

THE SYNTAX-PRAGMATIC INTERPLAY IN YAQUI

Languages have long been compared in terms of the rigidity vs. flexibility of their word order, but much less have been said regarding the rigidity vs. flexibility of their focus structure. The purpose of this paper is to examine the expression of focus structure and its interaction with certain syntactic features in the Yaqui language (Uto-aztecan).

Yaqui is a verb final language, and it is generally agreed upon that it allows for a relatively flexible order among nominal core arguments. In the unmarked word order (the one commonly found in direct elicitation), the subject NP usually appears core-initially (1a), except when it is realized as a pronoun, in which case it canonically appears in second-position. Direct and oblique NPs are pre-verbal, but the ordering among them is free. When a non-subject NP is extraposed to the right (1b), there is a co-indexed resumptive pronoun preceding the verb (Rude 1996). Concerning the focus structure, only Dedrick & Casad (1999: 43-45) comment that topicalization occurs sentence-initially (1c) often preceded by the conjunction *intok*, while the unmarked focus position is also a fronting process. For Yaqui (as for Uto-aztecan languages), nothing else has been said on the structuring of focus information within the clause.

- (1) a. *U goi-Ø u-me chu'u-im ke'e-ka.*
the coyote-NOM the-PL dog-PL bite-PFV
‘The coyote bit the dogs.’
- b. *U jamut-Ø a = bicha-k u-ka o'ou-ta.*
the woman-NOM 3SG:ACC = see-PFV the-ACC man-ACC
‘The woman saw him, the man.’
- c. *Kauwis-Ø intok, pocho'o-kun-bicha-u buite-k.*
fox-NOM and woods-to-site-to run-PFV
‘And the fox ran toward the woods’

This paper explores main-clause word order in Yaqui drawing upon Van Valin (1999)’s hypothesis on the interplay of focus structure and syntax. Rigidity vs. flexibility of focus structure interacts in interesting ways with rigidity vs. flexibility in the syntax, generating four attested language types (Table 1).

	Rigid Focus Structure	Flexible Focus Structure
Rigid Syntax	French, Toba Batak	English, Toura
Flexible Syntax	Sesotho, Italian	Russian, Polish

Table 1. Typology of the interplay of focus structure and syntax

Based on oral texts and data from my own fieldwork on the Sonora dialect, it is claimed that Yaqui falls into the syntactically-flexible and pragmatically-flexible type. This feature does not mean, however, that there is not a canonical word order for major constituents, in particular the occurrence of resumptive pronouns.

References

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