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Challenge

How would you explain the difference between the following sentence pairs?

1. The concepts in the examples of computational functions **are two**.
2. There **are two** concepts in the examples of computational functions.
3. This paper presents **a new algorithm**.
4. **A new algorithm** is discussed in this paper.
5. **Recently**, there have been several attacks.
6. There have been several attacks **recently**.
7. A simulation **was performed** to assess the impact of inshore growth overfishing on the brown shrimp yield.
8. A simulation to assess the impact of inshore growth overfishing on the brown shrimp yield **was performed**. (Sources: Learner corpus, 1,3,5; COCA ,7)

Background

Natural sentences are **unmarked**. Explanations of **naturalness** are, however unlikely to help learners since few learners have enough exposure to English to assess **markedness**. Therefore, it is essential to understand the syntactic principles of **information structure**, namely:

- **information flow**,
- **Information focus** and
- **end weight**.

Information flow

The general tendency is to move from less informative (**given**) to more informative (**new**) (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1993, p.410).

Passivization

Fig. 1 shows that the given subject in (3) is known and so likely to precede the more informative new information. Biber *et al.* (1999) found that around 90% of **agent phrases** introduced new information.

Fig. 1: Givenness

This paper	presents a new algorithm.
Given	New

Student activity 1

Read a description of a process. Highlight the new and known information.

Thematic development

There are four types of **thematic development** (Fontaine, 2013) that occur at clausal, sentential and discursal levels.



Constant theme

- **My dog** is black. It is a pit bull terrier.

Linear theme

- My dog is **black**. Its colour is rather rare.

Derived theme

- **My pet dog** (title) **My dog** is black.

Ruptured theme

- My dog is black. Pet food is expensive.

Student activity 2

Identify whether the theme is constant, linear, derived or ruptured.

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G. Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London, UK: Longman.

Fontaine, L. (2013). *Analysing English Grammar: A Systemic Functional Introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Quirk, R., & Greenbaum, S. (1993). *A University Grammar of English*. Harlow, UK: Longman.

Information focus

The typical point of focus is on information at the end of a clause (**end focus**). Fronting can be used for cohesion, focus or contrast by moving information earlier than expected by clause grammar (i.e. **SVOCA**, Fig. 2) and harness **initial focus**.

Fig. 2: Clause elements

Subject	Verb	Object	Complement	Adverbial
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Fronting

Objects, complements or adverbials may be emphasized by fronting as in (5).

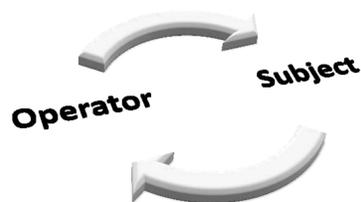
Student activity 3

Discuss the difference between this pair of sentences.

- There are two main conclusions **in this paper**.
- **In this paper**, there are two main conclusions.

Inversion

Subject-operator inversion is frequently used for rhetorical effect when negative adverbials are fronted.



- Only **rarely do foreign bodies** penetrate the wall of the aerodigestive tract. (Corpus of Contemporary American English, COCA)

Student activity 4

Rewrite the following sentence emphatically, starting with "never".
Assassination had **never** gone hand in hand with philosophy in Roman history until the death of Julius Caesar.

End weight

Heavy elements tend to occur at the end of a sentence (Yule, 2002, p.199) as in (2) and (7), easing the burden on working memory (Baddeley, 2012).

Postponement

Discontinuous noun phrases may be created by delaying the **tail of noun phrases**, as in (7).

- A simulation to assess the impact of inshore growth overfishing on the brown shrimp yield **was performed**.
- A simulation **was performed** to assess the impact of inshore growth overfishing on the brown shrimp yield.

Student activity 5

Identify the word or phrase that breaks the end weight principle.

Therefore how meronymic relation is structured is only found by looking at each relation with prototypical features carefully.

Extraposition

Cataphoric referents, such as *it*, can mark the place of heavy postponed noun phrases.

- A revolution in the building types, therefore, is necessary to achieve. (LC)
- **It is necessary to achieve** a revolution in the building types.

Student activity 6

Rewrite these using either *it* or *there* as the first word of the sentence.

- Three reasons for this **exist**.
- Understanding the situation and circumstances is **essential**.

Baddeley, A. (2012). Working memory: Theories, models, and controversies. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 1-29.

Yule, G. (2002). *Explaining English Grammar*. Shanghai: Oxford University Press / Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.