

MORPHO-SYNTACTIC *MARKEDNESS*
IN ITALIAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CDA

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1. INTRODUCTION

This essay will address two questions: *a*) how sentence constituents can be markedly realized in Italian and *b*) why a marked realization might be preferred over the unmarked one. To answer both questions, it is indispensable to start from the respective context. A formally marked linguistic realization can only be identified as such in the respective syntactic-textual environment in which it is embedded, whereas possible reasons for the sender's resorting to a marked realization of a sentence constituent can only be gathered from the respective extra-linguistic context. The latter clearly is a pragmatic approach to marked realizations. This paper will first put forward the theoretical basis for our practical analyses and then support this by evidence from the field of political speeches, namely by differently marked realizations of arguments and modifiers in speeches by Benito Mussolini, given in the years 1938 and 1941.

A further aim is to look at morpho-syntactic *markedness* in Italian from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This will first of all require clarification of the extent to which the analysis of the morpho-syntactic and pragmatic phenomenon of linguistic *markedness* is relevant to CDA, which entails a multifaceted and polyperspectival approach to discourse. Very often it is the *discourse of power* in the broadest sense which is at the very center of interest to CDA. Wodak & Fairclough (1998: 258) argue that discourse is "constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it [and] since discourse is so socially influential, it gives rise to important issues of power". *Power* is transmitted, constructed and abused through discourse. Discourse, as a vehicle and instrument of *power*, has therefore attracted the particular interest of Critical Discourse Analysts. As *power* is a highly complex and multilayered phenomenon, it is to be analyzed in all its social, anthropological, political, and historical dimensions. Wodak

(2001: 3) states that *power* grows or rises diachronically but functions synchronically. Yet, although *power* is in some way also distributed horizontally in the wide variety of societies and social communities, it basically operates vertically or hierarchically. Due to the complexity of societies in general, the diachronic, the diastratic as well as the diatopic dimensions will consequently also have to be taken into account when analyzing the phenomenon of *power through discourse in society*. It obviously takes a highly complex approach to comprehend a highly complex phenomenon such as *power* and specifically *power through discourse*. CDA sees itself as an interdisciplinary approach to discourse (Wodak, 2002: 6; Fairclough, 2003: 225 and van Dijk, 2001: 352), consisting of a number of different sub-disciplines. Each of these sub-disciplines correspondingly deals with a specific dimension of *power* or *power through discourse*, respectively. Together they eventually try to grasp the complex phenomenon in question. History, political science, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and psychology are, besides linguistics, among the most important ones of these sub-disciplines. In other words, linguistics must equally contribute its share to a complex analysis just as the other above-mentioned sub-disciplines. Yet, despite being just one sub-discipline among many, linguistics *does* play an essential role in the analysis, as the object of CDA is *power through discourse*, which means *power through linguistic discourse*.

However, language itself is already an extremely complex phenomenon. Even if analysts focus on the pragmatic dimension of language, they still have a wide range of linguistic appearances to deal with. The concrete object of interest in this study, however, is, as the title says, *morpho-syntactic markedness in Italian from the perspective of CDA*.

2. CONDITIONS FOR MORPHO-SYNTACTIC MARKEDNESS

Morpho-syntactically marked constituents are intended to be the *focus* –or at least one of various *foci*– of the respective sentence. They are *the* or at least *a* focal point of attention. This means that we are dealing with *focus* when examining the morpho-syntactic *markedness* of sentence constituents. *Focus*, however, has different understandings in different linguistic schools and perspectives. Hence, the necessity here of clarifying terminology. In addition, the linguistic system from which the utterance containing a *focused* element derives has to be taken into account, otherwise the sentence constituents in question cannot even be identified as *focused*. Finally, after identifying a particular sentence constituent as *focused* or markedly realized, the question has to be tackled, *why* this particular constituent of all constituents is *focused* through its marked realization. This after all is a

central issue to CDA. As mentioned above, however, an answer to this question can only be found in the discursive extra-linguistic context.

2.1. Concepts of focus as marked realization

Chomsky and Generative Grammar in general conceptualize and/or define *focus* formally-syntactically (cf. Chomsky, 1977: 202 ff. and 1993: 238 ff.). Both, the *focus* of the sentence and its *presupposition*, which represents the counterpart of *focus* in the generative view, are determined by the surface structure of the sentence. The *focus* of the sentence is understood as the intonation center. The *presupposition*, on the contrary, can be identified if the *focus* is replaced by a variable¹. Starting from very specific examples, Chomsky tried to go beyond those and to formalize certain *focus rules* which, however, have not really reached common or absolute acceptance (Chomsky, 1993: 238). The goal that was pursued by the elaboration of those *focus rules* was to account for the difference in *focus* between sentences –or statements– such as (1) and (2).

- (1) Peter likes JOHN
 (2) PETER likes John²

According to Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG), which derives from the original versions of Chomsky's Generative Grammar, *focus* is a function which noun phrases and prepositional phrases take on outside the clause rather than inside it (van Valin, 2001: 1985)³. *Focus*, as well as *topic*, are non-argument functions. However, Bresnan (2001: 97) points out⁴ that they

¹ In *PETER talks quickly Peter* is the *focus* and *talks quickly* the presupposition. If *PETER* is replaced by *JOHN*, *John* is the new *focus* but the presupposition remains the same.

² The one for (1) is (i) and the one for (2) is (ii):

- (i) the x such that Peter likes x – is John
 (ii) the x such that x likes John – is Peter

³ One of Van Valin's (2001: 185) examples of *focus* in LFG is *What did Chris give Pat?* in which *what* is the focus "because WH-words are always focal in nature; *what* stands for the information that the speaker wants to get from the addressee. In possible answers to the question, e.g. *He gave her a new sweater*, the part replacing *what* (i.e. *a new sweater*) is focal".

⁴ Bresnan (2001: 97) illustrates the difference between the nonargument functions *focus* and *topic* by means of the following contrastive example:

- (i) Q: What did you name your cat? A: ROSIE I named her
 (ii) Q: What did you name your pets? A: My dog, I named Harold. My cat, I named Rosie

often “diverge in their formal expressions, occupying different phrase structure positions or bearing different morphological marking”.

The concept of *function* in Functional Grammar (Dik, 1979: 19 ff. and 1997: 326 ff., and Welke 1993 and 2002) first of all refers to the wide range of communicative functions⁵. Halliday (1994: 24) states that “the particular function that each part has with respect to the structure of the whole” is one of the key issues in Functional Grammar. From the perspective of Functional Grammar, the *focused* element serves the purpose of introducing new and consequently highly relevant information. By introducing new information and transporting very often the key message, this very element, the *focused* sentence constituent, which is the most rhematic part of the sentence, allows for the communicative act to be continued. In the terminology of Functional Grammar it is therefore considered the element with the highest degree of *communicative dynamism*.

After this very rudimentary comparison of the notion of *focus* as marked realization and/or serialization in only three different grammatical approaches, it has become clear that every linguistic term –or concept– has to be clearly defined before being applied in general and, in the present case, in discourse analysis. However, the linguistic-grammatical conceptualization of language which provides the theoretical basis for our analysis is none of the above mentioned *grammars* but Valence Theory.

Valence Theory is not to be understood as a complete grammatical theory. In contrast to grammatical theories which go back to Aristotle and whose basic notion of sentence is bipartite, Valence Theory starts from the verb. On the abstract semantic level the verb as functor opens a determinate number of slots for arguments. Tesnière, generally regarded as the father of modern Valence Theory⁶, distinguishes between zero-, mono-, bi-, and trivalent verbs according to the number of slots for arguments inherent in the respective verb⁷. In the course of the transposition of the sentence structure

In (i) ROSIE is *focus*, in (ii) *my dog, my cat* are *topic*.

⁵ According to Dik (1979²: 19) “the *focus* presents what is relatively the most important or salient information in the given setting”. Later on he (Dik, 1997: 326) argues that “the pragmatic function of *focus* pertains to the *focality* dimension of discourse. The *focal* information in a linguistic expression is that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S to be most essential for A to integrate into his pragmatic information”.

⁶ In the history of linguistics, however, the ideas of valence theory can be traced back several centuries (Agel, 2000: 13 ff.).

⁷ Classical examples of zerovalent verbs are the ones which express weather conditions which, however, it is questionable as *Piove (It rains)* or *Nevica (It snows)* clearly indicate a first actant in the third person singular.

from the abstract semantic level onto the concrete syntactic level, the arguments governed by the verb have to be or can be linguistically specified, depending on whether they are obligatory or facultative complements. As a rule, arguments can be morpho-syntactically realized –or actantified– in different ways⁸, depending both, on the context and on the communicative goal of the message. Under certain circumstances, arguments can even remain zero-realized⁹. However, even if this happens, the slot for the respective argument does not disappear. It just remains *empty*. When analyzing the morpho-syntactically marked realization of arguments as *focused* actants, it firstly has to be checked how many slots the functor opens for arguments. Secondly, it has to be determined in what way an actantified argument represents a marked morpho-syntactic realization. The markedly realized and thereby *focused* element need not necessarily be the rhematic part of the sentence¹⁰. It can, in fact, be almost anywhere in the sentence/utterance. As regards the criterion of communicative dynamism, the markedly realized and thereby *focused* element does not have to introduce any new information, either¹¹. Generally speaking, the very morpho-syntactically marked realization of an argument itself means that this element is put into *focus*. If the respective argument were not to become a *focused* actant, its unmarked linguistic specification would do and, according to the principle of economy, it would be preferred over the marked one.

It has become clear that *focus*, realized through morpho-syntactic *markedness*, is treated differently here than in the above-mentioned grammatical theories. The next step in our approach is to identify the concrete morpho-syntactically marked realizations of arguments in the texts.

2.2. Morpho-syntactically marked realizations of arguments and modifiers in Italian: a matter of forms and functions in discourse

In the following section we will discuss a variety of morpho-syntactically marked specifications of arguments and modifiers as *focused* actants and circumstantials, respectively. This will involve dealing with the linguistic

⁸ The first actant in *Può andare a casa, Egli può andare a casa, Il ragazzo può andare a casa, Chi ha finito il lavoro, può andare a casa* ([He] may go home, He may go home, The boy may go home, Who has done the job may go home) is the third person singular, however, specified in different morpho-syntactic ways.

⁹ For example: *Sempre da ai poveri* (He always gives to the poor).

¹⁰ In *Ho letto il libro* [I have read the book] the second actant *il libro* is the most rhematic sentence constituent and yet we do not consider it *focused* as neither the realization nor the serialization are marked.

¹¹ For pragmatic reasons an element can be focused to highlight well-known information.

realization of arguments and modifiers as well as with the serialization of the resulting actants and modifiers¹².

2.2.1. The marked realization of arguments as focused actants

In Italian, which is partially a pro-drop language like many other Romance languages such as Portuguese, Romanian or Spanish, the first actant pronoun can be deleted provided the reference is unequivocal. In a sentence like *Il presidente arrivò ed egli aprì il convegno* (*The President arrived and HE opened the conference*), *egli* (*he*) is to be considered a morphologically marked realization of the first argument in the third person singular. The subject referent of *aprì* could easily be identified even if the sentence went *Il presidente arrivò ed aprì il convegno*¹³ because it is realized morphologically, i.e. through the grammatical morpheme, in the verb. The additional pronominal specification of the first argument, unnecessary to indicate the referential identity of the two first actants in the compound sentence, obviously serves a different purpose which has to be identified from the pragmatic perspective. The extract below clearly shows that over-explicitly realizing an argument is one way of markedly actantifying it¹⁴:

(3) Vent'anni dopo, nel marzo del 1938, si compie un evento fatale, che si delineava già dal 1878, come *voi* ben sapete [Milioni di uomini lo hanno voluto, nessuno si è opposto. Trieste si trova di fronte ad una nuova situazione, ma Trieste è pronta ad affrontarla e a superarla.] (Mussolini, 1938b: 145).

Twenty years later, in March 1938, a fatal event occurs which was becoming more and more apparent since 1878, as *you yourselves* know very well [Millions of men wanted it, nobody was against it. Trieste faces a new situation but Trieste is ready to stand up to it and to overcome it].

As English is not a pro-drop language, the pronoun *you* for *voi* must appear in the translated version of the quotation. In the Italian version, however, in which the referent can be gathered from the morphology of the

¹² All quotations have been translated into English by the author of the article.

¹³ The *markedness* of the first actant could still be increased if the sentence went *Il presidente arrivò ed egli, il presidente stesso, aprì il convegno* (*The President arrived and HE, the President himself opened the conference*).

¹⁴ As to the second and third actant in Italian the situation is different from the one of the first actant but also in these cases over-explicitness means *focus*. E.g.: A: "E quel conflitto?" B: "Quel conflitto, lo risolse il re." (A: "And that conflict?" B: "That conflict, the king solved it.") or A: "A chi presentarono la domanda di grazie?" B: "Al re e alla regina, presentarono loro la domanda di grazie!" (A: "To whom did they present the plea for clemency?" B: "To the king and to the queen, they presented the plea for clemency to them!").

conjugated verb, the specification of the first argument in the second person plural through *voi* is redundant and syntactically unnecessary. The translation of the opposing Italian constructions *come voi ben sapete* vs. *come ben sapete* into English is therefore anything but unequivocal. *You yourselves* as translation of *voi* can consequently only be seen as an attempt to convey the pragmatic concept standing behind the over-explicitly specified first argument in the second person plural. The fact that the first argument in the second person plural *is* realized pronominally even though it is syntactically and semantically unnecessary means that this actantification is marked which, however, can be accounted for only functionally from the pragmatic-communicative point of view.

Mussolini is suggesting that he knows what his audience knows. This takes the whole discourse down to a more personal and familiar level. By stressing *voi*, Mussolini, for one thing, underlines his awareness of the presence of his audience, and for another establishes and strengthens the personal relationship between the listeners and himself as orator. The listeners are supposed to judge history for themselves. However, his talking to them on this seemingly confidential and familiar level insinuates that he takes for granted that these people, whom he addresses personally, caringly and trustingly, would never disappoint him by disapproving of what he says or does.

2.2.2. The marked realization of modifiers as focused circumstantials

Traditionally it has been claimed that the verbal functor only opens slots for obligatory and facultative arguments which are to be specified actantially. It has been argued and proved in the meantime, though, that certain modifiers, to be realized circumstantially in the course of the syntactification of the functor-argument-modifier structure, can also be obligatory sentence constituents (cf. Moilanen, 1985: 186 ff.). Sentences like **Il discorso durò* (*The speech lasted*) or **La palestra si trova* (**The gym is situated*) are not *well-formed* because they are syntactically incomplete. What is missing, are the circumstantials of time/duration and place, respectively. Sentences, however, often contain additional circumstantials which are not required structurally. Yet, they can be expected to introduce important new information at the communicative level, otherwise they would not be specified. If the verbal functor is seen as the *core element* of the sentence for opening slots for obligatory and facultative actants, it must be conceded to the functor that it also opens slots for modifiers which, however, in general need not necessarily be specified circumstantially without thereby impairing the *well-formedness* of the sentence. It would actually be impossible and

communicatively highly problematic to try to specify most or even all of the modifiers, the slots for whose variables are to be imagined inherent in the verbal functor. Those modifiers which are eventually specified as circumstantials, are automatically to be considered *focused* sentence constituents, simply because they have been chosen from the wide range of modifiers to appear on the syntactic surface, which the following extract illustrates:

(4) Da quel giorno il mondo del liberalismo, della democrazia, della plutocrazia ci dichiarò e ci fece la guerra *con campagne di stampa, diffusione di calunnie, sabotaggi finanziari, attentati e congiure*, anche quando eravamo intenti a quel lavoro di ricostruzione interna che rimarrà nei secoli quale indistruttibile documentazione della nostra volontà creatrice (Mussolini, 1941: 51).

Since that day the world of liberalism, of democracy, of plutocracy has declared war on us and made war against us *with press campaigns, by spreading calumny, through financial sabotage, assassination as well as conspiracy*. All that happened even when we were working on the internal reconstruction which will continue to be remembered in the coming centuries as indestructible documentation of our creative will.

The clause *Da quel giorno il mondo del liberalismo, della democrazia, della plutocrazia ci dichiarò e ci fece la guerra* (*Since that day the world of liberalism, of democracy, of plutocracy has declared war on us and made war against us*) must contain at least one circumstantial to be monosemized. Without any circumstantial the statement would be confusing and misleading. The fact that the statement is monosemized by a modal circumstantial which consists of five parts and which thereby gains particular communicative weight, though, makes it clear that this circumstantial is markedly realized. Interestingly here, the marked realization of this circumstantial occurs on two levels. For one thing the appearance of this circumstantial can be considered marked due to the very linguistic specification of the underlying modifier as a circumstantial, which is structurally unnecessary, and for another, it is the size of the pluripartite circumstantial which counts as marked realization.

As regards the communicative function of this circumstantial, it seems as if this marked, extensive specification pursues two opposing objectives. On the one hand it must monosemize and thereby relativize the *a priori* extremely strong and provocative statement *il mondo del liberalismo, della democrazia, della plutocrazia ci dichiarò e ci fece la guerra* (*the world of liberalism, of democracy, of plutocracy has declared war on us and made war against us*), as the war scene, evoked by the orator, spontaneously creates mental images of atrocities and bloodshed. On the other hand, this

complex circumstantial helps point out that, at least in the orator's opinion, *il mondo del liberalismo, della democrazia, della plutocrazia* (the world of liberalism, of democracy, of plutocracy) almost warlike stops at nothing. That hostile liberal, democratic and plutocratic world, Mussolini is referring to, does not refrain from making war *con campagne di stampa, diffusione di calunnie, sabotaggi finanziari, attentati e congiure* (with press campaigns, by spreading calumny, through financial sabotage, assassination as well as conspiracy).

2.2.3. Marked serialization through cleft sentences

A cleft sentence, which is a complex sentence consisting of a main clause and a subordinate clause, seems a remodeled originally simple sentence. A nominal sentence constituent is taken out of the original simple matrix sentence, transformed into a copula clause and then restored as main clause into the original sentence which thereby turns into a complex sentence. The remaining part of the original sentence becomes the relative clause which depends on the newly created main clause (cf. Glück, 2000: 646). In the following quotation, where it is the first actant of the original, or only hypothetically constructed simple sentence, which is transformed into the copula clause, a phrasal first actant is the result of the transformation. In other words, a simple nominal first actant turns into a phrasal first actant which leads to the marked serialization of the constituents making up the sentence:

(5) [La situazione dell'Austria non migliora.] *È l'Italia che* interviene ora direttamente a risollevarne l'economia con gli accordi del Semmering (Mussolini, 1938a: 68).

[Austria's situation does not improve.] *It is Italy which* now directly intervenes to raise its economy with the Agreements of Semmering.

The copula clause *È l'Italia* (*It is Italy*) has become the phrasal first actant of the sentence. In the corresponding unmarkedly constructed sentence *l'Italia* (*Italy*) would also be the first actant of *interviene* (*intervenes*). The emphasis of the first actant, translated by the transformation of a nominal into a phrasal actant, has resulted in the marked serialization of the cleft sentence.

As far as the communicative function of this sentence construction is concerned, it seems only plausible to assume that the orator wants to draw the listeners' attention to the first actant. Being *forced* or at least *invited* to focus on one particular sentence constituent as center of the sentence, the listeners are likely to be distracted from other potential centers, no matter if they are

actantial or circumstantial specifications. *L'Italia* has rhetorically been placed at the center of interest. There is a chance that the listeners might uncritically consider Italy the generous Savior of Austria without questioning the background, the means or the goals of Italy's intervention alluded to by the orator.

2.2.4. Marked serialization and realization through passive construction with specification of the agent¹⁵

The passive diathesis as converse (Koch, 1995: 125) of the active diathesis leads to a change in *valence potency* in Ágel's (1995: 15) terms. The *valence potency* of a verb can be reduced by the transformation of the active into the passive diathesis (Welke, 1988: 138). A bivalent verb such as *prendere* (*take*) implies the sentence program A1 – V – A2¹⁶, which could be realized, for example, through *Il presidente prese la decisione* (*The president took the decision*). If this sentence is turned into a passive construction, the agentive first actant *il presidente* (*the president*) becomes a facultative third actant [*dal presidente* (*by the president*)] and the resulting sentence program is A1 – V – (A3), which can be seen in *La decisione fu presa [dal presidente]* (*The decision was taken [by the president]*). Thereby the semantic role of the agent is faded out. It is *catapulted out* of the actantial potential, as Ágel (1995: 18) puts it, which results in an altered information structure (Oesterreicher, 1991: 66). However, as the logical and the grammatical subject are not identical any longer (Bondzio, 1971: 97), the abstract-logical series of realized arguments changes, whereby also the meaning of the sentence alters. Welke (1994: 13) argues that the passive diathesis can, among other things, be seen as an instruction to the receiver to assume a different perspective. The realization as well as the serialization of arguments is to be considered marked in case the third argument is specified as agentive third actant despite its facultative status. Explicating a syntactically facultative element automatically means *focusing* it. Or, as Heringer (*cf.* 1984: 56) says, whenever something structurally dispensable is lexemically realized, it becomes particularly informative. If it were not highly relevant at the communicative level, it would not be specified according to the criterion of relevance, which will be illustrated by the following quotation:

(6) [Il popolo italiano, il popolo fascista merita e avrà la vittoria]. Le privazioni, le sofferenze, i sacrifici che *dalla quasi unanimità degli italiani e delle italiane*

¹⁵ We speak of the *agent* at the abstract semantic level but of the *agentive* as its lexemic realization at the syntactic level.

¹⁶ Here we define A1 as first actant, A2 as second actant and A3 as third actant.

vengono affrontati con coraggio e con dignità che può dirsi veramente esemplare, avranno il loro compenso, il giorno in cui (...) il triplice, immenso grido attraverserà fulmineo le montagne e gli oceani ed accenderà di nuove speranze e consolerà di nuove certezze l'anima delle moltitudini: vittoria, Italia, pace con giustizia tra i popoli (Mussolini, 1941: 58).

[The Italian people, the fascist people deserves and will have the victory]. The deprivations, the suffering, the sacrifices faced with courage and dignity *almost unanimously by the Italians*, which can truly be called exemplary, will be redressed the day the immense, lightning, triple scream will cross the mountains and the oceans and arouse new hopes and console the souls of the masses with new certainties: victory, Italy, peace with justice among the peoples.

The agentive third actant is focused twice in this quotation: on the one hand it is focused due to its very specification despite its syntactically facultative status, and on the other hand it is its preverbal position which underlines the communicative weight of this sentence constituent. Through this double-focusing of the agentive actant, Mussolini seems to stress that almost all Italians actively support his fascist ideology. By keeping the agentive actant from being in the most rhematic position, which is the position that implies the highest degree of *communicative dynamism*, he draws the audience's special attention to another element, namely to the one which is in that position, which is the modal circumstantial *con coraggio e con dignità (with courage and dignity)*. By attributing a high degree of *communicative dynamism* to these positively connoted circumstantials, the orator highlights for one thing the value he attributes to the support of fascism. By placing the agentive actant even before the verb, he might aim at keeping the listeners from concentrating too much on their own agentive role and from subsequently questioning it.

3. CONCLUSION

This short study has shown both that morpho-syntactic *markedness* of actants and/or circumstantials in Italian can be realized in various ways and that it serves different functional objectives. The extracts analyzed demonstrate that morpho-syntactic *markedness* is the result of cleft sentences, of over-explicit lexemic actantial realizations, of passive constructions with specified agents or of the structurally unnecessary specification of circumstantials. Morpho-syntactic *markedness*, never required by the criterion of syntactic well-formedness, clearly serves functional goals. The identification and interpretation of these goals will always, to a certain degree, be speculative. An attempt at illustration of identification and interpretation has been outlined above.

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