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## A Typology of the Interaction of Focus Structure and Syntax

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### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The study of differences and similarities among human languages has a long and venerable history, and most of the concern has been with, first, the morphological properties of languages, and then, more recently, with their syntactic properties. Inspired by Prague School work on communicative dynamism (e.g. Mathesius 1928, 1929; Firbas 1964, 1966; Sgall, et al, 1986), there has emerged in the last few years an interest in classifying the way languages grammatically organize the expression of the various information statuses that elements within a sentence may have, e.g. Dik (1989), Bearth (1992), Vallduví (1992), Lambrecht (1994). This grammatical organization of information is known as *focus structure*, and languages show striking differences in this aspect of grammar. É. Kiss (1987, 1994) and Vallduví (1992) have noted some typological differences among languages with respect to focus structure. The purpose of this paper is to examine the way that typological differences with respect to focus structure interact with certain syntactic features in languages. It will be seen that rigidity vs. flexibility of focus structure interacts in interesting ways with rigidity vs. flexibility in the syntax and that these two properties generate four attested language types.

We begin by sketching briefly the theory of focus structure from Lambrecht (1994) in the next section. In section 3 we turn to the actual typology itself, and concluding remarks are presented in section 4.

### 2. A theory of focus structure

The grammatical means which indicate the scope of the assertion in an utterance in contrast to the presupposed or topical part of the utterance is called the focus structure of the sentence by Lambrecht (1994). A significant feature of his approach is a classification of focus types. The fundamental contrast is between broad and argument focus; in argument focus the focus domain extends over only a single constituent, e.g. a NP, while in broad focus it encompasses more than one constituent. There are two kinds of broad focus, predicate focus and sentence focus.

Predicate focus is universally the unmarked type and coincides with the traditionally recognized 'topic-comment' organization of information in a sentence. In it, the subject is the

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<sup>1</sup>It is a great pleasure to contribute this paper to the volume honoring Prof. Alexandr E. Kibrik, an esteemed colleague and a valued friend. I'd like to thank Matthew Dryer for comments on an earlier draft. Abbreviations: ACC 'accusative', COP 'copula', DAT 'dative', FOC 'focus', LOC 'locative', OBJ 'object', PASS 'passive', PRFV 'perfective', PRDM 'predicate marker', REFL 'reflexive', REL 'relativizer', SUBJ 'subject', TM 'terminal marker', TOP 'topic'.

topic and the predicate is a comment or assertion about the subject-topic. Lambrecht (1994) gives the examples in (1).

- (1) Q: How's your car?  
A: a. My car/it broke **DOWN**. English  
b. (La mia macchina) si è **ROTTA**. Italian  
c. (Ma voiture) elle est en **PANNE**. French  
d. (Kuruma wa) **KOSHOOSHITA**. Japanese

(The focus element is in small caps.) In each example, there is an NP serving as topic; it is the subject NP in English and Italian, the detached NP in French, and the *wa*-marked NP in Japanese.

Sentence focus constructions contrast strikingly from predicate focus constructions, as they have no topical subject; the focus domain is the entire sentence. Lambrecht illustrates this focus type with the following examples.

- (2) Q: What happened?  
A: a. My **CAR** broke down.  
b. Mi si è rotta la **MACCHINA**.  
Lit: 'Broke down to me the car'  
c. J'ai ma **VOITURE** qui est en **PANNE**.  
Lit: 'I have my car which broke down'  
d. **KURUMA** ga koshooshita

The whole sentence is asserted; it lacks a presupposed topic, as in (1). The most common use of sentence focus is presentational constructions, as in (3).

- (3) a. Once upon a time there was an old man and a dog.  
b. Then out from under the bed ran a mouse.  
c. There arose a violent storm.

These sentences lack an established topic, and they serve to introduce new participants into the discourse. The subject NP occurs in the postverbal position normally reserved for objects, which is the unmarked focus constituent in a predicate focus construction.

The final focus type is argument focus; the focus domain is a single constituent, and it may be subject, object, an oblique, or even the verb. Examples from Lambrecht are given in (4).

- (4) Q: I heard your motorcycle broke down.  
A: a. My **CAR** broke down.  
a'. It's my **CAR** that broke down.  
b. Si è rotta la mia **MACCHINA**.  
Lit: 'Broke down my car'  
b'. È la mia **MACCHINA** che si è rotta.  
'It's my car that broke down.'  
c. C'est ma **VOITURE** qui est en panne.

'It's my car that broke down.'  
d. KURUMA ga koshooshita.

The presupposition 'something broke down' is associated with the sentence, and the assertion is that it is the speaker's car rather than something else which broke down. Hence the focus domain is restricted to the NP *car*. Lambrecht contrasts unmarked argument focus with marked argument focus, the distinction being where the focus falls: if it falls on the final constituent in the clause in English, then it is unmarked, whereas if it falls to the left of that, it is marked. Thus argument focus on an object is a case of unmarked argument focus, while focus on a subject is a case of marked argument focus. An example of unmarked argument focus in English would be as in (5).

(5) Q:What did Sally buy?  
A:She bought A NEW CAR.

Here the focus is on the direct object NP, which is the final NP in the clause.

An additional distinction which is crucial to our discussion is that between the *potential focus domain* and the *actual focus domain* (Van Valin 1993). The actual focus domain is the part of the sentence which is in focus; Lambrecht refers to it simply as the 'focus domain'. The potential focus domain is the part of the sentence in which a focal element may potentially be found. In English, for example, the entire main clause is the potential focus domain; in (1a) the actual focus domain is *broke down*, in (2a) it is the whole clause *my car broke down*, and in (3a) it is the subject NP *my car*. As we will see in the next section, not all languages have the entire main clause as the potential focus domain, and this has important consequences for the interaction of focus structure and syntax.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The interaction of focus structure and syntax

With respect to both focus structure and syntax, we are concerned with comparing languages in terms of the rigidity vs. flexibility of their word order and the rigidity vs. flexibility of their focus structure. The first distinction is well known and has been much discussed. Languages like English and Toba Batak, a Western Austronesian language spoken in Indonesia (Schachter 1984), represent the 'rigid word order' type, while languages like Russian, Polish, Latin and Dyirbal represent the 'flexible word order' type. This is, of course, a continuum and not an absolute opposition, and there are languages which fall between these two extremes. The notions of rigid and flexible focus structure refer to restrictions on the potential focus domain: languages in which the potential focus domain is the entire main clause in simple sentences will be considered to have flexible focus structure, whereas those in which the potential focus domain is restricted to a subpart of the main clause will be considered to have rigid focus structure. The interaction of these two oppositions generates the typology in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup>We will limit our discussion in this paper to simple sentences, as the question of the potential focus domain in complex sentences is quite independent of the issues to be discussed herein. For some discussion, see Van Valin (1993, 1995), Van Valin & LaPolla (1997).

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

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

In the following sections, we will examine each of these types. We begin with English and Toura, a Mande language spoken in the Ivory Coast (Bearth 1992).

**3.1 Rigid syntax and flexible focus structure** English and Toura have relatively rigid word order, English being SVO and Toura SOV. As the examples in (1a), (2a), (4a) and (5) show for English, focus can fall on the whole VP, the whole clause, the subject NP alone, or the direct object NP alone. It can also fall on clause-final adjuncts, as in *Sally bought the new car YESTERDAY*. These possibilities are further illustrated in (6).

- (6) a. Kim sent the book to LESLIE yesterday.  
 b. Kim sent the book to Leslie YESTERDAY.  
 c. Kim sent THE BOOK to Leslie yesterday.  
 d. Kim SENT the book to Leslie yesterday.  
 e. KIM sent the book to Leslie yesterday.

There is a special clause-initial position in which WH-words, which are always focal, and fronted focal elements can occur, as in (7)

- (7) a. WHAT did you buy?  
 b. THAT BOOK I wouldn't buy.

There is a left-detached 'topic' position which is outside of the clause and therefore outside of the potential focus domain; it is illustrated in (8).

- (8) a. As for Mary, I spoke to her yesterday.  
 b. As for Mary, who did she go out with yesterday?  
 c. In Zagreb, many people drink coffee in outdoor cafés.  
 d. In Zagreb, where do many people drink coffee?

These left-detached phrases are set off from the following clause by an intonation break, and if the element in them functions as an argument in the following clause, there is a resumptive pronoun in it referring back to the detached NP. There is no intonation break between the clause-initial WH-word or NP in (7), nor is there any resumptive pronoun in (7b) (*\*THAT BOOK I wouldn't buy it*). Further evidence that the sentence-initial and clause-initial positions are distinct comes from (8b,d), in which both occur in the same sentence. Hence English readily allows focus to fall on any clause-internal constituent from the special clause-initial position to clause-final adjuncts. This is what is meant by flexible focus structure: the potential focus domain includes the entire main clause, and there are no restrictions on where focus can occur.

There is no need in English to change the word order of the sentence just to accommodate different focus possibilities; the focus structure adapts, as it were, to the rigid syntax, with focus

expressed primarily prosodically. This is not to say that English does not allow word order variation for pragmatic purposes; rather, the point is that it is not an obligatory aspect of English syntax. We will see examples below in Sesotho and Italian in which word order changes are obligatory in order to meet focus structure restrictions.

As mentioned above, Toura has relatively rigid SOV order. Unlike English, it has a rich system of focus-marking particles, and therefore it does not rely on prosody for signalling focus structure as much as English does. The basic predicate-focus construction is given in (9a), while two different types of focus marking are exemplified in (b)-(c).

- (9) a. Tìà ké gwéé l̥'.  
 PRDM peanuts buy  
 'Tia BOUGHT PEANUTS.'
- b. Q: Tìà-' mεε l̥' le?  
 -PRDM what buy TM  
 'WHAT did Tia buy?'
- A: Tìà-' gwéé-' l̥' le.  
 -PRDM peanuts-FOC1 buy TM  
 'Tia bought PEANUTS.'
- b'. Q: Waa gwéé l̥' le?  
 who peanuts buy TM  
 'WHO bought peanuts?'
- A: Tìà-' gwéé l̥' le.  
 -FOC1 peanuts buy TM  
 'TIA bought peanuts.'
- c. Tìà ké gwéé-le l̥'.  
 PRDM peanuts-FOC2 buy  
 'Tia bought PEANUTS.'

The focus marker in (b) is a tonal clitic (as is the predicate marker in many of these examples), whereas in (c) it is the same word that elsewhere is glossed 'TM'. The distinction between the two focus types revolves around their presuppositions; the (b) type is non-contrastive and is used in answers to questions and for introducing new elements into the discourse, whereas the (c) type appears to be more contrastive. In order to have the verb alone in focus, a special periphrastic construction must be used, as in (10).

- (10) Tìà-' gwéé l̥-' wo' le.  
 -PRDM peanuts buy-FOC1 do TM  
 'Tia BOUGHT peanuts.'

As in English, there is a special clause-initial position for focal elements as well as a left-detached 'topic' position in Toura; they are exemplified in (11).

- (11)a. Gwéé-' Tìà-' l̥' le.  
 peanuts-FOC1 -PRDM buy TM  
 'PEANUTS Tia bought', or 'It is PEANUTS (not potatoes) that Tia bought.'

- b. Gwéé (láà), Tìà ké à lɔ'.  
 peanuts (TOP) PRDM 3p buy  
 'As for peanuts, Tia bought them.'

The two positions in Toura contrast just as they do in English; there is no intonation break between the initial NP and the following clause in (a), and there is no resumptive pronoun referring, whereas in (b) there is an intonation break between the initial NP and the following clause and there is a resumptive pronoun. The NP in the clause-initial position in (a) bears a focus marker, while the NP in the left-detached position in (b) is followed by an optional topic marker. Thus, Toura presents an elaborated system of focus marking which makes use of both special positions as well as focus markers for clause-internal elements. As in English, it is possible but not necessary to place an element in a special position, in order for it to be focussed upon.

**3.2 Flexible syntax and rigid focus structure** The opposite of the situation in English and Toura is found in Bantu languages like Sesotho and Setswana (Demuth 1989, 1990) and in Indo-European languages like Italian and Spanish. In Sesotho and Setswana, members of the Sotho group of Bantu languages of southern Africa, there is an absolute constraint against focal elements appearing preverbally. They are SVO languages, and consequently subjects must be 'highly topical, old, given information' (Demuth 1989). This is exemplified in the following examples from Setswana.

- (12)a. Monna o-bed-its-e mosimane.  
 man SUBJ-beat-PRFV-MOOD boy  
 'The/\*a man beat a/the boy.'
- b. Mosimane o-bed-its-w-e ke monna.  
 boy SUBJ-beat-PRFV-PASS-MOOD by man  
 'The/\*a boy was beaten by a/the man,' or 'A man hit the boy.'
- c. Monna o-fihl il-e.  
 man SUBJ-arrive-PFFV-MOOD  
 'The/\*a man arrived.'
- d. Ho-filh-il-e monna.  
 LOC-arrive-PRFV-MOOD man  
 'There arrived a man,' or 'A man arrived.'

The preverbal NP must be interpreted as topical and not focal, while postverbal NPs may be interpreted either way, depending on context. With intransitive verbs, a focal subject occurs after the verb, and the subject agreement slot in the verb is filled by a locative agreement marker, as in (12d). The impact of this constraints is seen most clearly in WH-questions: WH-words are always focal, and therefore they may not occur preverbally and must appear either at the end of the sentence (in the unmarked form) or postverbally in a cleft construction. Consequently, it is not possible to have a question in which an interrogative pronoun (the focus) is the subject, as in (13a). Accordingly, a passive construction, as in (13b), or a clefted form (13c,d) is used to put the interrogative pronoun in focus position.

- (13) a. \*Mang o-pheh-ile lijo?  
 who SUBJ-cook-PERF food  
 ‘Who cooked the food?’
- b. Lijo li-pheh-li-o-e ke mang?  
 food SUBJ-cook-PERF-PASS-MOOD by who  
 ‘The food was cooked by who?’ or ‘Who cooked the food?’
- c. Ea o-f-ile-ng ntja ke mang?  
 REL OBJ-give-PERF-REL dog COP who  
 ‘The one that gave you the dog is who?’
- d. Ke mang ea o-f-ile-ng ntja?  
 COP who REL OBJ-give-PERF-REL dog  
 ‘It’s who that gave you the dog?’

What these examples show is that the potential focus domain in Setswana and Sesotho does not encompass the entire clause in a simple sentence, as in English and Toura; rather it is restricted to the verb and following elements. It is therefore impossible, as (12) shows, to simply shift the focal stress to the subject, as is done in English; rather, the subject, be it an NP or WH-word, must be shifted to a different position in the sentence, specifically, to a position after either the main verb, as in the passive constructions in (12b) and (13b) (in which it is not longer syntactically the subject) and the inversion construction in (12d), or to a postcopular position in a cleft construction, as in (13c,d). In these languages, the structure of a sentence must fit the requirements of the focus structure. There are four options used in (12)-(13) to meet the prohibition against preverbal focal elements: passive, subject inversion, and two types of cleft construction. This is why languages like this are classified as having rigid focus structure and flexible syntax: the syntax adapts to the focus structure, not the other way around.

The situation in Italian, as illustrated in (1b), (2b), and (4b, b´) is similar but not identical to that in the Sotho languages. Lambrecht (1986, 1994) argues that Italian has a restriction against preverbal focal NPs, and therefore in both sentence focus and argument focus, the focal subject must be postverbal. This is accomplished either through inversion or clefting. In the sentence focus example in (2b), the focal subject occurs postverbally, and this is also one of the options available for expressing a focal subject in argument focus, as in (4b); the other is a cleft construction, as in (4b´). Where Italian differs from Sesotho and Setswana is that the prohibition against preverbal focal elements is not absolute; WH-words can occur in the special clause-initial position for WH-words discussed earlier. This is illustrated in (14).

- (14)a. Quando parte l’ultimo treno?  
 when leaves the.last train  
 ‘When does the last train leave?’
- b. Che vende il ragazzo?  
 what sells the boy  
 ‘What is the boy selling?’

Hence in Italian the restriction is against focal preverbal subjects and not against every kind of preverbal focal element.

The essential common feature of these languages is that the syntax adapts to the focus structure. This is why they are characterized as having flexible syntax and rigid focus structure.

Whether a subject occurs preverbally or postverbally is heavily influenced by whether it is topical or focal, and simply shifting the focal stress onto a preverbal subject, as is done in English, is not an option in them.

**3.3 Rigid syntax and rigid focus structure** A good example of a language in which both syntax and focus structure are rigid is French. Lambrecht (1986, 1994) argues that French has the same basic constraint against preverbal focal subjects that Italian has, but in French, unlike Italian, there is no subject-inversion construction akin to (2b) in Italian or (12d) in Sesotho. French solves this problem by having constructions in which an otherwise focal subject appears postverbally and therefore can satisfy this constraint. In the sentence focus example in (2c), where Italian has inversion and English a focal preverbal subject, French has a two clause construction which literally translates as ‘I have my car which broke down.’ There are two striking things about this form. First, the *j’ai* ‘I have’ at the beginning adds nothing semantically to the sentence, as the NP *voiture* ‘car’ is marked for first person singular possession. Second, part of the focal, asserted information occurs in a relative clause, which is quite unusual, given that relative clauses are normally presupposed and not asserted. Nevertheless, this construction gets around the restriction on preverbal focal material, as *ma voiture* ‘my car’ appears after the verb in the matrix clause. In argument focus, a cleft is used, as in (4c); this option is found also in English and Italian. French is also similar to Italian in that it permits WH-words to appear preverbally in questions, as in (15a).

- (15) a. Qui a préparé la nourriture?  
‘Who prepared the food?’  
b. C’est qui qui a préparé la nourriture?  
‘It is who who prepared the food?’

However, there is an alternative cleft form for WH-questions which observes the constraint, given in (15b), and it is in fact the preferred form in spoken French (Knud Lambrecht, personal communication). Thus French seems to be heading toward an absolute Sesotho/Setswana type of prohibition against preverbal focal elements.

Toba Batak presents another combination of rigid syntax and rigid focus structure; it is a strict VOS language, with a left-detached ‘topic’ position and a clause-initial, preverbal position for WH-words in questions (Schachter 1984). Unlike the other languages under discussion, its unmarked word order is comment-topic, and the unmarked focus position is immediately following the verb.

- (16)a. Manjaha buku guru i.  
read book teacher the  
‘The teacher is reading a book.’  
b. Manjaha buku guru.  
‘A (certain) teacher is reading a book.’  
c.??Manjaha buku i guru i.  
‘The teacher is reading the book.’  
d.?\*Manjaha buku i guru.  
‘A (certain) teacher is reading the book.’

The NP immediately following the verb is preferentially interpreted as indefinite and non-specific; a definite NP in that position is strongly disfavored. An indefinite NP in the subject position must be interpreted as specific (referential). The focus structure differences between the two positions can be seen clearly in WH-questions and in the possibility of omitting arguments in discourse. WH-questions are exemplified in (17).

- (17)a. Manjaha buku ise?  
 'Who is reading a book?'  
 b. Ise manjaha buku?  
 'Who is reading a book?'  
 c. Manjaha aha guru i?  
 'What is the teacher reading?'  
 d. \*Aha manjaha guru i?

If a WH-word functions as subject, as in (17a,b), it may appear either *in situ*, as in (a), or clause-initially, as in (b). This indicates that the subject position is not exclusively topical but may be focal. However, if the WH-word functions as the direct object, as in (17c,d), then it must be *in situ*, as the ungrammaticality of (d) shows. If the immediately postverbal position is necessarily focal, then the occurrence of an object WH-word there is to be expected, and there is no need to move it to the beginning of the clause to signal its focal nature. The second phenomenon is the omission of arguments in discourse; it is illustrated in (18).

- (18)a. Mangida imana do nasida?  
 see him PRT they  
 'Do they see him?'  
 b. Olo, mangida imana do.  
 'Yes, [they] see him.'  
 c. \*Olo, mangida nasida.  
 'Yes, they see [him].'

In the answer to a simple yes-no question like (18a), it is possible to leave out the final NP, the subject, but not the immediately postverbal NP, as the ungrammaticality of (c) shows. Thus, the focus structure of the Toba Batak clause can be represented as 'V NP<sub>FOC</sub> NP<sub>TOP/FOC</sub>'.

Since Toba Batak has no case marking on NPs, NPs cannot be moved around after the verb in accordance with the dictates of focus structure. So what happens if the actor NP is indefinite, non-specific and the undergoer is highly topical? An alternative voice form, illustrated in (19), must be used.

- (19)a. Di-jaha guru buku i.  
 PASS-read teacher book the  
 'A teacher is reading the book.'  
 b. Dijaha guru buku.  
 'A teacher is reading a (certain) book.'  
 c. ??Dijaha guru i buku i.  
 'The teacher is reading the book.'

- d. ?\*Dijaha guru i buku.  
'The teacher is reading a (certain) book.'

*Di-* has been glossed as 'passive', because it correlates with the occurrence of the undergoer as subject, but there are good reasons to believe that this construction is quite different from the canonical passive construction; however, this is tangential to the point at hand and will not be pursued here. The pattern of acceptability in (19) with respect to the referentiality and definiteness status of the NPs is the same as in (16), the difference being that it is the undergoer which must be specific and preferentially definite, rather than the actor. The same patterns with respect to WH-questions and omissibility hold in this construction as well.

- (20)a. Dijaha guru aha?  
'What is a teacher reading?'  
b. Aha dijaha guru?  
'What is a teacher reading?'  
c. Dijaha ise buku i?  
'Who is reading the book?'  
d. \*Ise dijaha buku i?

- (21)a. Diida nasida do imana?  
'Do they see him?'  
b. Olo, diida nasida do.  
'Yes, they see [him].'  
c. \*Olo, diida imana.  
'Yes, [they] see him.'

As in (17), a subject WH-word can occur either *in situ*, as in (20a) or in the clause-initial position, as in (b). If the WH-word functions as the actor, as in (20c,d), then it must occur *in situ* in the immediate postverbal position. The omission phenomena in (21) parallel those in (18): only the subject can be omitted, not the immediately postverbal NP.

Toba Batak thus presents a combination of rigid VOS word order with a strong comment-topic tendency in terms of focus structure. The major exception is subject WH-words which can occur *in situ* and need not be moved to preverbal position. Two things may be noted here. First, WH-words were the only exception to the constraint against preverbal focal material in Italian; they are exceptional in this respect in Mandarin Chinese, which otherwise disallows preverbal focus (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997). Second, it is not surprising that clause-final position is not exclusively topical, analogous to the exclusively topical clause-initial preverbal position in Sesotho/Setswana, given that universally, clause-final position is overwhelmingly unmarked for focus.

**3.4 Flexible syntax and flexible focus structure** The final language type is one with flexible syntax and focus structure. A good example of such a language is Russian, often cited as a 'free-word-order language'. In terms of focus structure, however, Russian word order is much less free: in declarative utterances the order topic-focus is strongly adhered to, whereas in WH-questions the focus is normally in clause-initial position, according to Comrie (1979, 1984). He

presents the following examples of questions and answers to illustrate these ordering constraints.<sup>3</sup>

- (22) a. Q: [Kto] [zaščičajet Viktor-a]? 'Who defends Victor?'  
 who.NOM defends Victor-ACC  
 FOCUS TOPIC
- A: [Viktora zaščičajet] [Maksim-Ø]. 'MAXIM defends Victor.'  
 Victor-ACC defends Maxim-NOM  
 TOPIC FOCUS
- b. Q: [Kogo] [zaščičajet Maksim-Ø]? 'Who(m) does Maxim defend?'  
 who.ACC defends Maxim-NOM  
 FOCUS TOPIC
- A: [Maksim-Ø zaščičajet] [Viktor-a]. 'Maxim defends VIKTOR.'  
 Maxim-NOM defends Victor-ACC  
 TOPIC FOCUS
- c. Sp1: [Maksim-Ø] [ubivajet Aleksej-a]. 'Maxim KILLS ALEXEI.  
 Maxim-NOM kills Alexei-ACC  
 TOPIC FOCUS
- Sp2: [A Viktor-a]? 'And VIKTOR? [i.e. 'What is happen-  
 and Victor-ACC ing to Victor?"]  
 FOCUS
- Sp1: [Viktor-a Maksim-Ø] [zaščičajet]. 'Maxim DEFENDS Victor.'  
 Victor-ACC Maxim-NOM defends  
 TOPIC FOCUS

WH-questions and their answers are argument focus constructions, as in (22a,b). Speaker 1's first utterance in (22c) is predicate focus, while Speaker 2's question and 1's response are both argument focus. Topic precedes focus in all of the declarative utterances in (22).

What about sentence focus? Given the flexibility of Russian word order, one might expect that Russian would be like Italian and place a focal subject after the verb. In fact, both word orders are possible, as illustrated in (23).

- (23)Q: Čto slučiloc?  
 what happened?
- A: a. Mašina slomalac'.  
 car broke.down  
 '[My] car broke down.'
- b. Slomalac' mašina.  
 '[My] car broke down.'

The fact that both of these are possible sets Russian apart from Italian, French and Sesotho, since (23a) would not be possible in this context in any of these languages. Moreover, an informal survey of approximately 100 native speakers revealed an overwhelming preference for (23a)

<sup>3</sup>Normally, the answer would be simply the focal element(s) and the topical elements would not be repeated. However, they are included here in order to better illustrate the focus structure constraints on word order.

over (23b).<sup>4</sup> That is, they preferred to have the subject occur before the verb with focal stress rather than have it appear after the verb; this is the pattern found in English. Thus one can conclude that Russian does not exclude preverbal focal subjects, as Italian, French and Sesotho do, and therefore that Russian focus structure is more flexible than that in the other three languages.

Polish, like Russian, is usually characterized as having grammatically unconstrained word order which follows a strict topic-comment ordering principle (e.g. Siewierska 1993 and references cited therein, also Jacennik & Dryer 1992 for a different view). However, Polish shows the same pattern as Russian does with respect to sentence focus. The following examples are from Eschenberg (1998).

- (24)Q: Co się stało?  
what REFL happened  
'What happened?'
- A: a. Samochod mi się zepsuł.  
car 1sgDAT REFL broke.down  
'My car broke down.'
- b. Zepsuł mi się samochod.  
broke.down 1sgDAT REFL car  
'My car broke down.'

Here again the fact that both (24a) and (24b) are possible distinguishes Polish from Italian, French and Setswana and puts it, perhaps not surprisingly, into the same category as Russian. In these languages syntax and focus structure are in a complex relationship; it is not the case that one simply accommodates the other, as in these three languages, English and Toura.

#### 4. Conclusion

We have seen that the interaction of focus structure and syntax, when they are contrasted in terms of the rigidity vs. flexibility of each, generates a four-way typology of languages. Each of the four types is attested, and as one would expect, they differ from each other in interesting ways. A significant syntactic feature of the languages with the most rigid focus structure is that they are verb-medial (SVO). The verb acts as a boundary marker delimiting the potential focus domain in clauses; neither verb-final nor verb-initial languages have such a clear delimiter of the potential focus domain, and accordingly focus structure in them is much less rigid. Toba Batak comes close but still 'leaks' in that it allows focal WH-elements to occur in the clause-final subject position. This brings up another interesting finding: among focal elements, WH-elements in questions seem to be less restricted than other types of focal elements in terms of the constraints on the potential focus domain. In several languages, e.g. Italian, Mandarin and Toba Batak, they alone are able to occur in positions otherwise off-limits to focal elements.

This paper has attempted to show that languages can be categorized not just in terms of how flexible their syntax is but also in terms of how this flexibility or lack thereof interacts with focus

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<sup>4</sup>This was asked of the approximately 100 native speakers attending a lecture I gave at Moscow State University at the invitation of Prof. Kibrik in 1993. Roughly 90% preferred (23a), and 10% preferred (23b).

structure in general and in particular with constraints on the potential focus domain in clauses. From the point of view of this interaction, English, for example, turns out to be quite free in terms of focus placement possibilities, while others turn out to be much more restricted. This typology captures another intriguing and complex aspect of the interaction of form and function in natural language.

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