DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF WORD ORDER IN SESOTHO ACQUISITION[1]

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1. Introduction

Word order has been a topic of great interest since the onset of systematic language acquisition studies (Slobin 1966, Bloom 1970, Bowerman 1973, Brown 1973). Such study, it was thought, might provide evidence for competing theories of what is innate and what is learned in the process of language acquisition. Additional research has examined later points in discourse development where children use three or more constituents in an utterance, with potential for the use of several different word orders. When data concerning children's word order is compared in different languages, the story becomes more complex. It appears that most children tend to use a fairly fixed word order in initial word combinations (English - Maratsos & Chalkley 1980, Turkish - Slobin 1982, Mandarin - Erbaugh 1982), even in languages that have case marking and allow great flexibility in word order (Russian - Slobin 1966) and even in cases were adult input contains varied word order. In Finnish (Bowerman 1973), however, one child followed adult variable word order at a very early stage. Further investigation has revealed a tendency to delete subject and/or order constituents in a new-old information sequence (Italian - Fava & Tirondola 1977, Dutch - Snow 1978). Such data suggests a 'functional' approach to language (Bates & McWhinney 1979), where the child assumes the hearer is privy to the same background information with which he or she is operating. It is only later, with increased discourse sensitivity and awareness, that children begin to provide the hearer with the background information necessary for the effective development of a discourse topic.

It appears that several variables are involved in what word order a child may use in a given language. Some languages have more fixed word order

(English, Chinese), while others are extremely flexible (Cayuga, Walpiri). Some languages rely mainly on word order to indicate grammatical relations and shifts of focus (English). Others rely primarily on inflection (Russian), while still others rely on both (Serbo-Croatian). It appears that mixed systems (i.e. Serbo-Croatian), where both word order and inflections are involved in constructing discourse, are harder to master than systems which use only either word order or inflectional strategies. There may, of course, be individual variation between children which would make the pattern of one system more accessible than another.

This chapter examines acquisition data from Sesotho,[2] an SVO Bantu language with inflected subject-verb and noun-complement agreement, where alternative word orders are used for different discourse functions. Sesotho speaking children initially use SVO word order. Then, at about 2½ years, they begin to use some different word orders. In this chapter we will discuss the functions of these word orders in spontaneous child speech, with special attention given to the linguistic and discourse environments where children make maximum use of the word order possibilities in this language. We conclude with some hypotheses concerning the nature of cognitive processes involved in learning to manipulate word order.

2. Discourse Context and Word Order Strategies

Many linguists have noted the large number of possible word orders used in Bantu languages (Aghem-Watters 1979, Makua-Stucky 1985), Chichewa - Bresnan and Mchombo 1986). The discourse functions of some of these constructions have been described for the related Bantu language Haya (Tenenbaum 1977, Byarushayo & Tenenbaum 1978). These constructions and their uses correspond closely to those of Sesotho.[3] As in Haya we find word order shifts used mainly to clarify a misunderstanding or a misreading of what was intended.[4] Adult-child interaction is frequently beset with 'communicative breakdowns' and is therefore precisely the kind of context in which we would expect maximum manipulation of word order to occur. We predictably find that Basotho adults use a great number of word order shifts when speaking to young children (aged 2-3). Basotho adults and caregivers talk animatedly with children even before youngsters can verbalize (Demuth 1983). Once they begin to talk, children are prompted to answer questions and assume an active role in conversation. In trying to make themselves understood, Basotho caregivers use the wide repertoire of Sesotho grammatical forms available for discourse strategies.

Children, on the other hand, have much of the burden of communication lifted from them when they are communicating with such accommodating adults.[5] In fact, few of the word order shifts we find used by children occur during interactions with adults. Instead, we find that the more challenging communicative contexts for the child are those involving interactions with sibling or peers, where the hearer is less linguistically accomodating than the adult. It is in daily play situations that we find most of the young child's (and even 5-6 year olds') use of word order shifts, and it is these context which we examine in this chapter.

In the following sections we discuss the most relevant word orders in Sesotho, and then proceed to consider how adults use these constructions when speaking to children. Finally, we examine children's developmental changes in word order manipulation as a discourse strategy, from about 2 until 6 years of age.

3. Word Order in Sesotho

Basic Sesotho word order is SVO, with object pronoun cliticized before the verb, as seen in examples (1) and (2) below (sc = subject concord, foc = focus marker,[6] obj = object pronoun). Each subject concord and object clitic agree in noun class gender with their co-referent noun. The *o* is the subject marker for humans, *e* is the object clitic for nouns such as 'dog', etc.

(1) *(Thábo) ó batla ntjá*
sc V O
(Thabo) he want dog
(Thabo) he wants a/the dog.

(2) *(Thábo) ó-a e-bátla*
sc-foc[7] obj-V
(Thabo) he it want
(Thabo) he wants it.

Lexical objects are occasionally preposed, especially in case of a reintroduced or contrastive discourse topic.

(3) *ntjá ó-a e-bátla*
O sc-foc obj-V
dog he it want
The dog, he (Thabo) wants it.

Preposed subjects are also used, again primarily as reintroduced contrastive topics of conversation.

(4) *'ná ke batla ntjá*
pn sc V O
me I want dog
As for me, I want the/a dog.

The use of postposed lexical object plus preverbal object clitic has been characterized in other languages as an afterthought. It is said to be used to clarify the object clitic when the speaker realizes that the referent is not in the 'active memory' (*Chafe, this volume*) of the hearer. It is also supposed to be used as an expression of surprise, doubt, emphasis or contrast, or to de-emphasise the assertion and emphasise the postposed element (Tenenbaum 1977). In Sesotho, however, postponed lexical objects are frequently used even in cases where the lexical object has just been specified (verbally or otherwise) and is apparent to both speaker and hearer. Postposed object constructions (realized nominally or by demonstrative pronouns) function in Sesotho primarily to emphasize or contrast the object or additionally to emphasize the verbal argument, the only 'new' information in the sentence.

(5) *ǵ-a ɕ- bátla ntjá*
sc-foc obj-V O
he it want dog
He (Thabo) wants it, the dog.

As with postposed objects, postposed subjects are also used to focus attention on the verbal assertion rather than on the already specified, emphatic or contrastive subject. These constructions are found in contexts where the subject referent has already been identified. Thus, in the following example, various aspects of *ntjá* 'dog' have already been mentioned.

(6) *e-a tsamáea ntjá*
sc-foc V S
it leave dog
It's leaving, the dog.

In each of these cases, the shifted lexical referent has been previously identified in the discourse. These constructions are not used to introduce a new referent, but may contrast a referent with others which are also active in the discourse context.

In addition to extraposition, clefts and passives also play a role in the pragmatics of Sesotho discourse and reference. Below we examine the use of these constructions in question formation.

The unmarked form of questions in Sesotho places the question word at the end of the sentence, as seen below:

(7) *nthɔ éɕ kǵ ɕ̂ng? mǫthǫ êǫ kǵ mâng?*
thing this cop what person that cop who
This thing is what? That person is who?

Thábo ǵ káɕ̂?
T. he where
Thabo is where?

Questions are phrased in this manner when an already salient referent is being brought into the discourse for the first time, or when one referent is being contrasted with another. In addition to this unmarked question form, there is also a cleft question or 'preposed' form which is used only in cases where the referent has already been specified:

(8) *kǵ ɕ́ng nthɔ éɕ? kǵ máng mǫthǫ êǫ̂?*
cop what thing this cop who person this
It's what, this thing? It's who, this person?
ǵ káɕ Thábo?
he where T.
He's where, Thabo?

These are the only two ways to form questions with copular constructions; there is no separate pseudo-cleft form.

It is frequently the case that unmarked and cleft questions will be used in sequence: the unmarked form is used first to establish the referent; after this both forms can be used interchangeably. Such sequences occur not only in repeated turns by the same speaker, but also in consecutive turns by different speakers, as seen in the following interaction between child and grandmother. Here the child uses the unmarked question form to verbally introduce the referent, while the grandmother uses the cleft question form once the discourse topic has been established.

(9) Hlobohang (36 months) and grandmother MM are identifying items on a food chart.
H *Nthóe kǵ ɕ́ng?*
N-dem cop wh-
thing-this is what
This thing is what?
MM *Ê, kǵ ɕ́ng eɔná nthɔ êǫ̂?*
cop wh- pn N dem
yes, it's what that-one thing that
Yes, it's what, that thing?

Unmarked and cleft questions also occur with full verbal predicates, where they then use a relative construction. Here again, the unmarked form

is used with first mentions or reitterations of the referent, while the cleft form is used only once the referent has been specified.

(10) *éa ǫ-f-ilé-ng ntjá ké mâng?*
rel obj-v-prf-rel O cop wh-
who you gave dog is who
The one that gave you the dog is who?

(11) *ké mâng éa ǫ-f-ilé-ng ntjá?*
cop wh- rel obj-V-prf-rel O
it's who who you gave dog
It's who that gave you the dog?

Examples (7)-(11) illustrate the active forms of questions. Passive forms are used when the subject is questioned.

(12) *ǫ f-íl-ó-e ntjá ké mâng?*
sc V-prf-pas O cop wh-
you given dog by who
You were given the dog by who?

In passive question forms, the direct object is frequently preposed, resulting in questions like that in (13) below - similar to the preposed object construction in (3) above.

(13) *ntjá ǫ ę-f-íl-ó-e ké mâng?*
O sc obj-V-prf-pas cop wh-
dog you it were-given by who
The dog, you were given it by who?

While permutations of word order between cleft and passive options[8] are not frequently employed within the same speech event by children, they are often used by adults in their attempts to communicate effectively with young interlocutors. We now examine how adults manipulate these constructions to achieve effective communication with children.

4. Adult Uses of Word Order in Talking with Children

As might be expected, adults and caregivers possess a much larger repertoire of variations in word order than do children. Further, adults frequently use several different pragmatically motivated word orders within a single

communicative episode. Thus, we find complex word reordering such as that in (14) where there are shifts from passive to cleft constructions (a & b, c & d), a minor tense/aspect shift (a & b) a postposed subject (d), and final resorting to an unmarked question form (e). The great aunt here is persistant in trying to extract an answer from her grandniece:

(14) Great aunt J is engaging grandniece 'Neuoe (30 months) in conversation, pressing her for information concerning which child (affectionately called 'grandmother' here) hit 'Neuoe.

a. *Ǫ 'la shátj-ó-a ké mâng?*
sc pst V-pas cop wh-
You were lashed by who?

b. *Ké mâng a n'a ǫ shápa?* (2x)
cop wh- rel pst-cont sc V
is who who were you lash
It's who that was lashing you?
(Another child tries to prompt N in between J's repetitions)
(N tries to respond)

c. *Ǫ n'ǫ shátj-ó-a ké nkhǫnǫ mâng?*
sc pst-cont V-pas cop N wh-
you were lash by grandmother who?
You were being lashed by which old lady?

d. *Ké mâng a n'a ǫ-shápa nkhǫ́nǫ́?*
cop wh- rel pst-cont obj-V N
is who who you lash grandmother
It's who that was lashing you, the old lady?
(N tries to respond)

e. *É? Nkhǫ́nǫ́ a n'a ǫ-shápá ké mâng? É?*
wh S rel pst-cont obj-V cop wh- wh
uh grandmother who you lashis who uh
Uh? The old lady that was lashing you is who? Uh?
(N finally answers)

Notice here again the ordering of 'unmarked' passive before the more emphatic cleft. The introduction and postposing of *nkhono* 'grandmother' lends further emphasis to the agent of the action. This shifting back and forth from one construction to another reflects an apparent attempt on the part of the adult to help the child understand the question and produce the desired response.

during interaction with young children. A possible interpretation for the use of these constructions is that they represent efforts to help direct the child's attention to what the speaker considers to be salient in the discourse.

5. Children's Use of Word Order

The data on rural Basotho children's speech is selected from 93 hours of spontaneous verbal interaction between 4 children, their peers, siblings and older family members. Each of the children was audio recorded every 5-8 weeks over a period of 12-14 months. The youngest child was 25 months at the initation of the study, while the older siblings were 5-6 years old. As noted above, Basotho adults initiate verbal interaction with young children with great enthusiasm. They introduce the majority of discourse topics and are largely responsible for topic continuity and topic shift. It is only after the age of 2½ or so, when young children start to spend more time with their peers, that they begin to initiate topics of conversation, introduce contrastive topics and maintain discourse topics which have already been initiated. It is precisely at this time that Basotho children begin to manipulate word order. Here we examine the conversational strategies used by children of two years of age and trace that development until the age of 6.

Young children do not control all the word order possibilities discussed above. Instead, two year old children use the alternative strategies of repetition, gesture and prosodic intensity to make themselves understood. Example (15) below illustrates a case where a young child is interacting with a 'less than competent speaker'. He uses the same construction repeatedly, resorting to the use of prosodic intensity when communication fails.

(15) Hlobohang (27.3 months) has just pointed to the tape recorder, asking researcher K whose it is. He then tries unsuccessfully to ask who bought the tape recorder for her.

H *a rekélá é mâng?*
(ọ ę-rek-éts-o-ę kę mâng)
you it-buy- cop who
ben/prf/pas
You were bought it by who?

(K doesn't understand)

K *M̂.*
Yes.

H *a rekélá é mâng?*
(ọ ę-rek-éts-ó-ę kę mâng)
you it buy- cop who
ben/prf/pas
You were bought it by who?

K *Ké éa-ka.*
cop my
It's mine.

(H is indignant - his question is not being answered

H *a rekélá lé mâng?!*
(ọ ę-rek-éts-ó-ę kę mâng)
you it-buy- cop who
ben/prf/pas
You were bought it by who?!

Note here that the construction used is the passive, and that there is no attempt, when communication fails, to switch to the (grammatically more complex?) cleft form *kę mâng ea o rekétséng eɔna*? 'It's who that bought it for you?' Such a shift might have helped the hearer clarify what the child intended. At this early age Hlobohang apparently does not possess the linguistic knowledge or discourse skills necessary to switch from passive to cleft and vice versa. The use of cleft constructions becomes quite noticeable only a few months later, about 2½ years of age.

Manipulation of unmarked and cleft questions, however, is already productive by the age of 25 months, as seen in the following example:

(16) Hlobohang (25 months) and Mololo (4.5 yrs) are playing with tin can 'cars'.

a. *Ę́ káę é'ngoę?*
sc wh- S
It's where, another one?

b. *É'ngóę ę́ kâę?*
S sc wh-
Another on is where?

c. *Ę́ kaę́ é'ngoę́ éla?*
sc wh- S dem
It's where, that other one?

In this interaction Hlobohang is trying to elicit a response on the part of the

hearer. The first question (a) takes the form of a cleft. In adult speech we would expect an unmarked question to be used upon first mention, so that the referent could be specified. Here the child apparently assumes that the referent is known to the hearer and he uses the cleft form. This is consistent with observations that Dutch and Italian children (Snow 1972, Fava & Tirondola 1977) initially tend to order new information first, assuming the hearer is privy to the background upon which the utterance is based. In (b) the child switches to the unmarked question form. After no response from the hearer again, he shifts back to the cleft form in (c), providing further specification of referent with the addition of a demonstrative pronoun. Although the child makes an unwarranted assumption here about the recoverability of the referent, he is able to manipulate cleft and unmarked question forms from a very early age.

While children do use occasional cleft constructions with full predicates by 2 years of age, there is a dramatic increase in the use of this construction at 30 months (Demuth 1983). The function of clefts at this time was to clarify misunderstandings, but also to specify *who* or *what* was responsible for a particular action or state of affairs. Concurrently we find that postposed subject constructions begin to be produced with extreme frequency. As discussed above, these postposed constructions are not the result of an afterthought or clarification (as proposed for adult speech in other Bantu languages), or even for emphasis or contrast (as in adult Sesotho). Rather they are used to focus on the assertion or activity of the referent which has already been specified. Postposed subjects are very commonly used at 2½ years of age in contexts such as the following:

(17) Mololo (5 yrs) and Hlobohang (30 months) are playing cars.

a. Mol *Ę́ŕę́ kę bonę koloi.*
hort sc V O
Let me see the car.

b. H *Ę-a tsamáea koloi éa:-ka.*
sc-foc V S pos
it go car my
It's going, my car.

c. *Ę phethǫ́-ilé lękhalé-ng koloi éa-ka*
sc V-prf N-loc S pos
it turned-over aloe-at car my
It turned over at the aloe, my car.

In (a) the first speaker specifies the referent. In (b) and (c) the second speaker elaborates on the *action* in which the referent is involved. Postposed subject constructions of this kind present new verbal information first, again preserving new-given order of presentation frequently found with young children.

Postposed subjects are commonly used at 2½ years. At this time, postposed *objects* start to be produced. Between 3 and 4 years postposed objects are frequently used, then taper off to more adult-like usage in particular contexts. Once again, postposed objects have been already introduced into the discourse and are used either for emphasis, or to illuminate the action to which the object is subjected.[9]

(18) Mololo (5-6 years) tells grandmother that Hlobohang (36 months) has his (Mololo's) book. Grandmother says she will give Mololo 'her' book, which is actually Hlobolang's. Hlobolang then complains whiningly to Grandmother in turns (a) + (b) and tells Mololo to take back his book in turn (c)

a. *Tliá buka ena éaka.*
V O dem poss
bring book that my
Bring (me) that/my book.

b. *'Ná ke-a e-batla buka éa:ka*
pn sc-foc obj-V O poss
me I it-want book my
As for me, I want it, my book.

c. *É-nke, ha ké é-tsotélle buka émpe.*
obj-V neg sc obj-V O adj
it-take neg I it-care book ugly
Take it, I don't care about it, the ugly book.

Turn (a) introduces the *book* in object position. In utterances (b) + (c) the lexical form of *book* is postposed, while in the main clause it takes the form of an object clitic. As with postposed subjects, we find postposed objects in contexts where the lexical form has already been introduced in immediately previous discourse and is postposed in subsequent utterances to give it emphasis. Such constructions became increasingly frequent about 3 years of age.

Notice here also the preposing of the independent subject pronoun *'na* in (b), used for contrastive emphasis (Kunene 1975). Preposing of this independent pronoun is extremely common and occurs frequently as the sole

subject 'marker', with no subject concord marker (usually before the age of three, but occasionally even with 5 and 6 year olds). A complete analysis of the functions of *'na* and other preposed subjects in children's speech is the topic for another paper (see Demuth, in preparation).

Preposed objects, however, were not generally used by very young children. They become productive around the age of 3, but only frequently used by 5 or 6 year olds. This construction, variously referred to as fronted, topicalized or left dislocated, is also acquired relatively late in other languages (English (Gruber 1967), Mandarin Chinese (Erbaugh 1982)). Preposed objects emphasize a reintroduced or contrastive topic, as seen in example (19) below. Here the older child uses a preposed object (a), no lexical object in (b) and a postposed object in (c):

(19) Mololo (4.6 yrs) has been talking to himself while playing with a flashlight (torch), turning it off and on while Hlobohang (26.2 months) is roasting potatoes in the ashes from the fire. Mololo tells Hlobohang:

a. *Tɔ́:ch* *ea-haǫ́* *kę* *ę* *tímme,*
o pos sc obj V-prf
flashlight your I it turned-off
Your flashlight, I'm turning it off.

b. *Kę* *ę* *tímme* *hóre,*
sc obj V-prf interj
I it turned-off like-this
I turned it off like this.

c. *Kę* *ę* *tímme* *tɔ́:ch*
sc obj V-prf O
I it turned-off flashlight
I turned it off, the flashlight.

Note again the particular progression in use of constructions. The referent is initially preposed in an effort to draw the hearer's attention to the 'reintroduced' discourse topic, in part, perhaps, to contrast the *torch* with the *potatoes* which Hlobohang has been playing with. In so doing, it is the discourse referent which is ordered first. Once the referent has been established, it is repeated in the form of an object clitic. When it is lexicalized again in (c), it is postposed with the propositional emphasis on the verb. This sequence of word orders seems once again to support the new-given ordering pattern across turns of a discourse unit. By the age of 3, children begin to use postposed object constructions with increased frequency. Preposed objects, however, become more frequently used only by 5-6 year olds and and are used quite often by adults.

6. Discussion

In sum, there is a specific developmental trend in the learning of different word orders in Sesotho. Initially, SVO word order is used. Before two years of age gesture, repetition and prosodic intensity serve discourse functions later accomplished by the manipulation of word order. Around 2 years copular questions in unmarked and cleft form are used in sequence, with the cleft often preceding the unmarked adult-introductory form. By 2½ years postposed subjects are very commonly used once the discourse referent has already been specified. Clefts become productive at this age, emphasizing or contrasting the referent. By 3 years the use of postposed subjects has diminished, while postposed objects become much more frequent. Preposed objects are rare at 3 years while 5 and 6 year old children and adults in speech to children use them frequently. After an experimental stage with each of these constructions children seem to store them away for future use when discourse situations require them. Such use, analysis and 'retention' of grammatical form, has been contrasted (Keenan & Schieffelin 1976a, b) with other language learning that children experience, where overgeneralized forms, as with irregular plurals or verbal paradigms, are eventually discarded. In the case of Sesotho word order the child retains each new construction, gradually compiling a set of grammatical devices to be used when required by the discourse situation.

Data from this study indicate a predisposition for presentation of new propositions before old information during the period between 2-3½ years. Thus, subjects and objects are postposed once they have been introduced in lexical form. Verbal information is then presented first. This is consistent with findings from Dutch and Italian youngsters (Snow 1972, Fava & Tirondola 1977). It also appears that certain forms, such as postposed objects or subjects, do not function primarily as afterthoughts or as clarification devices for children, but rather as grammaticized ways of encoding discourse information. Adults rarely make use of these word orders, except in cases of contrast or clarification. One of the productive environments for the use of these constructions is adult-child interaction. Thus, we see a much larger proportion of word order shifts in adult-child discourse than adult-adult conversations. Children likewise use alternative word orders more often when speak-

ing to other children and talking to themselves than they do in talking with adults.

The following table graphically illustrates the incremental progression by which Sesotho speaking children acquire a working facility with distinct word orders. Notice how the onset of usage of a given construction is gradual, as indicated by the dotted line. There is a marked increase in the use of the construction at the beginning of the solid line. The solid line indicates continued frequent usage of the form, while a return to the dotted line indicates a relaxation in usage to those discourse contexts in which adults would also be expected to use the construction.

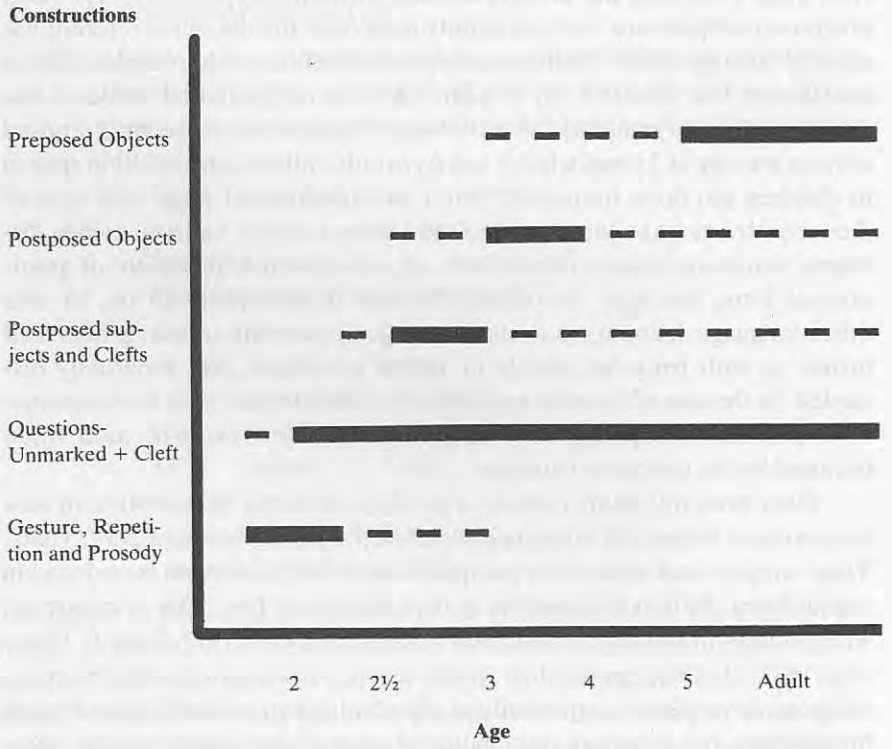

TABLE 1

It is important to note that Basotho children, along with children from other language studies, never order words in an ungrammatical way, even at initial stages of development. Why this should be, in a language which has the potential for several different word orders, and in which adults use these orders freely in speech to children, is cause for speculation. The fact that children appear to 'experiment' with different constructions at various stages in their development may provide additional evidence for positing some kind of canonical shape (Slobin 1982, Slobin & Bever 1983) or template construct (Erbaugh 1982, Demuth, Faraclas & Marchese 1986) which helps the child organize language. There is a tendency for children across languages to use some sort of basic word order initially. Once that shape has been firmly established, a child then experiments with another. Only after that option has been thoroughly explored does a child incorporate yet another canonical/template form, and so forth. Language acquisition evidence from an extremely free word order language such as Cayuga (Mithun, *this volume*), or Walpiri (Bavin 1985), might provide us with evidence of variation in strategies children employ in learning such languages.

NOTES

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2) *Sesotho* is a southern Bantu language spoken by the *Basotho* people in the countries of *Lesotho* and South Africa.

3) See Demuth & Johnson 1986 for thorough discussion of the discourse and grammatical functions of word order in Sesotho and Setswara.

4) This contrasts with Spoken French (Lambrecht, *this volume*), where certain postposed constructions are actually the unmarked case.

5) This expectation might not be upheld in societies such as Samoa (Ochs 1982), Kaluli (Schieffelin 1979) or Maya Quiche (Pye 1980) where adults are minimally 'accomodating' (Ochs & Schieffelin 1983) in their physical and verbal interactions with children.

6) Many Bantu languages have a 'focus' marker (Givón, 1975) which is generally suffixed to the subject-verb agreement marker (subject concord). Languages differ in the extent to which this marker is grammaticized. The function of this particle in Sesotho is completely grammaticized, providing foucs only a verb (i.e. in verb final constructions such as intransitives or transitives with preverbal pronominal object clitic. Focusing and topicalizing other grammatical constituents in Sesotho are primarily achieved through the reordering of words.

7) The focus marker *-a* in Sesotho is restricted to verb final indicative constructions like that in example 2. (with some temporal adverbs permitted postnominally) and negative perfective constructions: ha kę-a phęha lijɔ - neg sc-foc cook food 'I didn't cook (the/any) food'.

8) For more detail on passive constructions see Demuth (1985).

9) As noted in examples (3) and (4), and seen once again here in examples (18) and (19), extraposed objects require the use of the preverbal object clitic. Preverbal information (subject concord, focus marker, tense/aspect, object clitic) becomes progressively more phonologically differentiated between ages 2 and 3, but it is especially from 2½ years onwards that object clitics become more distinct. It is possible that this process might be a 'prerequisite' for being able to extrapose objects - an additional factor to be considered in the explanation for why these two constructions became most productive only after extraposition of subjects.

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A UNIFORM PAUSE AND ERROR STRATEGY FOR NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

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1. Overview of the Foregrounding Hierarchy

Both native and non-native speakers of English pause and err at the same places in their oral descriptions. The relative importance of the event being described is critical in prompting speakers to pause, err, or correct themselves, while language background has astonishingly little influence. Although non-native speakers pause more and make more errors, both natives and non-natives have the most difficulty at precisely the same points in their descriptions of an animated cartoon. These pivotal points were the most important events in the story, which would not make sense without them. Regardless of language background, all speakers mentioned the same core set of events.[1]

Paradoxically, the pivotal events were also the most difficult for people to describe fluently. More peripheral, backgrounded events, and editorial comments which were outside the plot line, were described more fluently. This indicates that all speakers share a common, cognitively-based strategy for choosing which actions in an ongoing scene are most worthy of mention. In this study, thirty native and non-native speakers described a simple cartoon of a crab chasing a goldfish. All human beings perceive such prototypical events in a similar way. Naturally, more deliberate or artistic speech is often available to embellish the basic descriptions.

Framing a description of the pivotal events in a narrative requires the greatest amount of planning and effort. The difficulty in overall planning depletes the resevoir of energy available for fluent speech, so descriptions of pivotal event are relatively error-prone. All speakers a share a common monitor which rations their linguistic energy; they only add background and editorial comments if they have an energy surplus. If they do, then their