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Theticity

*Hans-Jürgen Sasse*

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D 50923 Köln

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# THETICITY

Hans-Jürgen Sasse

University of Cologne

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Phenomenon

The subject matter of this chapter is the semantic, syntactic and discourse-pragmatic background as well as the cross-linguistic behavior of types of utterance exemplified by the following English sentences and their translation equivalents in other European (and some non-European) languages<sup>1</sup>:

(1) *My NECK hurts*<sup>2</sup>

Albanian:	<i>Më dhemb GRYKA</i>
Basque:	<i>Mina dut lepoan</i> <sup>3</sup>
Bulgarian:	<i>Boli me GÄRLOTO</i>
French:	<i>J'ai mon COU qui me fait MAL</i>
German:	<i>Mein HALS tut weh/Mir tut der HALS weh</i> <sup>4</sup>
Hungarian:	<i>Fáj a TORKOM</i>
Italian:	<i>Mi fa male il COLLO</i>
Japanese:	<i>KUBI ga ITAI</i>
Modern Greek:	<i>Ponai o LEMOS mu</i>
Polish:	<i>GARDŁO mnie boli/Boli mnie GARDŁO</i>
Russian:	<i>Bolet GORLO</i>
Serbocroatian:	<i>Boli me VRAT/GRLO</i>
Spanish:	<i>Me duele el CUELLO</i>
Irish:	<i>Tá pian i mo scornach/Tá mo scornach nimhneach</i> <sup>5</sup>

(2) *The PHONE's ringing*

Albanian:	<i>(Po) bie TELEFONI</i>
Basque:	<i>TELEFONOAK jo du</i> <sup>6</sup>
Bulgarian:	<i>TELEFONÁT zväni</i>
French:	<i>Y'a le TELEPHONE qui SONNE</i>

<sup>1</sup> Examples are mostly taken from the relevant literature, without specifying the source when standard examples occurring in many publications are cited. Otherwise, the sources are indicated in the form of statements such as "the following example is borrowed from...". German examples of subject-accented sentences come from my own slip corpus of material transcribed from television plays, unless otherwise indicated. Serbocroatian and Irish material is likewise my own; I am indebted to Elvira Veselinovic for her kind help with both languages. VS sentences from Italian, Spanish, Latin, Romani, Russian, Modern Greek and Hungarian are taken from the corpora examined in connection with the VS study undertaken by EURO TYP Thematic Group 1 between 1992 and 1994 (cf. Matras and Sasse 1995). I hereby collectively thank the members of the group for their excellent work.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, syllables carrying the intonation peak are marked with small caps.

<sup>3</sup> Interlinear translation: pain-ART:ABS be-1s neck-ART-INESSIVE

<sup>4</sup> This is an elaboration on a standard example often cited in the literature, see, in particular, Lambrecht (1987, 1994). The translations are taken from various sources, including own work with informants. Some of the translations really mean 'my throat hurts', but this is irrelevant in the present connection.

<sup>5</sup> Interlinear translation: EXIST pain in my throat/EXIST my throat sore.

<sup>6</sup> Interlinear translation: telephone-ART-ERG hit-PERF be-3s.



German:	<i>Das TELEFON klingelt</i>
Hungarian:	<i>Csöng a TELEFON</i>
Italian:	<i>Squilla il TELEFONO</i>
Japanese:	<i>DENWA ga NATTE iru yo</i>
Modern Greek:	<i>Xtipai to TILEFONO</i>
Polish:	<i>TELEFON dzwoni</i>
Serbocroatian:	<i>Zvoni TELEFON</i>
Spanish:	<i>Suena el TELÉFONO</i>
Irish:	<i>Tá an FÓN ag ringáil<sup>7</sup></i>

Sentences such as those listed in (1) and (2) are usually held to stand in opposition to sentences with a topical subject. The difference is said to be formally marked, for example, by VS order vs. topical SV order (as in Albanian *po bie telefoni* ‘the PHONE is ringing’ vs. *telefoni po bie* ‘the PHONE is RINGING’), or by accent on the subject only vs. accent on both the subject and the verb (as in the English translations).

The term **theticity** will be used in the following to label the specific phenomenological domain to which the sentences in (1) and (2) belong. It has long been commonplace that these and similar expressions occur at particular points in the discourse where “a new situation is presented as a whole”. We will try to depict and classify the various discourse situations in which these expressions have been found in the different languages, and we will try to trace out areas of cross-linguistic comparability. Finally, we will raise the question whether or not there is a common denominator which would justify a unified treatment of all these expressions in functional/semantic terms.

For a number of reasons, the term “thetic” has not become exceedingly popular in certain parts of the scientific community. The main problem seems to lie in its non-linguistic background, rooted in the philosophical tradition of the late 19th century, in particular, in the writings of Franz Brentano and Anton Marty (cf. 1.2 below). The term has thus received a “non-empirical smell” which many “ordinary working linguists” do not like (cf. Sornicola 1995). Moreover, the term is closely connected with the idea, repeatedly expressed in philosophical circles, that a “thetic judgment” is a cognitive operation *sui generis*, reflecting an act of predication sharply distinct from other types of predication such as the traditional bipartite Aristotelian subject-predicate judgment. This view is not shared by many empirical linguists. However, this is not the place to enter this controversial discussion. We will refrain from too far-reaching fundamental speculations and confine ourselves here to the description and cross-linguistic classification of certain utterance types and their usage. We have nevertheless decided - with certain provisions to be discussed in the sections below - to stick to the term “thetic” in favor of other terms that might suggest themselves (such as “all-new” or “sentence

<sup>7</sup> Interlinear translation: EXIST ART telephone at ring:VN.

focus"). We will therefore use this term throughout the present chapter. The justification for this decision lies mainly in the fact that it is a handy term, most widely known in many linguistic circles and thus, if stripped of its philosophical touch, most appropriate in serving as a neutral term for an integrative approach bringing together insights from different sources such as envisaged here.

## 1.2. Previous Research

We will not give a complete account of the history of research on the phenomenological domain called theticity here. For this purpose, the reader is referred to works such as Wehr (1984), Ulrich (1985), Sasse (1987), Haberland (1994), and Lambrecht (1994). In what follows, we will confine ourselves to a brief sketch of the main issues characterizing the research situation from which the present study proceeds.

The linguistic analysis of sentences such as those cited in (1) and (2) above has followed a number of independent and quite different traditions. The point of departure for most data-oriented grammarians lay in the *form* of these utterances, which was considered to be "marked" vis-a-vis other types of clause structure in the respective languages. For instance, in the Italian, Spanish, Russian, Serbocroatian, Albanian, Modern Greek and Hungarian examples, to mention just a few, the word order is predicate + subject, while the "normal" or "unmarked" word order for a declarative sentence in these languages is usually considered to be subject + predicate. In the English, German, Dutch and Polish examples, the subject is markedly stressed and forms a closely-knit intonation unit with the predicate, in contrast to the "normal" intonation pattern found in the declarative sentences of these languages, which is said to have a stressed predicate. In French and Irish, a special construction is used which is optionally introduced by an existential expression followed by the subject and presents the predicate in a relative clause. In Irish, but not in French, this is also coupled with a difference in word order; the construction is called "abnormal order" by MacCana 1973 since the "normal" word order in Irish is verb-subject.

Studies proceeding in this way - from the form of the utterances - have usually attempted to explain the formal differences in terms of one or the other functional or semantic framework. The relevant constructions have most frequently been explained in terms of "activation state" (given vs. new) as "all-new-utterances", "news sentences", "neutral descriptions" or "entirely rhematic", i.e., roughly, as expressions containing no given element or, more precisely, as expressions in which both the subject and the predicate are new (Schmerling 1976, Kuno 1972, Wehr 1984, Krylova & Chavronina 1977, and many others). The problem with these terms (and the concepts usually hidden behind them) is, first of all, their

commitment to a research tradition on information structure often operating with comparably ill-defined concepts such as “given” and “new”. The functional explanations found in this kind of work are therefore often rather vague; it remains unclear what notions such as “rhematic”, “neutral”, etc. really mean and it has been disputed that “all-new” utterances really consist of entirely “new” elements given the fact that they often contain pronouns and other elements readily discoverable from the preceding text. In summary, the notions employed in these circles have been either unsatisfactorily ambiguous (“neutral”) or confusing (“new” = “not aforementioned”?). Moreover, Chafe (1974) observed that, for simple subject-predicate sentences, two different intonation patterns are possible which do not seem to correspond to any differences in the activation state of the constituents involved<sup>8</sup>. In all sentences in (3) and (4), both constituents are conceived of as conveying new information:

- (3) a. *My SISTER is DYING*  
 b. *My SISTER died*
- (4) a. *The BUTTER MELTED*  
 b. *The BUTTER melted*

He explains the difference as follows: “It seems likely that the verb-noun combination of [the examples in b] form for the speaker a conceptual unity which is not present in the combinations of [the examples in a]” (1974:115). A similar approach was taken by Fuchs (1976, 1980), who coined the term “integration” to label a situation in which “the whole syntagm is introduced as one unit of information, ‘integrating’ its parts into one ‘globally new’ unit” (1980:449)<sup>9</sup>. The term “integration” was recently taken up again by Jacobs (1992).

The “integrative” nature of these utterances also constituted the point of departure for certain approaches stressing their “focal” character, a view expressed as early as in Müller-Hauser (1943) who uses the expression “mise en relief de la phrase entière”. “Presentational sentences”, “sentence focus” and “event-reporting sentences” are further examples of terms used in this connection. Important studies along these lines are Lambrecht (1987) and, in particular, Lambrecht (1994); see also Drubig (1992).

A different line of research was followed by Allerton and Cruttenden (1979), who investigated subject-accented sentences in English and claimed that they fall into three categories, characterized by the nature of

<sup>8</sup> The term “all-new” is also a particularly bad choice with regard to languages such as Hungarian, in whose VS constructions the subjects are obligatorily definite and thus never “new” in one of the senses of this term.

<sup>9</sup> I avail myself of this opportunity to apologize to the late Anna Fuchs. In my 1987 paper I listed her in the group of adherents of the “information structure” approach without mentioning that she had already expressed views very similar to the point I made in that article.

the verb: (1) semantically empty, predictable predicates, (2) verbs of appearance and disappearance, (3) verbs denoting a misfortune. Empty verbs are often of the kind which state the existence of their subjects by naming a typical state of affairs or activity which characterizes these subjects. Sentences like:

- (5) a. *The SUN is shining*  
 b. *NIGHT is falling*

merely describe the existence or appearance of their subjects ('there is sunshine', 'night appears'). For the most part, then, subject-accented sentences in English are existential sentences. Those which are not covered by "existence" are explained by Allerton and Cruttenden in terms of the semantic closeness of the verbs to the subjects they accompany:

- (6) a. *The KETTLE's boiling*  
 b. *The TELEPHONE's ringing*  
 c. *The TAP's leaking*

"In such cases we see that a kettle is capable of very few verbal activities other than boiling, that a telephone can do little except ring, etc." (1979:52).

An approach which explains English and German subject-accented constructions exclusively in terms of the "existential" lexical semantics of the verbs involved has been rejected by several scholars, e.g. Krifka (1984, for German), and Sasse (1987, for English), though similar statements have also been made for other constructions in other languages. In particular, VS sentences in Romance languages have often been analyzed in terms of the existential semantics of their verbs: "The verbs... tell us only or mainly that the subject exists or is present; is absent; begins; continues; is produced; occurs; appears; arrives" (Hatcher 1956:7 on Spanish VS sentences). The existential character of Romance VS sentences had already been assumed by Blinkenberg (1928) for French. This was reaffirmed for French by Atkinson (1973) and Jonare (1976) and was confirmed for Italian by Lonzi (1974) and Wandruszka (1982).

Quite independent of the approaches sketched so far, there had been a very early philosophical approach to the subject which did not proceed from linguistic considerations about the semantics of certain constructions but from logical considerations about the nature of predication. This is the approach from which the notion of "theticity" originated. The term was first introduced by Brentano (1874; to the English-speaking world best known as Brentano 1973) and was originally conceived of as part of a dichotomy "thetic vs. categorical", which was held to reflect a "logical" distinction between two types of human judgment. Hence, Brentano and



Marty do not speak of thetic and categorical *utterances* (implying that there could be some formal manifestation of the “logical” dichotomy<sup>10</sup>), but of thetic and categorical *judgments*. In this view, the “categorical judgment” is the traditional bipartite Aristotelian type of judgment consisting of a (logical) subject and a (logical) predicate, while the monolithic “thetic judgment” simply involves “the recognition or rejection” of the “material of a judgment”. As Ladusaw (1994, paraphrasing Kuroda 1972) puts it, the categorical judgment has a “presupposed” subject in the sense that a precondition for making the judgment is that “the mind of the judger must be directed first to an individual, before the predicate can be connected to it”. In other words, with a categorical judgment one says something about an entity, whereas the thetic judgment simply “poses” (hence “thetic” from Ancient Greek *tithēmi* ‘to put, pose’) the existence of a certain state of affairs. This strong philosophical viewpoint, which regards the thetic/categorical distinction as a cognitive phenomenon *sui generis*, reflecting two radically different types of predication, is usually rejected today.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, a number of less philosophically oriented linguistic adaptations of the Brentano-Marty approach have since appeared. The earliest I know of is Mathesius (1929), who claims that there are two basic types of “assertiveness”, one which is a simple presentation of an event (thetic), and one which has a topic-comment structure with an asserted comment set off from a presupposed topic (categorical). After a long period of silence, the issue was taken up again by Kuroda (1972), in particular, with respect to the behavior of the Japanese particles *wa* and *ga*, followed by Vattuone (1975) with respect to Genuese VS constructions, Ulrich (1985) with respect to VS clauses in Rumanian and Sasse (1987) in a general typological account. The linguistic adaptations of the Brentano-Marty theory differ from the original philosophical approach in one important aspect. They all try to set up the thetic-categorical distinction as some sort of semantic universal and look for “manifestations” of it in the sentence structure of individual languages. Although this type of approach was rather characteristic of linguistic work in the seventies and eighties and has revealed a great number of important insights, it was ultimately doomed to failure because it tended to neglect the more subtle aspects of form-content relations in the individual languages.

To sum up our brief historical account so far, we can distinguish one line of research proceeding from the form of utterances in individual

<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Marty explicitly separated the notions of “psychological” (or “logical”) and grammatical subject-predicate structure and allowed for a discrepancy between the two which he explained in terms of his “theory of inner speech form”. In fact, one of his main points was the independence of *Urteil* (judgment) and *Aussage* (sentence form), cf. Marty (1897 and 1918:5-19).

<sup>11</sup> For brief historical accounts of the thetic/categorical debate, the reader is referred to Ulrich (1984), Sasse (1987) and, most recently, Haberland (1994) with further references.

languages and setting up “functions”, mostly in terms of information structure, and one line proceeding from the assumption that a rather abstract “universal” notion of monolithic, non-articulated predication is somehow directly manifested in a certain sentence structure and, vice versa, that this sentence structure “expresses” the respective notion.

Not surprisingly, the problem is not only a terminological one; it also pertains to the empirical basis from which the different approaches proceed. It is interesting to note that the sets of examples adduced in the different camps do not always seem to belong to identical phenomenological areas, which is evident from the differing types of sentences cited. Quite understandably, therefore, doubts have been raised as to whether there is really any empirical justification in assuming that theticity is a proper linguistic entity.

In Brentano-Marty oriented circles, for instance, theticity has often been demonstrated by problematic examples such as the following:

(7) *Inu ga hasitte iru*  
 ‘A DOG is running.’ (Kuroda 1972)

(8) *NOBODY LEFT* (Ladusaw 1994)

Sentences such as (7) are claimed to have both a “thetic form” (by virtue, for instance, of the particle *ga* in Japanese) and a “thetic logical interpretation”. However, such examples have always been cited in isolation; no indication is given as to where such expressions appear in actual discourse. Sentence (8), in turn, is claimed to be “thetic” on the basis of general logical considerations, although it does not have the form claimed by others to be typical of “thetic” sentences in English (subject accentuation or *there is*-construction). Moreover, when translation equivalents of (8) in other languages are compared (for instance, Modern Greek, cf. Sasse 1995b), focus constructions come into play which render a “thetic” interpretation problematic. It remains doubtful whether sentences with “pronominal” subjects such as (8) are really interpretable as subject-predicate constructions in the same way as, say, in the examples (1) through (6) above. In most of the languages examined, they appear to follow conventionalized patterns and it seems wise to exclude such cases from the examination of productive mechanisms.

Moreover, Brentano’s and Marty’s original German examples were mostly confined to existentials and weather verbs (such as those under (9)), whereas “all-new utterances”, “news sentences”, etc. are frequently exemplified by verbs of appearance, loss or damage, as in (10):

(9) (a) *Es regnet.*  
 ‘It is raining.’

- (b) *Es findet ein Markt statt.*  
'A market is being held.'
- (10) (a) *The BRITISH are coming.*  
(b) *JOHNSON died.*

It is readily accepted by many researchers that utterances such as those in (9) do not predicate a property of some entity (for instance, *raining of it*), but simply recognize or "pose" a situation. It is much more controversial, however, to maintain this for the utterances in (10) or for (7), given the fact that there is nothing to suggest that the syntactic and conceptual structure of such sentences fails to reflect a predicative ("aboutness") relation. The latter seems to be counterintuitive to many people given the fact that the subject-predicate structure, coupled with a subject-predicate interpretation, is still there. What both groups of examples seem to have in common is that both of them are candidates to be used (*inter alia*) in discourse situations where the scope of the assertion extends across the entire proposition, and this is where the "judgment" approach and the "information structure" approach meet. The usual way of demonstrating broad scope of assertion is the application of tests, such as the well-known question test with the frame "what's the matter/what happened?". All four utterances in (9) and (10) are equally good answers to these questions and as such turn out to be employable as utterances with a broad scope of assertion. Nevertheless, if "broad scope of assertion" is equated with "entirely new information", there is still a considerable amount of sentences which do not show the expected form. Moreover, the test rules out a number of expression types considered to be "thetic" by Brentano and Marty (such as universal statements, cf. Kuroda 1972 and Sasse 1987), but also a number of Romance, Modern Greek, etc. VS clauses which have been claimed to be "all-new utterances" but turn out to have verb focus (cf. Sasse 1995b), and a number subject-accented sentences in German, English, and other languages which turn out to be constructions with narrow focus on the subject.

Finally, it has to be noted that different languages cover different sections of the entire phenomenological domain, which means that language-specific investigations which proceed from the form of utterances in single languages are not necessarily comparable from a functional point of view. In other words, if a "function" is generalized on the basis of a single language and then transferred to the analysis of another language, inadequate interpretations may arise. For instance, the description of German and English subject-accented sentences and the comparable constructions in French as "all-new" may not be entirely adequate, but is less inappropriate than a description of Hungarian VS constructions in the same terms, even if all of the constructions are used in superficially similar contexts (cf. footnote 8).

The crucial factor responsible for all this confusion seems to lie in the illegitimate mixture of formal and semantic considerations. This has led to two types of unfelicitous generalizations in two different directions: For the strong Brentano-Marty adherents, on the one hand, considerations of philosophical semantics (“judgment” structure, existence, quantor semantics, etc.) usually had priority over form, though formal considerations were sometimes adduced to support the semantic analysis (e.g. by Kuroda 1972 in rejecting universal statements as an instance of “thetic” judgments: this was chiefly done by pointing out that they have a “categorical structure” in Japanese). For syntactic and discourse-oriented researchers, on the other hand, the center of attention had always been the form of the utterances, and the possibility of polysemous constructions, where one form has a number of distinct meanings and uses, was often neglected.

### 1.3. The Present Research Strategy

Given the state of affairs sketched in the preceding paragraph, it is necessary to develop a research strategy capable of coming to terms with two basic requirements: First, it should handle the form-function problem in a much more sophisticated manner, and second, it should guarantee comparability across languages.

The two requirements are closely interconnected. One of the main faults of previous research on theticity (including my own) was failing to clearly distinguish between form and content as such, and, more specifically, between universal and language-specific aspects of both<sup>12</sup>. Basically, nobody has ever tried to make explicit what kind of animal “theticity” really is and on what level of linguistic analysis it has to be dealt with. The explanations discussed in the previous section strongly disagree on the linguistic domain to which the different distinctions proposed should be attributed. The following table summarizes the interpretation of the distinctions and the domains to which the distinction are attributed in the different approaches.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that I do not consider it illegitimate to look for correlations of form and content; on the contrary, this is what linguistics is all about. But when it comes to cross-linguistic comparison, the two have to be clearly separated. It is only in this way that an understanding of mismatches between universal hypotheses and language-specific phenomena - and, by implication, a proper typological generalization - becomes possible.



APPROACH	INTERPRETATION OF DISTINCTION	DOMAIN TO WHICH DISTINCTION IS ATTRIBUTED
ORIGINAL THETIC/ CATEGORICAL APPROACH	Two cognitively different types of human "judgment"	Cognitive or "logical"
MODIFIED THETIC/ CATEGORICAL APPROACH	Two different viewpoints manifested in different predicative structures	Discourse/Syntax; Topic-Comment articulation
ACTIVATION STATE APPROACH	Different constellations of activation state	Discourse/Syntax; Information value ("given", "new")
FOCUS/BACKGROUND APPROACH	Difference in scope of assertion	Discourse/Syntax; Focus-Presupposition articulation
LEXICAL APPROACH	Triggered by lexical properties	Lexicon

**Table 1: Some prominent approaches to the thetic/categorical distinction**

Furthermore, the phenomena subsumed under the different labels are not necessarily always the same, as we have already seen. This is due to the fact that most authors have taken it for granted that "thetic", "focus", "all-new", etc. are universally definable linguistic functions and that there are clearly identifiable (and cross-linguistically comparable) linguistic structures serving these functions in a straightforward way. This has led to considerable confusion of structural and semantic criteria, resulting in the neglect, to a large extent, of polyfunctionality and of subtle, language-specific constraints governing the use of the constructions in question.

The methodology or, to put it more modestly, the heuristic strategy pursued here will therefore take previously accumulated knowledge about the phenomenological domain of theticity as a point of departure, without, however, postulating any general or "universal" functional concept in terms of which the entire domain would be defined. Instead, the domain will be tackled from all the different angles that have so far been subject of the relevant studies: the language-specific constructions involved, their place in the general language-specific pool of available constructions, ambiguities and oppositions, usualization and obligatorization, the use of the constructions in actual discourse, the language-specific constraints on the use of these constructions, and the interaction between lexical semantics and constructions. We will then attempt to filter out areas of cross-linguistic comparability and, finally, try to arrive at proper typological generalizations.

Preliminary research along these lines was done between 1992 and 1994 by members of Theme Group 1 of EUROTYP and resulted in Matras and

Sasse (1995), henceforth called the “VS study”. In this study, a fine-grained analysis of verb-subject constructions in a number of European languages was presented. The approach was primarily semasiological and was based on the examination, in part quantificational, of the occurrence of verb-subject constructions in real texts of different text types. The VS study was extremely helpful in preparing the research for this paper since it yielded a number of important parameters along which other constructions which had played a role in the discussion of theticity could be analyzed. In the following, we will draw heavily on the results of this study; its findings will be the chief point of departure here.

## 2. Constructions

### 2.1. Formal Types of “Special” Constructions in the Domain of Theticity

In the literature on “thetic”/“all-new”/“presentational” etc. expressions, the following formal construction types are identified as relevant:

1. Highly accented subject + immediately following enclitic-like low-toned verb for “thetic”/“all-new”/“presentational” etc. utterances, as opposed to double accent on both subject and verb or accent on verb only for “categorical”/“topic-comment” etc. utterances. The alleged opposition can be exemplified by the English and German sentences under (11) and (12) below (cf. Lambrecht 1987, 1994). This type is called “prosodic inversion” by Lambrecht (1994:318ff.); the traditional term is “subject accentuation” (henceforth **SAcc**).

- |      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| (11) | <i>Was ist los?</i><br><i>What's the matter?</i>                         | <i>Mein AUTO ist kaputt.</i><br><i>My CAR broke down.</i>  |
| (12) | <i>What happened to your car?</i><br><i>Was ist mit deinem Auto los?</i> | <i>My CAR broke DOWN/My car broke DOWN.</i><br><i>Mein AUTO ist KAPUTT.Mein Auto ist KAPUTT.</i> <sup>13</sup> |

2. Verb-subject order for “thetic” etc. utterances as opposed to subject-verb order for “categorical” etc. utterances. This opposition may be exemplified by the Italian sentences in (13). Similar oppositions have been claimed to occur in a great number of European as well as non-European languages; for a general survey, the reader is referred to Sasse (1987) and Ulrich (1985). This type will be referred to by the abbreviation **VS**.

<sup>13</sup> The problem with these examples is that in actual discourse, the answer to questions of this type usually contains only the predicate, the subject being pronominalized. Discussion of these and similar problems of ellipsis is found in Lambrecht (1987, 1994); see also Sasse (1995a, fn.4).

- (13) a. *Mi si è rotta la MACCHINA.*  
'My CAR broke down.'

b. *La macchina si è ROTTA.*  
'The CAR broke DOWN.'

3. The construction "Subject + Relative Clause" (normally in the scope of an existential or deictic marker; if the subject is introduced by 'have' as an existential marker, it becomes an object) for "thetic" etc. utterances in opposition to various other structures found in "categorical" etc. utterances. This type was discussed under the label "split structure" in Sasse (1987:538ff.). In connection with Welsh, MacCana (1973) referred to it as "abnormal sentence". In the following, we will use the abbreviation **Split** for "split structure". The type is exemplified by French in (14)-(19), which demonstrate different variants depending on the presence and the nature of the existential/deictic markers.

- (14) a. *J'ai le COU qui me fait MAL.*  
'My NECK hurts.'

b. *Mon cou il me fait MAL.*  
'My neck HURTS.'

- (15) *Il y a un TUYAU qui fuit.*  
'There's a PIPE leaking.'

- (16) *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? - C'est MAMAN qui me bat.*  
'What's the matter? - MUM's hitting me.'

- (17) *La MAISON qui brûle.*  
'The HOUSE is burning.'

- (18) *Voilà la SIRÈNE qui hurle.*  
'The SIREN is wailing.'

- (19) *Nous avons une invitation ce soir, et ma FEMME qui est malade!*  
'We are invited out this evening; but my WIFE is sick!'

4. Subject incorporation (henceforth **SInc**). In a "thetic" etc. utterance, the subject of the corresponding "categorical" etc. utterance is incorporated into the verb. Clear cases of morphological incorporation, i.e. in the form of a real compound, have so far been found only in some Native American languages, e.g. Iroquoian (cf. Sasse 1987:548ff.). They are rare in these languages and seem to be

confined to very short existential statements.<sup>14</sup> What is more frequent is some sort of “pseudo-incorporation” (Mithun’s incorporation type I, i.e. a closely-knit combination of noun and verb with no intervening material allowed, cf. Mithun 1984); however, the noun is not fully incorporated, in the narrow sense, in that it does not entirely lose its word status. It is often very difficult to distinguish this from the SAcc cases. This type of SI is exemplified in (20) below by a sentence from Boni (Eastern Cushitic), cf. also Sasse (1987:544ff.) for further examples.

- (20) a. *áddjgégé-juudi*  
 father:1sPOSS-die:3smPERF  
 ‘My FATHER died.’
- b. *áddjgégé á- juudi*  
 father:1sPOSS VF- die:3smPERF  
 ‘My father has DIED/is DEAD.’ (Verb Focus)
- c. *áddjgégé- é juudi*  
 father:1sPOSS NF die:3smPERF  
 ‘It’s my FATHER who died.’ (Subject Focus)

Three further types of relevant constructions may be mentioned in passing, since they do not seem to occur in European languages and are therefore not dealt with in the following: (1) Verb nominalization, usually preceded by existential markers, for “event-central” types of utterances (cf. Sasse 1987:552ff.); (2) Particles, as in Japanese (cf. Kuroda 1972); (3) Special morphology for “thetic” predicates; cf. Sasse 1987:553 on Tagalog; special verb morphology is also said to be attested in a number of lesser-known languages (Haiim Ben Rosén, p.c.). The occurrence of introductory existential markers with otherwise “unmarked” sentence types, which is reported for several languages, has also to be examined in the present connection. Something similar also occurs in English (cf. Lambrecht’s *There was a farmer had a dog*, 1988b)<sup>15</sup>.

The four constructions exemplified in 1.-4. above regularly occur in European languages and are reported to be characteristic of utterances in the domain under consideration. SAcc seems to be by far the most frequent, closely followed by VS. As far as the latter is concerned, a distinction has to be made between languages which allow verbs in sentence-initial position (the “SV/VS alternating type” of Hopper 1985),

<sup>14</sup> The usual way of marking a thetic utterance in Cayuga is by means of the particle *ne:* ‘it is’ put in front of the otherwise unaltered sentence.

<sup>15</sup> A very special construction not to be dealt with in this article occurs in one European language: Finnish. In Finnish, the subject of a thetic utterance is in the partitive (cf. Belletti 1988). Since no detailed study of the behavior of thetic expressions in Finnish is as yet available, we will not further comment on this issue.

and those in which the position before the verb has to be filled with something else when subject-verb inversion occurs (XVS). All languages of the SV/VS alternating type also allow XVS constructions.

European languages of the SV/VS alternating type seem to be the following: Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech (marginal), Hungarian, Italian, Modern Greek, Polish (marginal), Portuguese, Rhaeto-Romance, Rumanian, Russian, Serbocroatian, Spanish. Spoken German also allows VS with certain specific functions, cf. section 4. XVS occurs in Dutch, English (marginal), French, German and several other Germanic languages; it was also characteristic of earlier stages of several Romance languages. Latin was also of the SV/VS alternating type (cf. Bolkestein 1995).

Several scholars have pointed out that the VS construction, especially when in thethetic function, is often characterized by lack of agreement between the initial verb and the subject, cf. French:

- (21) *Il est arrivé des bonnes nouvelles.*  
'Good news have arrived.'

In Genuese, the initial predicate regularly has neither number nor gender agreement; it always stands in the third person singular masculine (Vattuone 1975). Lack of agreement is also characteristic, though not obligatory, in VS constructions in Vulgar Latin and Italian (cf. Wehr 1984, 1995).

Split is said to be the most prominent construction in thethetic domain in French (Lambrecht 1987, 1988a, 1994, Wehr 1984), though it also marginally occurs in other Romance languages (Italian, Rhaeto-Romance, Spanish, and Catalan). The other European language of which it is highly characteristic is Welsh, cf. MacCana (1973) and Wehr (1984).

As far as European languages are concerned, SInc constructions have so far only been described for Danish. The following is a Danish example of an SInc construction from Nedergaard Thomsen (1991):

- (22) *der kom-nogle-fremmede til byen*  
there came-some-strangers to town  
'some STRANGERS have come to town'

Here, the sequence *kom-nogle-fremmede* is a phonological word. The type is strikingly reminiscent of the Boni case cited above: The NP is not really incorporated into the verb in the sense of a noun-verb compound since all the elements involved retain their morphological autonomy (i.e. they remain nominal, verbal, etc., constituents and do not become parts of



compounds); nevertheless, it constitutes a formal amalgam with the verb both intonationally and structurally (no intervening elements).

## 2.2. Distribution of Formal Types Across Languages

Almost all languages have more than one of the four types described in the preceding section. The distribution of types across selected European languages is given in table 2 below.

LANGUAGE	SAcc	VS	XVS	Split	SInc
Albanian	marginal	+	+	-	-
Basque	+	marginal	+	-	-
Bulgarian	+	+	+	-	-
Catalan	+	+	+	marginal	-
Czech	+	marginal	+	-	-
Danish	+	-	+	-	+
Dutch	+	-	+	-	-
English	+	-	marginal	-	-
French	+	-	+	+	-
German Standard	+	-	+	-	-
Vernacular	+	+	+	-	-
Hungarian	cf. note	+	+	-	cf. note
Italian	marginal	+	+	marginal	-
Latin	?	+	+	-	-
Modern Greek	marginal	+	+	-	-
Polish	+	marginal	+	-	-
Portuguese	+	+	+	marginal	-
Rhaeto- Romance	+	marginal	+	marginal	-
Rumanian	marginal	+	+	-	-
Russian	marginal	+	+	-	-
Serbocroatian	marginal	+	+	-	-
Spanish	+	+	+	marginal	-
Turkish	+	-	-	-	-
Welsh/Irish	-	<sup>16</sup>	-	+	-

Table 2: Distribution of “Special” Constructions Across European Languages

A note on Hungarian: In Hungarian, the “subject focus construction” (accented subject in the immediately preverbal position = focus position) participates in the domain of theticity in complementary distribution with VS. This could be seen as a case of SAcc: The general formal make-up of the construction (apart from the restrictions concerning definiteness and to be discussed below) is closely related to German, English, etc. SAcc

<sup>16</sup> In insular Celtic, VS is the “unmarked” word order. It is not normally employed for “thetic”/“all-new” etc. utterances.

constructions: accented subject, toneless verb. As in German and English, the Hungarian construction is ambiguous as to a “thetic” and a “subject focus” reading. It seems, however, that the combination of subject and verb is closer in Hungarian than in German and English SAcc constructions. Moreover, the Hungarian construction is part of the general focus mechanism of this language and the focus position is *always* the immediately preverbal position. In other words, the construction in Hungarian, though it superficially resembles SAcc, has a quite different status in the grammatical system. It could, however, very well be seen as a case of SInc in the loose sense used here and has in fact been so described in the literature.

The general typological picture emerging from table 2 is quite straightforward as far as the areal distribution of the constructions is concerned. A number of languages clearly stand out as “deviant”: Turkish is the only language which does not allow any type of verb-subject order, and Danish is the only language with SInc. Both are located on the margins of the area. Otherwise, the area is clearly divided into two larger sub-areas: roughly, a Northwestern and a Southeastern one.

Although the SAcc construction is present in almost all of the languages, there are typical areal differences in how prominent it is in competition with other devices. It is only marginal in Eastern and Southeastern languages where VS is dominant. The farther to the West one proceeds, the more prominent it becomes. In Czech and Polish, it is clearly in competition with VS; still more so in (Standard) German where VS is absent and XVS is subject to the strongly grammaticalized “verb-second” strategy. In Dutch, it is in competition with the *er*-construction (a formal equivalent of the English *there is*-construction), but the latter seems to be more prominent in this language. On the Western and Northwestern fringes of the area, on the other hand, it is absent (with the exception of English).

The VS construction occupies a contiguous area covering Romance, Slavic and Balkan languages with a strong concentration in the Balkans (with the exception of Bulgarian) where it has the broadest range of functions (cf. section 3). The Hungarian case is a bit special due to the “focus configurationality” of this language (cf. 2.5.2); otherwise, it neatly fits into the Eastern/Southeastern pattern. It is interesting that Basque, in spite of its close contact with Spanish, is different in that it prefers the SAcc construction except for a number of well-defined lexical areas such as *pain*; it is very similar, in this respect, to Czech and Polish.

The Split construction is confined to a smaller area in the West and is really prominent only in French and Celtic. However, it once may have had a wider distribution (cf. Wehr 1984).

### 2.3. Text Frequency of "Special" Constructions

It is often stated in the literature that the four "special" constructions under examination here are "special" or "marked" not only with respect to their functions (which is a problematic idea at any rate since we do not know what an "unmarked" function is) but also with respect to their text frequency in the respective languages. This is, in part, true; however, the picture is much more differentiated than usually assumed. In particular, the VS study has revealed that the frequency of VS constructions as opposed to (topical) SV constructions varies considerably according to the text type. Quantificational studies have been made for Russian, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, and Modern Greek. A striking difference was found between spoken and written language. In Hungarian and Modern Greek, the percentage of VS clauses was significantly higher in spoken than in written texts (Sasse 1995b:145, 171). On the other hand, Miller (1995) reports that the highest figures were obtained in academic texts and in novels, the lowest in dialogues. Such differences are probably due to the fact that the different senses (cf. 2.4) of VS constructions were not distinguished in the quantificational studies, with the result that the different functional "range" covered by the individual languages yielded different figures of occurrence. Moreover, specific subtypes of VS constructions are restricted to or at least predominantly found in specific text types. If one proceeds from a finer-grained classification of text-types, one will find tremendous differences even within the same "macro-genre". For instance, in all of the modern languages with a literary tradition examined in the VS study, it was found that VS is used as a prominent strategy for headlines, advertisements and announcements, but much lower figures were found in other sections of the newspapers (this pertains to Russian, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian and Modern Greek, but also to Serbocroatian<sup>17</sup>, which was not investigated in the VS study). The general situation is exemplified by figures for Hungarian and Modern Greek in the tables below (taken from Sasse 1995b, the Hungarian figures are adapted from Behrens 1982). The count excluded sentences with no overt subject. The difference between topical and focal subject was not taken into account.

	VS	SV
Advertisements	85.0 %	15.0 %
Headlines	73.0 %	27.0 %
Announcements (Weekly Magazine)	39.0 %	61.0 %
Announcements (Newspaper)	36.8 %	63.2 %
Spoken Narrative	34.0 %	66.0 %
Crime Story	29.0 %	71.0 %
Modern Novel	22.0 %	78.0 %

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to Elvira Topalovic and Elvira Veselinovic for help with the Serbocroatian data.



**Table 3: VS/SV Proportion According to Text Type in Modern Greek**

	VS	SV
Spoken Conversation	32.2 %	67.8 %
Written Text (Novel)	10.8 %	89.2 %

**Table 4: VS/SV Proportion in Spoken vs. Written Text in Hungarian**

Similar figures can be found - *mutatis mutandis* - for Italian, Spanish, and Serbocroatian; for the situation in Russian, cf. the detailed tables in Miller (1995).

No statistical investigations of this kind have been made so far for the other types of constructions. Impressionistically, SAcc constructions are rather frequent in German and in English. Nevertheless, this has not been corroborated by statistical data. During the preparatory phase of the VS study some years ago, I counted SAcc occurrences in a video-recording of a German TV play of approximately 45 minutes length. The result was a figure of less than 7 % SAcc sentences in comparison to 93 % of sentences covering all the other types of constructions occurring in German sentences. This is considerably lower than the figures obtained for VS constructions in the languages investigated in the VS study (except Russian). Of course, this figure has to be counterchecked against a larger corpus of data and, in particular, against a variety of text types.

## 2.4. Polysemy of Constructions

Before dealing with the question of how the different constructions identified above are tied to the domain of theticity, we will briefly examine their polysemy and exclude those of their functions and specific applications which do not seem relevant to the present subject. We will first deal with the VS construction, proceeding from the findings of the VS study.

### 2.4.1. VS Constructions

#### 2.4.1.1. Narrow Focus

There are at least two narrow focus constellations triggering VS order which have to be carefully separated from the thetic constellations: **verb**

**focus and contrastive subject focus.** For most of the languages examined in the VS study, it has turned out that verb focus is one of the most prominent functions of VS order. As some of Schroeder's (1995) examples suggest, this seems to include even Turkish, which is otherwise not a SV/VS alternating language. Other relevant languages of the sample are Russian, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Modern Greek and Hungarian (Sasse 1995a:10). To these, Rumanian, Albanian and Serbocroatian may be added (for Rumanian see Ulrich 1995; Albanian and Serbocroatian data come from author's research). What kind of verb focus is expressed by VS is open to further investigation. It is clear that VS does not signalize normal "completive" predicate focus found with verbs in a continuous chain of events predicated of a presupposed subject, but often involves a stronger degree of contrastive emphasis usually associated with "polar" or "verum" focus (see Dik 1981 and Höhle 1992) which emphasizes the truth of the relevant predicate. On the other hand, there are many VS cases with the verb bearing a strong accent and therefore likely to represent instances of verb focus, which do not occur in the typical environments of "polar" focus. The exact presuppositional/assertional conditions for verb focus thus remain unclear. The tendency for favoring or obligatorizing VS in sentence questions, noted for some languages, may be taken to represent one instance of verb focus. For a detailed analysis of verb focus in Rumanian VS clauses, the reader is referred to Ulrich (1985, in particular pp. 256-284), where the phenomenon is called "Abtönung". It is often difficult to distinguish verb focus from cases usually called "right dislocation" or "afterthought"; arguments for a clear separation in Rumanian can be found in Ulrich (1985:225ff.).

Contrastive subject focus was noted in the VS study for Russian, Modern Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish and Romani. The only language that does not express contrastive subject focus by VS seems to be Hungarian. There are good reasons for this due to the strongly grammaticalized preverbal focus position in this language<sup>18</sup>. Contrasts may be oppositional or suppletive (e.g. with 'also'); a special subtype of the contrastive focus VS construction, which occurs in several languages, is double contrast with an 'as-for' topic in front of the verb and the contrastive subject in postverbal focus position. For further information, the reader is referred to Matras and Sasse (1995).

It has to be noted that verb focus VS and contrastive subject focus VS represent two different constructions once the intonational features are taken into account. Verb focus is represented by an intonational type which requires a strong accent on the verb, while subject focus requires the intonational peak on the subject.

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<sup>18</sup> This has not always been the case. Contrastive subject focus with VS is attested in earlier stages of the language, cf. Sasse 1995:179f.; good examples can be found in Behrens 1989.

#### 2.4.1.2. Inversion

It is necessary to distinguish “VS cases proper” from cases of “inversion” triggered by certain preverbal constituents (cf. also Myhill 1986). In Hungarian, this difference has a formal correlate in that certain cases identifiable as inversion allow subjects with zero articles in postverbal position while “VS cases proper” do not (Sasse 1995b:174 with further references). The role of preverbal material in VS constructions in most of the SV/VS alternating languages is as yet poorly understood. In Modern Greek, Rumanian, and Albanian, at least, **focus fronting** triggers inversion. The situation in Hungarian is special due to the grammaticalized preverbal focus position (cf. 2.5). Bolkestein (1995) cites clear cases of focus fronting with inversion in Latin, but inversion seems to be optional here. In all languages of the VS sample, there seem to be preferences for focus fronting with certain emphatic modal adverbials (*so much, very*, etc.). A special instance of focus fronting is **negation fronting**, which occurs in all the languages examined in the VS study, but with differing degrees of grammaticalization. In all cases, the negation is procliticized to the verb. In Hungarian, it consequently occupies the focus position and may therefore be held responsible for the inversion of other material that might occur in this position. Whereas this peculiarity is absent from the other languages, all of them seem to have a tendency for putting negated predicates in front of their subjects, at least in short sentences (cf. the discussion for Modern Greek in Sasse 1995b). This is attested even for Latin (Bolkestein 1995:153). One might speculate that fronting of negated verb forms is a special case of contrastive verb focus, or the negative counterpart thereof. Negative elements other than the negated verb form itself, viz., polar items, negative indefinite pronouns or adverbials such as *nothing, never*, etc., negative quantifier phrases, are also often put in clause-initial position and, in this case, trigger inversion. Negation fronting with inversion also occurs in Western European languages which are not of the SV/VS alternating type; for example, it has been obligatorized in certain cases in English as an archaic relic of a former XV word order.

A grammaticalized case of focus fronting can be seen in the obligatory preverbal position of **interrogatives**, which obligatorily triggers inversion in almost all languages investigated in the VS study and many more European languages (except, perhaps, Latin). Note again that the situation in Hungarian, though superficially the same, is different on closer inspection since interrogatives occupy the obligatory preverbal focus position; so, interrogative fronting has a different value in the overall grammatical system here.

The inversion of subjects with **verbs of saying** after direct speech reported for almost all European languages independently of the SV/VS alternating type (even belletristic forms of English) may also best be

considered as a fossilized case of inversion due to focus fronting. The fronted stretch of direct speech preceding this type of inversion may be regarded as the focal object of the clause. For further information see Sasse (1995a:12 with further references).

It is difficult to say whether or not adverbials of “**setting**”, i.e. expressions indicating time, place, and circumstance and setting a frame for the following predication, also trigger inversion in some languages<sup>19</sup>. In Modern Greek, Russian, Romani, Rumanian, and Albanian, at least, VS is strongly preferred after sentence-initial temporal adverbials including temporal clauses. In other languages of the VS sample, the role of adverbials of setting as triggers of inversion is doubtful (cf. Sasse 1995a:12). The only language which does not have VS with “setting constituent fronting” at all is Latin (Bolkestein 1995).

A final factor which seems to favor inversion is **weight**. Long subject constituents (so-called “heavy” constituents) have a tendency to be placed after the verb. Examples for such cases in Russian, Modern Greek, Hungarian, Italian and Latin can be found in Matras and Sasse (1995), though some of the examples are controversial.

#### 2.4.2. SAcc and Split Constructions

It is commonplace that SAcc constructions are often ambiguous for a narrow subject focus reading and athetic reading. This is the case, at least, in those languages which use them as a prominent thetic construction. Other languages remain to be investigated; it may turn out that there are formal differences in certain instances. By the way, the formal coincidence of subject focus and thetic is not uncommon and by no means restricted to SAcc constructions; it is also found in Japanese, which operates with particles (Kuroda 1972). Readings of SAcc constructions other than subject focus and thetic are not known to me. The construction is thus much less ambiguous than VS.

As far as Split constructions are concerned, their ambiguity may depend on the subtype. Those introduced by deictic markers (such as French *voilà...*) and *have* are perhaps the only non-polysemous thetic constructions found all over Europe. Things become more complicated with those types of Split constructions which have an initial existential or no pre-subjectal element at all (cf. French examples in 2.1), since the same sentence types are used for subject focus (cleft constructions). It has been repeatedly maintained that subject cleft constructions are intonationally different from thetic Split structures (Müller-Hauser 1943,

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<sup>19</sup> For the role of adverbials of setting as a factor triggering VS in languages other than those of the VS sample, see Myhill (1986).



cf. also Wehr 1984); nevertheless, the issue remains controversial since it is doubtful whether the intonational differences can be clearly identified in all cases.

## 2.5. Language-specific Restrictions

Each language imposes language-specific restrictions on the usability of its constructions. In the following, we will discuss a number of examples of such restrictions relevant to the four constructions dealt with in this paper. The account given here is by no means intended as exhaustive. Detailed studies to this effect have only been made for VS constructions in some of the languages of the VS study; several other languages such as German, English and French are well-investigated and a lot of material is available in the literature; however, the situation in most of the other European languages remains to be further investigated. The discussion will be given here under three headings: global syntactic patterns, monoargumentality, and definiteness and animacy. The role of lexical semantics is discussed in an extra section (5).

### 2.5.1. Global Syntactic Patterns

Languages differ considerably in the degree of rigidity found in their syntactic organization. This has a strong influence on the manipulability and discourse-functional exploitability of their constructions. There are relatively generous syntactic structures, which impose comparably few constraints on the application of certain constructions. The consequence is, among other things, that the constructions may be freely exploited for discourse-pragmatic purposes. This is probably what has traditionally been understood as "free" or "pragmatically-based" (cf. Mithun 1987) word order. Among the languages of Europe, Balkan languages such as Rumanian, Albanian and Modern Greek may be cases in point. Apart from a small number of obligatorizations, most of the restrictions found in these languages seem to be lexical and/or pragmatically well-motivated.

In the other extreme, there are languages with a rigid syntactic organization which imposes a considerable number of restrictions of a conventionalized, grammaticalized nature on their constructions.

English basically has a rigid SVO order. Its potential of word order variation for discourse-pragmatic purposes is severely restricted. Mechanisms of exbraciation, left-dislocation, topic fronting are present, but limited. It therefore makes extensive use of cleft constructions and intonational devices. As far as other types of discourse-pragmatically

exploitable word order constellations are concerned, VS is possible to a certain extent, provided that the preverbal position is filled with an element other than the subject (i.e. it is always XVS). Except for the fossilized cases of inversion alluded to in section 2.4.1, there are only few types of VS constructions available. Some of them are relevant in the thetic domain. One is the well-known *there is*-construction, which is, in turn, subject to lexical restrictions by virtue of its existential/deictic character. There is also a VS construction sometimes met in newspapers and recently described in detail by Birner and Ward (1992). It follows the pattern "participle (present or perfect) + auxiliary + subject" and is therefore possible only with periphrastic verb forms. For further restrictions on the occurrence of this construction, see Birner and Ward (1992, especially p.8ff.). Finally, there is a construction which is used in belletristic literature for scene-setting descriptions and requires an adverbial in preverbal position (cf. example (51) in section 3.3 below). In the thetic domain, English also makes use of the SAcc construction but this, in turn, is restricted to intransitive clauses with a limited number of verbs. In all other cases, specifically "thetic" constructions are not available. English thus has to steer a middle course through a considerable number of "special" constructions (including the usual polyfunctional SV pattern), all of them in competition with each other and subject to heavy constraints. On thetic constructions in English cf. also Drubig (1992).

In German, which also uses SAcc constructions for thetic utterances, there seem to be far fewer restrictions on this type. But the VS pattern, which is also exploited in certain areas of the thetic domain, is likewise subject to the global organization of German syntax which is dominated by the verb-second principle. Similar to English, the VS pattern can thus only be employed in thetic utterances when the preverbal position is filled. This may be achieved, as in English, by expletives or adverbials. It is clear that the discourse-pragmatic exploitability of these constructions is limited.

The most spectacular case of a global syntactic pattern bearing a strong impact on its thetic construction (in this case VS) is Hungarian. The most important grammatical factor influencing the employment of VS constructions in Hungarian is the complex grammaticalized system of what É. Kiss calls "focus configurationality"<sup>20</sup>. The central point is that the position immediately preceding the verb form plays a special role. It is filled by a single constituent called the "**verb modifier**" by Behrens (1982), a designation which I will adopt here. The verb modifier

<sup>20</sup> Exhaustive descriptions of this system are presented, from a generative point of view, in É. Kiss (1987) and numerous other publications by the same author, and in Behrens (1982), in a non-generative framework. An historical account can be found in Behrens (1989). For present purposes, we will confine ourselves to a brief summary of those facts which are relevant for the subsequent discussion of VS order as a thetic device.

(henceforth M) can be an adverb of any sort, a noun in any case form, an adjective, a preverb or an infinitive, and forms a close intonational unit with the verb. In addition to the M position, there is a grammaticalized topic slot T in preverbal position. This can be preceded by adverbials of setting (S). If we symbolize optional constituents occurring between the T and the M positions by X and Y, the “configurational” make-up of the H sentence is, roughly,

((S)(T)(X)(M(V))(Y))

with all constituents except V being optional.

There are certain rules governing the definiteness and referentiality features of those nominal constituents which may fill the M position. The general rule, often cited in the literature, is that non-referential constituents occur in the M position, while referential constituents (either indefinite or definite) are placed after the verb:

- (23) a. *újságot olvastam* 'I was reading a newspaper'  
           newspaper I.read  
       b. *olvastam egy újságot* 'I was reading a (specific) newspaper'  
           I.read a newspaper  
       c. *elolvastam az újságot* 'I read the newspaper'  
           I.off.read the newspaper

Behrens (1982:110) points out that indefinite referential constituents are not obligatorily restricted to the postverbal position; they may occupy the M position as well. In particular, this order is almost predictable when there are two arguments, one indefinite and one definite. Moreover, local adverbials may appear in the M position even when they are definite.

Hungarian has a grammaticalized focus marking system distinguishing between **verb focus** and **non-verbal constituent focus**. The latter consists in placing the focus constituent in the M position. It is usually claimed in the literature that a focus constituent can be intonationally distinguished from a non-focalized verb modifier by having higher pitch. What is even more important is the fact that the preverbal focus constituent ousts a possible non-focal M from its preverbal position into a position after the verb (if M is not the focus constituent itself). This is usually called inversion<sup>21</sup>.

There are certain elements which obligatorily occupy the M position. Among these are negations, interrogatives, and certain adverbs. One can

<sup>21</sup> Note that this is a different sense of inversion than that understood in section 2.4.1.2 (where it was confined to inverted subjects), though the effects may sometimes look superficially similar.

say that these elements are obligatorily focalized. These elements may also have the effect of replacing possible candidates for the M slot and moving them into the postverbal position. Finally, it is important to note that both definite and indefinite noun phrases may occur in the focus position, but a definite constituent in preverbal position (with the exception of the local adverbials referred to above) is almost always readily identifiable as bearing narrow focus.

It is clear that this complicated system has a strong bearing on possible occurrences of thetic VS clauses. In particular, the definiteness/referentiality constraint rules out VS clauses with articleless subjects. In such cases, the subject focus construction is used. The subject focus construction is thus ambiguous for a narrow focus and a thetic reading, if the preverbal position is filled by a noun phrase with zero article. As already mentioned, the subject focus construction resembles a SAcc or SInc construction, but due to the special conditions of focus configurationality it has a quite different status than the SAcc constructions of English or German. Furthermore, XV constructions must always be carefully examined as to whether or not the X is focal before they can be compared to similar constructions in other languages.

### 2.5.2. Monoargumentality

Most widely discussed as a main restricting factor in the occurrence of thetic constructions is **monoargumentality**. This is a (perhaps misleading) term used to cover a number of formally heterogeneous relational constellations leading to a configuration of just one predicate plus one nominal argument. It should not be confused with intransitivity or monovalency, and it has to be taken as a surface structure criterion ruling out considerations on possible "underlying" direct, indirect or oblique objects. Furthermore, the term "argument" is meant in the restrictive sense as an overt noun phrase. The class of monoargumental predicates thus includes strict intransitive, monovalent predicates as well as medio-passives, reflexives, and support verb constructions, but also verbs which may have clausal arguments. In this sense, monoargumentality has turned out to be a strong restricting factor in Italian and an even stronger one in Spanish: Irrespective of their discourse function, VS constructions are allowed in these languages only with monoargumental verbs (see Sornicola (1995) and Cennamo (1995) for further discussion). VS *is* allowed with transitive verbs in Italian, provided that they have a pronominalized object; otherwise, the so-called subject-indicating impersonals could not be properly described. In addition, it seems that different types of VS structures exhibit different degrees of sensitivity to the monoargumentality criterion. It is usually stronger in thetic functions of VS constructions than in other usages of



these constructions, but the whole problem remains to be investigated in detail.

Among the SV/VS alternating languages investigated in the VS study, monoargumentality can sometimes be observed as a statistical tendency, but not as a grammatical constraint. Some of the languages are not very sensitive to monoargumentality; in Hungarian and Modern Greek, transitive VS clauses are common and we have ample evidence that they occur in the “thetic” types. The same seems to be the case in Rumanian as far as can be judged from Ulrich (1985). Intransitives appear to be more frequent in these languages, at least with the “thetic” types, but we lack detailed statistical evidence. Perhaps for all other languages of the SV/VS alternating type, the characterization given for Latin by Bolkestein (1995:36) can be applied: “The tendency to appear in VS order is strongest ... in the case of intransitive, monovalent predicates with the verb to be prominently among them... However, bivalent predicates, transitive and intransitive, with both arguments expressed, are not incompatible with VS order”.

Monoargumentality also seems to be a factor strongly influencing *there is* constructions and SAcc constructions in English (cf. above). It is less prominent in German SAcc constructions and in French Split constructions, though always observable as a statistical tendency.

In summary, we can say that the monoargumentality parameter still remains open for further research, since the evidence is sometimes inconclusive and not exhaustive in this respect. In particular, we do not know exactly how the parameter works for different types of VS constructions. The monoargumentality constraint makes sense with clearly thetic constructions since, the more material a sentence contains, the more likely it becomes that it contains presupposed or focal material, which rules out a thetic construction.

The following table gives an overview of the relevance of the monoargumentality factor as a strong grammatical constraint in selected European languages.

Language	Construction	Monoargumentality factor
Albanian	VS	low
English	SAcc	high
French	Split	low
German	SAcc	low
Hungarian	VS	low
Italian	VS	high
Modern Greek	VS	low
Rumanian	VS	low
Spanish	VS	high

**Table 5: Role of Monoargumentality Factor in Selected European Languages**

### 2.5.3. Definiteness and Animacy

Further factors limiting the number of admittedthetic constructions may be the definiteness or animacy of the subjects involved. Interestingly enough, this constraint has so far only been posited for VS constructions given the fact that the well-investigated SAcc and Split constructions in English, German, French, etc. do not exhibit any restrictions of this sort. However, a clear case of a construction strongly resembling SAcc and heavily restricted by definiteness features may be found in Hungarian (see below).

As far as SV/VS alternating languages are concerned, the definiteness features of the subject constitute a strong constraint on VS constructions in Hungarian and in Russian. Let us deal with Hungarian first, which is the more complicated case. Hungarian has a strict rule which permits only subjects with the definite or indefinite article to be placed after the verb (cf. 2.5.1). Correlated with this is the fact that the focus construction with the subject filling the focus slot is in complementary distribution with the VS construction insofar as non-referential subjects with zero article obligatorily appear in subject focus position (i.e. in a non-topical SV order clearly distinct from SV with topical S). In other words, some of thethetic functions are distributed between VS and “subject focus” construction in that VS appears with definite subjects and “subject focus” with non-referential subjects; indefinite specific subjects with the indefinite article may appear in both constructions. Examples can be found in Sasse (1995b:176f.), where further details are discussed. The “subject focus” construction is therefore ambiguous insofar as it has a narrow subject focus reading and athetic reading. If we interpret the Hungarian subject focus construction as a case of SAcc (cf. above), this sensitivity to definiteness would contradict the claim, made in the first paragraph of this section, that, of thethetic constructions examined here, only VS is sensitive to definiteness.

In Russian, the situation is nearly opposite. Postverbal subjects are per default interpreted as indefinite or non-referential. Only verb focus constructions and episode-initial VS constructions containing “given” subjects are exempted from this default interpretation. In other cases, position is a clear sign of definiteness and compensates for the lack of a definite article, so that indefinite subjects must be placed in postverbal position while definite subjects are excluded in this position. For further details see Maslova (1995) and Sasse (1995a:22f). In sum, Hungarian and Russian handle features of definiteness and referentiality in an opposite way, and these things necessarily have a bearing on the language-specific restrictions of the actual use of VS and SV clauses in a text.

Definiteness and animacy do not appear to play any important role as strictly *grammaticalized* restrictions on VS constructions in the other languages of the SV/VS alternating type. What is often mentioned in the literature, however, is statistical preferences. For instance, Sornicola (1995) reports that in her Italian corpus, all subjects in VS constructions of thethetic types (called “all-new” by her) have inanimate subjects, and in her Spanish corpus, at least the great majority of such subjects are inanimate. But at any rate, this does not seem to amount to a grammatical constraint.

#### 2.5.4. Local Restrictions

In addition to the impact of language-specific global syntactic patterns and cross-linguistically observable tendencies, many languages have “local” obligatorizations of the relevant constructions. In Modern Greek, VS is obligatorized in certain types of relative clauses (cf. Sasse 1995b); similar conventionalizations in subordinate clauses are also discussed for Italian and Spanish (cf. Bernini 1995 and Sornicola 1995). Modern Greek and Albanian also obligatorize VS in non-factual clauses; the same restriction is reported for Romani by Matras (1995).

### 3. Theticity and Discourse Functions

In the preceding section, we have examined four constructions which are relevant in the investigation of the phenomenological domain of theticity. We have investigated their formal structure; we have identified and filtered out a number of usages of these constructions which are clearly non-thetic and will be disregarded in the following sections; and we have described a number of important language-specific grammatical constraints which globally govern the use of these constructions.

In the following, we will examine the various discourse situations in which thetic expressions have been said to typically occur. This will help us in arriving at a first approximation of cross-linguistic functional comparability. We will proceed from a list of functions recognized as relevant in the VS study and described in detail in Matras and Sasse (1995).

### 3.1. The Relevant Discourse-Functional Domains

The following discourse functions involving the thetic complex are distinguished: annuntiative, introductive, interruptive, descriptive, and explanative. In addition, the VS study has revealed a “connective” function (with two subtypes, the “reactive/consequential” and the “discontinuative” type, cf. Sasse 1995a:16 and Matras 1995). Ranging the connective complex along with the other cases has turned out to be problematic, and an extra section will therefore be devoted to the discussion of these cases (4).

#### 3.1.1. The Annuntiative Function

One of the most prominent discourse configurations in which the thetic complex is found to be relevant is so-called “statements out of the blue”, such as monopropositional exclamations in spoken language and special text genres such as announcements and newspaper headlines in written language. We may call this the **annuntiative** function. The VS study clearly revealed that this function was served by verb-subject order as a productive strategy in most of the languages investigated (Italian, Spanish, Russian, Modern Greek, Hungarian; to these may be added Albanian, Rumanian, Serbo-Croatian, and several further languages not covered in the VS study). The same function is typically fulfilled by subject-accented sentences in Germanic languages (German, Dutch, English, etc.) and in certain other European languages (Basque, Polish, Czech and others), sometimes in competition with VS. French and Welsh use Split constructions for this purpose. Some examples follow.

Headlines:

- (24) *Cambia il governatore alla Bundesbank*  
 changes the governor to.the Bundesbank  
 ‘At the Bundesbank, the governor changes.’ (Italian; Bernini 1995)
- (25) *Umer matematik Andrej Tixonov*  
 died mathematician A.T.  
 ‘(The) mathematician A.T. died.’ (Russian; Maslova 1995)
- (26) *Anavlithike i dhiki ekdhoti efimeridhas*  
 was.deferred the lawsuit of.an.ditor of.a.newspaper  
 ‘Newspaper editor’s lawsuit deferred.’ (Modern Greek; Sasse 1995b)

- (27) *Poginuo britanski vojnika*  
killed British soldier  
'British SOLDIER killed.' (Serbocroatian; author's corpus)
- (28) *SCHULBUS verunglückt*  
school bus crashed  
'School bus crashed' (i.e. 'School bus accident.')(German; author's corpus)

Exclamations:

- (29) *Jönnek a szomszédok!*  
come the neighbors  
'The NEIGHBORS are coming!' (Hungarian; Ulrich 1984)
- (30) *Telefonise o Kostas!*  
has.called the K.  
'KOSTAS has called!' (Modern Greek; Sasse 1995b:167)
- (31) *A venit Antonescu!*  
has come A.  
'ANTONESCU has come!' (Rumanian; Ulrich 1984:163)
- (32) *Einer Ihrer KLIENTEN ist ermordet worden!*  
one of.your clients is been murdered  
'One of your CLIENTS has been murdered!' (German; author's corpus)
- (33) *J'ai ma femme qui est malade!*  
I.have my wife which is sick  
'My WIFE is sick!' (French; standard example)

Nevertheless, it was also found that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the annuntiative context and certain utterance types. First of all, the fact that each language imposes its own semantic and syntactic restrictions on the employability of certain constructions under certain circumstances leads to significant differences in the permitted scope of occurrence of the various constructions when compared across languages. These restrictions have already been dealt with in section 2.5. Second, some languages seem to formally differentiate between annuntiative exclamations in spoken discourse and monopropositional news reports such as newspaper headlines. German, for instance, formally distinguishes exclamations in spoken language, which are typically full sentences of the SAcc type, from a headline strategy in newspapers, which operates with subject-accentuation, too, but makes use, in addition, of a predicate-dropping device characteristic of the telegraphic style of newspapers (cf. example (28) above). Split structures in French and Welsh and in the other languages in which they marginally occur seem to be restricted to exclamations but do not typically occur in headlines.



Moreover, in none of the languages examined can it be said that the annuntiative discourse situation necessarily evokes one or several of the formal devices said to express theticity. Even if the different grammatical and lexical constraints imposed on the various constructions are filtered out, there still remains a considerable number of attested exclamations and headlines which, unexpectedly, do not follow the “thetic” pattern. Rather, constructions are used which involve “topical” subjects. This is clearly due to the trivial fact that news can always be reported about situations in which certain persons or entities are already in the center of attention (i.e. presupposed in the traditional sense). This constellation then evokes a topic construction. In the VS study, it was found that in nearly all cases where SV order (with “topical” S) or a verb-focus construction were chosen in such a context, the S’s were referring to discourse topics likely to be shared by the audience (cf. examples in Bernini (1995) for Italian and Sasse (1995b) for Modern Greek and Hungarian; this has also been confirmed by a brief investigation of Serbocroatian and Albanian headlines). The usual precondition for the occurrence of topic constructions in headlines is that a certain person or entity, which had already been the subject of discussion in earlier articles of the newspaper, is involved in an “open” situation, i.e. it is expected that he/she/it will do something, and this something is now being reported:

- (34) *Izrael elfogadta ez amerikai meghívást*  
 Israel accepted the American invitation  
 ‘Israel accepts American invitation.’ (Hungarian; Sasse 1995b:183)

This is also the case in German predicate-dropped newspaper headlines, where subject-accentuation contrasts with double accentuation under precisely the same conditions which are responsible for the VS/topical SV alternation in the VS languages:

- (35) *FULBRIGHT erkrankt*  
 F. got.sick  
 ‘FULBRIGHT (got) sick.’
- (36) Bonner BAU TEURER  
 Bonn’s construction more.expensive  
 ‘Construction in Bonn more expensive.’

Contrasts such as this are also encountered in spoken discourse and have been extensively discussed in the literature (cf. the summary of earlier writings and the discussion of further examples from different languages in Sasse 1987, where an interpretation in terms of the “background of expectation” was given; cf. also Lambrecht 1994 for a lucid discussion of the entire complex). Of course, this “expectability” of the subjects’ topical status can only be taken as a possibility of post festum interpretation and not as a predictive rule, given the fact that there is a considerable range of optionality to be expected here. This depends on the individual

assumptions of speakers or writers with respect to what knowledge their addressees share in each special case.

Nevertheless, the high degree of consensus among speakers of different languages with respect to the interpretation of these cases clearly shows that the presuppositional "prehistory" in which news reports are embedded has a strong bearing on the choice of the construction employed and that, in turn, certain presuppositions are intimately connected with certain expression types.

### 3.1.2. The Introductory Function

The next function to be discussed is the **introductory** function, by which we mean first mention subjects as a text-opening strategy. There are good reasons to restrict this function to the introduction of discourse participants. There is a second type of utterance often occurring in text-initial position with first mention subjects, namely, scene-setting background descriptions. These do not introduce participants into the discourse. Moreover, in the languages examined, they are frequently not expressed in exactly the same way as participant introductions. This frequent formal difference supports the assumption that scene-setting is an operation quite different from participant introduction. We will therefore posit a separate function of scene-setting which will be dealt with in the following paragraph.

Interestingly, participant introduction is not a very frequent function of the "thetic" constructions discussed in the literature. The VS study has revealed the following results. In the Modern Greek corpus, VS scores comparably low as a text-initial word order in all genres investigated, while in Italian, there is a difference between the two corpora on which Bernini's investigation is based, though the frequency of text-initial VS does not seem to be exceedingly high in either case (Bernini 1995:66). In the Hungarian newspaper texts, the first sentences are usually SV (with topical subject), though this may be, in part, explained by the fact that many of them repeat the VS title in the reverse order, the subject then becoming "topical". Modern Hungarian narrative texts, however, do not very often begin with VS clauses either, and in none of the cases found does the VS construction introduce a new subject to be used as a topic in the subsequent text passage. For Russian, however, Miller (1995:135) claims that "VS structures typically introduce the entity that is the discourse topic of the following piece of text, ranging from a sentence or two to a whole paragraph". He thus explicitly describes the indication of a first mention subject as one of the three functions of VS order in Russian intransitive clauses (the other two being contrastive subjects and the introduction of new episodes with given subjects). This may be seen as a special device of Russian in connection with the absence of a definite article in this language and its compensation by word order (cf. Maslova 1995:109). As for the other languages examined in the VS study, all we

can say is that VS clauses may occur at the beginning of texts, but we lack exact figures on their frequency and their exact nature. One notable exception are clauses with the predicate 'be' and similar existentials for which we have ample evidence that they almost automatically trigger VS, at least in Italian, Modern Greek, Hungarian, Latin, and Russian. Outside of the languages covered by the VS study, the same situation was found in Albanian and Serbocroatian (unpublished research by this author), and in Rumanian (Ulrich 1985). This is confirmed by earlier studies on other Romance and non-Romance languages (cf. Wehr 1984:15ff., summarizing previous research). In most of the European languages, including those which otherwise do not make extensive use of verb-subject order, the existential (X)VS type figures prominently in introductory speech formulas of traditional narratives ("there was an X"). At least with existential predicates, then, we can confirm that VS clauses are preferably exploited for the introductive text function in many languages.

The remainder of the constructions relevant in the "thetic domain" do not seem to be used in introductory phases, except for the Danish SInc construction which is, at any rate, coupled with VS. Neither Split constructions nor SAcc constructions ever play a role in participant-introducing contexts. Except for the comparably rare cases of participant introduction by means of the existential (X)VS construction mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the main introductive strategy for participants in modern language all over Europe is by first mentioning new participants in the form of grammatical objects of transitive verbs. Even more frequently, however, authors refrain from using a special introductive device altogether: The main hero of modern narratives is usually presented as a topic from the very first sentence on.

### 3.1.3. The Interruptive Function

All authors of the VS study agreed that, in their languages, text-internal VS clauses (other than cases of grammaticalized inversion) never continue statements about a topical subject commented on in the preceding sentences. Typically, these VS clauses evoke a "sudden event" effect which we will call the **interruptive** function. They are usually preceded by a series of events in a topic chain which is disrupted by a sudden, unexpected new situation. Data from all our languages converge in their preference (in some cases even obligatoriness) of VS clauses in cases of sudden, interruptive events. The phone, the alarm-clock or the door-bell ringing, somebody knocking on the door, the door opening, the lights being turned on or off, etc., are notorious instances met over and over again. The same semantic areas are described in studies on other SV/Vs alternating languages (see, for example, Wehr 1984 and Ulrich 1985),



and were also found in the data from Albanian and Serbocroatian investigated by this author.

Turning tothetic constructions other than VS structures, it has long been known that they figure prominently in interruptive contexts. The studies on SAcc in English and German, which present a wealth of relevant examples, have already been mentioned in section 1, and the reader is again referred to the examples given there. The interruptive function is also amply documented for Split constructions in French and Welsh; see again Wehr (1984) for both languages, MacCana (1973) on Welsh and Ulrich (1985) and the various works by Lambrecht on French.

### 3.1.4. The Descriptive Function

VS clauses with a scene-setting function, henceforth called **descriptive**, have likewise been found in all sample languages of the VS study, and, in addition, in Albanian and Serbocroatian. They usually (but not necessarily) involve existential verbs (often in a disguised form denoting a certain prototypical property of the subject such as *shining* of the sun) and describe environmental conditions presented as a background to the main story line. A lot of beautiful examples extracted from belletristic literature from Modern Greek and Hungarian can be found in Sasse (1995b); Ulrich (1985) also offers a considerable number of examples from Rumanian.

German, English, Dutch and other languages which use SAcc constructions regularly employ these for scene-setting descriptions:

(37) *Ein BLIZZARD nahte.*  
'A BLIZZARD was approaching.'

(38) *SILENCE descended.*

In these languages, the SAcc construction in a descriptive function is usually restricted to very short sentences which do not involve much more material than the subject and the verb themselves. For more elaborate utterances, other strategies are used. In German, SAcc is more or less in complementary distribution with an XVS construction, with the preverbal position filled by a temporal, local or modal adverbial:

(39) *In den Tälern löste sich der Nebel zögernd auf.*  
'In the valleys, the fog hesitantly lifted.'

(40) *Schon senkte sich die Dunkelheit über das Moor.*  
'Already had darkness fallen over the moor.'

(41) *Zu dieser Tageszeit waren nur wenige Menschen auf dem Marktplatz.*  
'At this time of day, only a few people were on the market place.'

Many of the SV/VS alternating languages also prefer to employ similar XVS constructions for longer descriptive utterances. Examples from Modern Greek and Hungarian were given in Sasse (1995b). The following is an additional example from Rumanian, borrowed from Ulrich (1985:117):

- (42) *La trei sute de metri spre stînga, în coasta oraşului [...] se legănau, înghesuite, şlepuri de fier pîntecoase.*  
 'Three hundred meters to the left, [...] all crowded together, swayed the iron barges.'

### 3.1.5. The Explanative Function

The four constructions are prominently involved in expressing explanations of or elaborations on a given situation. This function is called the **explanative** function. It requires a presupposed event, i.e. something which has already happened but remains to be identified. The explanative discourse setting thus always involves two parts: the first part, which establishes the presupposition, and the second part, which gives the explanation or elaboration. Depending on how the first part is established in the text, several subtypes may be distinguished:

1. The presupposition is established by the state of affairs referred to in the immediately preceding utterance. The sentence preceding the "thetic" construction indicates a state of affairs calling for an explanation in terms of a yet unknown event, cf. the following German example of an SAcc construction:

- (43) *Da trat ein jäher Wendepunkt in meinem Leben ein: meine SCHWESTER kam zur Welt.*  
 'Then, there was a drastic change in my life: My SISTER was born.'

2. The presupposition is established by a question "what happened?" or quasi-synonymous questions such as "why do you do x?". The following example of a French Split construction demonstrates this:

- (44) A: *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?*  
 B: *C'est MAMAN qui me bat!*

'A: What's the matter? B. MUM is hitting me.'

3. The presupposition-establishing element is part of the extralinguistic setting, e.g. a paralinguistic element (gesture, mimics).

Furthermore, the presupposition can be built up interactively by the question-answer sequence (as in (44)), or monologically, as in (43), or in a combination of both, as in the following German example:

- (45) A: *Wo will er hin?*

B: *In die Klinik. Seine FRAU wird operiert.*

'A: Where is he off to? - B: To the clinic. His WIFE is having an operation.'

The explanative function has been extensively discussed in the literature. For further information, the reader is referred to Wehr (1984), Ulrich (1985), Sasse (1987), Lambrecht (1994) and Matras and Sasse (1995), all of whom summarize and evaluate earlier scholarship on the subject.

### 3.2. Similarities and Differences Among the Discourse Functions

The five discourse functions of thetic constructions described in the preceding section have been predominantly established on the basis of their environment, i.e. the position in which they occur in the discourse. In the following, we will briefly point to certain similarities and differences among the various discourse functions.

The most striking similarity is probably the fact that all thetic utterances which occur in these five discourse situations share the feature of the low presuppositionality of their subjects. In most of the cases, we have found that languages use a special construction when the subject does not refer to an entity which is presuppositionally established, i.e. about which new information is expected, but rather, resort to topic constructions when this is the case. Disregarding language-specific restrictions for the moment, the following general tendencies have been observed: annuntiative, interruptive and explanative utterances with non-presupposed subjects involve a thetic construction, while annuntiative, interruptive and explanative utterances with presupposed subjects are expressed by a topical SV construction; clearly introductive utterances are always expressed by a special thetic construction (if there is an introduction at all), which may be attributed to the fact that their subject is always non-presupposed. The presuppositional status of descriptive utterances is less clear, and, not surprisingly, there is a certain fluctuation between thetic and topical constructions.

Descriptive clauses share a number of important features with interruptive clauses, which set them apart from the other three types. Both interruptive and descriptive clauses may occur text- or paragraph-internally as well as text- or paragraph-initially. It is not the position in the text but the event as such that is responsible for the presuppositional interpretation. Interruption implies a change in reference to the presuppositional background, a break in referential continuity. The author may nevertheless begin a story with a sentence such as *The TELEPHONE rang*, assuming that this expression will evoke a frame in the reader's mind in which it is conceived of as a sudden, interruptive event. The same is true of scene-setting descriptions. A scene-setting description does not require any specific textually determined presuppositional background for it to be understood (it is situated, so to

speak, on a different level than the main story line) and may thus be placed anywhere in the text. Both interruptive and descriptive VS clauses may occur in chains, i.e. there can be several interruptive events simultaneously or several states constituting a complex scene-description. There is, however, an important difference between interruptive and descriptive clauses with respect to the opposition between "thetic" constructions and constructions with topical S. In the SV/VS alternating languages, it was found that the opposition between VS and SV with topical S (where this is possible) is of a different nature in interruptive states of affairs than in descriptive ones. With interruptive states of affairs, VS is largely obligatory; the same proposition expressed by means of a construction with a topical subject loses its interruptive character. This means that certain noun-verb-combinations are quasi-lexicalized for their interruptive VS order. This is not the case with descriptive utterances. Here, VS order may sometimes be lexicalized, sometimes obligatorized for other reasons, but there are many cases where speakers say that word order doesn't really matter. Moreover, "natural phenomena" (sun, moon, stars, fog, rain, etc. etc.) may occur as presupposed topics, which makes sense in cases of previous mention, e. g. if the topic is long-lasting fog, which is said to dissipate. This still may be held to be a descriptive utterance. The descriptive function can alternatively be signaled by VS in such cases as well. A similar situation was found in languages which use SAcc and XVS in descriptive contexts: Topic constructions are often equally good, and it is not always possible to give plausible explanations for the difference.

In summary, the point in the discourse where interruptions and scene-setting descriptions occur is not in any way communicatively predictable. This is in contrast to introductory, annuntiative and explanative utterances. The former two are clearly characterized by not involving any previous text. They thus occur in a presuppositional environment in which no pre-established entity is available to which new information can be connected, except when the speaker/writer deliberately establishes such an entity on the spot. With explanative utterances, the relevant conditions of low presuppositionality are explicitly built up in the preceding discourse, and a lack of response to these explicitly established conditions would be a severe violation of Gricean maxims. In other words, if the language *has* a strategy at all for signalling the low presuppositionality of an entire proposition, it may be expected that this strategy is employed as an "unmarked" choice in situations where low presuppositionality is explicitly preestablished.

There is a particular similarity between annuntiative and explanative thetic utterances. In principle, they can be seen as a continuum. On the extreme explanative end, a presupposition of an "open" situation ("something happened") is explicitly built up in the discourse. However,



we have also admitted cases in which explanative utterances are evoked implicitly, for instance, by means of interrogative gesture. From these, it is only a very small step to situations where a speaker just announces or exclaims a bit of information without caring whether or not the addressee is explicitly asking for it. In most cases, the speaker will automatically proceed from the assumption that the addressee is interested in the information (e.g. in the newspaper context); in a sense, then, annuntiative utterances could be regarded as implicitly evoked explanative utterances.

Given the various similarities among the discourse situations in which thetic utterances occur, it comes as no surprise that there is a considerable amount of overlapping of the lexical material occurring in the different types. For instance, the occurrence of phone-ringing can be described as an interruptive event, but it may also be conveyed as an announcement or an explanation. All three of these are attested in my German slip corpus from television plays; the only difference lies in the tense of the respective utterances:

- (46) *Er war in den Keller gegangen, um die Leitung zu reparieren. Das TELEFON klingelte. Da muß er wohl raufgekommen sein.* (Derrick)

'He had gone down to the basement to fix the line. The TELEPHONE rang. It must have been at that point that he came back upstairs.'

- (47) *Ich bin heute morgen schon um sechs aufgewacht. Das TELEFON hatte geklingelt.* (Derrick)

'I have been awake since six o'clock this morning. The TELEPHONE had rung.'

- (48) *Bea, das TELEFON klingelt. Gehst du für mich ran, bitte?* (Sterne des Südens)

'Bea, the telephone's ringing. Can you get ot for me, please?'

### 3.3. Coverage of Functions by Construction Types in the Different Languages

From a typological point of view, it is interesting to compare the languages of our sample with respect to the discourse functions expressible by means of the various constructions. There are some striking points of agreement among the languages with respect to certain functions that are always or never expressed by a certain construction, regardless of the position of the construction in the overall grammatical system of the individual languages; nevertheless, significant differences among the languages may also be observed. We will first consider the similarities across the languages before we deal with the differences.

All languages agree in the fact that participant introduction, if explicitly marked, is always done by means of (X)VS constructions, and never by means of any of the otherthetic constructions. Even languages in which the majorthetic construction is of a different type, such as English and French, use (X)VS constructions for this purpose (cf. English *once upon a time there was an X*). In (Standard) German, English and Dutch, where the preverbal position must be obligatorily filled, an XVS construction with an expletive element has to be used to fulfill the requirements for VS order (cf. German *Es war einmal ein X*).

Slightly less absolute but still striking is the preference of (X)VS constructions for descriptive utterances. Not only do such constructions figure prominently in the SV/VS alternating languages, where they are of course expected, but also in languages which otherwise impose heavy restrictions on the occurrence of VS order, such as German or even English. German descriptive XVS sentences often bear a striking superficial resemblance to descriptive XVS sentences of the SV/VS alternating languages. More often than not, a one-to-one correspondence is possible:

(49) Modern Greek:

*Apo to parathalassio kendro akustike i melancholiki melodhia enos*  
 from the by.the.beach pub was.heard the melancholic melody of.a

*saksofonu*  
 saxophone

(50) German:

*Aus dem Lokal am Strand ertönte die melancholische Melodie eines*  
 form the pub on.the beach sounded the melancholic melody of.a

*Saxophons*  
 saxophone

'From the pub on the beach, the melancholic melody of a saxophone was heard.'

Even in languages with a strong preference for SV order such as English, XVS is a favorite construction for scene-setting descriptions in belletristic style:

(51) *Naked towered the branches of the trees towards the sky.*

SAcc constructions are only seldom used for descriptive utterances. In both German and English, they are restricted to very short utterances (cf. 2.1.4). In English, they are slightly more frequent than in German but, on the whole, SV sentences introduced by an adverbial are preferred. As far as I was able to ascertain, Split constructions are never used for descriptive utterances in any language.

We will now turn to some general observations about differences between the languages.

The first difference pertains to the role of the explanative function. In Europe, there seems to be a typological dividing line between languages in which the explanative setting plays a major role as a discourse strategy and languages in which it is of minor importance. Interestingly, this difference is closely connected with the expression type prominently used for “thetic” utterances. Generally speaking, many of the languages which use the VS strategy as a predominant device for all kinds of thetic expressions do not very frequently apply it in the typical explanative context. Not surprisingly, the explanative function had played an important role in the discussion of SAcc and Split constructions; it had been identified as one of the most important functions of subject-accented clauses in English and German and of the French and Welsh Split constructions (cf. Wehr 1984, Sasse 1987 and Lambrecht 1994 with further references). It has, however, been given much less attention in the literature on VS constructions. This is not to say that explanative VS constructions do not occur. The following sequences from Rumanian, Modern Greek and Russian<sup>22</sup> are good examples:

- (52) [...] *dar puşca n-a luat foc, a fost asudat praful* [...].  
 ‘But the gun didn’t go off; the POWDER had gotten wet.’
- (53) *Pao sto ipoyio. Kaike i asfalia.*  
 I.go to.the cellar burnt the fuse  
 ‘I’m going to the cellar. The FUSE has blown.’
- (54) *Tri mesjaca nazad u nas v sem’e slučilos’ gore. Umer naš otec.*  
 three months ago at us in family happened grief Died our father  
 ‘Three months ago we had grief in our family. Our FATHER died’

Similar examples are cited for Latin by Bolkestein (1995). Nevertheless, several authors report that the explanative context is less prominent in some of the SV/VS alternating languages, SV clauses with topical subjects frequently being a possible alternative, which is not the case with German SAcc constructions, for instance. For Modern Greek and particularly for Hungarian, the situation is discussed in Sasse (1995b). In the Modern Greek corpus, SV sentences with topical subject often occurred in explanative contexts when the subjects were animate. Further research is

<sup>22</sup> The Rumanian example is adapted from Ulrich (1984:152), the Greek and Russian examples come from the VS study (cf. Sasse 1995a:18 and Miller 1995:140).

necessary, of course, but there seem to be good reasons for believing that this factor plays a role in other languages, too, so that the development of a proper explanative discourse strategy may sometimes be hampered by the semantic features of the constituents involved. In Hungarian, the situation is a bit different: As already indicated above (2.5), VS constructions are, to a large extent, dependent on structural and lexical factors with the result that they are allowed to occur in explanative contexts when they typically occur elsewhere in this form; otherwise, they are simply not possible. At any rate, Hungarian seems to lack a proper explanative strategy comparable to that of German and English SAcc sentences and French Split constructions. A SV/VS alternating language in which VS constructions seem to be very frequently used for explanations is Rumanian, as described by Ulrich (1985); she calls such occurrences "faktumsetzend". No restrictions on the animacy of subjects in these contexts seem to hold here.

The second difference among the European languages is found in the distribution of discourse functions across the possible alternative constructions. In principle, it can be observed that in many languages, more than one of the two or three constructions available in the respective language can be freely used for one and the same function alternatively. The following is an example from my German corpus where the same statement is first uttered in the form of a SAcc construction, and then repeated in the form of XVS:

(55) (Im ICE:)

Meine Damen und Herren, dies ist eine Kundendurchsage. Ein KLEIDUNGSSTÜCK wurde im Bordrestaurant gefunden. Der Verlierer möchte sich bitte im Dienstabteil, Wagen 9, melden. Ich wiederhole: Im Bordrestaurant wurde ein KLEIDUNGSSTÜCK gefunden. Der Verlierer...

'Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a customers' announcement. An article of CLOTHING has been found in the restaurant. The owner of the lost object should please report to the Service Compartment in Wagon 9. I repeat: In the restaurant, an article of CLOTHING has been found. The owner...'

In a similar (but opposite) way, many of the SV/VS alternating languages also allow SAcc constructions as a possible, though marginal, free alternative<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, languages may also differentiate functions by means of different constructions. In languages with SAcc and Split constructions, these are never used for introductive utterances, (X)VS being employed instead (cf. above). Furthermore, Split constructions are never used for descriptive utterances. The (X)VS construction thus seems

<sup>23</sup> Research has yet to be done to ascertain whether these are true alternatives or have a different semantics, e.g. subject focus.



to have the broadest range of functions cross-linguistically, followed by the SAcc construction and the Split construction:

	(X)VS	SAcc	Split
introductory	+	-	-
descriptive	+	(+)	-
interruptive	+	+	+
annunciative	+	+	+
explanative	+	+	+

Table 6: Range of functions of alternative constructions

A number of language-specific distributional phenomena, often cutting across the five discourse functions, are also worth mentioning here. First and foremost, English has become famous for having the SAcc and the *there is* (i.e. a special subtype of the XVS) construction side by side, with certain distributional overlapping, but not being entirely equivalent (cf. xxx). The same can be said of the proportion between Dutch SAcc and *er*-construction. French is similar in having VS (with expletive *il*) side-by-side with the Split construction. The range of application of the two structures is clearly differentiated (cf. Wehr 1984, summarizing earlier literature). In some Slavic languages, such as Polish, Czech and Bulgarian, VS is obligatorized with a small number of well-defined expressions, such as pain and similar bodily affections; VS is possible outside these obligatorized areas in one or the other function, but SAcc seems to be preferred.

This brings us to the third major difference among our languages: degrees of lexicalization and productivity. For English, Allerton and Cruttenden had already claimed that SAcc constructions in English only occur with a well-defined number of verbs. To a still larger extent, this seems to be valid for *there is* constructions, which are often said to be restricted to so-called "unaccusative" verbs. Similar analyses have been offered for Romance VS constructions (cf. above). This is not the case in other languages. According to our investigations, VS constructions in languages such as Russian, Rumanian and Modern Greek are much more open in this respect, and German allows a considerable freedom in the predicates of its SAcc construction. The role of lexical semantics will be discussed in section 5 below.

#### 4. The “Connective” Complex

In addition to the five discourse functions described in the preceding section, some languages are claimed to have VS clauses with a special **episode-opening** function. Note that none of the other thetic constructions have ever been said to have such a function. This will be of some importance when it comes to the question, to be discussed at the end of this section, whether or not these cases belong to the thetic complex.

Introduction of a new episode in narratives is mentioned by Miller (1995) as one of the three main functions of VS in Russian. It is also characteristic of Romani and Modern Greek, particularly in spoken narrative. These VS constructions are characterized by involving a **given** subject, usually a main character of the story, or even the speech participants themselves in the form of explicit personal pronouns (I, you). Note that in Russian (and the same holds true for Modern Greek and Romani), pronominal reference is normally included in the verb form, except when the referents of the pronouns are presented as contrastive (either contrastive focus or contrastive topic). These pronouns, however, are not contrastive in the usual sense and do not normally bear strong accent. In other words, these cases differ from both the narrow focus constructions considered in 2.4.1.1 and the low-presuppositionality cases discussed in section 3. The question arises as to their status and their affinity to the thetic complex discussed so far.

First, it must be stated that a high degree of “givenness” of the subjects of non-contrastive VS clauses (other than those triggered by inversion and narrow focus, in which the situation is, at any rate, different) is not in itself a problem as long as “givenness” is equated with “definiteness” or “identifiability”. “Given” subjects in this sense are the rule rather than the exception with the annuntiative type of VS clauses, and both the interruptive and the descriptive type commonly involve “identifiable” subjects as well. For Italian, Bernini (1995:52) explicitly states that VS clauses with definite subjects are common. In Hungarian, VS clauses *must* have definite or specific subjects (on the language-specific reasons for this see above), though pronominal subjects are rare. “Givenness” in this sense must be distinguished from referential distance, and this is what seems to be the relevant factor here. Unfortunately, a detailed count of referential distance of S in both VS and SV clauses is available only for Russian. Miller (1995:134) indicates a significantly higher referential distance of S in VS than in SV clauses; nevertheless, VS clauses taking up a subject separated from its last mention by only a few sentences are common. As far as I know, statistical analyses of referential distance have not been made for any of the other SV/Vs alternating languages, but the general impression is that the situation in Modern Greek and in Romani is very similar to that of Russian, while Italian, Spanish and Hungarian

may differ in this respect (Sasse 1995a:16). In sum, the subject's presuppositional status as such does not appear to play a significant role. Rather, what seems to be at issue here is the disruption of immediate topic continuity. New episodes typically involve a change in personnel and a new action at the same time, and it appears to be a function of VS clauses in some of the languages to signalize this type of topic discontinuity. Note that this function does not seem to play a role in Italian, Spanish, and Hungarian, but has been reported for Latin (Bolkestein 1995) and Rumanian (Ulrich 1985).

Episode-introducing VS sentences often do not only indicate a shift in personnel and action, but are presuppositionally somewhat more intimately connected to the preceding text. This presuppositional tie is not one of referent continuity, but a more complex one in terms of consequences of the preceding events. Matras (1995) calls this the **connective** function of VS clauses and describes it in detail for Romani narratives. This function is not only characteristic of Romani VS clauses, however, but is found in Russian, Rumanian and Modern Greek as well. It even occurs in languages which are not of the SV/VS alternating type, such as Substandard German. The formula is *X did a - thereupon Y did b*, where the second part is signaled by VS. This type is particularly characteristic of spoken narrative and often involves highly "given" subjects. Again, this function seems to be absent in Hungarian, Spanish, and Italian, but occurs in Latin.

Observations on episode-initial VS clauses in the different languages suggest the distinction between two subtypes of "connectiveness", both of them highly prominent in some languages while totally lacking in the others: one that involves an explicit consequence or **reaction** to the immediately preceding state of affairs and one which does not, but rather, indicates a shift from one episode to the next. Instances of both can be seen in the following Romani examples taken from Matras (1995's examples 1b and 7c (1995:190 and 196):

(56) (They came and picked up my father too, they beat him)

*Taj gelas lesko káko taj počindas vareso bare bare*  
and went:3s his uncle and paid:3s some big big

*love taj kindas les avri*  
money and bought him out

'And (so) his uncle went and paid a lot of money and bought him free'

(57) (And at ten o'clock, when we were all sleeping already, suddenly somebody knocked at the door. Well, I didn't say anything, and my mother-in-law, she didn't say anything either.)

(The next day, ...)

șutas pe e romni tele te sovel  
 threw:3s REFL DEF woman down COMP sleep:3s

'... the woman went to sleep'

While in (56) the uncle's buying the father free clearly reacts to the father's being arrested, in (57), the woman's going to sleep is not a consequence whatsoever of the preceding states of affairs; it merely stands in a temporal sequence to them. We can therefore distinguish between a **reactive/consequential** and a simple **discontinuative** function of episode-initial VS clauses<sup>24</sup>. As for the reactive type, MATRAS correctly points out that this is typical for (though not restricted to) specific semantic areas such as verbal reactions (*thereupon she said/asked/answered...*) and emotions (*thereupon she was pleased/laughed/started crying/was frightened...*). It is perhaps significant that quite a number of examples of both "connective" types are XVS clauses, where V is preceded by adverbial material which includes entire adverbial clauses, and this should be taken into account for a reexamination of the inversion problem (cf. 2.4.1.2 above).

The connective function has been discussed in great detail for Rumanian VS clauses by Ulrich (1985; cf., particularly, 284-302). She exempts the entire complex from the thetic domain and posits a special function (as part of the polysemy of Rumanian VS constructions), which she calls the "narrative" function. This is an attractive decision since it would solve the problem of the discrepancies in presuppositionality between these cases and the thetic cases examined in section 3. Moreover, it was observed that this function is confined to VS constructions (in European languages at least), and it could be assumed that it is a specific function of VS order in these languages apart from the functions called thetic. An alternative analysis of these cases in terms of verb focus had already been proposed in Sasse (1995a, pp. 17-18 and fn. 10). It could be argued that the clause-initial position of the verb in these instances signals a contrast to the state of affairs expressed in the preceding utterance. This would be in accordance with the fact that, in some of our languages at least, verb focus with pronominal referents as subjects usually requires an explicit personal pronoun in post-verbal position. The connective VS clauses share this feature in all the languages examined. Episode-initial VS clauses could then be taken to represent an implicature of verb focus specifically conventionalized in certain languages but not in others. However, this is open for further research.

<sup>24</sup> The terms "connective" and "discontinuative" may seem contradictory at first sight, but are not since they refer to different layers of presuppositional depth: With respect to the overall network of text structure, these utterances "connect" text segments, while with respect to topic continuity, they "disconnect" continuous chains.



## 5. The Impact of Lexical Semantics

The results of our research strongly support the traditional claim that certain semantic areas are destined for thetic constructions, such as existentials, verb of appearance, psych-verbs, meteorological conditions, and the like. This is a core of existential semantics in a broader sense, which always seems to constitute the lexical semantic basis of the constructions in question. Exhaustive lists of verbs occurring in VS constructions of SV/VS alternating languages can be found in several contributions of Matras and Sasse (1995), in particular Bernini (1995) on Italian, Miller (1995) on Russian, and Sasse (1995b) on Modern Greek. In addition, Ulrich (1984) gives a detailed account of the situation in Rumanian, discussing other languages as well. In a German corpus of approximately 500 SAcc utterances recorded from television plays the same semantic areas prevailed. On the other hand, all authors agree that VS constructions are not restricted to these areas and that no straightforward conditions in terms of semantic classes can be formulated. For Russian, Restan's strong assumption about strict limitations on semantic classes was contradicted by Maslova (1995) for her corpus of headlines; Miller (1995), who examines a different corpus of text types, finds the semantic range of verbs in VS constructions even still more open. German SAcc constructions cover a considerable range of verbs; the statistical prevalence of the semantic areas referred to is only a tendency. No case was found where one of the thetic constructions dealt with in this paper is explicitly confined to or automatically triggered by a well-defined homogeneous semantic class of predicates. Even the alleged semantic restrictions of the English SAcc construction were found to be more flexible than hitherto assumed. There may be obligatorizations with single verbs, but the only case found so far was the verb 'be'/'exist' in some languages. Of course, the semantic range is lowest in Italian and Spanish because of monoargumentality which a priori rules out all transitive verbs proper. Within the monoargumental domain, however, all types are found, though types involving less agentive subjects prevail. Agentivity and control properties of subjects are also said to be statistically relevant for the choice between SV and VS in studies of other languages, without, however, constituting strict conditioning factors. In all languages other than Italian and Spanish, the range of admissible semantic types largely depends on what subtypes of "theticity" can be expressed by VS order. It is clear that in those languages which have clear episode-opening functions of VS clauses, the semantic range must be much higher than in those which do not have them, since in the episode-initial position there are comparably much fewer restrictions on possible situations than, say, in the interruptive type. However, if connective functions are exempted from the domain of theticity, then it may well be that the number of verbs admissible in a thetic construction cross-linguistically decreases significantly.

This brings us to the intricate problem of the interplay of lexical semantics and discourse strategies. In numerous expressions, thetic constructions are half-way lexicalized in the sense that a certain noun + verb combination is always unmarked in a certain construction, be it VS, SAcc, or Split, and highly marked (if ever possible) in a construction with a topical subject<sup>25</sup>. This tendency for lexicalization is strongest in idiomatic expressions, to which certain existentials with abstract subjects, but also impersonal verbs, psych-verbs and similar expressions indicating affection usually belong in our test languages. A further relatively large group of noun + verb combinations which appear in default VS order are those in which V and S are "in semantic agreement" ("lexical solidarities", Coseriu 1967). This had already been claimed for English SAcc constructions by Allerton and Cruttenden. The combination of the semantically affine lexical elements involved contains built-in default presuppositions which lead, in all of the languages examined, to a quasi-lexicalization of the entire expression in the form of an unmarked or default thetic construction. The notorious cases of *phone-ringing* and *door-opening* are good examples. Both states of affairs are predetermined for suddenness. It is significant in this connection that verbs of appearance occur more often in thetic expressions with interruptive character than verbs of disappearance, but the latter are frequently found in thetic utterances with explanative and annuntiative functions. Disappearance of someone or something often provokes an action which is then explained in terms of the loss (*I have to go to the Police Station. Don MILLER has escaped.*). Typical annuntiative states of affairs referred to over and over again in the literature are mishaps, such as the loss of something, a gnat-bite, a pain, a dish burning in the oven, but positive events as well such as the suddenly flowering cactus. To what extent such cases are conventionalized and to what extent they can be exploited for creative processes in discourse is a language-specific matter. Yet, there is a common core of quasi-lexicalized "theticity-relevant" states of affairs cross-linguistically associable with certain discourse positions and closely tied to the five discourse-pragmatic functions of thetic constructions set up in section 3. Some of these correlations are exemplified in the following table, which is a refined version of the table given in Sasse (1995a:24).

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS	ASSOCIATED SEMANTIC AREAS
<b>introductive</b> <b>annuntiative</b>	<b>existentials + indefinite animate subjects</b> <b>appearance and disappearance, beginning, ending;</b> <b>expected results of actions ('dinner is ready')</b>

<sup>25</sup> In these cases, a topical subject is usually possible only with verum focus on the verb. In addition to the fact that this is a rare situation in most of the cases under discussion, in those languages which express verum focus by fronting the verb with a strong accent, the order would still be VS!

interruptive	mishaps, gleeful news; pain, bodily conditions sudden events (phone ringing, door opening), appearance
descriptive	meteorological expressions, existentials with natural phenomena as subjects, existentials pertaining to habitual situations; beginning, lasting and ending of background scenery
explanative/elaborative	(in principle same as for annuntiative, but perhaps more open)

Table 7

Examples of states of affairs typically associated with "thetic" VS and tendentially lexicalized

Without having been examined in detail, typological differences have been observed in the following areas:

1. Languages differ in the extent to which they allow generalizations out of the "existential" semantic core which is destined for thetic constructions. That is, they differ, so to speak, in the freedom of metaphorically extending existentials (including "dynamic" existentials such as appearance and disappearance) to other situations not originally being existential situations proper.
2. Languages differ in the semantic areas covered by a certain construction depending on the range of discourse functions served by the construction.
3. Languages differ in the degree of lexicalization. Lexicalizations always involve the existential core situations, such as bodily affections, but also sudden appearances, e.g. core interruptives such as phone-ringing, etc.
4. Languages differ in their discourse strategies. In some languages, for example, certain constructions are predominantly lexicon-driven, while in others, comparable constructions are discourse-sensitive and form a characteristic pattern of text constitution independent of the lexical material occurring in the constructions.

## 6. Summary, Conclusions, and Perspectives for Future Research

Through our typological research on theticity, a number of questions have been answered; others remain open for future research.

Among the questions which have been answered are the following:

1. Is theticity a cross-linguistically comparable phenomenon?

The answer is yes. We have been able to disclose a number of constructions which are used, in individual languages, for the expression of certain similar types of situations. These are comparable to the extent that they show very similar cumulations of functions when compared across languages. Moreover, the number of construction types found cross-linguistically is very small; that is, many languages employ at least superficially similar constructions in similar situations.

2. Is theticity a unitary phenomenon?

The answer is clearly no. We have found five subtypes of theticity, each with its own phenomenological peculiarities. The fact that, in all of the languages examined, most or even all of the five subtypes are relevant for the use of the same formal device does not mean that they are all the same.

3. Is theticity predictable in terms of a single, both necessary and sufficient criterion?

The answer is no. We have found that the "all-new" criterion invoked by many scholars is not adequate. The criterion of low presuppositionality of the entire situation expressed was found to be a precondition for the use of a thetic utterance in all of the five subtypes examined; however, it does not trigger thetic constructions even in languages in which the relevant constructions are not subject to strong grammatical or lexical constraints since topical constructions are always possible under the same conditions. Low presuppositionality is thus a necessary, but not a sufficient criterion. Rather, thetic constructions are connected with an additional act of assertion which explicitly signals the low presuppositionality of the state of affairs expressed, something like "look out, addressee, an assertion is being made that adds a new situation to your presuppositional fundus" (this is the idea of "sentence focus" recently favored by many researchers in the field). The permitted range of actual application of constructions with which this presuppositional/assertional signal is connected is determined by a variety of factors such as the language-specific polysemy of the construction, the synonymy of "competing" constructions, the nature of language-specific discourse strategies, the restrictions imposed by the global grammatical organization of the



individual languages, etc. This makes the actual use of the relevant constructions rather difficult to generalize across languages.

4. Is theticity dependent on the lexical semantics of the constituents involved?

To a certain extent, yes. The central lexical domain connected with thetic constructions is static or dynamic "existence". Languages were found to differ in the degree of sensitivity to this factor. In some languages, obligatorization of thetic constructions was found in the most central areas of existential semantics. In all languages, thetic constructions show a statistical preponderance of verbs with clear existential semantics over verbs from other semantic domains. Further lexical semantic factors found to be relevant are semantic "solidarities", animacy and control properties of the subjects involved, and others.

5. Is theticity a category?

The answer is clearly no. It is a conglomeration of similar presuppositional/assertional conditions prevailing in similar semantic areas, which are frequently expressed by comparable constructions in different languages.

6. Is there a simple thetic-categorical distinction?

Again, the answer is no. Thetic constructions always stand in opposition to a variety of other constructions which are not easily subsumed under a label of "categoricity". For instance, narrow focus constructions are not categorical in the sense envisaged by earlier writers such as Brentano and Marty. It is a fact that thetic constructions are often opposed to constructions with a topical subject (which would probably be held to be categorical by these authors), but this is only one of the many possible syntactic oppositions in which they may be involved.

There are two larger areas in which further research is clearly necessary. One is the problem of the origin and the nature of presuppositions. Which are the relevant factors which give rise to presuppositions and how can they be adequately represented? One of the main difficulties, which complicates research in this area enormously, resides in the fact that presuppositions come from two sides: from the discourse situation, and from the meaning of the utterance with all its components (i.e. both by the meaning of the construction and the lexical meaning of the constituents involved). It has not been possible so far to disentangle the complex interaction of these two sources of presuppositional conditions.

The second problem open for investigation is the position of the phenomena examined here in the larger context of presuppositional/assertional phenomena generally. It is clear that the

domain of theticity itself is situated within a larger domain which comprises the entire network of form-function relations pertaining to the distribution of presuppositional and assertional characteristics among the objects and situations of an utterance in actual discourse. The constructions dealt with in this paper have been deliberately confined to subject-verb combinations since this was the traditional phenomenological domain from which we proceeded. However, in most of the languages examined the subject-verb pattern is only one of several subpatterns of a more general pattern, which occurs under similar conditions with similar discourse-pragmatic effects. It has repeatedly been pointed out that SAcc constructions in German, Czech, Polish, for instance, show a striking parallelity to constructions involving datives in the preverbal position (cf. the striking similarity between German *Seine FRAU* (nominative) *ist krank* 'His wife is sick' and *Seiner FRAU* (dative) *geht's nicht gut* 'His wife is not feeling well'). Moreover, objects of transitive sentences behave intonationally in a very similar way. This opens a perspective for regarding SAcc as a subtype of a general pattern of noun-accentuation in closely-knit noun-verb combinations which represent a broad scope of assertion (broader than a narrow or constituent focus). A similar case can be made for Hungarian. The conditions under which VS is allowed in this language are exactly the same as those which allow VN combinations generally (cf. 2.5.1). It thus seems necessary to reexamine thetic constructions in this larger context in order to reveal the more general patterns by which languages are characterized. Such questions have already been addressed by several authors (e.g. Drubig 1992 for English) but much more work has to be done along these lines.

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### Abbreviations

ABS	absolute
ART	article
COMP	complementizer
DEF	definite
EXIST	existential verb or marker
NF	noun focus
POSS	possessive
PERF	perfective
REFL	reflexive
VF	verb focus
VN	verbal noun
1s	first person singular
3s	third person singular

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HANS-JÜRGEN SASSE  
 Institut für Sprachwissenschaft  
 Universität zu Köln  
 D-50923 Köln

Von 1968 an erschienen die von Prof. Dr. Hansjakob Seiler herausgegebenen Arbeitspapiere des Instituts für Sprachwissenschaft. Nach der Emeritierung von Prof. Dr. Seiler im März 1986 wurde eine neue Folge mit neuer Zählung und dem Zusatz "Neue Folge" (N. F.) begonnen. Herausgeber ist das Institut für Sprachwissenschaft.

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