

Asymmetry and contrast in coordination in Sign Language of the Netherlands

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Research on spoken languages shows that the structure of coordination is typically determined by the parallel architecture of the conjuncts involved, a constraint that we refer to as the “Parallel Structure Constraint” (PSC) (Lang 1987). Apart from syntactic parallelism, the PSC requires that the conjuncts exhibit the same information structure (IS), i.e. that they are elements of the same focus alternative set (1a).

In this presentation, we address the structure of coordination and the working of the PSC in a sign language (SL), Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT), using corpus data. To date, coordination in SL has only received little attention, and all examples reported in the literature obey the PSC (e.g. Liddell 1980; Tang & Lau 2012). Data extracted from the Corpus NGT, however, reveal that the PSC may be violated in this language. In (1b), e.g., the order of predicate and argument varies across conjuncts (OV–VO).

- (1) a. * I brought the salad, and the beer, John (brought).
b. CAN CHOOSE WHEN DILEMMA [CI TAKE.OFF] OR [STAY CI]
'(You) can choose when you feel ambivalent, take the CI (= cochlear implant) off or let the CI stay.'

We argue that the word order variation in the second conjunct follows from fronting of a contrastively focused constituent, thus establishing a contrast relation across the conjuncts. As for the structure of coordination, we follow Munn (1993), according to whom the second conjunct is embedded within a Boolean Phrase (BP). The corpus data clearly show that the head of the BP in NGT can be overt, as in (1b), or covert. We further assume the availability of IS-related projections within the left periphery of NGT. Thus, in the coordinated structure in (1b), the second conjunct projects a FocP whose specifier hosts the contrastively focused element (STAY).

We claim that in NGT, IS-related syntactic movement is preferred over prosodic marking in situ, as it is a more salient foregrounding strategy in such complex (bi-clausal) constructions. Apparently, available prosodic IS-marking strategies (e.g. higher and/or larger articulation of a sign; Crasborn & Kooij 2013) do not make IS-related syntactic movement superfluous.

References: • Crasborn, O. & E. van der Kooij. 2013. The phonology of focus in SL of the Netherlands. *Journal of Linguistics* 49. 515–565. • Lang, E. 1987. Parallelismus als universelles Prinzip der Strukturbildung. In E. Lang & G. Sauer (eds.), *Parallelismus und Etymologie*. Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR. • Liddell, S. 1980. *American SL syntax*. The Hague: Mouton. • Munn, A. 1993. *Topics in the syntax and semantics of coordinate structures*. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Maryland. • Tang, G. & P. Lau. 2012. Coordination and subordination. In R. Pfau, M. Steinbach & B. Woll (eds.), *Sign language. An international handbook*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.