Verb-Subject order in L2 English: New evidence from the ICLE corpus

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Cristóbal Lozano clozan2@yahoo.com
Universidad de Granada

Amaya Mendikoetxea amaya.mendikoetxea@uam.es
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

http://www.uam.es/woslac

The phenomenon

  - L1 Spanish – L2 English, L1 Italian – L2 English:
    - ...it arrived the day of his departure...
    - And then at last comes the great day.
    - In every country exist criminals
    - ...after a few minutes arrive the girlfriend with his family too.

- Only with unaccusative verbs (never with unergatives).
  - Unaccusatives: arrive, happen, exist, come, appear, live...
  - Unergatives: cry, speak, sing, walk ...

- Explanation: syntax-lexicon interface (unaccusative hypothesis)

Word order in native English

- Very restricted: canonical word order SV.
  - Four girls sang
  - Four girls arrived

- LEXICON: Lexicon-syntax interface (Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, etc):
  - Unaccusative Hypothesis (Burzio 1986, etc)
  - There arrived four girls at the station.
  - *There sang four girls at the opera.

- WEIGHT: Syntax-phonology interface (Arnold et al, etc)
  - Heavy material is sentence-final (Principle of End-Weight, Quirk):
    - That money is important is obvious.
    - It is obvious that money is important.

- FOCUS: Syntax-discourse interface (Biber et al, Birner, etc):
  - Postverbal material tends to be focus (new info)
  - We have complimentary soft drinks and coffee. Also complimentary is red and white wine.

Word order in native Spanish & Italian

- Lexicon-syntax interface:
  - UNERGATIVES: SV
    A:  ¿Qué ha pasado? / Che cosa é suceso?
    B:  Juan ha hablado [SV]
        Gianni ha parlato [SV]
  - UNACCUSATIVES: SV
    A:  ¿Qué ha pasado? / Che cosa é suceso?
    B:  Ha llegado Juan [VS]
        È arrivato Gianni [VS]

- Syntax-discourse interface:
  - UNERGATIVES: VS
    A:  ¿Quién ha hablado? / Chi ha parlato?
    B:  Ha hablado Juan [VS]
        Ha parlato Gianni [VS]
  - UNACCUSATIVES: VS
    A:  ¿Quién ha llegado? / Chi è arrivato?
    B:  Ha llegado Juan [VS]
        È arrivato Gianni [VS]
Hypotheses

- **H1 [LEXICON]:** Lexicon-syntax interface:
  - Postverbal subjects with **unaccusatives** (never with unergatives)

- **H2 [WEIGHT]:** Syntax-PF interface:
  - Postverbal subjects: **heavy** (but preverbal light)

- **H3 [FOCUS]:** Syntax-Discourse interface:
  - Postverbal subjects: **focus** (but preverbal **topic**)

5. Method

- Learner corpus: L1 Spa – L2 Eng; L1 Ital – L2 Eng
- ICLE (Granger et al. 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Number of essays</th>
<th>Number of words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICLE Spanish</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>200,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICLE Italian</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>227,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>643</strong></td>
<td><strong>427,461</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Problem: proficiency level?)

- WordSmith v. 4.0 (Scott 2004)
- SPSS v. 12.0

Data analysis

- Based on Levin (1993) and Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995):
  - **Unergatives:** cough, cry, shout, speak, walk, dance…[TOTAL: 41]
  - **Unaccusatives:** exist, live, appear, emerge, happen, arrive… [TOTAL: 32]

Data analysis: lemmas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unaccusatives</th>
<th>Unergatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semantic class:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Semantic subclass:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence: exist, flow, grow, hide, live, remain, rise, settle, spread, survive</td>
<td><strong>Light emission:</strong> beam, burn, flame, flash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance: appear, arise, awake, begin, develop, emerge, flow,&quot;&quot;,&quot;&quot;, follow, happen, occur, rise&quot;&quot;</td>
<td><strong>Sound emission:</strong> bang, beat, blast, boom, crack, crash, cry, known, ring, roll, sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappearance: die, disappear</td>
<td><strong>Smell emission:</strong> smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherently directed motion: arrive, come, drop, enter, escape, fall, go, leave, pass, rise&quot;,&quot;&quot;, return</td>
<td><strong>Substance emission:</strong> pour, sweat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Manner of speaking: cry&quot;, shout, sing&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk verbs: speak, talk</td>
<td><strong>Bodily processes:</strong> Breathe verbs: breath, cough, cry&quot;, sweat&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal expressions: laugh, sigh, smile</td>
<td><strong>Manner of motion:</strong> Run verbs: fly, jump, run, swim, walk, ride, travel, slide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manner of motion</td>
<td><strong>Performance:</strong> Monadic agentives: dance, phone, play, sing, work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>Snore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**From Levin (1993) and Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995)**

| TOTAL UNACCUSATIVES: 32 | TOTAL UNERGATIVES: 41 |
### Example: syntax-lexicon (unaccusatives only)

- **Mostly S-V**: [92% Italian, 97% Spanish]
  - The real problem appears when they have to look for their first job.
  - ...these people should exist.
- **But many V-S**: [8% Italian, 3% Spanish]
  - There exist positive means of earning money.
  - So arised the Saint Inquisition.
  - In the main plot appear the main characters: Volpone and Mosca.
  - ...

### Examples: syntax-phonology

1. **Preverbal unaccusative subjects**: light vs. heavy
   - a. …for the first time, beggars appeared. (spm02003)
   - a’. …it was in that time when the utopian societies created by the early socialists appeared. (spm04019)
   - b. Violence does exist … (itto2034)
   - b’. Nowadays, the differences between men and women should not exist any more,… (itto4006)

2. **Postverbal unaccusative subjects**: light vs. heavy
   - a. …and from there began a fire … (spm04011)
   - a’. …and thus began the period known as Restoration, which in literature ended in 1707 on the death of George Farquhar, the last major writer of the "Comedy of Manners". (spm08005)
   - b. We could call it the body language and through it, emerges the protagonists’ personality. (its1064)
   - b’. This is conveyed in line 25 where by the expression emerges the people’s ignorance in having prejudices. (its1065)
15. Summary/Conclusion

Result 3: syntax-discourse

**Focus:**

(1) a. In the world, dominated by science, technology and industrialisation, there is no place for dreaming and imagination. Thanks to science and its consequences, technology and industrialisation, appeared the big factories and the capitalism system.

b. It seems impossible, although we now reached technology a high standard of life, we are very pessimists. It seems as progress has stolen our imagination and therefore the love for small things. I can give few examples that such a fact: television is becoming lately the killer of conversation between parents and children: it is almost disappearing the use of writing nice letters to friends, since there is the telephone.

**Topic:**

(1) a. The approval of acting of women were something essential. Women started to perform female characters and this contribute to give a sexual and realistic atmosphere. [...] Female characters appear with a stronger personality they really love these men.

b. The idea of Europe doesn't ignore these differences, but englobes them, accept them and upon them construct its identity. [...] If I think of the concept of Europe I cannot think of anything else that of a whole of different countries, but that all together produce the European identity. The differences have always existed in the Europe and for ages its peoples fought one against the other.

**References**


Belletti, A. (2004a), (ed.) 


Jaeggli, O. and K. Safir (eds) (1989), Syntax-discourse…… ..


Kaltenb...
Thank you!

For every lemma (e.g., APPEAR, ARISE), we searched for:

- All possible **native forms**:
  - appear, appears, appearing, appeared
  - arise, arises, arising, arose, arisen
- All possible overregularised and overgeneralised **learner forms**:
  - arised, aroased,arisened, aroaseden ("So arised the Sain Inquisition")
- All possible forms with probable L1 transfer of spelling:
  - apear, apearls, apearign, apearred
- All other possible **misspelled forms**:
  - appeard, apeard
Filtering criteria

- MAIN FILTERING CRITERIA:
  - The verb must be intransitive (unergative or unaccusative).
  - The verb must be finite, active voice.
  - The subject can appear either postverbally (VS) or preverbally (SV).
  - The subject must be an NP.
  - The sentence can be either grammatical or ungrammatical in native English.

- OTHER FILTERING CRITERIA (TOTAL=28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcorpus</th>
<th>V type</th>
<th># usable concordances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Unergative</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unaccusative</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraposition was discarded

- NOTE: extraposition discarded:
  - It only remains [to add that nowadays we live in a world...]
  - It happened [that the countries which make the weapons are...]

Unaccusative: grammatical vs. ungrammatical

Figure 1. Proportion (in %) of grammatical vs. ungrammatical unaccusative VS

Result: VS and (in)definiteness

Figure 1: Production of postverbal subjects according to their definiteness.

INDEFINITE
...some decades ago, it appeared a new invent: the television.
The play was very well performed and also appeared new elements in the stage.
...it has appeared some cases of women that have killed their husbands...

DEFINITE
...because later could appear the real evidence and the real guilty.
...and usually appears the noble young man that either waste or has wasted his fortune.
In the main plot appear the main characters: Volpone and Mosca.
Unaccusativity Hypothesis

(1) a. unergative
   'John spoke'

   IP
   |  I'  
   |     
   | NP [EXT ARG] V V' [INT ARG] 

b. unaccusative
   'Three girls arrived'

   IP
   |  I'  
   |     
   | NP V V' 


VS in native Spanish

Inergativos: SV

A: ¿Qué pasó anoche en la reunión?
B: *Un hombre gritó.
# Gritó un hombre.

Inacusativos: VS

A: ¿Qué pasó anoche en la reunión?
B: # Un hombre llegó.
  # Llegó un hombre.

5. VS in native Spanish (2)

Inergativos: VS

A: ¿Quién gritó anoche en la reunión?
B: *Un hombre gritó.
# Gritó un hombre.

Inacusativos: VS

A: ¿Quién llegó anoche a la reunión?
B: # Un hombre llegó.
  # Llegó un hombre.

Scale (syntactic weight/complexity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOMINAL SCALE</th>
<th>ORDINAL SCALE</th>
<th>SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIGHT</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(D) N PRN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEAVY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(D) ADJ N</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(D) ADJ* N</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(D) ADJ N*</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(D) ADJ N*</td>
<td>(IP/CP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unaccusative VS:
grammatical vs ungrammatical

(1) Ungrammatical it-insertion:
a. I do believe that it will not exist a machine or something able to imitate the human imagination. (spm01007)
b. …. and it still live some farmers who have field and farmhouses. (itb07001)

(2) Grammatical locative inversion:
a. In the main plot appear the main characters: Volpone and Mosca … (spal1002)
b. Cesare Lombroso (1835/1909) criminological, asserted that on the earth lived people which were born-criminal. (itrl1005)

(3) Insertion of any other type of phrase (XP-insertion), which is typically (but not exclusively) a PP:
a. There exists a whole range of occasions in which we have had to be witness of how people from other nations usually fight abroad for foreign causes. (spm10015)
b. …, there still remains a predominance of men over women. (itto4006)

(4) Ungrammatical Ø-insertion:
a. Nevertheless exist other means of obtaining it [i.e., money] which are not so honourable, but quicker. (spm01013)
b. Instead I think that exist factors which, on long term, can predispose human mind to that crime … (itrl1010)

(5) AdvP-insertion:
a. … and here emerges the problem. (spm01001)
b. Later came a world of disorder, during and after the First World War … (itrs1010)

(6) Grammatical existential there-insertion:
a. … and from this moment begins the avarice. (spm04048)
b. [No instances of XP-insertion were found in the Italian corpus]