

Great coffee, that Maxwell House!
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Subsentential utterances pose a problem for theories that embrace uniform mapping between syntax and semantics. On the one hand, we have something that on the surface (syntax) does not appear to be a sentence (e.g. TP) but on the other hand, the meaning (semantics) is clearly that of a proposition (e.g. <t>). In order to overcome this dilemma, Merchant (2004) analyzes fragments as involving focus fronting of the fragment, followed by ellipsis. Utterances such as (1), however, cannot be analyzed in this way because they are not composed of a single phrase. In this paper, I argue in favor of a predicate fronting analysis of (1) and against an ellipsis account. Nevertheless, under the proposed analysis, (1) is a TP, thus maintaining a simple syntax-semantics correspondence.

Utterances such as (1) have several distinct properties. They are typically made up of a non-verbal predicate (DP/NP, AP or PP) followed by a DP subject. It is in fact ungrammatical to include an overt copula (2). The predicate must be stative: the missing verb in (3) is *is* not *is being* (Shopen 1972). The predicate is new information, while the subject is topical. Hence the subject must be definite and salient in the discourse (note the preference for demonstratives and first and second person possessive pronouns). Moreover, the subject cannot antecede a negative polarity item in the predicate (4), cannot be part of an idiom (5) and cannot contain focus sensitive elements such as *even* and *only* (6). In languages that mark case overtly (e.g. Serbian), the subject is nominative (7). Finally, utterances like (1) have a distinct intonational pattern: the predicate must receive the most prominent stress and the subject is obligatorily destressed.

In order to account for these properties, I invoke predicate inversion à la den Dikken (2006) (also Vinet 1991; contra Vinet, I do not analyze (1) as an exclamative because there is no scalar implicature (Zanuttini and Portner 2003)). As schematized in (8), (1) contains a small clause complement (RP) to T, where *your mom* is the subject and *smart woman* is the predicate. The predicate moves to [Spec, TP] in order to license the null copula head. If the copula is overtly realized, movement is blocked (2). This null copula is semantically restricted: it can only be interpreted as either *be* (1) or *have* (9) and is stative. T, however, is unrestricted: (1) can receive a past tense reading (if the hearer's mother is dead, for example). This analysis accounts for the marked nature of this construction in English – it is only possible with the null stative copula.

As noted by den Dikken (2006), inversion is typically associated with lack of focus on the predicate. In (1), however, the predicate is strongly focused. Thus although predicate inversion can be associated with a certain kind of information structure (topic>focus), inversion itself is not driven by information structure (e.g. topic or focus features). In fact, in languages where predicate fronting is the norm (e.g. Niuean, Malagasy), the predicate introduces new information (focus) and the subject is highly topical and obligatorily definite/specific, just as in (1).

I also argue against an analysis involving right dislocation and initial material deletion (Napoli 1982). In other words, (1) does not have the same structure as (10). Although such an analysis correctly accounts for the topic properties of the subject and the intonation, it does not explain the semantic restrictions on the predicate: e.g. (3) cannot be interpreted as meaning (11). Moreover, although initial material deletion would account for most of the examples (it correctly deletes unstressed pronouns and determiners), it is too unconstrained – deletion of the possessive pronoun *your* in (12a) is possible, but similar deletion is impossible in the construction under investigation (12b). Syntactic ellipsis fails as well: what is putatively deleted in (1) is not a constituent (13).

The proposed analysis has implications for theories of syntax-semantics mapping, the nature of predication and the distribution of predicate inversion both in English and cross-linguistically.

- (1) Smart woman, your mom.
- (2) *Is a smart woman, your mom.
- (3) An ass, that guy at the next table.
- (4) *Ever on time, no one in my class.
- (5) *About to hit the fan, the shit.
- (6) *Smart woman, even/only your mom.
- (7) Fina zena, tvoja majka.
nice lady your.NOM mother.NOM
'Nice lady, your mom.'
- (8) [_{TP} [_{PredP} \emptyset [smart woman]]_j T [_{RP} [_{DP} your mom] R° t_j]]
- (9) Always lots of money, that guy.
- (10) She's a smart woman, your mom.
- (11) He's being an ass, that guy at the next table.
- (12)a. Hair's too long! = Your hair's too long! (Napoli 1982: (1m))
b. Best friends, those guys. \neq My/your best friends, those guys.
- (13) ~~She is a~~ smart woman, your mom.

References

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