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«Fragments» and discourse patterns: backwards discourse licensed PPs in spoken French.

Ford and Thompson (1986) first pointed out cases of adjuncts PPs taking scope on large segments of the following discourse. Examples of this pattern are easy to find in spontaneous varieties of spoken French:

(1) au Bangladesh tu as aucune femme dans la rue - autant en Inde les femmes travaillent dans les champs la femme c’est quelqu’un c’est une personne très importante dans la famille dans la société dans le village - au Bangladesh la femme elle passe toute sa vie enfermée à la maison et parfois elles sortent jamais (voy, 43, 10)

In Bangladesh there are no women in the streets as much as in India women work in the fields the woman (it) is somebody (it) is a person very important in the family in the society in the village In bangladesh (on the contrary) the woman she spends all his life home and sometimes they never go out

The locative adjunct en Inde extends its scope on a following discourse unit composed of three independent sentences. This “broad” scope can receive two explanations. The first one involves a mismatch between syntax and semantics: a preposed adjunct with non terminal contour syntactically attached to one sentence can take as semantic argument a conjunction of propositions. Under the second one, involving a syntax-semantics matching, the PP is an independant syntactic unit, an orphan fragment (Culicover Jackendoff 2005), linked to the context by a topic-comment like “discourse pattern” determining the scope of the adjunct. The main goal of this presentation will be to give theoretical and empirical arguments in favour of the “matching” hypothesis. My strongest argument will be based on the description of a less noticed empirical fact, which independently requires a solution based on discourse patterns. Consider the following example of a “backwards oriented” wide scope adjunct (in bold):

(2) Il y en a qui demandent du kirsch d'autres préfèrent la vanille d'autres c'est de la poire enfin au goût de des différentes personnes

some order Kirsh liquor, others prefer vanilla, others, it is pear (spirit), well according to each person taste

The detached PP cannot be licensed only by the preceding verb. The reduction would definitely sound very strange:

(2')?? d'autres c'est de la poire au goût des différentes personnes

In this case, the matching hypothesis is the only available solution. I will show, in a second step, that, although (1) and (2) are examples of discourse licensed PPs, the two licensing discourse patterns are different. For instance, the backwards wide scope pattern can be unambiguously marked by a special morphosyntactic device tout ça (all this) as in:

(5) et dans cette même prison dernièrement il y a eu d'autres cas de ce genre je ne sais pas si vous aviez appris le cas de ce garçon ... qui s'appelait Sandraboze et aussi ce garçon il s'appelle Seliah heu ce garçon on l'a laissé mourir aussi + + tout ça dans cette même prison +

and in this jail itself lastly ther have been other similar cases I don't know if you happen to hear about the case of this guy who was called Sandraboze. And also this guy Selah well this guy they also let him die also – all this (happened) in this very jail

From the content point of view, the “forwards” oriented pattern can be informally defined as a domain setting one, the “backwards”, as a comment on a recapitulation (tout ça) of the preceding context. I will examine the types and status of the recapitulating device, using the context feature to implement the patterns in the framework of Construction Grammar.

Culicover Peter, , Jackendoff, Ray. Simpler Syntax, Oxford UP


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