

Questions on Bresnan Chs. 1-2 ‘Nonconfigurationality’ and ‘Movement Paradoxes’

Briefly answer the following questions on Bresnan Ch. 1 ‘Nonconfigurationality’ and Ch. 2 ‘Movement Paradoxes.’ Hand in your answers on Wednesday, Jan. 16.

1. Bresnan observes that ‘across languages, there often appears to be an inverse relation between the amount of grammatical information expressed by words and the amount expressed by phrases.’ p. 6. Briefly explain this comment with reference to the Verb Phrase (VP). Bresnan claims that English has a VP while Warlpiri does not. What sort of “grammatical information” is expressed by the VP in English? How does Warlpiri express this same grammatical information?
2. What is Bresnan’s evidence for the claim that Warlpiri lacks a VP? (p. 8 and fn. 6)
3. Bresnan claims that while Warlpiri and English differ in their syntax, ‘they have a common organization at a deeper level than is apparent from their differing modes of expression.’ p. 7. Briefly describe this ‘common organization at a deeper level’. What is Bresnan’s evidence for this claim of commonality?
4. In addition to phrase structure and grammatical relations, Bresnan argues for a third type of structure, namely ‘predicate argument structure’, which includes ‘thematic structure’ related to the predicate’s meaning (see the thematic hierarchy in (14) on page 11). Briefly summarize her argument for predicate argument structure.
5. Bresnan notes that movement paradoxes are problematic for the assumptions that ‘the inner or underlying structure of language has the formal categorial properties of phrase structure’ and that the surface configuration of phrase structure categories are derived from that underlying structure via movement transformations. p. 19. What does she mean by ‘formal categorial properties of phrase structure’? Give a few examples of such properties.

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6. (Optional question, for extra credit) *Functionalism*. The quote in question 1 above has a ‘functionalist’ basis, that is, it can be motivated on the basis of the communicative function of language: speakers need some way to indicate which NP fills which role in the relation denoted by the verb. Bresnan notes that to indicate grammatical relations like subject and object, English uses constituent structure while Warlpiri uses case and agreement. But English does distinguish case on pronouns:

- i. She saw them.
- ii. *Her saw they.

Interestingly, while Warlpiri has very free word order, English has fairly rigid order *even when the arguments of the verb are pronouns*:

- iii. *Them saw she.
- iv. *She them saw.
- v. *Saw them she.

Since the pronoun forms indicate that *she* is the subject and *them* is the object, fixed word order is redundant. Then why are iii-v unacceptable? Is this a problem for our ‘functionalist’ motivation? Or not?