributes the change from an earlier SOV order to the grammaticalization of free subjects in the Tail position, where they supposedly occurred originally as "afterthought" elements. That is, elements would be described as being in the Tail position in the pre-grammaticalized phase; a major indicator of such grammaticalization is the phonological integration of the erstwhile Tail element into the preceding parts of the sentence, without an intonation break, as in 12 and 13.

- (12) Kuraha yonyhoryeno biryekomo.
 bow he:made:it boy
 'The boy made a bow.' (1985:31)

- (13) Kanawa y-aka-ye Tuhkoro.
 canoe 3S:30-make-DIST:PAST Tuhkoro
 'Tuhkoro made a canoe.' (1981:211)

In Hixkaryana, "the grammaticalization process has clearly reached a late stage, with OVS established as the basic order, but it may never be ... complete" (1985:103f), since, not infrequently, the sentence-final free subject is phonologically dislocated (1981:218). This is indicated by the comma in the following data:

- (14) Txemye hati, Mawarye.
 he:poisoned:them HEARSAY Mawarye
 'Mawarye poisoned them.' (1965:67)

Right-dislocated components in Hixkaryana are not limited to subjects, but "are widely used in the language and with varying functions" (1985:104):

ADJUNCT:

- (15) Ekeh me wehxaha, atunano wya.
 sick:one DENOMLZR I:am fever by
 'I am sick with fever.' (1985:34)

NOMINAL OUTSIDE THE GRAMMATICAL NUCLEUS OF THE CLAUSE:

- (16) Koseryehyakonɪ, romryenɪ.
 I:was:afraid my:boyhood
 '(With reference to) my boyhood, I used to be afraid.'
 (1985:155)

DIRECT OBJECT:

- (17) Wenyhoryetxehkan ha, fro ha.
 I:finished:making:it INTENS that:thing INTENS
 'I have finished making that thing.' (1979b:78)

SECOND ITEM IN COORDINATION:

- (18) Hakrya wotxownɪ ha, koso heno komo.
 peccary they:shot:it INTENS deer group COLL
 'They shot peccary and some deer.' (1979b:78)

The Tail position is often used for what Derbyshire calls "frame of reference topics", defining these in the sense of Chafe's Mandarin Topics ("the frame within which the sentence holds"; see Sect. 2). This has already been illustrated in examples 14, 16, and 17; another example is given below (the parsing of Hixkaryana data into pragmatic functions is my own, RAD):

- (19) -----Comment----- ---Topic---
 ʃsna rma txko tyufa nkekonɪ, oseryehɪ.
 to:there SAME DIMIN spitting she:did:it her:being:afraid

'(As an expression of) her being afraid, she was spitting into the little (pot).'

(1985:155)

With this type of Topic, then, Hixkaryana has a Comment-Topic configuration. To show that Comment-Topic is actually the basic pragmatic configuration in the language, I will cite evidence for the following claims:

- (i) In the case of full NP subjects, there is an unmarked association of Topic with Subject.
- (ii) The order (0)VS is the most pragmatically neutral ordering of these elements when they are full NP's.

In this study I am disregarding constituent orderings with pronouns, since in Hixkaryana they have specialized discourse-pragmatic functions that are "totally different" from other referential devices in the language and not closely related to Topics (Derbyshire 1986:275ff). The question of clauses without full NP constituents is discussed in Sect. 6.

Derbyshire states that "The constituent that primarily carries unmarked theme is the subject, and this normally follows the verb (and object)" (1985:152). Here, "theme" is roughly equivalent to "Topic". The subject as unmarked Topic in Hixkaryana is demonstrated in a statistical study of "topic continuity" based on the model of Givón 1983. In this study, whereas the subject of a given clause has been referred to, on the average, 2.51 clauses earlier, the figure rises to 4.52 for direct objects and 7.49 for oblique objects (calculated from Tables 1, 6, and 10 of Derbyshire 1986). The evidence, then, is that subject is the grammatical relation in Hixkaryana which most consistently preserves continuity of reference. Since this is also one measure of topicality, this also indicates that subject in Hixkaryana has the highest degree of topicality among grammatical relations.

Derbyshire 1986 shows, among other things, that the (0)VS order is the most pragmatically neutral one in Hixkaryana when full (nonpronominal) NPs are present. The main points of the argument are summarized as follows. Continuous topics (those that occur medial and final in an episode) are most likely to be expressed either by verb agreement only or by VS order with an NP subject (267). In particular, "the postverbal noun phrase is a more continuous topic than the preverbal noun phrase" (275); "SV is a pragmatically marked order that is used sparingly even for the restricted functions which primarily characterize it" (279), namely, for "bringing into the register an entity that has not been on the scene for some time" (255). "The occurrences of VS", on the other hand, "range over almost every possible dimension of topic continuity and discontinuity" (279); this ordering is "used to express so many different discourse-pragmatic functions that it must be considered the most neutral of the coding devices" (272f). This kind of distribution for (0)VS is what one would expect from a basic or unmarked ordering. With the typical identification of S with Topic, this means that Comment-Topic is the basic or unmarked pragmatic configuration in Hixkaryana, when full NP's are in view.

It should also be mentioned that Hixkaryana uses Focus-Presupposition as a marked configuration. This involves an optional movement process which Derbyshire calls "fronting for emphasis" (1985:74). The following examples, taken from the page just cited, show this process applied to transitive (20) and intransitive subject (21):

(20) --Focus--- -----Presupposition-----
 Okomkurusu b̄iryekomo heno yoskeko.
 bushmaster child dead it:bit:him
 'It was a bushmaster (snake) that bit the child.'

(21) Focus- -----Presupposition-----
 Waraka haxa nehurkano asama yawo.
 Waraka CONTR he:fell trail on
 It was Waraka (not someone else) who fell on the
 trail.'

Uses of fronting for emphasis include contrastive emphasis, as in 20 and 21, and the introduction or reinstatement of an entity in discourse (1985:146ff), as already mentioned in the discussion of SV order. This configuration highlights items that the speaker wishes to present as being particularly informative. What follows the fronted constituent appears to have the pragmatic function Presupposition, containing information which the speaker feels that the hearer is not likely to challenge. Thus, Focus-Presupposition in Hixkaryana is a special-purpose configuration, occurring only under specific discourse-pragmatic conditions.

In summary, there are two identifiable pragmatic configurations for Hixkaryana sentences with free NPs: Comment-Topic and Focus-Presupposition. Topic-Comment does not appear to occur. Based on statistical and distributional evidence from texts, Comment-Topic seems clearly to be the basic or unmarked configuration. This fact correlates well with the basic ordering OVS for the language, given a typical association of S with Topic. The question of possible pragmatic configurations for sentences without NP arguments is discussed in Sect. 6.

5 Focus-Presupposition in Xavante

Xavante is a language of the Ge family with approximately two thousand speakers who live in eastern Mato Grosso near the headwaters of the Xingu and Araguaia rivers. In Xavante, "A predicate complex is the core of the clause. It is that part of the clause that begins with person-aspect proclitics and ends with the verb," together with possible modifiers postposed to the verb (Burgess 1986:28). The predicate complex, or simply the predicate, may include other elements, such as adverbial or direct object, between the person-aspect proclitics and the verb. These proclitics are coreferenced to the grammatical subject, which may or may not be represented as well by a noun phrase.

Basic word order is problematic in Xavante. Derbyshire (to appear) lists Xavante as ?OSV (SOV). Burgess states: "When both subject and object are identified by noun phrases, there is no overt distinction as to which is which either by affixation or by word order ... Their order relative to each other is determined by information or topical structure ... " (1986:28). The following examples are taken from McLeod & Mitchell 1977:125:

(22) Ê waptsã ma tô adzö.
 INTER dog 2/3 PERF he:beat
 'Did he beat the dog?'

(23) Ê ma tô waptsã adzö.
 INTER 2/3 PERF dog he:beat
 'Did he beat the dog?'

- (24) **È** ma tδ adzö / waptsǎ hǎ.
 INTER 2/3 PERF he:beat dog that:is
 'Did he beat it, that is, the dog?'

In 22, the object **waptsǎ** 'dog' occurs immediately after the interrogative marker **È** and before the predicate complex; in 23, it occurs within the predicate complex, immediately after the person-aspect proclitics **ma tδ**; in 24, it occurs in a Tail construction, together with the element **hǎ**, which is discussed later in this section.

The Focus-Presupposition configuration occurs paragraph medial in Xavante. "The first sentence in a paragraph usually contains several items of new information. Further new information is added in the body of the paragraph, often one item per clause. The final sentence in a paragraph is often a summary one containing only given information" (Burgess 1986:33). The one item of new information is typically added as follows: "New primary information normally occurs before the predicate in a clause" (29f). (The word "primary" is used here in distinction to new secondary information, which is of lesser informativeness and hence is not formally distinguished from given information (30).) When new information is added sentence-initially, the remainder of the sentence takes on the pragmatic function of Presupposition.

To illustrate this, I give as example 25 the translation of an entire Xavante text (Text 1 from McLeod 1960). For reasons of space, I am omitting the text itself. I have parsed the recognizable Focus-Presupposition sentences into their pragmatic functions, and have rendered these in an English word order corresponding to the order of these constituents in Xavante.

- (25) a. Eunice and another are going to fly to Batovi
 (settlement).
 (New paragraph)
 b. Who with?
 c. ---Focus---
 With Alice.
 d. They are going to fly together.
 (New paragraph)
 (Question understood: Why are they going?)
 e. -----Focus----- ----Presupposition---
 It is in order to see Helen that they will fly to
 -----Tail-----
 the dance, to the jaguar (festival).
 They will go over there.

- g. -----Focus-----
It is in order to see the jaguar (festival)

-----Presupposition-----
that they will fly there.

(New paragraph)
- h. Who will come here for them?
- i. Focus (Presupposition ellipsed)
Jim.
- j. Focus -----Presupposition-----
Jim will come here for them.
- k. ---Focus--- -----Presupposition-----
Next Monday he will come here for them.
- l. -----Focus----- Presupposition
Nharinha is the first one he will fly.
- m. They will fly together.

(New paragraph)
- n. Is Nharinha going to fly?
- o. She is flying to Cuiabá, and Nené also.

(Background explanation)
- p. Dominga will stay here.
- q. -----Focus----- -Presupposition--
It's to her father that she will go.
- r. -----Focus----- -Presupposition--
It's to her father that she will go.
- s. So only Nharinha will fly (the first time).

(New paragraph)
- t. What (is Nharinha going) for?
- u. -----Focus-----
It's in order to get her eye scraped

--Presupposition--- -----Tail-----
that she is flying, since it hurts so much.
- v. -----Focus----- -----Presupposition-----
It's the painful part that he will scrape for her.

- (New paragraph)
- w. Does her eye hurt?
- x. Yes, her eye hurts.
- y. -----Focus----- --Presupposition--
It's because her eye hurts that she will fly,

-----Tail-----
so that someone can scrape it for her.
- z. When Nharinha flies, the women will stay away for
an indefinite period.
- (New paragraph)
- aa. Will the chief stay by himself then?
- bb. ---Focus-- Presupposition -----Tail-----
By himself he will stay, the man alone,

-----Tail-----
the man alone.
- cc. Kosisababa will go away to the fields.
- dd. She will stay there.
- ee. When she (Nharinha) returns, she will come back
here.
- ff. Her husband, as soon as he finishes the house-
building, he will go there.
- gg. As soon as he finishes the house-building,
he will go there, Tsiriwaruwẽ (husband's name).

The paragraph-initial questions (b, h, n, t, w, aa) are from the narrator to himself. This is a common paragraph-initial device in Xavante, along with sentences giving several new items of information (Burgess 1986). Sentences d, f, m, and s are summary statements; as per Burgess, these are typically paragraph final. Tail elements, which generally give additional information, occur in e, u, y, and bb. In at least two of the Focus-Presupposition configurations, j and r, the Focus does not consist of new information at all, but is repeated from the preceding sentence. Not only the content, but also the Focus-Presupposition configuration as well is repeated from the preceding sentence. Burgess suggests that this may signal the conclusion of a high-level topic (Burgess 1986:34). Sentences bb through gg appear to be part of some type of coda to the text which provides related explanation.

Speaking from a non-Xavante viewpoint, the most prominent feature of this text is the high frequency of Focus-Presupposition configurations occurring paragraph-medially. The first impression of an English speaker is that these sentences overplay the introduction of new information. This is because, in English, this configuration is used only in highly specialized contexts, when the Focus information rates rather drastic highlighting:

- (26) ---Focus--- --Presupposition--
It was Fred that married Laura (not Max).

This configuration is common in Xavante because it has taken on the role of the basic or unmarked pragmatic configuration. Cross-linguistically, it is paragraph-medial sentences which best display neutral or unmarked patterns; paragraph-initial and paragraph-final sentences tend to be special-purpose types (Givón 1983).

The actual Xavante data for paragraph h through m are given below as example 27.

- (27) h. É wa dza wê tsô ǎwitsi?
INTER who FUT here them:for come
'Who will come here for them?
- i. --Focus-- (Presupposition ellipsed)
Dzemi-hǎ.
Jim-that:is
Jim.
- j. ---Focus--- -----Presupposition-----
Dzemi-hǎ tê dza wê tsô ǎwitsi.
Jim-that:is 3 FUT here them:for come
Jim will come here for them.
- k. -----Focus-----
romhuriduridzep-amo-na
Monday-other-on

-----Presupposition-----
tê dza wê tsô ǎwitsi.
3 FUT here them:for come

Next Monday he will come here for them.
- l. -----Focus----- Presupposition
Nharinha-dza'utsi tê dza atsamrǔ.
Nharinha-first 3 FUT fly
Nharinha is the first one he will fly.
- m. Tê dza atsamrǔ-dzahure.
3 FUT fly-DUAL
They will fly together.'

Although Focus-Presupposition is the unmarked pragmatic configuration in Xavante, it is not the only configuration. In Sect. 3 of her paper, Burgess discusses Topic-Comment. This configuration is quite noticeable with interrogatives which begin a discourse or paragraph (1986:36):

(28) ----Topic---- -----Core-----
 Pi'o-nori-hã, ê momo tê ai'aba're?
 woman-PL-that:is INTER where they go
 'The women, where are they going?'

(29) -Topic- -----Core-----
 Donaudu, ê mame tê ñamra?
 Donald INTER where he live
 'Donald, where does he live?'

(In 28 and 29, I have used the term "Core" instead of "Comment" because it is less suggestive of the declarative mood.)

Topic-Comment (Topic-Core) configurations also occur in descriptive sentences involving a type of rhetorical question (loc.cit.):

(30) -----Topic----- -----Core-----
 Udzö-hã barana-hã, ê I-ro'o-baihöirê?
 light-that:is night-that:is INTER which-burn-many
 'Lights at night, wow! are there ever a lot!'

The Topics in 28-30 are analyzed by Burgess as "marked Topics", whose function is to introduce or reintroduce entities into the discourse. Since they are outside of the syntactic nucleus of the clause, they are analyzed as outer Topics in the framework of this paper. One of the linguistic signals of their occurrence is phonological left dislocation, with an intonation break before the Core. Another is the occurrence of the enclitic element *-hã*. In McLeod (1974), this morpheme is variously glossed as 'it is', 'specifier', and 'focuser'. In the examples presented in this paper, it occurs following Tail (24), Focus (27i, j) and outer Topic (28-30). That is, it seems to occur with pragmatic functions giving new or, in some sense, highly informative content. Further study is needed to determine whether this is an adequate characterization.

According to Burgess, there is also an unmarked (inner) Topic-Comment configuration in Xavante: "In a clause in which all information is new, the first element is the topic. If the clause is intransitive, the subject is most likely to be the topic. If the clause is transitive, either subject or object may be topic, and their order relative to each other is determined by which is the topic, the topic being the first element" (1986:38). This kind of configuration is illustrated in examples 31 and 32; the Topics are, respectively, subject and object:

- (31) Topic ---Comment--
 Litsi ma tê-dzada.
 Lici she leg-burn
 'Lici burned her leg.'
- (32) Topic -----Comment-----
 Toptö wahi matê ti-tsa.
 Toptö snake it her-bite
 'A snake bit Toptö.' (38)

Burgess also identifies unmarked Topics in sentences with given information (1986:39), but it is not clear that there is any linguistic evidence of their being distinct pragmatic functions. Recognizable Topic-Comment configurations do occur in Xavante, but only when Topic is new information. On this basis, we classify them as marked, special-purpose configurations. It is not known whether there are formal distinctions in Xavante between Topic-Comment and Focus-Presupposition, but the nonpresuppositional character of the Comment component seems to distinguish between the two configurations.

In Xavante, then, although it is problematic to establish a basic order among the grammatical relations S, V, and O, available descriptions and text data point rather clearly to Focus-Presupposition as the basic pragmatic configuration.

6 "V-only" languages

"V-only" is a term used by Payne (1986) to describe a situation in a language in which there is a statistical predominance of clauses having no free S or O elements. Such languages have presented problems in determining the basic order of grammatical relations (Brody 1982). One such language is Yagua of Peru (unitary member of the Peba-Yaguan family) (Payne 1986), and another is Hixkaryana of Brazil (Carib) (Derbyshire 1986). Both are V-only in regard to the most neutral sentence type in natural discourse, but both have identifiable basic orderings of grammatical relations when free S and O nominals do occur: Yagua as VSO (Payne, 460) and Hixkaryana as OVS (Derbyshire 1986:281). For languages of this type, basic word order can be investigated, as for other languages, in those sentences where both S and O occur as free nominals, and thus, even though many sentences are V-only, "we can maintain a basic word order concept that is valid for all known languages" (Derbyshire, to appear).

For such languages, there are methodological problems in determining a basic pragmatic configuration. There appear to be three possibilities:

- (i) The language could be analyzed as having only one pragmatic function in the basic configuration, and that would be Focus/Comment (recall that I am treating Focus and Comment as varieties of the same basic pragmatic function, Sect. 2).

Thus, the basic pragmatic configuration for all V-only languages would be Focus/Comment-only.

- (ii) The same procedure could be followed for determining the basic pragmatic configuration as for determining basic word order; that is, the V-only sentences would be ignored, and the basic pragmatic configuration for the (rest of the) language would be the least marked one when there are two or more pragmatic functions in evidence.
- (iii) Since there are obvious acts of reference performed in most V-only sentences, the possibility could be explored that these sentences have an ellipsed pragmatic function. That is, if there is a least marked pragmatic configuration, say Topic-Comment, for sentences in the language with free NP arguments, then (Topic)-Comment could be claimed as the basic configuration for the language as a whole.

Alternatives (i) and (ii) are less than ideal, in the sense that each fails to take into account a certain class of sentences in the language; (i) ignores sentences with free NPs, and (ii) ignores the V-only sentences. Alternative (iii) is only viable on the condition that there is a least marked pragmatic configuration among those sentences with free NPs, but given that the condition holds, it is the best option of the three.

In Hixkaryana, for example, we have shown in Sect. 4 that Comment-Topic is the least marked configuration for sentences with free NPs. The basic or unmarked pragmatic configuration for the language, then, would be Comment-(Topic).

7 Toward universals of pragmatic structuring

If it is true that "discourse universals tend to be 'more universal' than syntactic structure" (Givón 1984:129), then one is certainly justified in looking for universals in regard to pragmatic configurations. In Sect. 1, it was mentioned that early treatments of this area sometimes cited characteristics of human cognition which suggested the universality of something like the following:

- (1) "The ordering Topic-Comment is the only basic pragmatic configuration in human languages; other configurations only occur as marked choices."

This is a hypothesis I favored in Dooley 1982.

More recently, Givón has posited a universal in the opposite direction. Not only does he state that "topic-comment is not the unmarked universal word-order", but he asserts that

- (33) Topic-Comment "is the marked universal word-order, the one used

when the topic is discontinuous, surprising, less obvious, less predictable" (Givón 1984:128).

He then goes on to put forward characteristics of human cognition in favor of his own position: "But this only makes sense. If one has difficulty establishing a new topic, or if one suspects that the hearer is likely to experience such a difficulty, the most sensible strategy is first to make sure that the topic is firmly established, and only then to come up with the new information" (loc. cit.)

Evidence has been put forward in this paper to show that neither 1 nor 33 has universal validity. Topic-Comment, Comment-Topic, and Focus-Presupposition all serve as basic pragmatic configurations in human language. The following table summarizes the major pragmatic configurations discussed in this paper:

	Basic word order	Basic pragmatic configuration	Marked pragmatic configuration
Mbyá	SVO	Topic-Comment	Focus-Presupposition
Hixkaryana	OVS	Comment-Topic	Focus-Presupposition
Xavante	?OSV	Focus-Presupposition	Topic-Comment

Figure 2. Basic and marked orderings

Since neither 1 nor 33 hold, universals of pragmatic configuration must be formulated along other lines. The following three statements are offered as possibilities:

- (34) In all languages, sentences can be found having an overall pragmatic configuration in which there are pragmatic functions in a syntagmatic relationship.
- (35) All languages without a basic ordering of grammatical relations (S, O, V) have a basic configuration of pragmatic functions.
- (36) All languages have a basic configuration of pragmatic functions.

Note that 36 is stronger than either 34 or 35 in that it implies both of them, but neither 34 nor 35 implies the other.

Statement 34 would be a trivial consequence of the universal occurrence of any particular type of pragmatic configuration. For example, if either of the following statements proved true:

- (37) a. Every language has either a Topic-Comment or a
Comment-Topic configuration;
b. Every language has a Focus-Presupposition
configuration,

then 34 would follow as a corollary. Both 37a and 37b hold in the three Brazilian languages discussed in this paper.

Statement 35 relates especially to the question of "free word order languages". Concerning such languages, Thompson states: "I am suspicious of the notion 'free word order'. A language which is described this way will generally turn out, upon closer investigation, to be one in which pragmatic factors determine the position of major constituents; the task of the linguist working on such a language is to specify what these factors are and how they interact" (1978:23). Given the powerful coding tool that an unmarked ordering of sentence constituents is, it would be a *priori* unlikely that a language would fail to take advantage of it either in pragmatics or in grammar.

For statement 36, certain V-only languages (Sect. 6) may present an obstacle. If, in a certain language, the major part of the sentences in natural discourse are of the V-only type, then it is possible that among the remaining sentences there may be no configuration which is least marked discourse-pragmatically. In Yagua, when pragmatic criteria are taken into account, there is a least marked word order for sentences with free NPs, and it is VSO (Payne 1986:453). However, it is not known whether there is any particular configuration of pragmatic functions which corresponds to this.

Due to topic properties often associated with grammatical subject, it may be that

- (38) Languages with medial S in their basic word order
(VSO and OSV languages) do not have either Topic-Comment or
Comment-Topic as a basic pragmatic configuration.

Xavante (?OSV) has Focus-Presupposition as its basic configuration and Topic-Comment as a marked configuration. As just mentioned, the case for Yagua (VSO) is unclear.

8 Conclusion

Evidence presented in this paper indicates that neither Topic-Comment nor the opposite order of Comment-Topic can be universally taken as a basic/unmarked pragmatic configuration in human languages. Rather, it appears that languages adopt a basic configuration from a certain small set of possibilities, all of which have plausible explanations in terms of human cognition and discourse-pragmatics. These include Topic-Comment, Comment-Topic, and Focus-Presupposition. It would be a research program of obvious value to determine what statements regarding pragmatic configurations actually do have universal validity.

It would also be important to investigate why one or another pragmatic

configuration "catches on" in a given language at a given time and becomes the basic configuration, while others function as marked, special-purpose configurations, or else do not occur at all.

The basic question for the investigation of pragmatic configurations in language is the same as what Perlmutter gives as the basic question of linguistics as a whole: "In what ways do natural languages differ, and in what ways are they all alike?" (Perlmutter 1980:195). And, especially for a part of language like pragmatics that interfaces in an obvious way with extralinguistic phenomena, the further question needs to be asked as well: "Why do these differences and commonalities occur where they do?"

Notes:

1. Thompson, after quoting from certain Prague School linguists, states that "In English, the positions of those sentence elements is [sic] at the disposal of grammatical determinants virtually to the exclusion of pragmatic factors" (1978:25). Since English gave major if not primary impetus to early recognition of the Topic-Comment configuration (Sapir 1921, Hockett 1958:191, 201f) and further studies such as Tomlin 1985 appear to bear out the influence of discourse-pragmatic factors on subject assignment and hence on initial position in many sentences, Thompson's assessment seems too strong.
2. The following abbreviations are used in the glosses of data in this paper:

COLL	collective	NEG	negative
CONTR	contrast	O	object
DENOMLZR	denominalizer	PERF	perfective
DIMIN	diminutive	PL	plural
DIST:PAST	distant past	PROG	progressive
EXCL	exclusive	S	subject
FUT	future	SG	singular
HABIT	habitual	STAT	stative
IMM:PAST	immediate past	1	first person
INTENS	intensifier	2	second person
INTER	interrogative	3	third person

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