

## Selectives (sentence topic markers), oppositive contrast and word order

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In this talk, I will address markers and constructions hosted by the opposite contrast domain (Lakoff 1971; Mauri 2008), illustrated in examples (1) and (2), from a cross-linguistic perspective.

In Wälchli (2022), I used the oppositive contrast domain to define a heterogeneous group of sentence topic markers (“selectives”) in a sample of 81 languages and considered to what extent the markers thus obtained are also used on subordinate clauses, notably conditional clauses, thus reconsidering Haiman’s (1978) claim that conditionals are topics. Constituents marked with selectives indicate a point of departure in the sentence from which further common ground can be established, which is why conditional clauses are highly suitable as such constituents (see Lehmann 1974). Selectives tend to occur early in the sentence, but in most languages they follow the constituent they scope over, as Hills Karbi *ke* [TOP] in (1), which is the ideal position for avoiding scope ambiguity, given their characteristically high degree of freedom-of-host-selection (nominal, pronominal and clausal constituents). Interestingly, in almost all languages considered, selectives are not restricted to contrast constructions, even though I used oppositive contrast as a definitional domain for them.

While selectives tend to occur both in the anchor sentence and in the contrast sentence in contrast constructions, many languages also have oppositive contrast markers, which only occur once in oppositive contrast. In a recent paper (Wälchli 2023), I have investigated how oppositive contrast markers and selectives relate to each other from a cross-linguistic perspective. The contrast connective used in oppositive contrast can also differ only in word order in oppositive contrast constructions, as in (2) from Estonian, where *aga* ‘but’ follows a contrast-sentence-initial oppositive phrase. “Oppositive phrase” (in brackets in (1-2)) is a purely descriptive notion to denote the phrase in oppositive contrast constructions that is contrasted with a phrase in the anchor sentence, the “anchor phrase” (in curly braces). There seems to be a universal tendency for oppositive phrases to be placed initially in languages of all basic word order types, notably including languages where basic word-order is verb-initial.

The constructions and descriptive notions considered in the talk will be confronted with elements from Role-and-Reference Grammar, such as the left-detached position. I will argue that the cross-linguistic trends identified in the talk are well in-line with a theory that makes a systematic distinction between sentence and clause levels.

### Examples

(1) Hills Karbi (mjw-x-bible 40026011)

*Athe-ke* {*ke-duk*      *kelak*      *atum*} *ke*      *kaike-ta*  
thus-TOP NMLZ-poor      weary      PL      TOP      always-ADD  
*nang-tum*      *a-long*      *do-ver-ji*,  
2-PL      POSS-LOC      be-always-IRR  
*bonta* [*ne*]-*ke*      *nang-tum*      *a-long*      *kaike*      *do-ver-ve*.  
**but**      1SG-TOP 2-PL      POSS-LOC      always      be-always~NEG  
‘...the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.’

(2) Estonian (est-x-bible-1997 40026011)

{Vaeseid}	on	teie	juur-es	ju	alati,
poor.PART.PL	be.PRS.3SG	2PL.GEN	at-INESS	PTC	always
[mind]	<b>aga</b>	ei	ole	te-i-l	alati.
1SG.PART	<b>BUT2</b>	NEG	be.CONEG	2PL-PL-ADESS	always

‘...[the poor] you always have with you, but you do not always have [me]’

## References

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