Left Dislocation Construction in Modern Languages: A Comparative Study of Chinese and European languages

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Abstract:

Left Dislocation (LD), as a marked construction syntactically, is of great significance theoretically and practically. However, academic studies on the syntax-discourse interface of the construction and the logic behind it are still at the budding stage. Studies on LD in English, Chinese, French, German and Spanish are emerging. Particularly in the past four decades, a fair amount of work has been done on the discourse functions of a number of marked syntactic constructions in English. This paper will provide a theoretical and comparative survey on the LD studies of respective languages, with special emphasis on Chinese and English, and propose a new theoretical framework.

Key Words: Left Dislocation (LD), Syntax-discourse Interface, Discourse Function, TOP

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has long been noticed that there appear to be correlations between information structure and grammatical form. The occurrence of normally clause-internal material in utterance-initial position, as in Left Dislocation (LD) constructions, is an example of pragmatically motivated syntax. The organization of a text has some influence on the formation of a single sentence; a well-formed sentence can contribute to the effectiveness of a text. Since form-function associations are arbitrary, a single discourse function may be associated with different syntactic forms and a single syntactic form may be associated with different discourse functions. And the discourse functions of some syntactic forms are mainly explored in the domain of syntax-discourse interface.

Left Dislocation (LD) is a syntactic phenomenon which can be observed to act at several different levels. Firstly, from a cognitive or informational perspective, LD is considered to be one of the major means to avoid grammatical complexity and to obey the cognitive-linguistic limitations given in linguistic interaction. Secondly, from an interactive point of view, LD would be the means to negotiate referents and compete for or gain the floor, as scholars in linguistic circle believe in. Thirdly, from a contextual standpoint, LD’s most cited main “referent grounding” function can be argued to achieve more specific shades which are affected by contextual features and speakers’ attitudes.

There have been a fair number of researches that have been done preliminarily on LD in English, while only a few on those in Chinese which are based on simple comparison of the construction between the two languages. The purpose of this paper is to study and compare the syntactic forms and discourse functions of LD construction in both English and Chinese, and analyze the interface of them.

2. STUDIES ON LD IN CHINESE

Despite the fact that LDs are extensively used in Chinese communications, the academic studies on its syntactic and functional implications are relatively insufficient. As a result, it is a necessity to conduct a basic research on its syntactic and discourse functions. In Chinese language, Quasi-LDs have various forms that are generally called “Atypical LDs”, such as “As for”, “As to”, etc., for they cannot meet the criteria of Ross’s definition on LD. However, according to Bussmann’s definition, these “Quasi-LDs” are part of LD in a broad sense.

As early as in the 1940s, Wang used the term “意复”(repetition of meaning) when referring to LD. He stated: “The repetition of meaning is the repetition of pronouns instead of the same words. It can be classified into three types: (1) the repetition of subject; (2) the repetition of object; (3) the repetition of possessive pronouns. (意复者，字面上并不重复，只是用代词复指。此类可分为三种：（1）复主位；（2）复目的位；（3）复加语”) (Wang Li, 1985: 417). Lü Shuxiang referred to the concept of “movement” in explaining the flexibility of
Chinese sentences by saying: “Movement’ means a constituent is moved out of its usual position and placed in another location… In order to put emphasis on a particular constituent, we usually move it to the front of the sentence (移位就是一个成分离开它平常的位置，出现在另外的位置。……为了强调某一个成分，我们常常把它挪到句子头上去。)”. “Sometimes, we move the divergent features of the listed same categorical things to the front of the sentences, leaving the shared features on the normal positions. (有时候我们把列举的同类事物的区别部分挪到前边去，只把共有的部分留在正常的位置上。)” (Lü, 1984: 545-546).

And Lü used the following examples:

(4) 广阔的平原底下，横的，竖的，直的，弯的，挖了不计其数的地道。
   Beneath the vast plain, the horizontal, the vertical, the straight, the winding, dug numerous tunnels.

(5) 他出去一趟，方的，圆的，高的，矮的，买了一大堆。
   He went out, the square, the round, the tall, the short, bought a pile of them.

(6) 十年来，大大小小，他经历了几十次战役。
   Ten years more, big ones and small ones, he has experienced dozens of battles.

The above three examples reveals that there seems to be a universal phenomenon of LD in English, Chinese and other languages. Due to its flexibility in function, Chinese seemingly prevail over English in LD frequency.

2.1 Cognitive Account

Wen (2005) is regarded as the first scholar in China to present a cognitive approach to the study of LD. In his article “Left Dislocation Constructions: A Cognitive Account”, Wen investigates the properties, functions and cognitive foundations of LD. According to Wen, the reason why a speaker chooses LD rather than normal word order constructions in verbal communication is that he has selected a different construal so that he is able to make the left-dislocated element more prominent, and achieve different discursive effects. The cognitive premise of LD is mainly for emphasis.

Different from Wen, Cheng (2004) compares LD in English and Chinese in the paper “syntactic and semantic differences between E-C LD constructions”. She refers LD to a typical topic structure which exists in both English and Chinese with quite different local contexts and semantic relationships. Aside from the discourse functions, the Chinese topics also play a syntactic role. Combined by certain semantic content and syntactic forms, topic structure in
Chinese is a special grammatical category in the process of grammaticalization, she proposes. (Cheng, 2004: 63-67).

Thereafter, Cheng, in her article “Frequency of LD and the Emergence of Topic Construction”, further shows that the frequency of LD (TC_1) is much higher than typical TOP (TC_2) in Archaic Chinese but from 900 A.D by analyzing relevant data TC_1 declined sharply while the other greatly rose. She hypothesizes that it is the time that Chinese topic had begun its grammaticalization and TC_1 is the prototype of the grammaticalized topic. In the frequency of TC_1 and TC_2 in English, however, the same diachronic change hasn’t been found. Topic in English doesn’t hold its own syntactic position and has retained the functional status from early modern English to the present day English. New topic constructions in Chinese offer good examples for the study of topic typology (Cheng, 2006: 101-107).

Moreover, corpus is extensively used in the research on LD in Chinese Language. For instance, in the paper “A Study on Topicalization and Left Dislocation in the Beijing Dialect and Its Typological Implications”, Liu Linjun and Gao present a corpus study of the two topic-comment constructions: TOP and LD in the Beijing dialect. Their study finds that TOP not only occurs more frequently than LD in the corpus, but also has a more diverse role to fulfill in discourse. When put against the background of other languages in the world, TOP in Mandarin, a topic-prominent language, is not simply pragmatically motivated as in English, a subject-prominent language, and its extensive distribution across the board of different linguistic constructions attests to its syntactic significance (Liu and Gao, 2010: 44).

2.2 Pragmatic Account

Besides cognitive account, Shi (2009) puts pragmatic account into practice. In “the Distribution of Referential Expressions in LDs and Their Accessibility Interpretation”, Shi conducts a study on the syntactic features of referential expressions in LDs within the theoretical framework of accessibility. It is found that definite descriptions, proper names and stressed pronouns which have lower accessibility are often chosen to fulfill the role of the left dislocated component, and pronouns with higher accessibility as its co-referential expression (Shi, 2009).

2.3 Functional Account

Functional account is the third approach to conduct researches on LD in Chinese. Zhang and Qiu’s article “the Functional Explanation of Movement Structure” highlights that left and right dislocations serve various functions. The former can be employed to serve such functions as the realization of textual meaning, management of topic, specification of personal reference, maintenance of structural balance, emphasis on prefaces and semantic exaggeration, whereas the latter may make contribution to clarification and emphasis. Furthermore dislocation structures may be regarded as marked constructions by some Chinese scholars (Zhang and Qiu, 2006: 1).
3. STUDIES ON LD IN ENGLISH

There is a considerable amount of LD in modern English, and the discourse function of the syntactic construction of LD in English has received significant attention. Previous researches, with divergent approaches and methodologies, have done a lot in different ways.

LD in English has also been studied intensively and extensively by Chinese scholars in this respect. Young (2006) analyzes the English LD construction in terms of its syntactic/semantic structure information structure, topical structure as well as its textual functions. According to his analysis, the LD construction consists of two components: the left detached section and the matrix clause. The left-detached section is mostly a nominal phrase and it is linked with the matrix clause via coreference by means of usually a pro-form. The information contained in the left detached section, as claimed by Yang, can be neither too new nor too old. It is mainly the anchored brand-new information, the unused new information or the inferable information which differs greatly from the typical information structure of the canonical sentence. The left detached section acts as an independent topic which dominates the matrix clause on the right. The property of its being used as an independent discourse unit brings to it such textual functions as topic introduction topic insertion process-simplification and topic contrasting (Yang, 2008: 23).

The research on LD in English carried out by European scholars up to now can be considered thorough and deep. For instance, Chafe (1987) demonstrates that the introduction of new entities to the discourse is constrained by some cognitive factors. To introduce “one new concept at a time” is preferred cross-linguistically, and has been confirmed by some other linguists. The point can be shown by the following two sentences.

**Presentational clause**

(1) There is a girl from the house. She asked me…

**Topic/Comment clause**

(2) I know a girl from the house. She asked me…

Apparently, the new entity is introduced as the complement of the predicador in both examples. In example (1) the presentational clause uses a dummy subject—“there” to predicate the existence of the new entity, and the whole clause presents new information. In example (2) the

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subject of the topic/comment clause is by definition at least cognitively accessible, if not discourse active, as Chafe claims.

From the way brand-new participants are introduced, it can be seen that as for most constraints, there are usually shortcuts which may allow speakers to accomplish their objectives more efficiently. LD is one such shortcut; to put is simply, it is to syntactically detach the new entity from the main part of the clause. With the new entity being introduced outside the main clause, it can function as the topic while still honoring Chafe’s “one new concept” constraint. It is believed that in order to help the reader make the connection between the dislocated entity and its function in the main clause that follows, the detached element is reiterated in the main clause using a pronoun of some kind that refers back to the detached element. Prototypically, the pronominal trace is placed in the canonical position in the clause of the dislocated component, namely, its ‘normal’ position. This detachment construction is particularly referred to by linguists as a dislocation, and by grammarians as a pendens construction. The primary functions of these constructions are to introduce new participants into a discourse or to reintroduce a referent which was previously introduced but which has not been mentioned in the immediately preceding discourse (Foley, and Van Valin, 1985: 356).

The examples they cite include a list of items, one of which is resumed as the topic after the list is introduced. It aims at promoting one of the previously mentioned entities to the primary topic of the discourse. Another similar analysis is done by Lambrecht (1996), professor of French and Italian at the University of Texas at Austin. He notes that LD constructions are reserved for topic-announcing or topic-shifting contexts, while presentational constructions are the standard means of promoting a topic from non-active (brand-new, unused, or accessible) to active in the hearer’s mental representation of the discourse.

Example (3)
LD
“This girl from the house, she asked...”
Rhetorical question
“See the girl from the house? She asked...”

Generally speaking, LDs are regarded as the tool to serve to streamline the introduction of an entity to the discourse. English allows LDs, but it seems to prefer other devices like rhetorical question to accomplish the same discourse task. Both have the effect of either announcing or shifting the topic of the clause that follows. They also attract more attention to the topic than it would have received being introduced using one of the more conventional methods. Therefore, some scholars like Runge (Runge, 2008: 1-3) argue that, where the topic would not otherwise
have been cognitively accessible, LDs serve a necessary function, activating the entity into the discourse.

Fariña (1995) argues that the relationship between left dislocated entities and these main clauses is merely a semantic one of co-reference and that, therefore, no formal, structural liaison exists between them. The analysis that contemplates the left-dislocated constituent as a “sister” of a lower clausal node inside the highest S node is consequently abandoned in favour of a discourse-oriented interpretation. According to his hypothesis, LD is best seen as involving structurally independent co-referential units in discourse.

The following section will provide more description about the previous researches on LD from the perspectives of generative approach, functional approach, pragmatic approach and applied linguistic approach, which will contribute to the unveiling of the problems left unsolved by former linguists.

### 3.1 Generative Approach

The academic survey by this paper reveals that much of the generative literature regards LD as a constituent inside a superordinate clausal node that branches off into the dislocation proper and the usual sentence node. In this external configuration relative to the predication contained in the lower sentence, the LD is said to occupy a TOP(IC) position inside the overall sentence structure.

**The TOP(IC) Node**

“LD” in English traces back to Ross (1967). In his influential work, Ross defined left-dislocated NPs as the product of a “copying rule” which moves a constituent to the leftmost position in the S tree leaving a pronominal copy in the original place. The co-reference relationship between the two NPs is guaranteed as a result of the movement transformation. However, Ross opposed copying rules of this sort to chopping rules, such as TOP, in which no proxy proform is left behind after movement of the NP. For reasons that need not detain us here, Ross’s theory came in for a good deal of criticism and was subsequently abandoned in favour of a non-transformational approach. Thus, the view soon became firmly established among generative grammarians that LD does not involve movement but, rather, generation in the base (Haegeman, 1991: 213; 368-70). To be precise, LDs are base-generated in a non-argument position through adjunction to the sentence. In essence, this analysis entails a surface structure as shown in tree (1), which, using more traditional representational conventions, can be turned into tree (2). However, it is not considered that the LDed constituent is a constituent of the

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3 The base-generation theory originates in Chomsky (1977: 80), where, unlike the accounts just cited, LD and topicalization are believed to be the same type of structure. In another respect, needless to say, not all generative grammarians uphold a sentence-based view of LD. See Maling and Zaenen (1981: 261) and Bowers (1981: 271) for doubts concerning this view. See also Koster's analysis of LD as a “satellite” of S, and Authier's defence of the “old” theory of movement.
sentence to start with, no matter how the configuration chosen might be. This qualification is not immaterial. In the generative literature, the base-generation theory of LD is just a part of a general conception of grammar, and the way this part relates to the other aspects of the grammar stems from general postulates of the theory. Nevertheless, the question remains unanswered that what evidence can test that “detached” NPs belong (in whatever means) with the sentences that follow them. Putting this way, the issue addressed in this paper does not depend so much on particular syntactic theories as on such fundamental syntactic primitives as phrase-structure, dependency and representation.

Tree (1)

![Tree (1)](Fariña, 1995: 8-9)

Tree (2)

![Tree (2)](Fariña, 1995: 8-9)
As for tree (2), as argued by Fariña, the dislocated NP is generated as a sister of the whole sentence, thereby giving rise to a superordinate S node that comprises the two. In this respect, the external position that the base-generation theory assigns to LDs relative to the predication is an exact copy of the position that is usually allocated to peripheral sentence adverbials (Baltin), as shown in tree (3).

Tree (3)

![Tree Diagram](image)

Figure 1.3 (Fariña, 1995: 8-9)

### 3.2 Functional Approach

Apart from generative approach and functional approach, many functional linguists and discourse analysts in general view LD as “syntactically unrelated to the sentence it refers to”. According to this interpretation, left-dislocated NPs are just independent NPs in discourse. Functional studies of LD are quite few, and most literature focuses on English instead of other languages. The ones that do exist are mostly written within a discourse analysis framework. The representative ones are by Ochs and Schieffelin (1976, 1983), Givón (1983) and Prince (1985).

First of all, the study by Ochs and Schieffelin (1976, 1983) will be discussed hereafter. Their research focuses on the “Reference + Proposition constructions”, a term that is a little broader than what this paper defined as “LD”; it is defined in the following way: “some referent is specified initially and is then followed by a proposition relevant in some way to this referent” (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1983: 158-159). Their study deals with spontaneous conversational discourse, nevertheless their analysis is not based on an extensive corpus of different discourse
types, nor does it give a great detail of the LDs’ discourse context. Their conclusion is that the initial referent is some entity known to or knowable by the hearer from the nonverbal context of the utterance from some prior background experience. To put it simply, it is some entity that the hearer can identify or recognize. But this argument is not well grounded, and it seems to require a further elaboration.

Moreover, Ochs and Schieffelin argue that formally and functionally the expression of the initial referent and the expression of subsequent predications constitute more or less independent communicative acts. They say “more or less” because these constructions vary in the extent to which they are formally integrated. But they consider the same for relations between separate utterances within a stretch of discourse. They may be somehow formally bound through the use of conjunctions, adverbs, anaphora and the like. When discourse and sentence are put into contrast, it is probably a continuum. Along this continuum, communicative acts are morpho-syntactically or otherwise formally linked to varying extents. The continuum is used to characterize properties within and across languages (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1976: 255).

Givón argues that while the cross-language studies largely upholds this scale, it is clearer now that the scale is still too language-specific, and that better and typologically more relevant predictions can be made by recognizing a number of scales, each reflecting some specific syntactic coding means—be those word-order, morphology, intonation or phonological size—which alone or in various combinational form, make up the syntactic constructions that code our scalar domain (Givón, 1983:18).

The defect of Givón’s research is also apparent. From the scale above, it can be seen that the coding of a referent depends on its accessibility as a topic. But the study obviously neglects the interactional dimension, uses too rigid quantitativeness and emphasizes only narrative discourse. LD is regarded as a referential expression which is directly relatable to topic accessibility.

The third study is also DA analysis done by Prince. Without exploring this analysis, Prince’s model of the functional contrast between LD and TOP, in some detail, we can hardly accurately describe the point of departure for this study. There is a major difference between Prince’s analysis of LD and the analyses of many other researchers. While many linguists agree that there is a single function of the LD sentence type—that is to establish a new sentence-level topic, Prince counters this analytic trend by asserting that “no single function can in fact account for all of the LD data in English” (Prince, 1997: 120). In early work, Prince referred generally to an LD-TOP contrast4, and in the later work5 she states clearly that only one usage of LD is involved in the relevant markedness opposition, instead of all the LD forms.

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Therefore, what makes difference is that Prince (1985) compares LD and TOP. Here, Prince claims two major types of LD, which she labels LD-1 and LD-2, respectively. For instance, the following is considered to be cases in point of LD-1 and LD-2:

LD-1: “The book Z had I had got from a guy who got it from a very good call girl. We kept a copy of that book in a safe deposit box. The standard procedure was that.. [new paragraph] My first book, Z paid half of each trick to the person who gave it to me. After that, it was my book.” (Prince, 1985: 74)

LD-2: “Once when we went to Big Bear and we caught a lot of fish and Suzie Kathy and Betty went to a park and me my mom and dad went fishing. And this guy his fishing pole fell down in the water and he had to go down and get it.” (Prince, 1985: 75)

Observed from the above examples, The function of LD-1 is claimed as “LD-1 marks an entity as being already evoked in the discourse or else in a salient set relation to something already evoked. The entity thus marked in represented by the NP.” The function of LD-2 is described as “Discourse Function of LD-2: LD-2 creates a separate information-unit for an entity not currently in focus and not represented by an NP in a favored position, e.g., sentence-final, for introducing out-of-focus entities.” (Prince, 1985: 74-75)

Prince also claims that the NP should not be in a “favored position”. In other words, LDs with a gap functioning as a direct object would, by definition, not be instance of LD-2. LD is thus viewed purely as a word order variation, but its processual dimension is ignored.

According to Prince’s analysis, TOP and LD-2 are in an inclusive relationship: TOP has the sole function of LD-2 that is marking a poset relation. Furthermore, TOP is more specialized for it has one more function which does not share with LD-2. The proposed relationship among LD-1, LD-2, and TOP is illustrated by Figure 1.4. In this figure, “DF” stands for the set of discourse functions associated with each construction.

![Figure 1.4 The Functional Relationship between LD-1, LD-2 and TOP (Prince 1981a, 1984, 1997)](image)

Fourthly, Aijmer (1989) treats LD within Dik’s functional grammar framework (Dik, 1981: 128), dividing LD into Themes— the function associated with left-dislocated structures, and Tails— the function related to right-dislocated structures in English conversation. The study shows that Themes and Tails are functionally divergent phenomena. The former are explained interactionally in terms of the negotiation of information which takes place between speaker and hearer, while the latter are associated with the interpersonal or polite function of speech. The functions mentioned in the study are anticipated identification, reinforcing (Quirk et al, 1985: 1778), and foregrounding (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976b). It is concluded that the principle behind presenting an NP as Theme is to activate a discourse referent (discourse topic). The choice depends on how what the speaker wants to discuss about is related to the preceding context. The Theme can also be explained as a device for simplification and clarification which is conditioned by the speech situation (Aijmer, 1989: 137-52). Aijmer’s research, however, focuses only on the different processing functions of LD and right dislocation, making little specific contribution to the discourse functions of LD to some extent.

Fifthly, Geluykens (1992) attempts a functional analysis of LD in English discourse by using a resolutely empirical methodology, and he tries to employ aspects of both DA and CA methods. The study shows that, first of all, LD is a typically conversational phenomenon, and as a result, a good understanding of the use of LD can only be obtained by conducting a research on conversation. LD is not only, quantitatively speaking, more frequent in conversation, its functioning in other discourse types is, to a large extent, a reflection of its conversational functions. In this sense, the functions of LD in conversation are basic as well.

### 3.3 Pragmatic Approach

Different from the generative approach, Gregory and Michaelis (2001) investigate the functional opposition between two pragmatically specialized constructions of English: TOP and LD. Concerning the function of LD specifically, the two scholars use distributional trends in conversational data from the Switchboard corpus to revise some conclusions reached by Prince (1981a, 1981b, 1997). In Prince’s works, it is stated that LD has no unitary function, but Gregory and Michaelis emphasize that the distinct uses of the construction identified by Prince can be classified under the general function of topic promotion. While Prince claims that TOP is a more pragmatically specialized construction than LD, they place emphasis on the fact that LD has equally restrictive and distinct use conditions, which reflect its status as a topic-promoting device (Gregory and Michaelis, 2001: 1665).

Other grammarians focus on the pragmatic functions served by inversions in general, (cf. Quirk et al., 1972; Chafe, 1976). These studies explore the usefulness of non-canonical word order for

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6 It is held by some scholars that pragmatics is a subfield of functional linguistics, but here the author would like to make the pragmatic approach as an important part for the benefit of the study.
textual cohesion, contrastiveness, euphony, and ease of language processing, as fruitful as pragmatics is to the understanding of how people actually use languages, and there are some linguists who are uncomfortable using pragmatic principles as an explanatory force in linguistics for two reasons. First, pragmatic principles of language organization are not very rigorous as scientific principles, i.e. they do not make completely accurate predictions about word order. Pragmatic principles discuss GRAMMTICAL TENDENCIES, which are the result of one discourse function or another. Pragmatic principles are not GRAMMTICAL RULES, they believed. For example, Quirk et al. (1972), and others have often noted the tendency for “heavy” clausal constituents to appear clause finally-the euphonic function of “end-weight”.

3.4 Applied Linguistic Approach

Apart from the above-mentioned scholars, Parisse (2008) is also a representative. He observes that children produce more LDs than adults and do not simply reproduce a feature of adults’ oral language. As to the understanding of the difference in production of left-dislocated subjects between children and adults, he believes that more plausible explanations are performance limitation or a consequence of the development of the use of personal pronouns, even when they are not obligatory. He argued as well that children’s left-dislocated subjects should not be considered as a copy of adults’, but as a specific construction pattern that appears during the course of language development. Hence, LD is an inevitable stage for Children’s language development.

4. STUDIES ON LD IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Apart from studies on LD in English and Chinese, other studies on LD are worth attentions, particularly those on Spanish, German, French and Italian.

4.1 LD in Spanish

Like English and Chinese, Spanish is also abundant with LDs. For instance, Rivero (1980) has proposed that left-dislocated structures should be generated in the base, with an NP in a TOP node immediately dominated by an S’node, and an NP or pronoun elsewhere in the string. Such a configuration may appear embedded in many types of complement clauses and relative sentences. From this analysis, it follows that left-dislocated structures are not constrained by conditions associated with movement rules. In other words, Left-dislocated structures in Spanish may lose their basic syntactic characteristics through an unrelated transformational process that deletes subject pronouns freely. He has also motivated an analysis of TOP as a movement process into COMP, one that cannot be identified with Wh Movement but which applies iteratively, within the limits set by the Subjacency Condition. Therefore, he has eliminated the possibility of postulating movement transformations—Raising and TOP—that would violate a wide set of conditions that apply to movement rules in general. By proposing analyses that do not require movement rules that are not sensitive to constraints on
transformations, by limiting the movement rule analysis to cases that are subject to those
constraints, Rivero has implicitly argued for the validity of those movement restrictions in
Spanish (Rivero, 1980: 363-393).

Terms such as “LD” and “TOP”, which originally referred to particular constructions in
English, have also been used to refer to apparently similar topicalizing strategies in Spanish.
However, in Casielles-Suárez’s (2003) study “Left-Dislocated Structures in Spanish”, a deeper
analysis of the structures observed in Spanish is done, which shows that they differ from the
English constructions syntactically, pragmatically and phonologically. Thus, Casielles-Suárez
believes, what has been considered to be the Spanish equivalent of English LD is in fact a
different construction which involves a clitic, and does not show any of the restrictions of
English LD. Moreover, Spanish also has a more restricted type of LD which has a strong
pronoun, and does behave like English LD. Finally, what looks prima facie like a TOP in
Spanish is in fact an instance of LD with no overt pronoun. From this perspective, Casielles-
Suárez concludes that Spanish has no TOP, but it shows three types of LD: a clitic LD, a
strong-pronoun LD, and a clitic LD with no overt clitic.

The typical assumption in a pro-drop language like Spanish is that covert as well as overt
subjects secure a preverbal position at Spell Out in which their case and agreement properties
are satisfied. The paper “Left Dislocated Subjects and the Pro-drop Parameter: A Case Study of
Spanish” written by Ordóñez and Treviño (Ordóñez and Treviño, 1999) presents more evidence
against such a claim. On the one hand, their research shows that pre-verbal overt subjects
pattern with left dislocated Dos and IOs in a wide range of syntactic contexts: ellipsis,
extraction of quantifiers and interpretation of pre-verbal quantifiers. In these same contexts,
sentences with a silent subject differ from sentences with overt ones. It is therefore concluded
that overt pre-verbal subjects are necessarily left dislocated.

4.2 LD in German

In the paper “Notes on the Syntax and the Pragmatics of German Left Dislocation” by Frey,
syntactic properties of German Left Dislocation (GLD) are analyzed and studied. It is shown
that GLD is always a topic marking construction. In the paper, it holds that the phrase which is
designated as a topic by GLD cannot be a sentence topic in a preceding sentence. Furthermore,
GLD demands that its designated topical phrase be linked to the preceding text. With regard to
discourse topics, it is argued that GLD can only be used to continue a given discourse topic, but
it cannot be used to embark on a new one. The collection of properties this paper assigned to
GLD is unique to GLD. It is shown that V-second clauses and HTLD (Hanging Topic Left
Dislocation) reveal a different pattern. With respect to the syntax of GLD, some arguments
against a movement analysis of the preposed phrase are presented. It is underscored that an
approach which base generates the preposed phrase in a position adjoined to a CP-node
dominating the base position of the RP is superior. The preposed phrase, as well as the RP, may undergo further movement (Frey, 2005).

One interesting result of the study of German LD presented here ties in neatly with other work on such constructions across languages. In the light of the present paper, work on Italian clitic left dislocation (CLLD) by Aoun and Benmamoun’s (1998) intriguing investigation of two types of CLLD in Arabic dialects are typical representatives. It seems to emerge that Cinque’s original intuition behind LD constructions across languages in which he distinguishes movement-derived from base-generated LD structures is on the right track after all (Cinque, 1977), rather than trying to capture the movement properties somehow else (Cinque, 1990). Their research find that if scholars want to evaluate movement variants of CLD and CLLD on a par, they might expect the resumptive elements in both to be of the same nature, especially if Cinque is right in identifying a specific pronominal element employed for resumption as a characteristic of the movement variant; in his case, this concerns the clitic in CLLD. There seems to be an additional, yet still specific, resumptive element in German CLD as well, that is the d-pronoun. If the latter is the result of spelling out a copy left behind by (an otherwise illicit) movement, scholars might try to show the same to be at work in CLLD. These scholars usually leave this discussion open, but it might turn out to yield interesting results. Such an approach invariably runs into trouble as readers look for evidence in the C-domain; languages that employ CLLD typically express resumption lower down in the clause, arguably inside the T-domain (e.g. Italian, Greek, Arabic). The conclusion drawn by Grohman is that if it turns out that this clitic can be analyzed as a spelled out copy of a phrase that otherwise would have moved within a prolific domain, researchers would not only be able to express the Cinque/Aoun and Benmamoun cut in a straightforward fashion, but also support the framework sketched here briefly with evidence for the CDE in a further domain (Grohman, 2000:139-151).

4.3 LD in French

Apart from Spanish and German LDs, the attributes of French LD are also worth study. Barnes’(1985) monograph on left-dislocated structures in contemporary French is widely taken to mark a major step forward in the analysis of dislocated structures within a discourse framework. She is committed to the view that “LD is best seen as being entirely pragmatically motivated”. Her principal goal is to seek “a more nuanced description of the pragmatic function of LD than the previously prevailing view of LD as overtly marking the topic-comment relation and effecting a shift in the D[iscourse] T[opic]” (III). To achieve this goal, she makes use of a corpus derived from some six-hour-long recorded spontaneous conversation among educated native speakers living for the time being in the United States, making the point on more than one occasion that such a genre will necessarily have pragmatic characteristics of its own, very different from those of narrative on which much previous work has been based. The main part
of her research consists of a detailed and convincing elaboration of the notion Discourse Topic (DT), as well as of its relationship to the notion Sentence Topic (ST). While an adequate approach “must allow the contemporaneous existence of several DTs at various levels corresponding to increasingly long stretches of the discourse”, even the lowest level of DT must be distinguished from ST, not least because the latter “must be explicitly represented in the sentence; i.e. a ST corresponds to some expression in the sentence”. There follows an analysis of the various types of LD structure found in the corpus, distinguishing pronominal from lexical detachments and seeking to provide an adequate pragmatic explanation for the occurrence or non-occurrence of dislocation in particular instances, as Barnes has pointed out.

The pragmatic accounts, however, like the syntactic accounts which preceded them, do not serve fully to explain the attested data, except by the circular route of using particular examples to illustrate the pragmatic motivation being claimed. Pragmatic and syntactic accounts must be reconciled rather than opposed if an adequate overview is to be gained. This article is an important contribution to half of that equation.

In his paper “The Syntax, Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistics of Left- and Right-Dislocations in French” (Ashby, 1988), Ashby treats the aspects of the syntax, pragmatics and sociolinguistic distribution of left- and right- dislocations in a corpus of spoken French. Both types are pragmatically marked structures, usually employed for specific discourse functions. The correlation between syntactic type (LD or RD) and discourse function is not entirely arbitrary. For example, turn-taking is a process of gaining control of discourse space, of asserting oneself in discourse. Hence, this function must be coded at the beginning of the utterance (i.e. by a LD). Turn-closing, on the other hand, signals to one’s interlocutor that discourse space is being ceded, that the speaker has no more to say on the subject, at least for the time being. Turn-closing thus comes naturally at the end of the utterance (in a RD). It is not surprising, then, that LDs and RDs in French have divergent discourse functions. What is less evident is why two pragmatic functions (contrast and topic shift) are shared by both syntactic types. The social distribution of weakly motivated tokens does not support the view that, as French moves toward verb-initial typology. Dislocated subjects are generally grammaticalized as ordinary subjects.

The notion “French dislocation is by essence an interface phenomenon” (De Cat, 2007: 216) put forward by De Cat is especially related to this paper. In French Dislocation: Interpretation, Syntax, Acquisition, Cécile sets out to substantiate this claim by offering a thorough and all-encompassing analysis of left and right dislocation phenomena in spoken French. De Cat’s major assumption is that French dislocation is best analyzed as a pragmatically motivated phenomenon requiring minimal syntactic machinery. As she argues, spoken French is a discourse-configurational language in the sense of Kiss (1987), where topics (and foci) are obligatorily dislocated. This is demonstrated by showing that in a large corpus of spoken French, all sentences containing individual-level predicates, which force a topic interpretation
of their subjects, occur with dislocated subjects. In addition, De Cat also shows that dislocated noun phrases have the syntactic and semantic properties usually associated with topics. On the whole, De Cat provides analysis of dislocation phenomena in French, displaced from syntax into the realm of the pragmatic/discourse interfaces.

Parisse’s (2008) study “Left-dislocated Subjects: A Construction Typical of Young French-speaking Children?” uses two corpora of spontaneous language production, one with children aged three to four and one with children aged two to four. The data are analyzed by use of Tomasello’s framework (usage-based theory of language acquisition). In this theory, children’s language competence differs from the adults’ and develops with age. The first issue is to demonstrate the existence of this specific feature. Indeed, it appears that children produce more left-dislocated subjects than adults and do not simply reproduce a feature of adults’ oral language. The presence of a developmental effect in the children’s production is also strongly tested by the results. The second issue is to try to better understand what could be the reason for the difference in production of left-dislocated subjects between children and adults. Several explanations of the children’s results are put forward, in keeping with the predictions of the usage-based theory. Lexical and usage-based explanations of children’s behavior are proved to be unlikely. More plausible explanations are performance limitation or a consequence of the development of the use of personal pronouns, even when they are not obligatory. It is proposed that children’s left-dislocated subjects should not be considered as a copy of adults’, but as a specific construction pattern that appears during the course of language development. This pattern, according to Parisse, could provide a path towards the development of more general linguistic abstractions, as proposed in the usage-based theory.

4.4 LD in Italian

LDs in Italian are also one of the research scopes in this respect, but the current literature is relatively limited. The studies are usually the ones on Italian conversational discourse, such as that by Duranti and Ochs (1979), who are concerned with LDs of the form exemplified by (7) below:

\[(7) \text{A Roberto l’ho fatto aspetta’ un’ora} \]
\[
\text{to roberto him(I)made wait an hour} \\
\text{“Roberto, I made him wait for an hour”}
\]

Duranti and Ochs point out that Italian differs from English, in that the dislocated elements of the LD are never the subject of the main clause; this proceeds from the fact that there are no subject clitic pronouns in Italian which might serve as the dislocated elements. What is special of the Duranti and Ochs’s approach is the fact that it probes LD on both informational and interactional levels. On the informational level, Duranti and Ochs investigate the occurrence of
LD-referents in both the prior and the subsequent discourse. With respect to the subsequent discourse, they find that “refents expressed in full subject and LD constructions overwhelmingly recur in the subsequent discourse” (Duranti and Ochs, 1979: 394). As for the interactional aspect of Duranti and Ochs’s work, the relationship between LD and the turn-taking system is explored. They have checked and attempted to disclose to what extent the LD as a whole has a floor-seeking function. To do this, the occurrence of the dislocated elements in turn-initial position is probed; consequently it is found that a substantial number of LDs appear turn-initially, often overlapping with a previous turn. They conclude that LD:

(8) “(…) may be used not only to gain access to the speaking floor but also to block or to reduce the access of others participating in the social interaction. That is, LD may sometimes be a competitive move.” (Duranti and Ochs, 1979: 405)

The above section has discussed a few studies on LD in English, Chinese and other related languages of Spanish, German, Spoken French and Italian. It has explicitly revealed the limit of LD studies. For instance, the interface aspect has been largely ignored, with the notable exception of Duranti and Ochs (1979) and De Cat (2007). Moreover, few research findings can disclose the reason why LDs in some language are more than that in other languages. For example, in French, LD is exploited more frequently than in English. In colloquial French, left-dislocated noun phrases are more frequent than the equivalent basic sentences.

(9) Mon frère, il s’en va en Mongolie.
My brother he is-going to Mongolia.
“My brother, he is leaving for Mongolia.”

Finally, few researches can explain why LD has different functions in different languages. For instance, LD in colloquial French differs in function from the equivalent operation in English. In French, a left-dislocated noun phrase represents a topic. Left-dislocated noun phrases are particularly frequent when a new topic is introduced into the discourse (as in the first of the following example 10 and 11) or when the speaker wishes to shift the topic of the discourse (as in the 12th example).

(10) [asking directions of a stranger in the street]
Pardon, la gare, ou est-elle?
Excuse me the station where is it
“Excuse me, where is the station?”

(11) Pierre: Moi, j’aime bien les croissants.
Me I like a lot the croissants
“Me, I like croissants a lot.”

(12) Marie: Oui, mais le pain frais, c’est bon aussi.
Yes but the bread fresh it-is good too
“Yes, but fresh bread is also good.”

The pragmatic function of LD is thus broader in French than in English (Finegan, 2012: 282-283). The studies by Duranti and Ochs are especially relevant to this paper’s claim that LD is the syntactization of an interactional process, as their findings appear to indicate that French and Italian may be further down the road in this syntactization process of LD; the study by previous literature also reveals that spoken French is a discourse-configurational language, and they put forward and developed a notion that LD should be studied from the perspective of syntax-discourse interface.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper provides a general theoretical and comparative survey on the current study of LD in English, Chinese, Spanish, French, German, and Italian from the angles of theoretical and comparative studies. The mainstream scholars in this respect assert that the relation between syntactic form and discourse function is arbitrary and language-specific. As can be seen from the above discussion, although there is an abundant literature on LD in different languages, there is good reason to make a comparative analysis of the LD construction in multi languages from the perspective of syntax-discourse interface, which is less touched by scholars in this academia.

There is almost no evidence for the sentence –based theory of LD. In order to be a constituent in a sentence, a string has to perform a specific function inside the sentence’s network, just as a subject or any other parts belong inside the sentence’s closely-arranged structure in different ways. But in LD, no single piece of evidence has been given to the dislocated part to be a definite constituent structure. Therefore, the base-generation, topic-phrase theory should be rejected. LDs cannot simply be seen as “word order variations,” because, being structurally independent units in the flow of discourse, “they operate … without commitment to what comes later (Geluykens, 1992:45; Fariña, 1995:17).”

REFERENCES


