

A Study of Dislocation in English: Prefaces and Noun Phrase Tags

Ahmed Jamal Rauf

Assistant Instructor

University of Kirkuk/ College of Education for Humanities

الخلاصة

تتناول الدراسة مفهوم الازاحة اللغوية في الانكليزية . الازاحة اللغوية تعني توزيع المعلومات ولكنها ليست اختيار ترتيب نظام الكلمة بشكل مبسط . هناك صنفان رئيسيان للازاحة اللغوية : المقدمات والعبارات الاسمية الملاحقة . تهدف الدراسة الى عرض التراكيب النحوية ووظائف الخطابة لهذه الظاهرة في الانكليزية . لقد توصلت الدراسة الى الاستنتاجات المهمة الاتية : (١) تستخدم الازاحة اللغوية في لغة الكلام ydv الرسمية اكثر من لغة الكتابة الرسمية . (٢) العبارات الاسمية الملاحقة اكثر شيوعاً من المقدمات في لغة الكلام ydv الرسمية في الانكليزية . (٣) تستخدم وظائف الخطابة في الازاحة اللغوية لتنظيم الموضوع وتطوير طراز الكلام في المقدمات والتركيز على نهاية الكلام في العبارات الاسمية الملاحقة .

Abstract

This study deals with dislocation in English. It means the distribution of information, but it is not a simple word-order option. There are two main categories of dislocation: prefaces and noun phrase tags.

The study aims at showing the syntactic structures and discourse functions of this phenomenon in English. The study

arrived at the following important results: (1) Dislocation is used in informal spoken English more than in formal written English. (2) Noun phrase tags are more common than prefaces in informal spoken English. (3) The discourse functions of dislocation are used to organize a topic, to develop a nature of conversation in prefaces and to focus on the end of conversation in noun phrase tags.

1. Introduction

Trask (1993: 84) clarifies that dislocation is a construction in which an element is displaced from its normal position in the sentence, that position being occupied by a pro-form. English exhibits both left-dislocation, as in (This movie, I really like it), and right-dislocation, as in (I really like it, the movie). Right-dislocations are sometimes called 'afterthought constructions.'

Mathews (2007: 220) mentions that left-dislocation, as in (This next man, have I got to see him?) is distinguished from simple fronting (This next man have I got to see?) by a pronoun (him) or other anaphoric element in the normal position of the dislocated element. He (2007: 348) adds that right-dislocation, as in (They are far too tight, these trousers you bought.), the element 'dislocated' (in the right dislocation

to the end of the sentence) is related to a pronoun (they) in its normal position.

Biberet al. (1999: 956) state that dislocation has to do with the distribution of information, but it is not a simple word-order option. There are two major types of dislocation: prefaces and noun phrase tags. Both types involve a definite noun phrase occurring in a peripheral position, with a co-referent pronoun in the core of the clause. Prefaces occur in initial position:

- (1) ***This girl*** this morning she threw a wobbly.

By contrast, noun phrase tags occur in final position:

- (2) I think he's getting hooked on the taste of Vaseline, ***that dog***.

In informal spoken English we also have the reverse process 'anticipated identification' (also called: left dislocation = preface), where a noun phrase is positioned initially and a reinforcing pronoun stands 'proxy' for it in the relevant position in the sentence:

- (3) ***Your friend John***, I saw him here last night.

Whereas postponed identification involves placing a pro-form earlier in the sentence while the noun phrase to which it refers is placed finally as an amplificatory tag:

(4) He's a complete idiot, ***that brother of yours***.

This construction is termed (right dislocation = noun phrase tag), which is restricted to informal spoken English, where it is very common (Quirk et al., 1985: 1310).

The present study aims at defining dislocation in English and showing its types. It is hypothesized that there are differences between left dislocation and right dislocation in syntactic structures and discourse functions.

2. Prefaces (Left Dislocations)

Preface is the term used for what is often called 'left dislocation'. It consists of a noun phrase, with a co-referent pronoun:

(5) ***Poor old Doctor Johns***, [he] said you'll never wear your heart out.

(6) ***This woman***, [she]'s ninety odd.

(7) And actually you know this ***Time Chemicals***, [they], [they] deliver you know, [they] came here with the stuff.

Prefaces differ from initial noun phrase as detached predicatives in that they are restrictive in meaning. They define rather than give additional information and can replace the co-referent pronoun: cf. Poor old Doctor Johns said (Biberet al., 1999: 138).

The preface is used to establish a topic first and then attach a preposition. It aids the planning of the speaker as well as the decoding of the hearer, because it breaks up a complex task into parts. By this arrangement the speaker can check that the hearer has clearly identified the main referent before going on to the main point. The hearer's response may be verbal (yes, mm, and the like) or non-verbal (nodding, eye-contact) (ibid).

Prefaces may precede both declarative and interrogative clauses. The relationship between the preface and the clause it is attached to may vary. In many cases, the preface is co-referent with a subject pronoun:

(8) **Jane** [she] plays bingo on Sunday night.

(9) **All that money**, I mean, in the end is [it] worth recurring?

However, a preface can also be a co-referent with an object pronoun:

(10) Well **Bryony** it seemed to be a heavy cold that was making [her] feel miserable.

(11) But **Ann-Luise** – what could have attracted [her] to a man in his fifties? (ibid, 957).

Quirk et al. (1985: 1416) explain that reinforcement is a feature of colloquial style whereby some items are repeated (either completely or by pronoun substitution) for purposes of emphasis, focus, or thematic arrangement. Its simplest form is merely the reiteration (with heavy stressing) of a word or phrase for emphasis or clarity:

(12) It's **far, far** too expensive.

(13) I agree with **every** word you've said – **every** single word.

In very loose and informal speech, a reinforcing or recapitulatory pronoun is sometimes inserted within a clause where it stands 'proxy' for an initial noun phrase"

(14) **This man** I was telling you about – well, [he] used to live next door to me.

(15) **The book** I lent you – have you finished [it] yet?

The above two examples show a complete noun phrase being disjoined from the grammar of the sentence. Its role (as subject and object respectively) is grammatically performed by

subsequent pronouns. But in being thus fronted, as marked themes, the disjointed noun phrases clearly set out the 'point of departure' for the utterance as a whole. This is a device that may be a convenience alike to hearer (in receiving an early statement of a complex item) and speaker (is not having to incorporate such an item in the grammatical organization of his utterance) (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990: 431-32).

Haegeman (1994: 406) illustrates left dislocation (preface) according to these two examples:

(16) **Simenon**, I do not like [him].

(17) **Simenon**, I always wonder when I discovered [him].

In (16) the NP 'Simenon' is in a sentence-initial position. Let us assume it is adjoined to (I do not like him). The pronoun 'him' is coreferential with the NP 'Simenon'. One might propose that the NP 'Simenon' is the D-structure object of 'like' and that it has been moved to sentence-initial position. The pronoun 'him' would then be interpreted as a pronominal copy inserted at the vacated site.

Fronting is a normal and frequently occurring feature of English. We usually front information because this (and not the subject) establishes common ground and orientates the listener

or reader to what is coming in the rest of the clause and also gives them extra emphasis. This happens mostly in speech:

- (18) **Strange people** [they] are ! (Parrott, 2000: 275; Swan, 2005: 503)

3. Noun Phrase Tags (Right Dislocations)

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 428) mention that the opposite case (viz. noun phrase tags) arises when a noun phrase tag is added to the end of a sentence in informal speech, clarifying the meaning of a pronoun within it:

- (19) [They]'re all the same, **these politicians**.

Quirk et al. (1985: 1417) add that such utterances are usually spoken, with a rise on the 'tag' confirming its relatively 'given' status:

- (20) [They]'re | all the SAME, **these poliTiCians** |

The tag can be inserted parenthetically, as well as placed finally:

- (21) [He]'s got a good future, **your brother**, if he perseveres.

An even more informal type of tag comprises a subject and operator:

(22) ***That was*** a lark, that was !

(23) [He] likes a drink now and then, ***Jim*** does.

In some dialects of English (especially Northern BrE), the operator may precede the subject:

(24) [She]'s lovely girl, is ***Ann***.

Swan (2005: 504-05) clarifies that we space out information by putting some of it in a complete sentence and then adding more details at the end. The extra words at the end are called a 'tag':

(25) [They] work very hard, most of ***them***.

It is possible to 'announce' the subject with a pronoun, and put the full subject in a tag:

(26) [They]'re very polite, ***your children***.

In a sentence like this, we often drop the pronoun at the beginning:

(27) Very polite, ***your children***.

Biberet al. (1999: 139) mention that tags are short structures which can be added at the end of the clause in conversation or in written representations of speech. They take either the form of a noun phrase or of an interrogative or declarative clause.

Noun phrase tags are usually described as involving 'right dislocation':

(28) Oh [he] was a, [he] was a lovely man, wasn't [he],
Doctor Johns?

(29) I think their kid's got a bloody new organ-and I heard
[it] all before I got out of bed **this bloody organ.**

Noun phrase tags are formally like prefaces in that there is a detached noun phrase and a co-referent pronoun inside the core of the clause. They may follow both declarative and interrogative clauses. The tag is normally co-referent with the subject of the preceding clause:

(30) Has[it] got double doors **that shop?**

(31) Did [they] have any , **the kids?**

The tags here serve as clarification, establishing beyond doubt the reference of the preceding pronoun (ibid, 957).

4. The Discourse Functions of Dislocation

Biber et al. (1999: 956) manifest that the discourse functions of dislocation may be seen as primarily concerned with 'information flow' and 'emphasis'. Prefaces serve to establish a topic. The same work can be done by separate clauses:

(32) A: When I went to the hospital today, ***there was this girl***, right

B: Yes.

A: [She] took an overdose.

(33) ***What about your secondary school*** ? Did you still go [there]?

(34) ***Do you know the woman at the end of our road?***

Takes me to ... school everyday [She]'s got a D reg Sierra-with a, - a looking petrol cap-something went wrong with this other one.

In (32) the topic is new information established through an existential clause; in (33) and (34) it is information that is known to the hearers, but which might not be uppermost in their minds, so is primed by interrogative construction (ibid: 958).

Prefaces are also sign of the evolving nature of conversation. Note how the first speaker in (32) appeals to the addressee by adding the discourse marker 'right'. The addressee responds and the original speaker goes on to the main point. In the following example, the addressee picks up the topic before the first speaker gets to the proposition:

(35) A: ***That woman on Terminator.***

B: [She]'s ugly.

C: [She]'s not.

Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002: 419) mention that the discourse functions of noun phrase tags are more difficult to pinpoint. Frequently they seem to have a clarifying function. It is possible that the speaker, after using a pronoun, may realize that the listener will not understand the referent, and thus the noun phrase tag is necessary clarification. Some noun phrases also seem to serve the principle of end-weight:

- (36) [It] must have as a bit of a shock, ***the idea of, er, Rhiannon coming and settling down here after everything.***

Unlike prefaces; however, which are regularly realized by full noun phrase, tags may consist of a demonstrative pronoun:

- (37) [It] was a good book ***this***.
(38) [That]'s marvelous that, isn't it yes?

The noun phrase tag in such examples serve to emphasize the proposition, in much the same way as declarative tags.

The use of noun phrase tags fit in with the general characteristics of conversation: the clarifying function with the

evolving nature of conversation, and the emphasizing function with the prevalence of emotive expressions (Biber et al, 1999: 958).

Conclusion

The present study has arrived at a number of results for both prefaces and noun phrase tags, they are as follows:

1. Dislocation is used in informal spoken English more than in formal written English.
2. Noun phrase tag (right dislocation) is more common than prefaces (left dislocation) in informal spoken English.
3. The position of noun phrase tag is at the end of a sentence, unlike preface, which is at the beginning and they are the same in form.
4. Prefaces differ from initial noun phrases that they are limited in their ideas. They explain the exact nature of the subject or object forms rather than giving extra information.
5. Left dislocation is not the result of movement, but it is presented in the adjoined position of D-structure.
6. Right and left dislocations give the hearer extra emphasis in speech.

7. Noun phrase tags can be used in conversation and representative written forms of speech by adding more details at the end of sentences.
8. The discourse functions of dislocation are used to organize a topic, to develop a nature of conversation in prefaces, and to focus on noun phrase tags at the end of conversation

References

- Biber, D., et al. (1999). Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. London: Longman Group Limited.
- Biber, D., S. Conrad, and G. Leech (2002). Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Greenbaum, S., and R. Quirk (1990). A Student's Grammar of the English Language. London: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Mathews, P.H. (2007). Concise Dictionary of Linguistics. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Parrott, M. (2000). Grammar of English Language Teacher. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Quirk, R., and S. Greenbaum (1973). A University Grammar of English. London: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Quirk, R., et al. (1985). A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. London: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Swan, M. (2005). Practical English Usage. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trask, R.L. (1993). A Dictionary of Grammatical Terms in Linguistics. London: Routledge Inc.

