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Markedness as figure-ground manipulation: a hypothesis

Abstract: Markedness in language has been a perpetual fascination for linguists of all persuasions, but a unified account of it has proven elusive. In this paper, I propose a figure-ground gestalt (FGG) hypothesis, arguing that markedness is a mechanism for speakers to manipulate figure-ground arrangement in cases where the unmarked figure-ground organization is found wanting. There are three parts to this hypothesis. The first is the physio-anatomical basis of FGG, i.e., FGG is a biological reality rooted in the anatomy of the human eye and the neurology of attentional limitation. The second part of the hypothesis is the assumption that FGG has a heavy and prevalent bearing on the major architecture of language (the "unmarked" version of language). Thirdly – which is the essence of the hypothesis – when the default FGG organization in language cannot fulfill specific needs arising from context, the speaker rearranges FGG presentation. The result of this FGG manipulation is linguistic markedness. Four key marked constructions – subject auxiliary inversion, passive voice, *it*-cleft, and anticipatory *it* – are analyzed to support the proposed hypothesis.

Keywords: figure; ground; gestalt; attention; markedness

1 Statement of the problem

The notion of markedness assumes that, in a typical paired construction in language (e.g., *men/women*), one member of the pair is held to be more basic, common, typical, or natural –in a word, *unmarked* – while the other is held to be the opposite. The latter is dubbed *marked* due to the extra material needed for its coding over its

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unmarked counterpart.[1] *Women* is hence "marked" (as opposed to *men*) by *wo-* and *books* is marked (as opposed to *book*) by *-s.*

The marked-unmarked distinction originated in phonology, due to the pioneering works by Prague School linguists Jakobson (1932, 1939, 1949) and Trubetzkoy (1931, 1939, 1969). However, the notion was quickly expanded to other dimensions of language: morphology (Zwicky 1979), semantics (Comrie 1976; Lyons 1977), syntax (Chomsky and Lasnik 1977; Sells 2001), discourse (Birner 1996; Prince 1992), and language typology (Greenberg 1966).

The interest in markedness has also transcended the boundaries of various subdisciplines of linguistics. In the functionalist tradition, for instance, Givón (1990) sees markedness in terms of cognitive complexity, arguing that marked constructions require more mental effort from the hearer and – consequently – longer time for processing. In typological studies, Greenberg (1966) measures markedness by frequency, using it as an important yardstick to group the world's languages in terms of word order. In generative linguistics, views of markedness evolved over time – from Chomsky and Halle (1968; see also Kean 1975) to Chomsky and Lasnik (1977) – with the latter view better known: unmarked structures form the universal grammar ("core grammar," in their terms) while marked structures lie at the periphery. Finally, cognitive grammar sees unmarked structures as the prototypical and marked structures as aprototypical – ways for "a given situation to be portrayed in alternative ways" (Langacker 1991: 330; see also Janda 1996).

This interest in markedness, however, has not produced much consensus about how it should be accounted for. Instead, what Battistella remarked three decades earlier still rings true: the notion "has so far resisted a satisfying treatment, and no clearly defined theory of markedness has emerged" (Battistella 1990: 5; see also Lapointe 1983: 228–299).[2] This paper presents an attempt at a unified theory of markedness, advancing the thesis that markedness is a mechanism for speakers to manipulate figure/ground gestalt for discourse-specific purposes.

In Section 2, I will discuss a few theoretical prerequisites and formulate the hypothesis. Sections 3 to 6 discuss four marked constructions in English by way of demonstrating how the proposed hypothesis works: subject-auxiliary inversion, the passive voice construction, the *it*-cleft construction, and anticipatory *it*. Section 7 concludes the paper.

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1 This is not always the case, as we will see below.

2 This lack of consensus has also led to proposals to get rid of the notion of markedness altogether (Haspelmath 2006).

2 Theoretical foundations and formulation of the hypothesis

2.1 Figure-ground gestalt (FGG)

FGG refers to a feature of visual perception that entities in a visual field fall under two categories: figure or ground, with the former standing out against the latter. In the study of language, FGG has been invoked to account for a host of linguistic phenomena across languages: the morphology of Greek (Hardy 1992), reflexives in Romania (Cornilescu and Nicolae 2017) and Icelandic (Wood 2014), the dative case in Emai (Schaefer and Egbokhare 2013), masculine noun inflection in Polish (Janda 1997), verbs of removal in Italian (von Heusinger and Schwarze 2006), Grade 2 verbs in Hausa (Abdoulaye 1996), motion verbs in standard Arabic (Alhamdan et al. 2018), applicatives in Tepehua (Watters 1995), topic continuity in Chamorrow (Fox 1982), logical connectors in English (Chen 1991), and the rise of inflectional morphology in general (Dressler 2011).

While these works have demonstrated the utility of FGG, they have not addressed the fundamental question of what FGG is and why it has proven to be so prevalent in language. I contend that the answer to these questions lie in the physiology of the human eye, the neurological limitations of attention, and the relationship between language and cognition.

The most relevant part of the anatomy of the human eye to our discussion is the retina. The retina is the paper-thin tissue that lines the back of the eye and contains the photoreceptors – light-sensing cells of two types: cones and rods – which send visual signals to the brain. The photoreceptors, however, are not mixed or evenly distributed in the retina. On the contrary, the cones, which enable the perception of fine details and color, are concentrated only in the macula, the center part of the retina. Further, there is a pit (or depression) in the center of the macula called "fovea" to provide the highest degree of visual acuity. The rods, which sense low light levels and hence offer less visual acuity – on the other hand – populate the areas outside the macula. So, the entity whose light is "processed" by cones comes into focus to become the figure, and those whose light is processed by rods form the surrounding "ground." In other words, in a visual field in which multiple entities exist, the physiology of the human eye leaves the perceiver no other alternative than to perceive them as figures or grounds (Chen 2023).

But what determines the figure and the ground in a visual field? Wertheimer's (1924, 1982) and Koffka's (1935) respective works led to a set of "gestalt laws" that have been substantiated by later (and a large amount of) experiments. These gestalt laws are "law of similarity": similar things tend to appear grouped together; "law of good

figure": ambiguous objects are perceived in the simplest way possible; "law of proximity": points that are connected by straight or curving lines are seen in a way that follow the smoothest path; and others. These principles are then "translated" into a range of linguistic features. A figure tends to be – among other things – "thing-like, solid, discrete, well-defined, tightly organized, small, stable, and symmetric" while a ground – also among other things – is generally "unformed, diffuse, shapeless, less definite, loosely organized, large, unstable, and irregular" (Wallace 1982: 214; see also Eriksen and Hoffman 1972; Reinhart 1984).

Coupled with the physio-anatomical aspect of FGG is the neurological characteristics of attention. If there is one consensus in the massive cognitive psychology literature on attention, it must be the notion of "attentional bottleneck" recognized by Broadbent (1958), limitations in the thinking subject's capacity to consciously entertain multiple trains of thought simultaneously.[3] This limitation, to my knowledge, has not been linked to the anatomy of the human eye, and I contend that it should be: that the two are related in some way, although the precise formulation of that connection requires experimental research.

2.2 FGG and language

Although FGG has been applied to the study of a great many linguistic constructions in all areas of linguistics, as was seen above, it is cognitive linguistics that explicitly recognizes the intimate (or rather inevitable) relationship between FGG and language. Among the theories that do so – idealized cognitive models (Lakoff 1987), cognitive semantics (Talmy 2000a, 2000b), and cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991) – the last is the most systematic and explicit.

First, both Talmy and Langacker recognize the determinative role FGG plays in language. Consider:

(1) The bike[F] is near the house[G].

(2) The house[F] is near the lake[G].

(3) ?*The house[F] is near the bike[G].
     (Talmy 2000a: 314)

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3 The debate about when the bottleneck takes place – whether it is the result of the brain's filtering of stimuli (Broadbent 1958) or an issue of memory recall (Prinz 2005, 2012) – was robust for the last half of the 20th-century.

Given that these three sentences are identical in syntax – i.e., they are equally grammatical – the unacceptability of Example (3) can only come from the referents of the NPs. That is, the sentence is (nearly) unacceptable because its figure *the house* is bigger in size than the ground the *bike*, indicating strongly that the grammaticality of sentences of this kind depends not on syntactical but perceptual and hence conceptual grounds.

Second – and more importantly – FGG is viewed as "a valid and fundamental feature of cognitive functioning" (Langacker 1987: 120). To Langacker, figure is a "substructure perceived as 'standing out' from the remainder (the ground) and accorded special prominence as the pivotal entity around which the scene is organized and for which it provides a setting" (120). Due to this "special prominence," figure shows up as the trajector in the trajector/landmark asymmetry, the source of energy in a billiard ball model (231–236), the causer in a causative construction (cf. Goldberg 1995), or the mover in a motion event (Talmy 2000a). All these roles – further – converge in the codification of figure as the subject of a sentence.[4]

It should be pointed out that this cognitive view of what the subject of a sentence is is different from the communicative dynamism (CD)/information structure view. On the latter view, the subject is the theme (as opposed to the rheme) of a sentence, one that carries the lowest CD or presents given (as opposed to new) information (Lambrecht 1994). Although the principle of information structure is among the most received theoretical constructs in linguistics, it is ill-suited for the FGG hypothesis due to its treatment of language as a carrier of information, which has two consequences. The first is indeterminacy: the subject presents given information most of the time but *not all the time. A tiger* in *A tiger is a cat* can certainly be said to be the theme, but it presents new information. Second, the information status of a linguistic unit depends on context. However, markedness, as is studied here, is anchored in constructions, whose meanings are in general context-independent (Goldberg 1995). In addition, the actual analysis of a construction within the framework of CD/information structure can run into serious problems as seen in, for instance, the study of full-verb inversion (Chen 2003, 2019).

In sum, both cognitive grammar and cognitive semantics view the subject as the sentential designee of figure in the unmarked version of language, which forms a theoretical foundation for the FGG hypothesis advanced in this paper.

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4 FGG have a bearing on the lexicon as well. In a profile/base relation, the profile is the figure while the base is the ground (Langacker 1987: 183–189). For instance, *arc* (profile) cannot be understood without the understanding of *circle* (base).

2.3 FGG and markedness

If FGG is a determinant of the unmarked structures in the major machinery of language, how can it account for markedness in language? In light of what we know about the marked/unmarked distinction, the unmarked side of language is structured to fulfill typical communicative needs. However, communication will lead to atypical situations. To adjust to these atypical, or "marked," needs that arise from specifiable contexts, the speaker will *manipulate* the arrangement of FGG, leading to atypical FGG configurations. Suppose I see a unicorn-like cloud in the sky and want you to enjoy the rare sight. However, it may not be the best for me to say

(4)   Look at that cloud. It looks like a unicorn, doesn't it?:

for I cannot assume that you can identify the unicorn-like cloud among other clouds in the vast expanse of the sky. What I could say, among others, is

(5)   See the lighthouse on top of the mountain? *Right above it is a cloud.* It looks
        like a unicorn, doesn't it?

I would have just used a full-verb inversion. In Chen (2003), I proposed an FGG-based model of Ground before Figure to account for this construction, proposing that inversion is an instantiation of this model. It enables the hearer to search the ground for the figure so that the figure is ensured the focus of attention when it appears. The Ground-before-Figure model was able to provide answers to a host of questions about inversion that previous accounts, such as information packaging, were not able to explain, e.g., the negation issue (that inversion does not allow negation of the verb, e.g., *In the room is not a unicorn*), the transitivity issue (that inversion does not allow transitive verbs, e.g., *In the room chased a unicorn a cat*), and the embedding issue (that inversion cannot be embedded in a subordinate clause unless the matrix verb denotes mental activity, e.g., *If in the room is a unicorn, I would not enter*).

While Chen (2003) deals with one marked construction, the present paper proposes a hypothesis about markedness in general, formulated as:

> FORMULATION 1: FGG Hypothesis on Markedness
> A marked construction is a mechanism of FGG manipulation: the rearrangement of the presentation of figure and/or ground in a visual field to fulfill a discourse-specific need that cannot be fulfilled by its unmarked counterpart.

Several notes must be made about the hypothesis proposed here. Firstly, as it has been seen above and will be seen below, the hypothesis is consonant with Langacker's cognitive grammar and Talmy's cognitive semantics. However, it is different from them in one crucial way. While cognitive grammar and cognitive semantics recognize the role FGG plays in the *unmarked* architecture of language, the present

hypothesis recognizes the role FGG plays in motivating *markedness* in language. In other words, the hypothesis is the first attempt to tie FGG, a perceptual theoretical construct, with markedness, a linguistic phenomenon whose centrality in linguistics is uncontroversial.

Secondly, FGG being about the sense of sight, the question arises as to why the sense of sight is relevant to the study of markedness but other senses are not. The answer that might come to our mind first is the privileged position the sense of sight occupies over its cousins. For example, when a verb of sense is used to mean *understand,* languages invariably select *see* or its equivalent, not *hear, smell, taste,* or *touch* (*I can see/*hear/ *smell/*taste/*touch how General Relativity can be invoked to define TIME*). However, this fact is only the manifestation of the underlying reason. The underlying reason lies in anatomy. As is discussed above in Section 2.1, there are two types of photoreceptors in the retina – cones and rods – that "force" some entities (usually one entity) to be perceived and then conceptualized as the figure and others as the ground. But the organs of other senses do not seem to possess this distinguishing capacity (Drake et al. 2010). Take the sense of hearing. Anatomically, there is no mechanism in the reception and transduction of external auditory stimuli to differentiate sounds in the way visual stimuli are differentiated into figure and ground. Sounds are distinguished only in terms of frequency (pitch) and intensity (loudness), not in terms of salience.[5]

The third note is on the crosslinguistic applicability of the FGG hypothesis. In the sense that FGG is a perceptual phenomenon, it should transcend the boundaries of language. I believe it does. In Chen (2003, Chapter 5), for instance, FGG is found to account for full-verb inversion not only in English but also in Farci, Chinese, and Chicheŵa (a Bantu language spoken in East Central Africa). In Chen (2009), I argued that the existential construction is yet another figure-ground instantiation, and the universality of the construction is well-recognized in the literature. In this paper, a few non-English languages will be cited also to demonstrate the crosslinguistic application of the hypotheses: Chinese, Italian, Okinawan, and Samoan.

FGG manipulation can take various forms. It can present figure and ground in different orders. It can enfigure an entity that would not be the figure in an un-marked construction. It can select an entity as figure from among a list of candidates. It can also create a figure out of an entity that would not be a figure otherwise. In Sections 3 through 6, I analyze four marked constructions to demonstrate these possibilities.

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5 This physiological reality – it should be noted – may be "overridden" by the perceiver's conscious effort to focus on a particular stimulus over others. In a bar, for instance, I can hear the whispering of a conversation partner in the much louder background noise of the bartender washing their wares. However, this is not the default situation as is the case with FGG. Other senses – of smell, taste, and touch – appear to be the same.

3 Subject-auxiliary inversion

What has been included in subject-auxiliary inversion (SAI) are two types of constructions that are distinctively different. The first is the construction that only inverts the order of the subject and the auxiliary, as is seen in Example (6).

(6)　(a)　Did she go?
　　　(b)　Had she gone, they would be here by now.
　　　(e)　May a million fleas infest his armpits!
　　　(d)　(Boy) did she go!
　　　　　(Goldberg 2006)

As I have argued elsewhere (Chen 2011), these SAIs express non-indicative, irrealis moods: the *yes-no* interrogative as seen in (a), the subjunctive (b), the optative (c), and the exclamative (d). We will not deal further with this type except the *wh*-interrogative. Interested readers are referred to Chen (2011) for details.

　　The second type not only inverts the order of the subject and the auxiliary but also fronts an additional element.

(7)　　*Seldom* did she go.

In Chen (2011), I argued that this type of SAIs serves the function of focus. Here I revise the focus hypothesis into figure presentation:

> FORMULATION 2: SAI
> Structure: X A Y
> Function: To present X as figure

"X" refers to the non-auxiliary fronted element, often placed sentence initially; "A" stands for auxiliary; and "Y" refer to whatever is left of the original sentence after the fronting and the inversion of the subject-auxiliary order. So, in Example (7), X is *seldom,* A is *did,* and Y is *she go.* This structure ensures the status of figure for X by placing it in the sentence-initial position, a position that is reserved for the figure in a canonical SVO sentence per Langacker (1991). Below we will focus on X, discussing three distinctive types of it: negative-X, *only*-X, and adverbial-X.

3.1 Negative-X

In a negative-X SAI, the fronted element is negative, typically (but not always, see below) indicated by the negation marker *not.* Scholars disagree on whether all types of negation can trigger SAI. On the one hand, many believe that only clausal negation

triggers the AS order; local negation does not (Dorgeloh 1997; Erdmann 1988: 71–72; Goldberg 2006: 172; Lakoff 1991: 58; Lakoff and Brugman 1987; Newmeyer 1998: 46). So, Example (8) is believed not to be an SAI because only the noun *money* is within the scope of negation.

(8)   For no money she would leave. (=She would leave for no money).

However, local negation can lead to SAI, as attested by Example (9):

(9)   Not for nothing did the moors have a library ranging from the Marquis de
       Sade to details of Nazi war crimes.
       (Erdmann 1988: 73)

The most important feature of negative-X SAIs is the fact that in all the negation-trigged SAIs, the negative particle is not the only thing that is fronted. It is the negative particle *together with* something else – *for nothing* in Example (9) – that is moved to the sentence-initial position. As a result, what is fronted is not only negation, but also another element, most often an idea or proposition: *not for nothing* means *for something.* The following are two more examples to illustrate the point. The (a) versions are SAIs; the (b) versions are their respective unmarked counterparts.

(10) (a)   *Not until Kim had finished* did Leslie begin to object.
      (b)   Leslie did *not* begin to object *until Kim finished.*
            (Green 1985: 131)

(11) (a)   *Under no circumstances* will this company accede to such absurd
            demands.
      (b)   This company will *not* accede to such absurd demands *under any
            circumstances.*
            (Green 1985: 131)

In each of these, the fronted negative element expresses an idea that seems to be conceptually complete. *Not until Kim had finished,* for instance, means something happens *at a time after Kim had finished.* This completeness accords the element the kind of semantic integrity that is needed to be a figure. As a result of fronting and the inversion of the order of the subject and the auxiliary, the status of figure is ensured for these elements because they are unambiguously placed in the position that is prototypically reserved for a figural entity.

What would happen to these figures in an unmarked SVO sentence? The answer is that many of them would not even exist as an entity, let alone being a figure. The figure of Example (10) (a) is *not until Kim finished.* In the unmarked (b) version, *not* is the negation marker for the matrix clause while *until Kim finished* is the adverbial of

time. *Not until Kim had finished* is a combination of the two notions that exist in different places of the unmarked version. It does not exist as a holistic notion. In other words, Negative-X SAIs actually *create* figures out of the unmarked SVO sentences and then place them sentence initially to ensure their construal as such.

In negative-X SAIs, the negative lexeme may also be adverbials that are negative or near negative in their semantics: *never, barely, seldom,* and *little.*

(12) (a)   *Never* will this company accede to such absurd demands.
      (b)   This company will *never* accede ….
            (Green 1985: 117, [b] version added)

(13) (a)   *Barely* had Priestley become an undergraduate again when the First World War broke out.
      (b)   Priestley had barely become ….
            (Erdmann 1988: 74–75, [b] version added)

The figures in these sentences are X-ness (the quality of some feature indicated by X): *never-ness* and *barely-ness.* As is seen in the (b) versions, these enfigured elements are adverbials of degree. As such, they are abstract in terms of notion and low on the structural hierarchy (not being obligatory elements such as subject, verb, or object but being elements that modify the obligatory verb), hence difficult to stand out as the figures in the unmarked SVO environment. Again, the SAI version turns them into figures by placing them sentence initially.

3.2 *Only-*X

We now move to *only-*X, the third type of SAI under discussion.

(14) (a)   *Then, and only then*, do you hand him the stolen plans of the new rocket.

      (b1) You *then, and only then*, hand him the stolen plans of the new rocket.

      (b2) You do *not* hand him the stolen plans of the new rocket *until then*.

(15) (a)   *Only if individuals cease to be rational* is progress threatened.

      (b1) Progress is threatened *only if individuals cease to be rational.*

      (b2) Progress is *not* threatened *unless individuals cease to be rational.*
            (Erdmann 1988: 76–78, [b] versions added)

In Chen (2003), I argue that the uninverted counterparts of these sentences are indeterminate. They could be either (b1) or (b2). Whichever the case, *then, and only then* in Example (14) and *only if individuals cease to be rational* in Example (15) cannot

be the figure due to their semantically peripheral status (modifying something else as opposed to presenting a central idea). However, once taken out of their respective positions in the unmarked SV sentences and then placed sentence initially in an SAI, they become figures.

3.3 Adverbial-X

There are a few SAI-triggering adverbials in English that seem to defy being grouped into a class.

(16)   *Particularly* did she commend its descriptions of some of those Italian places.
(Chen 2003: 17)

(17)   *Often* did she visit the inhabitants of that gloomy village.
(Green 1982: 125, Example 9)

(18)   *Bitterly* did we repent our decision.

(19)   *Thus* did the hen reward Beecher.

(20)   *In such a school* was I trained.
(Chen 2003: 17)

(21)   *Many a moonlit night* have I murmured it to the nightingales which haunt the gardens of St. Johns.
(Green 1982: 126)

These tokens have been judged "archaic," "unnatural and ungraceful," and "hardly used outside the literary language" (Green 1985: 125, citing others). Chen (2003) proposes that English inversion may have its roots in the Old English verb-second word order rule. Since the X slot of the SAI construction is treated as the figure, we can say that it is the need to enfigure that has kept these earlier constructions "alive." In other words, if a speaker wants to present *many a moonlight night* as the figure, they could do that because "history is on their side," so to speak.

In sum, the position that SAIs enfigure an entity that would not be the figure in the unmarked SV construction receives additional support from the *kind* of entities that are enfigured. As was discussed above, in Section 2.1, the inherent features of an entity determine the goodness of its figural candidacy. An entity that is small in size and distinctive in shape is a better candidate for figure than one that is diffused and boundaryless. The entities that are enfigured by an SAI are therefore not good candidates to begin with. Not only do they not have shape integrity; they are things

that can hardly be said to have shape in the first place, as they are abstract ideas or propositions that are not visible to the human eye. In the visual field in which they occur, therefore, the presentation of them as figures would need special handling. SAI is a mechanism for that special handling, which we call FGG manipulation.

4 Passive voice

4.1 The FGG account

The FGG account of the passive construction is formulated as having three postulates.
    FORMULATION 3: The passive construction
(a)   presents the patient of a verbal process as the figure,
(b)   either eliminates the agent or reduces it to being (part of) ground, and
(c)   denotes a complex atemporal relation

Postulate (a). The passive construction entails a transitive verb, which takes the agent and the patient as its obligatory arguments. In a passive, the patient is placed in the subject position, a position reserved for figure according to Langacker (1991) and Talmy (2000a). In addition and perhaps more importantly, passivization results in the patient being the trajector in the trajector/landmark asymmetry, another hallmark of figurehood (Langacker 1991: 335–343).
    Postulate (b). This postulate spells out two possibilities regarding the agent of a passive construction. The first – agent being eliminated – applies to short passives, those that do not include the agent-designating *by*-phrase. According to Biber et al. (1999: 938, Table 11.9), short passives constitute 86 % of their data in a corpus of 28,000 tokens. There are two reasons for leaving out the agent in a passive: the agent is "unknown, redundant, or irrelevant" (particularly in academic prose) or the identity of the agent is "either not at issue or it does not need to be stated" (938–939).
    Also relevant is the fact that there are verbs that do not allow the presentation of agents at all.

(22)   (a)   John was born in 1980.
       (b)   *John was born in 1980 by Mary.

(23)   (a)   John was said/reputed to be a good teacher.
       (b)   ?*John was said/reputed to be a good teacher by his friends.
             (Quirk et al. 1985: 162, with modifications)

(24)   (a)   John is supposed to be arriving now.
       (b)   *John is supposed to be arriving now by us.

This fact goes well with the current account. As was discussed in Chapter 1, entities in a visual field compete for attention. Since human attention is limited, the principle of economy leads to selectivity of entities to be presented in a sentence. The passive construction affords the speaker the opportunity to leave out the agent (for whatever discoursal considerations) so that other entities, particularly the figure, could have more attention. This could be the reason for the high frequency of occurrence of short passives in usage.

The second possibility in Postulate (b) applies to long passives in which both the patient and the agent appear. Consider:

(25)   (a)   John opened the door.
       (b)   The door is opened by John.

In the active, *John* is the subject; *the door* is the object. The sentence is of the SVO structure (Quirk et al. 1985). As such, both *John* and *the door* are obligatory (e.g., **John opened*). In the passive, however, the agent-denoting *John* is reduced to the much lower syntactic status of the object of a preposition, similar to other adverbials:

(26)   (a)   The door was opened by a kick.
       (b)   The door was opened by a sledgehammer.
       (c)   The door was opened by a gust of wind.

In Example (26) (a), what causes the door to open is the action of the agent; in (b), what causes the door to open is an instrument; and in (d), what causes the door to open is the natural force of air movement. These causes differ in terms – and (possibly) follow a descending order – of human volition and intervention. But that does not matter; they are all coded as oblique: the object of *by*. In other words, the agent *John* in Example (25) (b) – enjoys no higher structural status than an action, an instrument, or the act of God. Further, consider:

(27)   The door was opened by John with a sledgehammer.

There are two prepositional phrases in the example: the agent-denoting *by John* and the manner-denoting *with a sledgehammer*. There is no clear way to tell which is more important. If anything, the favor is tilted toward the manner adverbial on account of the end-focus principle (Quirk et al. 1985).

Postulate (c). This postulate recognizes the change of construal from the active to a passive construction. In an active voice construction, the construal of the event requires sequential scanning (the conceptualizer scanning the component states in serial fashion). So, Example (25) (a) would invite us to view ("scan") the verbal

process step-by-step – we may imagine John extending his hand, grabbing the doorknob with it, turning the knob, and the door opening. But Example (25) (b) does not. It asks us to scan summarily, so that we can activate the component states of the event "holistically as a single gestalt" (Langacker 1991: 21). In other words, the passive voice turns a dynamic process into an atemporal/stative relation.

4.2 Advantages of the FGG account

The proposed hypothesis has several advantages. Three are discussed below.

Shinzato (2020) discusses an interesting case of "passive warnings" in Okinawan, a Rukyuan language and a sister language to Japanese spoken on the main island of the Ryukyu Archipelago, between Taiwan and the main islands of Japan.

(28) *Sugur-arii- N doo yaa.*
      hit- PASS - PRS SFP SFP[6]
      'You will be hit now (for your insult)!'

Example (28) is used when the act of hitting is eminent. In such situations, the active voice cannot be used to express the meaning of warning. Postulate (a) in the proposed hypothesis offers a reason. The speech act of warning means that the warned action – "hitting" in this case – will materialize unless the addressee stops the warned behavior. So, the immediate withholding of the warned behavior is paramount to avoid the consequence, making the addressee the natural "focal party" (per Langacker). In other words, the situation demands that the addressee be the figure, hence rendering the active voice – which would present the speaker as the figure – inapt for the task.

Closely related to the passive construction is the middle voice, a construction that is found in many languages (Kemmer 1993).

(29) (a)   This model sells well.
      (b)   This bread cuts easily.
      (c)   The book reads smoothly.

The challenge posed by the middle voice for a linguistic theory is that its verb is active but its meaning is passive, i.e., the subject is not an agent but a theme.[7] I argue that the middle voice receives a coherent explanation from the FGG account of the passive on two counts. First, the middle voice is similar to the passive in that it presents a non-

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6 PASS: Passive; PRS: present; SFP: sentence final particle.
7 At the time of writing (July 2023), *cuts* in "This bread cuts easily" was marked for possible grammatical inappropriateness. The suggestion by the Microsoft grammar checker was to change *cuts* to *is cut*.

agent entity as figure. Obviously, the agent-defocusing account that is popular in the literature (Lyngfelt and Solstad 2006; Shibatani 1989) will not work, as there is no agent in the middle voice to defocus. Second, like the passive, the middle presents an atemporal, stative relation. Example (29) (a), for instance, is not a description of the act of someone selling the model but a description of the fact that the model is a popular commodity on the market. The same may be said about the other two examples: the bread possesses the quality of being cut easily (b) and the book is a smooth read (c).

The third advantage of the proposed FGG account of the passive lies in its formulation that does not tie the passive meaning to a particular structure. We consider two languages – Chinese and Samoan – below. Example (30) is from Chinese; Example (31) is from Samoan.

(30) (a) 孩子没喂
           háizǐ   méi   wèi
           Infant   NEG   feed
      (b) *孩子没被喂
           *háizǐ   méi   bèi   wèi
           Infant   NEG   PASS   feed
           'The infant has not been fed.'

In a context in which the speaker wants to say that the infant has been fed, the passive voice in (30) (b) – indicated by the passive marker *bèi* – should be used (Chen and Hu XXXX), as the English gloss suggests. However, the active (a) is the only option for speakers. There are two possible explanations. The first is economy: the fact that infants cannot feed themselves renders the passive necessary. The second has to do with the language being topic prominent (Li and Thompson 1981): the lexeme *háizǐ* is not the subject but the topic of the sentence. Whichever may turn out to be will not be a problem for the FGG account, as the FGG account allows all kinds of structures to express the passive semantics.

(31) (a) *Na   opo   e   le   tama   le   teine*
           PAST   hug   ERG   the   boy   the   girl
           'The boy hugged the girl'
      (b) *Na   opo   le   teine   e   le   tama*
           PAST   hug   the   girl   ERG   the   boy
           'The girl was hugged by the boy'
           (Cook 1996: 61)

Both sentences in (31) exhibit the canonical VSO order: the subject follows the verb and precedes a direct object. In (a), therefore, *e le tama* "the boy" and *le teine* "the girl" are respectively the subject and the direct object of the sentence. In (b), on the other

hand, *le teine* is the passive subject and *e le tama* is the agent but is neither a subject nor an object. The question for us is: how do we explain the fact that voice is not marked on the verb *opo* "hug," as it is the same in both the active (a) version and the passive (b) version? Langacker proposes that this is in line with "a regular pattern that has the semantic effect of deriving passive verbs from active ones but is phonologically null" (Such a proposal suggests the "virtue of the theory [his cognitive grammar account of the passive] that it allows us to describe the phenomenon without being forced to make artificial distinctions" (342). The current proposal, however, offers another – and a better one, I believe – possibility, that the notion of passivity in Samoan is expressed *by word order*. In other words, while passivity is by and large a morphological notion, it may not be so in all languages.

5 *It*-cleft constructions

It-cleft is a construction in which a single sentence is split into two sections, each with its own verb. Example (32) can be "*it*-clefted" into those in Example (33).

(32)   John stayed in London with Ronaldo for five months during the 1990s.

(33) (a)   It is John that/who stayed in London with Ronaldo for five months during the 1990s.
       (b)   It is in London that John stayed with Ronaldo for five months during the 1990s.
       (c)   It is with Ronaldo that John stayed in London for five months during the 1990s.
       (d)   It is for five months that John stayed in London with Ronaldo during the 1990s.
       (e)   It is during the 1990s that John stayed in London with Ronaldo for five months.

We shall call the first part of an *it*-cleft the *it*-clause (*it is* [*was*] X) and the second part, the *that*-clause. Structurally, the *it*-clause is believed in the literature to be the main clause and the *that*-clause is viewed as a relative clause (but see below), subordinating to the *it*-clause. The X slot of the *it*-clause – as demonstrated above – can be any other elements than the verb. Other observations about the construction will be made below where appropriate.

The central argument of the FGG account is that the *it*-clause of an *it*-cleft is the unit for the presentation of the figure, with the X slot being the designated focal point for the figure, while the *that*-clause is a slot for the presentation of the ground.

FORMULATION 4: The *It*-cleft is a construction to present FGG such that

a. The *it*-clause (*it BE* X) presents figure in which
   i. *It* is semantically empty but cognitively serves as a pointer to the upcoming figure.
   ii. *BE* is invariably singular in number to preserve the integrity of figure.
   iii. The X slot is reserved for figure.
b. The *that*-clause is the clause for ground, in which *that* marks what is to come as ground and connects ground with figure.[8]

In Example (32), *John* is the figure. But what would the speaker do if they had a special need for making another entity the figure? The answer is the *it*-cleft, as it offers the speaker an opportunity to manipulate FGG. The speaker can place any of these entities in the X slot: *in London, with Ronaldo, for five months,* and *during the 1990s,* as respectively illustrated in (b) through (e) in Example (33).

How about *John*, which is the figure in the canonical sentence anyway? One can imagine a situation in which the position of *John* as the figure of the sentence is doubted, e.g., the speaker has reasons to suspect that the hearer might have some mistaken belief that some other person than John did what is said. But once in the X slot, as it is in Example (33) (a), *John*'s position as the figure is ensured.

To illustrate the need to enfigure an entity in context, consider Example (34), transcribed from a YouTube podcast posted at the time of writing (August 2024).[9]

(34)   Host: I just wanted to provide your background. Let me know if I got anything wrong. After graduating from Naval Academy in 1994, the congresswomen became a US SH-3 Sea King pilot and Russian policy officer. Sheryl flew missions throughout Europe and in Middle East. In 2003 she was based in the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi a Russian policy officer as well. When you worked at the Commander-in chief of the US Navy in Europe you served the US Navy for nine years … got that right?
        Guest: You got a lot of that right. I will say *it wasn't in 2003 that I served in Corpus Christi… It was earlier than that…*

In the introduction of the guest, the host lists several of her career landmarks. The guest finds it necessary to correct an error about the year of her service at the Naval Air Station. When she speaks, what has been said by the host becomes the ground, with a list of entities. Since the correction is about the year of 2003, *2003* needs to be enfigured so that it stands out from what appears to be a complicated ground. So she

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8 *That* in the *that*-clause can be omitted due to factors that do not concern us here (Wulff et al. 2018).
9 https://youtu.be/em1wXiGee58?si=e0OxYMw9CiVWbCMC.

uses an *it*-cleft (*It wasn't in 2003 that…*) and follows it with *It was earlier than that …* to further highlight the figure.

In the literature on *it*-cleft, most attention is paid to the *that*-clause (Bourgoin et al. 2021; Collins 1982; Haviland and Clark 1974; Jespersen 1937; Lambrecht 2001; Prince 1978a, 1978b, with Prince's 1978a being the most influential). As for the *it*-clause part of the construction, scholars have done little more than to call it the "focused" component. From an FGG perspective, neither of these two approaches is adequate. Concentrating on the *that*-clause seems to miss the point, as it is not the fulcrum of the construction. Assigning the *it*-clause the function of focus does not go deep enough, as the term *focus* is notoriously ambiguous. The present proposal, on the other hand, offers explanations for three key structural features of the construction that previous accounts have not explained or cannot explain, i.e., 1) the function of the *it* in the *it*-clause; 2) the required singularity of BE in the *it*-clause; and 3) the status of the *that*-clause. These three features are discussed below and in that order.

5.1 The function of *it*

Jespersen (1937: 89) may be the first person to have noted that *it* cannot be replaced by any other lexeme. Some of the later scholars acknowledge the fact but none has attempted an explanation. The FGG account offers a natural explanation.

In the visual field represented by an *it*-cleft, the speaker wants to present as figure an entity that is not (or cannot be) the figure in a default FGG. That entity therefore requires introduction. The ideal part of speech for the task are, naturally, pronouns that point to a referent (instead of denoting a referent directly). Among the pronouns in English, *it* turns out to be the best candidate. First, unlike most of its peers (e.g., *I, we, you, he, she*), *it* may refer to anything and everything in the world. Its plural counterpart, *they,* could do the same, but plurality limits its (*they*'s) utility (see below). Second – and perhaps more importantly – *it* is the only member in the pronominal system that can be both anaphoric and cataphoric.[10] In a word, *it* is best suited for the job because it can be a space filler as well as point forward.

The lightness of *it* in terms of information load is also seen in the fact that there are languages in which no pronoun corresponding to *it* is used in the equivalent of *it*-clefts. The following is an example from Italian.

(35) *Siete   voi   que   volete   inebriarmi*
      is   you   who   want   intoxicate-me
      'It is you who want to intoxicate me.'
      (Jespersen 1937: 88)

---

10 Another such lexeme is the demonstrative *this* (Chen 1990).

In sum, *it* serves a double function in the *it*-cleft visual field. Structurally, it is a space filler for the subject position due to its lack of denotatum. Perceptually (and conceptually), it is a pointer, indicating to the hearer that a figure is about to be named.

5.2 Singularity of *BE* in the *it*-clause

Prince (1978a) points out that the linking verb *BE* in the *it*-clause is always singular but offers no explanations as to why.

(36)   It's not just one person that's hurt. It's usually four or five.
          (Prince 1978a: 896)

The FGG approach allows for an explanation. Note that the X slot in the *it*-clause is reserved for the figure. If the figure is five people, five people can be viewed either individually or collectively. As individuals, five people may be different from each other in size, skin color, gender, age. In the visual field in which they are presented as individual figures, they may spread out over a sizable area. However, once they are presented in singular terms, all these differences disappear. They are now one group whose members are presumably thought of as identical to each other. In other words, given the reality that there are *four or five* persons, Example (36) presents them *as a collective,* and a collective is a better figure than the individual members inside it. In addition, collectivization of individual figural entities is also found in canonical SV constructions:

(37)   (a)   Five people is good enough.
         (b)   *Five people are good enough.

(38)   (a)   Five hours is a long time.
         (b)   *Five hours are a long time.

5.3 The status of the *that*-clause

What is the structural status of the *that*-clause in an *it*-cleft? The term "relative clause" is used by almost every scholar on the subject, but many of them are apparently uneasy with the categorization, because the *that*-clause, simply put, is not a relative clause. Consider below, a modified representation of the sentences in Example (33), with the addition of Example (40).

(39) (a) It was John that/*who* stayed in London with Ronaldo…
      (b) It was in London that/(?)*where* John stayed with Ronaldo …
      (c) It was with Ronaldo that/*whom John stayed in London…
      (d) It was for five months that/**which/when* John stayed in London …
      (e) It was during the 1990s that/(?)*when* John stayed in London with Ronaldo for five months.

(40)   It was with enthusiasm that/*which John supported Ronaldo.

There are two reasons against treating the *that*-clause as a relative clause. First, if the *that*-clause were relative, the replacements of *that* in all these sentences in Example (39) should be acceptable. But most are not, with the clear exception of (a).[11] Take (b) for instance, if the *that*-clause were relative, it would be possible to use *where* instead of *that*, as *where* is a designated relative pronoun for a spatial head noun such as *London*. In fact, in a non-*it*-cleft context, *that* cannot be used at all:

(41)   In 2010, he lived in London, where/*that he met his future wife.

The second reason comes from restrictivity. A restrictive relative clause is one that provides essential (e.g., identifying) information for the head noun, which cannot be set off by a comma. An unrestrictive relative clause is the opposite. As such, the *that*-clauses in Example (39) (a–c) should be unrestrictive, as they provide no identifying information for their respective head nouns (*John, London, Ronaldo*). However, they cannot be, as they allow no setting off from their head nouns by commas. The strongest case is (a), in which *who* makes the *that*-clause every bit look like a relative clause but tolerates no insertion of a comma between *John* and *that/who*:

(42)   *It was John, that/who stayed in London with Ronaldo.
       (cf. I met John, who told me you were coming.)

So, what is the status of *that? That* appears to be a semantically empty connector, much like the way it functions below.

(43)   He told me/said *that* he got sick.

(44)   I was surprised *that* he got sick.[12]

In both, *that* serves the function of a connector. In Example (43), *that* connects an object clause with the verb; in (44), *that* connects a complement with the verb. As a lexeme, *that* can be said to be a structural marker. By analogy, *that* in the *it*-cleft

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11 *Wher*e in Example (39) (b) and when in (e) may be acceptable to some native speakers, but that is still the preferred choice per Jespersen (1937: 89).
12 The *that* in "That he got sick was known to all" is semantically empty, too, although it is a nominalizer rather than a connector.

construction can be said to be a conceptual marker of ground, connecting the ground with the figure.

Lastly, if the *it*-cleft construction is motivated by FGG, and FGG has a physio-anatomical basis, the account offered in this paper should have cross-linguistic relevance. That might be true, as the *it*-cleft construction or its equivalents are found to exist widely. It exits in, for instance, French (Katz 2000), Chechen (Komen 2015), German (Fiedler 2014), Chinese (Zhang 2014), Czech (Kudrnová 2019), Swedish (Huber 2003), Tagalog (Latrouite 2021), Mayoyao and Ifugao – both spoken in the Philippines – (Hodder 1999), and a few West Chadi languages such as Akan, Ga, and Ngamo (Grubic et al. 2019).

6 Anticipatory *it* construction

The anticipatory *it* (ant-*it*) construction is illustrated by sentences such as:

(45)   It is odd to see him at the party/that he was at the party.

The ant-*it* construction has been analyzed primarily for the referent of *it,* i.e., what precisely *it* refers to (Kaltenböck 2003, among others). The FGG account holds that the construction is the result of yet another manifestation of FGG manipulation.

> FORMULATION 5: ant-*it*
>
> Structure: it_j VP NOMINAL$_J$
>
> Function: to present an aprototypical entity as figure

The term "NOMINAL" is adopted from (Langacker 1987, 1991), referring to both noun phrases *and* proposition-expressing clauses that are nominal in nature (acting as nouns) that occur after VP. These elements are called "logical" or "semantic" subjects in traditional grammars (Biber et al. 1999; Quirk et al. 1985). "Aprototypical entity" refers to an entity that is not a good candidate for figure. As discussed in Section 2.1, figure entities tend to be small in size, well-defined in shape, and accessible to the senses, particularly the visual. Such a good candidate, however, cannot be denoted by NOMINAL in the ant-*it* construction:

(46)   (a)   That book is very interesting.
       (b)   *It is very interesting *that book*.[13]

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[13] To be differentiated from a typical left dislocation: "It is very interesting, that book," wherein the pause before "that book" is crucial.

(47)   (a)   Your dog is lovely.
          (b)   *It is lovely *your dog*.

Legitimate nominals that are allowed in ant-*it* are those whose referents are aprototypical figural candidates: verbal processes, abstract notions, and propositions.

    Verbal process figures are illustrated in Example (48).

(48)   (a)   It's a bit of a nuisance *to decorate the room/decorating the room.*
          (b)   It's not much fun *to work all day long/working all day long.*

Abstract notion figures are TIME, conditions, manners (respectively below), and possibly others:

(49)   (a)   It's not clear *when he left*.
          (b)   It doesn't matter *whether you like it*.
          (c)   It doesn't matter *how you do it*.

Propositional figures are seen in Example (50).

(50)   It is reported *that Trump's supporters are further galvanized by the convictions of his hush-money felony lawsuit in New York.*

In sum, these aprototypical figural candidates cannot "stand out" easily (to be the figure) in their respective visual fields. In an ant-*it* construction, however, they are unambiguously marked as figures by being coded as NOMINAL.

    We now look at the VP slot of the ant-*it* construction. The most frequently used verb is *be,* but other linking verbs such as *seem, appear,* and *so happen* also occur (Biber et al. 1999):

(51)   (a)   It *is* surprising/upsetting/saddening NOMINAL.
          (b)   It *is* a mistake/my honor/my pleasure NOMINAL.
          (c)   It *seems/appears/so happened* NOMINAL.

Linking verbs are by definition intransitive and hence have no passive counterparts. However, the passive voice version of reporting verbs and *belief* verbs can also occur in the ant-*it* construction:

(52)   (a)   It *is said/reported/rumored* that Trump may be facing yet another indictment.
          (b)   It *is widely believed/acknowledged* that Trump may be facing yet another indictment.

Lastly, *matter* (v) seems to belong to a category of its own.

(53) (a) It *matters/doesn't matter* how/when/where you do that as long as you do it.

   (b) It *matters/doesn't matter* whether you did it or not.

Two things characterize these verbs. The first is the lightness of their semantics. Second, since they denote stative – hence atemporal – relations, their construal requires summary scanning, not sequential scanning. Sequential scanning required by a temporal process invites zeroing in on the different components – possibly also details – of an event, as the conceptualizer perceives it as it unfolds. It is hence more demanding of (and competitive for) attention than summary scanning. In an ant-*it* environment, therefore, it makes sense for the ground-presenting VP to be less demanding and competitive so that the limited attentional resources can be devoted to the figural entity encoded by NOMINAL.

Lastly, about the pronoun *it*. In the last section, on *it*-clefts, it was arg+ued that *it* is a place holder as well as a pointer to the upcoming figure due to its semantic lightness and its being both anaphoric and cataphoric. That observation appears to apply here as well, i.e., *it* anticipates because it holds the place for the figure and points forward to its (figure's) eventual appearance.

Looking at *it*-cleft globally from the proposed FGG perspective, we see a doubling of roles: the figure is presented doubly; the pronoun *it* plays a double role. This may not be accidental, but for deeper reasons. Note once again the type of figure that is presented in the ant-*it* construction: a verbal process, an idea, or a proposition. Arguably, in an FGG presentation, which is originally visual, such unbounded, abstract, and diffused notions require more effort on the part of the perceiver to perceive, hence the extra effort on the part of the speaker – which is essentially (and metaphorically) on the part of the language – to present. So, the ant-*it* construction can be seen as a linguistic mechanism motivated by deeper conceptual considerations via, first, introducing the figure with a semantically light *it*, sentence initially, to prepare the hearer and, second, by delaying the appearance of the figure to the end of the sentence so that the speaker is able to present it "at leisure," having "cleared the ground," so to speak, for its presentation.

Finally, the FGG treatment of the ant-*it* construction also sheds light on split NPs, structures in which the head noun of an NP is separated by the verb from its appositive clause.

(54) When word came that afternoon that the governor had announced a curfew, to take effect at midnight, the mood shifted to defiance and disbelief.[14]

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14 https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/movement-grows-ferguson.

(55)   On Monday morning, news came that Nadine Gordimer, who won the 1991
         Nobel Prize in Literature, died Sunday, in Johannesburg.[15]

In these tokens, the head nouns occur in the subject position and their respective
appositive clauses follow the verb *came.* In my search, this is a highly restricted
construction, with the head noun being primarily *the word, the news, the rumor, the
report,* and *the order* and the verb being primarily *came,* with a few exceptions such
as *spread* and *surfaced,* as illustrated below.

(56)   Rumors *spread* about me[16] at school.[17]

(57)   A group of 44 Republican senators is demanding that the report by special
         counsel John Durham be made public once it is complete, days after news
         surfaced that it will likely be finished in the coming months.[18]

The parallels between split NPs and ant-*it* sentences are obvious: the highly restricted
head nouns in the former are analogous to *it* in the latter; the highly restricted verb in
the former – *come* most of the time – is analogous to *be* in the latter, and the
appositive clause in the former is analogous to NOMINAL in the latter. These structural
parallels are suggestive of cognitive parallels. As is clear, the figures of these sen-
tences are propositions (often summaries of states of affairs), be it *word, news,* or
rumor. As such and as is the case with the figure in an ant-*it* construction, they are not
visual but ideational, hence aprototypical, leading to the need for special handling in
language. The way language handles them is therefore also similar to the way it
handles ant-*it* FGG presentation: presenting the figure doubly. The presentation of
the figure by the head noun, whose meaning is incomplete without explanation (e.g.,
the word, the news, or *the rumor*), begs the question of what it is, hence keeping the
hearer expectant until after the verb when the appositive appears. The verb is
notable as well: the typical verb in the construction, *come,* is used metaphorically, as
it does not denote motion but the arrival in the visual field (Chen 2003). It is therefore
semantically light. Once the hearer reaches the appositive clause, the ground – in
both senses of the word – is cleared so that the hearer will devote undivided attention
to the "real" figure. The split NP construction is therefore yet another structure that
facilitates the presentation of a non-prototypical figure.

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15 https://www.newyorker.com/books/double-take/nadine-gordimer-in-the-new-yorker.
16 "about me" is not an appositive but a prepositional phase that modifies the head noun. We ignore
this difference, as it is not relevant to our discussion.
17 https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-trp-001&ei=UTF-8&hsimp=yhs-001&
hspart=trp&p=rumors+spread+about+me&type=Y241_F163_219417_070723#id=2&
vid=4be0daa7e296e15055b3eed36a0c3e4e&action=view.
18 https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/568639-forty-four-republicans-demand-durham-report-be-
made-public/.

7 Conclusions

Markedness in language is one of the central theoretical issues in linguistics. In this paper, I proposed an FGG hypothesis and attempted to demonstrate its merit with the analysis of four marked constructions. With full verb inversion (Chen 2003) and the existential construction (Chen 2009), six marked constructions are now demonstrated to be amenable to being accounted for in the FGG approach.

These six constructions vary a great deal, from voice to word order, and from morphology to semantics. They may be a good representation of markedness in English, and there may be reason to further hypothesize that other marked constructions that have not been analyzed in the paper could be FGG-motivated as well. The historical present tense (HP), for instance, has been shown to evaluate the narrated event, to mark the turning points of the story, or to indicate the authority of a narrative character. These uses can also be subsumed under the FGG hypothesis, as they all seem to enfigure an entity that would not be a figure if the unmarked past tense were used.

In Section 2.3, I discussed the crosslinguistic applicability of the FGG hypothesis, citing some evidence in my earlier work (Chen 2003). In this paper, I provided a few more examples by way of demonstrating crosslinguistic applicability from Chinese, Italian, Okinawan, and Samoan. These pieces of evidence – albeit scant – cover a range of typologically distinctive languages spoken in different geographical locations, hence indicative of the likelihood of the universal link between FGG and markedness. While I am quite convinced of that likelihood, a more confident statement about it should not be made without further investigation.

Data availability: Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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