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## INFORMATION STRUCTURE IN EFL TEACHING

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### Abstract

When speaking or writing in a foreign language, being grammatically and semantically competent may not be enough to convey the necessary information to the interlocutors in dual conversations or to the readers who read our texts in various genres such as personal letters, formal letters, e-mails, etc. Namely, individuals who communicate in a foreign language may generate grammatically and semantically well-formed sentences or phrases but their sentences and phrases may still not be comprehensible enough because they fail in highlighting the new information (unfamiliar information) and deemphasizing the given (old) information. Therefore, teaching how to utilize intonation, sentence stress and pitch when speaking English and teaching how to utilize various syntactic constructions such as fronting, left-dislocation, clefting, pseudoclefting, passive structures and word order in order to highlight new information and deemphasise given information when both speaking English and writing a text in English are of great importance in foreign language teaching. In this article, the concept of information structure is reviewed, examples are given both in Turkish and English and suggestions are made for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes.

*Key words:* information structure, given and new information, pragmatics

### 1. Introduction

Even though a sentence is grammatically and semantically well-formed, it may not be able to express the idea and convey the message because the new information it carries is not highlighted well enough and it emphasizes the wrong elements of the sentence or phrase at the wrong time.

According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), what speakers and writers do about information structure is very similar to what a painter does when creating his/her painting and they state that “Speakers and writers are responsible for highlighting certain elements and backgrounding other elements, exactly as a painter highlights particular details and deemphasizes others with judicious use of colour, shape, and position” (p. 214). Information structure concerns the way in which pragmatic information (such as what information is new, recent or unfamiliar, what information is old or familiar, what information is important, etc.) is packaged into a sentence. In order for our sentences to be successful in conveying information, we must emphasize the appropriate elements at the right time and deemphasize others. The issue of highlighting new information and deemphasizing given information in language texts oral or written is termed as information structure which is also known as information packaging (Finegan, 2008, p. 249).

As Finegan (2008) points out, “In order to mark information structure in a sentence, speakers rely on the fact that syntactic operations permit alternative ways of shaping sentences” (p. 250). Finegan (2008) gives the following sentences which are alternative ways of saying the same thing. Obviously, a different element is emphasized in each sentence.

1. The firefighter discovered a leak in the basement.
2. In the basement, the firefighter discovered a leak.

3. A leak in the basement was discovered by the firefighter.
4. It was the firefighter who discovered a leak in the basement.
5. What the firefighter discovered in the basement was a leak.
6. It was a leak that the firefighter discovered in the basement.
7. What was discovered by the firefighter was a leak in the basement.
8. The firefighter, he discovered a leak in the basement.(Finegan, 2008, p. 250)

Finegan (2008) points out that we exploit such a choice of alternatives to mark information structure.

## **2. Some definitions**

In order to have a preliminary idea about information structure, some definitions will be useful.

Crystal (1992) defines information structure as "... a proposed analysis of sentences into information units" (p. 187). He also states that "... in speech these units are usually distinguished by intonational criteria, the information focus being conveyed by nuclear tone. For example, in the sentence 'Mary bought a RED car' the intonational emphasis on 'red' conveys that 'red' is the new information in the sentence, while 'Mary', 'bought' and 'car' are part of the given information" (p. 188).

Finegan (2008) states that information structure is "...the level of structure at which certain elements in a sentence are highlighted or backgrounded according to their prominence in the discourse" (p. 539).

We can infer from the definitions above that the elements highlighted or emphasized in a sentence are new information which the sender thinks the receiver does not know and the elements which are backgrounded or deemphasized are the given information which the sender thinks the receiver already knows. To state briefly, information structure is divided into two major parts: new and given.

## **3. Categories of information structure**

The categories of information structure are listed as given and new information, topic, contrast, definiteness, and referentiality. According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), "These categories must be applicable to all languages although the ways they use them are different and with these categories, how discourse is constructed can be comprehended. Ultimately, these explanations may put forward hypotheses about how the different components of the human mind (such as memory, attention, and logic) work and get into interaction with each other" (p. 215). An important difference exists between the types of syntactic constructions found in particular languages and the categories of information structure. Furthermore, the range of syntactic constructions available in different languages differs noticeably; for example, some languages have a passive construction but others do not have that kind of construction. Because the categories of information structure are not language dependent, we cannot define them in terms of particular structures. Nonetheless, there is a very close relation between pragmatics and syntax (sentence and phrase structure). In all languages of the world, one major function of syntax is to bear and convey pragmatic information. The way in which pragmatic structure maps onto syntax differs from language to language (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 215).

As stated earlier, information structure is composed of two major parts: new information also termed as unfamiliar information and given information also known as old information. It will be useful to review given and new information in detail.

### 3.1. Given and new information

According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), one key category of information structure is the difference between given and new information. As Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out, “Given information is information currently in the forefront of the hearer’s mind; new information is information being introduced into the discourse” (p. 216). They give the following two-turn interaction as an example:

Alice: Who ate the custard?

Tom: Mary ate the custard? (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 216)

‘Mary’ is the new information because it is just being introduced into the discourse, and ‘custard’, in contrast, is the given information in Tom’s answer because it can be presumed to be in the mind of Alice, who has just introduced it into the discourse in the previous turn (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 216).

On the other hand, given and new information can be introduced into the discourse by the same speaker. Consider the following example:

- A man called while you were on your break. He said he’d call back.  
(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 216)

Finegan and Besnier (1989) state that a piece of information is sometimes received as given because it closely associates with something that has already been introduced into the discourse. For example, when an interlocutor introduces a noun phrase into a discourse, all the subparts of the referent can be treated as given (old or familiar) information. Examine the following example.

1. Kent returned my car last night after borrowing it for the day. One of the wheels was about to fall off and the dashboard was missing (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 216).

In face-to-face conversations and most other kinds of discourse, interactors take first person (speaker) and second person (addressee) pronouns to be given information (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 216). These noun phrases do not need to be introduced as new information into the discourse (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 216). Consider the following example:

A: I bought this book in Istanbul.

B: Really? When were you there?

Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out that noun phrases carrying new information usually have stronger stress than those carrying given (old) information, and they are commonly expressed in a more elaborate fashion - for instance, with a full noun phrase instead of a pronoun, and sometimes with an adjectival clause or adjectival modifiers. Finegan and Besnier (1989) give the following typical example of how new information is introduced into a discourse:

- When I entered the room, there was a tall man with an old-fashioned hat on, quite elegantly dressed (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 217).

Finegan and Besnier (1989) state that “... given information is commonly expressed in more attenuated ways – ways that are abbreviated or reduced. Sometimes given

information is simply left out of a sentence altogether” (p. 217). Consider how the given information (*is at the door*) is left out in the following interaction:

A: Who’s at the door?

B: The mailman (*is at the door*) (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 217).

### 3.2. Topic

According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), “The topic of a sentence is its centre of attention - what the sentence is about, its point of departure. The notion of topic is opposed to the notion of *comment*, the element of the sentence that says something about the topic” (p. 217).

Given information is the element of the sentence about which we say something; namely, given information represents the topic. On the other hand, new information represents what we want to express about the topic; it is the comment and thus, if *Mary ate the custard* is offered in a response to the question *What did Mary do?*, the topic would be *Mary* (the given information) and the comment would be *ate the custard* (the new information) (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 217). The topic of a sentence can often be phrased as in this example:

- Speaking of Mary, she ate the custard. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 217)

As Finegan and Besnier (1989) suggest, given information does not always function as the topic. In the second sentence of the following sequence, the noun phrase *her little sister* represents both new information and the topic.

- Mary ate the custard. As for her little sister, she drank the cod-liver oil. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 217)

According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), similarly given information can function as comment, as the underlined element in the following sequence shows. The given/new contrast differs from the topic/comment contrast.

- Harold didn’t believe anything the charlatan said. As for Hilda, she believed everything he said. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 217)

It is very difficult to make an exact definition about what a topic is. While the topic is the sentence element that serves as the centre of attention, a sentence like ‘Oh look!’ uttered to draw attention to a beautiful sunset, has an unexpressed topic (“the setting sun” or “the sky”). Thus a topic may not necessarily mean a property of the sentence, but it may be a property of the discourse context. Despite the difficulty in defining topic, the notion of topic is important and needs to be distinguished from other categories of information structure (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 218).

### 3.3. Contrast

Contrast is a category of information structure. As Finegan (2008) remarks, “A noun phrase is said to be contrastive when it occurs in opposition to another noun phrase in the discourse” (p. 254). In the following conversation, *Sara* in Beth’s answer is contrasted with *Matt* in Alan’s question.

Alan: Did Matt see the ghost?

Beth: No, Sara did. (Finegan, 2008, p. 254)

Finegan (2008) states that “Contrast Beth’s answer with another possible one in which the noun phrase would not be contrastive: *Yes, he did*” (p. 254).

Besides, Finegan (2008) states that contrast can also be marked in sentences that express the narrowing down of a choice from several candidates to one. In such sentences, the noun phrase which refers to the candidate that is chosen is marked contrastively.

- Of everyone present, only Sara knew what was going on. (Finegan, 2008, p. 254)

However, Finegan (2008) also points out that *Sara* in the following sentence is not contrastive.

- Gerard knew what was going on, and Sara did, too.

Finegan (2008) offers a simple test and states that "...if a noun phrase can be followed by *rather than*, it is contrastive" (254). Examine the following example.

Speaker A: Did Matt see the ghost?

Speaker B: No, Sara, rather than Matt, saw the ghost. (Finegan, 2008, p. 254)

Additionally, a single sentence can have more than one contrastive noun phrase. Finegan (2008) gives the following example in which *Sara* contrasts with *Matt*, and *an entire cast of spirits* contrasts with *a ghost*.

Aaron: Did Matt see a ghost?

Bella: Yes, Matt saw a ghost, but Sara saw an entire cast of spirits. (Finegan, 2008, p. 254)

According to Finegan (2008), "In English, contrastive noun phrases can be marked in a variety of ways, most commonly by pronouncing the contrastive noun phrase with strong stress" (p. 255).

- You may be smart, but he's popular. (Finegan, 2008, p. 219)

### 3.4. Definiteness

Speakers mark a noun phrase as definite when they think that the listener can identify the referent of the noun phrase or the noun phrase is marked as 'indefinite' (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 219). In the example below, the definite noun phrase 'the neighbour' in B's answer presupposes that A can determine which neighbour B is talking about. According to the explanation Finegan and Besnier (1989) give about the example below, "B's answer is appropriate if A and B have only one neighbour or have reason to expect a particular neighbour. If they have several neighbours, none of whom they know particularly well, B cannot assume that A will be able to identify which neighbour is at the door, and the answer to A's question must be indefinite" (p. 220).

A: Who's at the door?

B: It's the neighbour. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 220)

We can give the following dialogue in Turkish as an example for the same purpose. Compare the following example in Turkish with the example above.

A: Kim bağıyor? (Who is yelling?)

B: O Adam bağıyor. (The/That man is yelling.) (The pronoun, 'O' in Turkish is used for definiteness.)

According to Finegan & Besnier (1989), "Definiteness must be distinguished from givenness because a noun phrase can be definite and given, indefinite and given, definite and new, or indefinite and new" (p. 221). The underlined noun phrase in the first sentence is indefinite and new, and the one in the second sentence is definite and given.

- Once upon a time, there was a young woman who lived on a remote farm in the country. The young woman was named Mary. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 221)

Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out that "...a noun phrase that refers to new information can also be definite" (p. 221). In the following sentence, 'the plumber' is definite, and it is acceptable whether or not the speaker has introduced a particular identifiable plumber into the previous discourse.

- The kitchen faucet is leaking; we have to call the plumber.

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 221)

In certain circumstances, a noun phrase can be both indefinite and given, as with the underlined noun phrase in the following example:

- I ate a hamburger for breakfast – a hamburger, I might add, that was one of the worst I've ever eaten. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 221)

We can conclude that definiteness and givenness are distinct categories of information structure.

### 3.5. Referentiality

Finegan and Besnier (1989) state that "A noun phrase is referential when it refers to a particular entity. In the first example, the noun phrase *an Italian with dark eyes* does not refer to anyone in particular and is therefore non-referential. In the second example, in contrast, the same noun phrase does have a referent and is referential" (p. 222).

1. Katie wants to marry an Italian with dark eyes, but she hasn't found one yet.
2. Katie wants to marry an Italian with dark eyes; his name is Mario.

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 222)

The same category can be observed in the following example in Turkish:

1. Ali bahçeli bir eve taşınmak istiyor fakat henüz aramak için vakit bulamadı. (Ali wants to move to a house with a garden but he did not have time to look for one.)
2. Ali bahçeli bir eve taşınmak istiyor; taşınmak istediği ev şimdi oturduğuna çok yakın. (Ali wants to move to a house with a garden; the house which he wants to move to is very close to the one where he lives now.)

## 4. Intonation and information structure

Before the Second World War, the Prague School constituted serious studies on information structure. Brown and Yule (1983) report that "They studied what they called 'the communicative dynamics' of the elements contributing to a sentence, within the framework of functional sentence perspective" (p. 153).

Halliday, in one of his articles published in 1967, elaborated and developed the Prague Scholars' work which was related directly to his own interest in the structure of texts. He also drew other Western linguists' interest to the matter. He adopted the Prague School view of information as consisting of two categories: new information which the addressor believes the addressee does not know, and given information which the addressor believes the addressee already knows, either because it is physically present in the context or because it has already been mentioned in the discourse (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 153).

Halliday also supported Prague Scholars' idea that intonation in English has a role in emphasizing new information and backgrounding given information. Halliday is

concerned to specify the organization of information within spoken English and to relate this organization to phonological realization, specifically to intonation (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 154). Additionally, Lee (2013) emphasizes the role of sentence stress in information structure in English: “English sentences typically bear at least one greater stress prominence known as a sentence stress (or nuclear accent), which is heavier than other lexical and phrasal stresses. Sentence stress typically marks the flow of new information, in that sentences, clauses or utterances typically contain older or topical information and a set of newer information” (p. 3). He also exemplifies this role of stress with the following recorded sample of family dinner conversation about movies:

(1) Recorded conversation sample:

- 1 A. He would make diagrams of almost all the **shots** and –
- 2 B. **Really?**
- 3 K. Yeah... that’s how they were able to make that new **Psycho**, uhm
- 4 They used all of his **notes**, yes.
- 5 So it was actually – it was **exactly** the same as the original
- 6 except for the **actors**.
- 7 B. Including the **dialogue**?
- 8 A. **I think** so.
- 9 C. Oh, please pass the **salad**.
- 10 And **both** dressings. (Lee, 2013, p. 4)

Lee (2013) explains his example that illustrates how the new information is marked with a sentence stress: “As seen above, the new information, often in the predicate, is marked with a sentence stress. Most often, it relates the flow of new information in an utterance, in that it falls on a content word, often the last content word bearing new information. However, it can sometimes mark emphasis instead (line 5, line 10), in which case it may not fall near the end of a clause, and can readily occur on function words (‘both’ in line 10)” (Lee, 2013, p. 4).

#### 4.1. Information units

As Brown and Yule (1983) report, “Halliday assumes that the speaker intends to encode the content of the clause (the basic unit in his grammatical system). In many ways, what Halliday views as the ‘ideational’ content of a clause may be compared with what others have called the ‘propositional’ content of a simple sentence. This clause content is organised by the speaker into a syntactic clausal structure, in which the speaker chooses among the thematic options available to him and, in spoken language, the clause content is organised into one or more information units which are realised phonologically by intonation” (p. 155). Crystal (1989) points out that intonation has an important function to convey new information in speech. He emphasizes the significance of intonation with an example: “... if someone says ‘I saw a BLUE car’ with maximum intonational prominence on blue, this pronunciation presupposes that someone has previously queried the colour; whereas if the emphasis is on ‘I’, it presupposes a previous question about which person is involved. It would be very odd for someone to ask ‘Who saw a blue car?’ and for the reply to be ‘I saw a BLUE car’” (p. 171).

As Brown and Yule (1983) point out, according to Halliday, the speaker is obliged to disintegrate his speech into chunks of information units. He is also obliged to present his message in a series of packages. However, he is free to decide where each information unit begins and ends and how it is organized internally. Thus, given that the speaker has decided to tell his hearer that ‘John has gone into the garden with Mary’, the speaker may package this information into one chunk as in the following example:



1. John has gone into the garden with Mary.

Or two or three chunks as in:

2. John-has gone into the garden with Mary.

3. John – has gone into the garden with – Mary. (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 155)

Brown and Yule (1983) further asserts that “The ‘internal organization’ of the information unit, relates to the way in which given and new information is distributed within the unit” (p. 155). Brown and Yule (1983) also report Halliday’s view about the sequencing of new information and given information: “...the speaker will order given information before new information. The ‘unmarked’ sequencing of information structure is taken to be *given-new*. Naturally, information units which are initial in a discourse will contain only new information” (p. 155).

On the other hand, new information may become given information after it has been introduced into the discourse and when it is referred again. Furthermore, Cook (1989) points out that “... any unit of information may of course change status as the discourse proceeds, and what was new in one sentence becomes given in the next, precisely because it has just been said. Indeed communication might be defined as the conversion of new information into given information, and successful communicator as a person who correctly assesses the state of knowledge of his or her interlocutor. If we misjudge, and treat what is given as new, we will be boring; in the reverse case when we assume the new to be given, we will be incomprehensible” (p. 64).

In the following conversation, new information becomes given information.

**A:** What is your brother’s name?

**B:** His name is JOHN.

**A:** What does he do?

**B:** (Laughing) John is only TEN years old. (Cook, 1989, p. 64)

#### 4.2. Tone groups and tonics

As Brown and Yule (1983) point out, “Information units are directly realized in speech as ‘tone groups’ and they are also identified as ‘breath-groups’, ‘phonemic clauses’ or ‘tone units’. The speaker distributes the quanta of information that he wishes to express into these phonologically defined units” (p. 155).

Brown and Yule (1983) point out that it is possible to distinguish tone group phonologically. An important characteristic of tonic syllable is that it has the maximal unit of pitch on it. According to Lehiste (cited in Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 155), Tonic syllable is also called ‘nuclear syllable’ or ‘sentence stress’ and it has maximal moving pitch, maximal pitch height, maximal intensity and/or maximal duration.

In the following sentence the tonic is marked by capitalization, tone group boundaries by // and the silent ictus by ^. The tonic syllable functions to focus the new information in the tone group.

// ^ I / find it incompre /HENSible //

Finegan and Besnier (1989) state that “... in English and some other languages, intonation is an important information-marking device. Generally, noun phrases representing new information receive stronger stress than noun phrases representing given

information, and they are uttered on a slightly higher pitch than the rest of the sentence. This is called “new-information stress” (p. 230).

Finegan and Besnier (1989) give the following example which illustrates sentence stress to mark new information.

**A:** Whose foot marks are those on the sofa?

**B:** They're Hilda's foot marks. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 239)

Cook (1989) suggests the following practice:

Practice 1: Imagine a situation in which you have just marked 200 examination scripts. You might then be asked any of the following questions:

A) What have you just done?

B) How many examination scripts have you marked?

C) Who marked these 200 examination scripts?

D) What did you say you had marked?

E) What have you done with these 200 examination scripts?

F) When did you mark these examination scripts?

1) For each question, give a short answer of between one and five words.

2) If your spoken answer to each question was the full ‘I have just marked 200 examination scripts’, which word or words would you stress in each case?

3) If you had written a full answer to each question, how could you have rearranged the word order to draw attention to the most important word or words?

(Cook, 1989, p. 66)

## 5. Pragmatic categories and syntax

Languages use a variety of ways to express a given ‘thought’. Most frequently, the difference between these various ways of expressing the same thing is a pragmatic one. As Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out, “Languages differ in the extent to which and the way in which pragmatic information is encoded in morphology and syntax. Some languages like Japanese have function words whose sole purpose is to indicate pragmatic categories. Other languages like English depend on syntactic transformations like passivization to convey pragmatic information” (p. 224). They also state that for some languages, like French and Chinese, intonation is less important in marking information structure. However, in English, intonation is an important tool for information structure. Namely, different languages use different strategies to encode pragmatic information (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 224).

Under the following subtitles, syntactic strategies in marking pragmatic information will be explained and some examples in English and Turkish will be given.

### 5.1. Fronting

One of the strategies that speakers may use to mark information structure is fronting and it is a type of focus strategy which is often used to enhance cohesion and provide emphasis. According to Crystal (1992), fronting is carrying a sentence element from the middle or final position of a sentence to the initial position. Crystal (1992) gives the following example:

We turned left at *The Rose*.

*At the Rose*, we turned left. (Crystal, 1992, p. 147)

Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out that “Fronting is a movement transformation that operates in many languages, although its exact function varies from language to language. In English, it creates sentence (a) from the structure underlying sentence (b), which has the same meaning” (p. 224).

(a) Hilda I cannot stand.

(b) I cannot stand Hilda. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 224)

In English, fronting is used to mark ‘givenness’ by speakers and the fronted noun phrase represents given information.

A: I heard that you really like mushrooms.

B: Mushrooms I’d kill for. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 224)

As Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out, “A noun phrase can be fronted and if its referent is part of a set that has been mentioned previously in the discourse, even though it may not represent given information itself” (p. 224). In the following example given by Finegan and Besnier (1989), “...*mushrooms* is a hyponym of *vegetable*, which is mentioned in the question that immediately precedes the fronted noun phrase; the result is pragmatically acceptable” (p. 225).

A: What’s your favourite vegetable?

B: Mushrooms I find delicious. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 225)

Fronted noun phrases are often contrastive in English.

A: Do you eat cauliflower?

B: I hate cauliflower, but mushrooms I find delicious.

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 225)

As Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out, “The fronted noun phrase must be the more salient element of the sentence. If this requirement is violated, the result is pragmatically ill formed” (p. 225). In the example given by Finegan and Besnier (1989), “In B’s answer in the following interaction, *mushrooms* is not the most salient element in the sentence, because the hearer’s attention is distracted by the phrase with butter and parsley” (p. 225).

A: What’s your favourite vegetable?

B: \*Mushrooms I love to eat with butter and parsley. (\*Pragmatically ill-formed because the sentence does not fit well into the context in which they occur).

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 225)

## 5.2. Left-dislocation

Finegan (2008) defines left-dislocation as “an operation that derives sentences such as 1 from the same underlying structures as basic sentences such as 2” (p. 261).

1. Holly, I can’t stand her.

2. I can’t stand Holly. (Finegan, 2008, p. 261)

Manetta (2007) points out that a left dislocated noun phrase that appears in an initial pre-clausal position that is coreferential with a personal pronoun that occurs elsewhere in the clause. Manetta (2007) gives the following example sentences. The left dislocated phrases are bolded.

- (1) **My turtle**, he froze to death.
- (2) **My aunt Vicky**, she used to get bird poop on her every year.
- (3) **The knife**, I kept it at school. (Manetta, 2007, p. 1029)

Although left-dislocation syntactically resembles fronting, there are several differences between fronting and left-dislocating. In particular, a fronted noun phrase does not leave a pronoun in the sentence, but a left-dislocated noun phrase leaves a pronoun (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 226).

Margaret I can't stand. (Fronting)

Margaret, I can't stand her. (Left-dislocating) (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 226)

### 5.3. Clefting and pseudoclefting

Frascarelli and Ramaglia (2008) exemplify clefting and pseudoclefting with the following two sentences:

- (1) It is a book that I gave John. (cleft)
- (2) What I gave John is a book. (pseudocleft) (Frascarelli & Ramaglia, 2008, p. 1)

According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), "Clefting and pseudoclefting are transformations that are commonly used in English and many other languages to mark information structure in the sentence" (p. 227). In the example they give, sentence (a) is a cleft sentence, sentence (b) is a pseudocleft sentence, and sentence (c) is the basic sentence that corresponds to (a) and (b) – that is, the sentence that is derived from the same underlying structure but to which no transformation has applied.

- (a) It was Harold that Stan saw at the party.
- (b) What Stan saw at the party was Harold.
- (c) Stan saw Harold at the party. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 228)

According to Finegan and Besnier (1989), we can use both cleft and pseudocleft constructions to mark givenness, and the clefted noun phrase gives new information in a cleft construction. The rest of the sentence presents given information. In the following example, (b) can be the answer to the information question in (a). The answer to the question is clefted. However, (c) cannot be the accurate answer because the clefted element is not the requested new information.

- (a) Who did Stan see at the party?
- (b) It was Harold that Stan saw at the party.
- (c) It was Stan who saw Harold at the party. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 228)

For similar cases, following examples are possible in Turkish. In the constructions a, b, and c, different elements are emphasized as new information.

- (a) Mehmet'i kim şikâyet etti? (Who complained about Mehmet?)
- (b) Cemaldi Mehmet'i şikâyet eden. (It was Cemal who complained about Mehmet.)
- (c) Mehmet'ti Cemali şikâyet eden. (It was Mehmet who complained about Cemal.)

Although different elements are emphasized in (b) and (c), the emphasized element in (c) is not the requested new information. Therefore, the accurate answer to the question in (a) is the answer in (b).

As Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out, pseudocleft constructions and cleft constructions are similar and in pseudocleft sentences, the new information is placed after the verb 'to be', and the rest of the clause is between the WH-word and the 'be' verb.

(a) What did Stan see at the party?

(b) What Stan saw at the party was Harold dancing the rhumba.

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 229)

#### 5.4. Passives

Finegan and Besnier (1989) emphasize the role of passive construction in marking information structure and they state that like many other languages that have a passive construction, passive constructions can also be exploited to mark information structure in English. They give the following example to show how information structure is marked in passive sentences.

(a) The old man was scolding the mermaid.

(b) The mermaid was being scolded by the old man.

(c) The mermaid was being scolded. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 232)

Finegan and Besnier (1989) explain the examples above: "Of these three sentences, all of which can describe essentially the same situation, (a) is active, while the other two are passive structures. In (b), the agent is expressed (by the old man), whereas there is no expressed agent in (c)" (p. 232).

Native speakers and writers of English use agentless passive sentences and agent passive sentences for specific purposes. An agentless passive sentence is constructed if the agent is not important (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 232). Consider the following examples:

- A new shopping mall is being built near the Interstate.
- New Christmas stamps are issued every year
- Linguistics 100 has been cancelled today. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 232)

Agentless passives are used in Turkish for the same purpose.

- Yeni köprü gelecek ay bitirilecek. (The new bridge will be completed next month.)
- Bunların yarın postalanması gerekiyor. (These need to be posted tomorrow.)
- Bu radyo dün tamir edildi. (This radio was repaired yesterday.)

Agent passives are used for some reasons. The following are the reasons and examples for agent passive constructions:

1. The agent is expressed when it is a proper name indicating an artist, an inventor, a discoverer, or an innovator.
  - a. The Mona Lisa was painted by *Leonardo da Vinci*.
  - b. The Americas were discovered by *Christopher Columbus*.

2. The agent is expressed when it is an indefinite noun phrase conveying new information that the speaker/writer thinks is important enough to mention.
  - a. These works of art were all produced *by a woman*.
  - b. The corner store was robbed *by a masked gunman*.
3. The agent is expressed when it is an unexpected inanimate noun.
  - a. Thirteen people were injured *by a tornado* in Florida.
  - b. All the lights in this building are controlled *by computers*. (R-I-T Rochester Institute of Technology SEA Supporting English Acquisition, 2015)

### 5.5. Word order

As Finegan and Besnier (1989) point out, “Many languages use the sequential order of noun phrases to mark differences in information structure. English cannot use the full resources of word order for this purpose because it uses word order to mark subjects and direct objects. In the following English sentence, the word order indicates who is doing the chasing and who is being chased” (p. 233).

- The cat is chasing the dog. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 234)

If the noun phrases in the above sentence are inverted, the semantics of the sentence changes. Examine the following sentence.

- The dog is chasing the cat. (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 234)

However, in Turkish the word order does not mark the object or the subject. Although the word order changes in each version of “Köpeği kedi kovaladı”, the meaning (semantically) does not change because inflections on the noun define the noun either as the object or subject of the sentence but various word orders of the same proposition in Turkish have pragmatic functions. Turkish marks information structure through word order. In (a), (b) and (c), the introduction of focus and topic changes. Examine the following sentences in Turkish.

- (a) Köpeği kedi kovaladı. (The cat chased the dog.) (The dog is emphasized.)
- (b) Kedi kovaladı köpeği. (The cat chased the dog.) (The cat is emphasized.)
- (c) Kovaladı köpeği kedi. (The cat chased the dog.) (The verb, ‘chase’ is emphasized.)

Batman-Ratyosyan and Stromswold (2002) give the following examples and they state that “...in (2a) the constituents of the sentence are in the canonical position. In (2b) constituents have been moved to different positions to convey pragmatic information and Mektup is the topic, Ali is focused, and Hasan is backgrounded” (p. 794).

- (2) a. Hasan Ali'ye mektub-u ver-di.

Hasan Ali-DAT letter-ACC give-PAST

'Hasan gave the letter to Ali'

- b. Mektub-u Ali-ye verdi Hasan. '(Speaking of) the letter, it was Ali (that) Hasan gave (it) to.'
- (Batman-Ratyosyan & Stromswold, 2002, p. 794)

### 5.6. Restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

Finegan and Besnier (1989) state that in many other languages as well as in English there are two types of relative clauses: restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses.

Sentence (a) has a noun phrase modified by a restrictive relative clause, and sentence (b) contains a noun phrase modified by a non-restrictive relative clause. Finegan and Besnier (1989) also point out that “A restrictive relative clause enables the hearer to identify the particular referent of the head of the relative clause (*the tree* in example (a))” (p. 235).

(a) The tree that had been blocking the view was struck by lightning.

(b) The tree, which had been blocking the view, was struck by lightning.

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 235)

Finegan and Besnier (1989), in their further explanation, state that non-restrictive relative clauses give additional information (description, modification, or explanation) about the referent of the head noun, information that is not essential for the hearer to identify the referent of the head noun. Besides, they point out that “Non-restrictive relative clauses are usually set off from the rest of the sentence by short pauses, represented in writing with commas” (p. 235). Finegan and Besnier (1989) give the following example.

(a) A man who had been standing around suddenly darted inside the store.  
(indefinite, restrictive)

(b) A man, who had been standing around, suddenly darted inside the store.  
(indefinite, non-restrictive)

(c) John objected to the report that Sheila wrote at his suggestion. (definite, restrictive)

(Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p. 235)

## 6. Information structure in EFL classes

In EFL classes, information structure should not be neglected. When dealing with grammar or writing skills, students should be taught how to highlight new information and background given information through different syntax structures such as fronting, clefting and pseudoclefting, left-dislocating, passive structures and active structures. When students learn how to formulate these syntactic constructions, they should also learn their functional effects on information structure in discourse. For instance, students should know that passive constructions are not only syntactic varieties but also very functional in highlighting new information and deemphasizing given information. Finegan and Besnier (1989) want to draw our attention to beginning writers’ misconception about passive construction: “What makes a sentence like ‘*A good time was had by all*’ humorous is the fact that it is passive without a reason. Such unmotivated passives occur frequently among beginning writers, who appear to labor under the misapprehension that passive structures are more literary than active ones.” (p. 232).

EFL teachers should bring necessary language materials to their classrooms and get their learners to practise these syntactic variations in contexts so that they can use information structure strategies with these syntactic constructions in their written or spoken discourses successfully. Practice with authentic language materials is more useful than practice with non-authentic, simplified and graded ones because learners will have a chance to experience how information structure strategies are used with various sentence structures in authentic language materials.

Besides, the issue of information structure should also be emphasised when teaching pronunciation. Turkish learners of English, under the influence of their native language, usually cannot make the necessary stress on the correct sentence element and fail in emphasising new information and deemphasising given information in their spoken

discourses in English because Turkish is a syllable-timed language but English is a stress-timed language. Turkish EFL learners unnecessarily stress even function words such as prepositions, articles, auxiliaries, pronouns when they speak English. They speak English with flat or monotonous intonation and for this reason their speeches are usually incomprehensible and boring to native speakers of English. In order to fill this efficiency, EFL teachers should integrate grammar with pronunciation and when teaching grammar they should also teach their students how to stress the necessary sentence element in their sentences so that they can successfully convey the message by highlighting new information and backgrounding old information.

EFL teachers should attach due importance to the issue of information structure and enable their EFL learners to communicate successfully and convey the necessary information to their interlocutors in their conversations in English by utilizing information structure strategies in their pronunciations and construction of sentences.

## **7. Conclusion**

We cannot assume that syntax and semantics are the only regulators of sentence structure. A sentence may be grammatically and semantically well-formed but still be problematic when used in a particular context (Finegan, 2008, p. 249). For particular contexts certain elements need to be highlighted and the rest of the elements may require to be deemphasized for better comprehension.

In English, not only intonation, sentence stress and pitch but also various sentence constructions are utilized to emphasise given information and deemphasise new information. Therefore, EFL teachers should be aware of the contrasting differences between students' native language and English, because the answer 'I BOUGHT a new bag' to the question 'What did you buy?' would be odd due to the fact that the emphasis is on the word 'bought', which is a wrong sentence element to stress.

When speaking or writing, second or foreign language users must be able to emphasize the correct elements of their sentences at the correct time. Therefore, in EFL teaching, mere grammar and vocabulary teaching is not effective enough to make EFL learners successful communicators in English. Pragmatic aspects of English should also be integrated with teaching grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, listening, reading and writing.



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