

## Typologizing sentential subject constructions

This paper presents current typological work in progress on sentential subjects, i.e. those (complement) clauses playing the S or A role in an argument-structure construction, such as the bold part of (1):

- (1) Hebrew (Semitic: Israel; Glinert 1989:325)  
[**she-tiye**            **kaduraglan**]    ze lo    *matrid*    *oti*.  
C MPL-2SG.be:FUT    footballer            it NEG    bother    me  
**'That you'll be a footballer** doesn't bother me.'

Such subject clauses are often seen as minor syntactic patterns in grammars, infrequent discourse phenomena in language use and a rather negligible part of complementation systems. However, while one can certainly agree that clausal complexity tends to be avoided in the S/A argument slot, there are a number of reasons why sentential subjects deserve closer inspection from the viewpoint of modern, distribution-oriented typology (Bickel 2007).

First, sufficiently detailed data on complementation systems, including subject clauses, have only become available in more recent grammatical descriptions; consequently, previous studies and hypotheses concerning sentential subjects (e.g. Grosu and Thompson 1977, Dryer 1980) are often based on relatively small samples and have never been tested against a larger typological database. Crucially, however, such a database is needed in order to sever allegedly universal cognitive and communicative pressures in complementation systems from geographically and genealogically induced clustering of structures.

Second, the growing number of language-specific studies based on electronic corpora (e.g. Kaltenböck 2004) points to the intricate ways in which different construction types, among them fully balanced subordinate clauses, verbal nouns, infinitives, headless relative clauses, and subject-raising constructions, distribute in complementation and differentially respond (e.g. by extraposition) to different discourse contexts. In typological work, by contrast, the interplay of this wide array of construction types and the specific constraints on their distribution have not yet been examined systematically.

The present research project is concerned with creating the first comprehensive, auto-typologized database of sentential subject constructions. Following the multivariate approach (e.g. Bickel 2006), it analyzes all relevant constructions in each language along small-scale formal and behavioural dimensions, and assesses their functional potential by recording how each construction distributes in the respective complementation system. This procedure ultimately allows to statistically evaluate how similar construction types 'behave' across languages and to extract significant clusters of typological variables relating to complementation.

Since the database itself is currently still growing, the talk will discuss the design of the database, present the kinds of typologically relevant questions that can be (and are being) asked with it, and illustrate each key issue with material from representative languages or genera. Finally, we will also take a first look at possible correlations between variables, choosing 'extraposition and resumption' as a case study.

## *References*

- Bickel, Balthasar (2006). Towards a multivariate typology of clause linkage, with particular reference to non-embedded structures. Paper presented at the *LENCA 3*, Tomsk, June 2006.
- Bickel, Balthasar (2007). Typology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Major current developments. *Linguistic Typology* 11: 239-251.
- Dryer, Matthew S. (1980). The positional tendencies of sentential noun phrases in universal grammar. *The Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 25: 123-196.
- Glinert, Lewis (1989). *The grammar of Modern Hebrew*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grosu, Alexander and Sandra A. Thompson (1977). Constraints on the distribution of NP clauses. *Language* 53: 104-151.
- Kaltenböck, Gunther (2004). *It-extraposition and non-extraposition in English*. Wien: Braumüller.