

The Main Devices of Foregrounding in the Information Structure of Georgian Sentences*

Rusudan Asatiani
(Oriental Institute, GAS)
r_asatiani@hotmail.com

Abstract

Structuring of information proceeds through the foregrounding of certain parts of the information. In general, foregrounding can be realized on various linguistic levels and it is possible to distinguish: Conceptual, Functional, Discourse and Pragmatic devices, which can be represented by various formal means: Phonetic-Phonological, Morphological-Syntactic and Lexical-Pragmatic. All the devices can co-occur during the information packaging. Some of them are obligatory and are on the high level of the hierarchically organized processes of foregrounding (e.g. conceptual or functional foregrounding); some of them are optional and they are defined by the specific discourse and/or pragmatic values of a sentence (e.g. focus or topic); some forms of foregrounding are implicational (e.g. sometimes reordering implies emphasis of intonation) and so on. The relations between the different kinds of foregrounding are language specific, but it seems possible to speak about universal models of formalization of the information structures. In Georgian there is no morphological topic marker, but all other devices of foregrounding are possible. The paper examines the main models of such devices.

1. Introduction

Linguistic structuring of reality based on the notions ‘same-different’ proceeds through ‘oppositions’. An opposition means that there are at least two items one of which is ‘marked’ and another is ‘unmarked’. Structuring of the information, its packaging, also proceeds through oppositions where one part of the information stands out against a background of the other part of the information. From the communicational, pragmatic point of view, this information is highlighted, important and represents the foregrounding of a certain part of information. Any kind of ‘foregrounding’ (res. ‘Highlighting’, ‘Logical Emphasis’, ‘Promotion’, ‘Standing out as the first, important’ and etc) could be regarded as **one, common phenomenon** which represents the main strategy of structuring of linguistic structures. From this point of view Topic, Focus, Subject, Theme, Point of view and so on – are the same as far as they represent various forms of ‘foregrounding’. It is supposed that such a wide, generalized interpretation of ‘topicalization’ make more clear, what happens when we have mixed forms of ‘foregrounding’.

*This work was fulfilled within the Potsdam Project D2: “Information Structure of a sentence”.

Foregrounding, according to such a wide interpretation, can be realized on various linguistic levels:

1.1. Conceptual Foregrounding

During the linguistic structuring of the extra-linguistic situations some languages conventionally conceptualize as the central part of the information either Agent or Patient. In result, either Nominative (which shows agent's foregrounding) or Ergative (which shows patient's foregrounding) constructions arise. The first construction formally emphasizes *who is acting*, while the second emphasizes *what is done*.

From the grammatical point of view, conceptual foregrounding is represented by the unmarked, Nominative case: In the nominative languages it is the Agent, who always stands in nominative, while in the ergative languages it is the Patient (and not the Agent) who appears in nominative.

There are some languages which ignore semantic roles. The informational dimension plays a crucial role in the grammatical structures of such languages. This dimension helps the speaker and the hearer to package and retrieve the information: The highlighted part of the information (res. foregrounding of it) is formally marked by a special marker and it is possible to distinguish topicalized, foregrounding part of the information by morphological affixes.

1.2. Functional Foregrounding

Patient's foregrounding in the nominative languages, where agent is conceptually highlighted part, can further (on the second stage of foregrounding) be achieved by the changes of functional roles and as a result passive constructions rise. In the passive construction Patient is functionally promoted and it is defined as the Subject. The term *Subject* actually denotes foregrounding of a central part of information to *whom* or *what* the information concerns.

Active construction shows Agent's foregrounding (that means: Agent is the Subject), while Passive construction shows Patient's foregrounding (that means: Patient is the Subject).

1.3. Focus

During the communicative act, in the discourse, it is usual to stop the gap, which can occur in the information flow. In the dynamic linguistic structures, e.g. in dialogues such supplement of information is fulfilled by question-answer pairs: The demanded information in questions is given in the answers as the highlighted one: That is, foregrounding of the demanded information takes place. Such foregrounding can be reinterpreted as focusing and focal part of information is called *Focus*. In most cases, the Focus has a specific, marked intonation. It is represented in various languages by the different formal devices.

1.4. Topic

From the pragmatic point of view, sometimes it is necessary to make the information more exact, more precise and accurate or hypernymic in order to stress the contrast between the events, to clarify their implicational relations or bridging, to emphasize new or old information, to underline parallel events and so on. All these are reached by foregrounding of the contrasted parts of the information. This process is called topicalization and the foregrounding part of information is called **Topic**.

Conceptual and Functional foregrounding are obligatory. They are always represented in any linguistic structures. Focus is characteristic for the dialogue systems. As for the Topics, they are optional and defined only by the specific situations.

2. Grammatical Models of Foregrounding

From the formal point of view, foregrounding can be marked on various linguistic levels: **Phonetic-Phonological** (The almost universal device of foregrounding is the highlighting of a certain part of information by the marked intonation, which is different from the neutral one. Stress and other supra-segmental means are also possible.); **Morphological-Syntactic** (Some languages have special morphological markers (cases, particles, clitics) or specific syntactic constructions (reordering of unmarked word order, cleft constructions, different kinds of split, elliptic (short) answers and etc.); **Lexical-Pragmatic** (It is also possible to use special words, quantifiers or particles for the foregrounding (*indeed, certainly, also, just, only*, etc.) Besides the emphasis of the definite part of the information, such items add to the whole sentence specific semantics).

These devices denote the further foregrounding of any part of the information that is already structuralized and constructed on the conceptual or/and the functional linguistic levels.

All these devices can co-occur during the information packaging. Some of them are obligatory and are on the high level of the hierarchically organized processes of foregrounding (e.g. conceptual or functional foregrounding); some of them are optional and they are defined by the specific discourse and/or pragmatic values of a sentence (e.g. focus or topic); some of them are implicational (e.g. sometimes the reordering implies emphasis of intonation) and so on. Different devices and strategies are characteristic for the various languages. The relations between the different kinds of foregrounding are language specific, but it seems possible to speak about the universal signs of this linguistic processes.

3. Georgian Data

In the Georgian language there is no morphological topic marker but all other devices of foregrounding are possible.

3.1. Conceptual Foregrounding

The Georgian Language shows split ergativity: The Present Tense forms build the Nominative Constructions where conceptual foregrounding means to put the Agent in the central position:

monadire-0	k'l-av-s	irem-s ('The hunter kills the deer')
hunter-Nom	kill-Prs.-S.3	deer-Dat

The Aorist and Perfect Tense forms build the Ergative construction where conceptual foregrounding puts the Patient in the central position:

Aorist:	monadire-m	mo-k'l-a	irem-i
	hunter-Erg	Prev-kill-Aor.S.3.Sg	deer-Nom
Perfect:	monadire-s	mo-u-k'l-av-s	irem-i
	hunter-Dat	Prev-Perf.Vers.-kill-Th.-S.3g	deer-Nom

3.2. Functional Foregrounding

The Passivization is a regular way for the Patient's foregrounding for the Present Tense forms:

Active:	monadire-0	k'l-av-s	irem-s ('The hunter kills the deer')
	hunter-Nom	kill-Prs.-S.3	deer-Dat
Passive:	irem-i	i-k'vl-eb-a	monadir-is mier ('The deer is killed by the hunter')
	deer-Nom	Prev.-Pass.-kill-Prs.-S.3	hunter-Gen by

The Passive construction is not always formally clearly distinguishable by the verb forms in the Aorist:

Active:	monadire-m	mo-i-k'l-a	irem-i	tav-is-tvis('The hunter killed the deer for himself')
	hunter-Erg	Prev.-S.Vers.-kill-Aor.S.3	deer-Nom	self-Gen-For
Passive:	irem-i	mo-i-k'l-a	monadir-is	mier ('The deer is killed by the hunter')
	deer-Nom	Prev.-Pass.-kill-Prs.S.3	hunter-Gen	by

Finally, the Passive constructions are almost excluded in the Perfect Tense Forms.

Conceptually this fact is understandable: In ergative constructions (such constructions are characteristic for Aorist and Perfect) Patient is already defined as a conceptually foregrounding one and from the informational point of view its further functional foregrounding seems to be redundant.

3.3. Focus

The Focus in Georgian is represented by the special *rising* or *wave-like-raising* intonation, which differs from the non-focal, neutral intonation. Reordering and, especially, Fronting of the focal part of information is also characteristic. Because the Georgian language has free word order, all logically possible combinations of reordering can be realized as structures with different informational loading. It is difficult to describe and to explain all semantic or pragmatic nuances of these combinations. *Intonation+Fronting* seems to be the best and the clearest formal device of Focusing. Passivization is not an effective device for focusing because an answer usually has the same functional interpretation as the question has; That is, if a question is formulated by the active construction, an answer will be formulated as the active construction as well and vice versa: the passive question implies passive answer. Focus usually stands before the verb; so, the best order is: *Focus - Verb*. This regularity must be a result of one the strongest syntactic restriction of word order in Georgian: Question words always are in preverbal position and consequently focus which replaces Wh-words in answers usually appears in the same position. The rising intonation of focus also should be a result of the regularity of intonation phrasing in Georgian: The verb has a tendency to be integrated into the p-phrase of a preceding or a following argument and as one unite it has the boundary tone of a prosodic phrase (p-phrase) which is canonically rising.

Here are some typical examples:

ra xdeba? (What is happening?)	monadire(hunter.Nom) k'lav-s(kills-Prs) irem-s(deer-Dat)
vin k'lavs irems? (Who kills the deer?)	monadire k'lavs irems
ras k'lavs monadire? (What does the hunter kill?)	irems k'lavs monadire
ras ak'etebts monadire? (What does the hunter do?)	k'lavs monadire irems
vin ras k'lavs? (Who kills what?)	monadire irems k'lavs
	monadire k'lavs irems
	irems monadire k'lavs
	irems k'lavs monadire

In answers (especially to repeated questions, which demand to give more accurate information) special particles and definite syntactic constructions arise:

monadire k'lavs irems? (Does **the hunter** kill the deer? Is it the hunter who kills the deer?)
 diax (yes.Pol), **monadire** k'lavs irems
 diaxac(yes.Pol-also=yes.mimicking), **monadire** k'lavs irems
 diax, **es** (this) **monadire-a(is)**, vinc(who) k'lavs irems
namdvilad (really) **monadire** k'lavs irems
sc'ored(just,exactly) (**rom**(that,)) **monadire** k'lavs irems

martlac (indeed, right-also) (**rom** (that,)) **monadire** k'lavs irems
martlacda (indeed-and), **monadire** k'lavs irems

irems k'lavs monadire?(Does the hunter kill **the deer**?/Is it the deer which is killed by the hunter?)
 diax (yes.Pol), **irems** k'lavs monadire
 diaxac(yes.Pol-also=yes.mimicking), **irems** k'lavs monadire
 diax, **es** (this) **iremi-a**(is), visac(whom) monadire k'lavs
namdvilad (really) **irems** k'lavs monadire
sc'ored(just,exactly) (**rom**(that,)) **irems** k'lavs monadire
martlac (indeed, right-also) (**rom** (that,)) **irems** k'lavs monadire
martlacda (indeed-and), **irems** k'lavs monadire

monadire **k'lavs** irems?(Does the hunter **kill** the deer?/Does the hunter kill the deer or does he not?)
 diax (yes.Pol), **k'lavs** monadire irems
 diaxac(yes.Pol-also=yes.mimicking), **k'lavs** monadire irems
k'lavs monadire irems, aba(well!) ara(no)?(Of course, the hunter do kill
namdvilad (really) **k'lavs** monadire **irems**
sc'ored(just,exactly) (**rom**(that,)) **k'lavs** monadire irems
martlac (indeed, right-also) (**rom** (that,)) **k'lavs** monadire irems
martlacda (indeed-and), **k'lavs** monadire irems

And, so on.

Summarizing all the data, we can distinguish the following models for the Focusing:

1. Marked Intonation;
2. Reordering (Fronting) (+Intonation)
3. Syntactic Constructions (+Intonation)
4. Particles (+Syntax+Intonation)

3.4. Topic

The intonation is the main device for the Topicalization. The Topic intonation differs from the Focus and the Neutral intonations: it is *rising-falling (L*H*L)*. All devices which are characteristic for the Focus are also possible for the Topic. There can be found also specific particles and constructions.

Here are some typical examples:

ra-s	it'q'vit	monadir-is	shesaxeb?(What about the hunter?)
what-Dat	say.Fut-S.2.Pl	hunter-Gen	about
monadire-m	mo-k'l-a	irem-i	([The hunter]T killed the deer)
hunter-Erg	Prev-kill-Aor.S.3	deer-Nom	

ici-t	rame	irm-is	shesaxeb? (Do you know something about the deer?)
know-Prs-S.2.Pl	something.Nom	deer-Gen	about

irem-i mo-k'l-a monadire-m (The hunter killed [the deer]T)
deer-Nom Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Erg

irem-i mo-i-k'l-a monadir-is mier ([The deer]T is killed by the hunter)
deer-Nom Prev-Pass-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Gen by

ra-s it'q'vi-t am monadir-is shesaxeb?(What about this hunter?)
what-Dat say.Fut-S.2.Pl this.Gen hunter-Gen about
am monadire-m mo-k'l-a irem-i ([This hunter]T killed a deer)
this.Erg hunter-Erg Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 deer-Nom

ai am monadire-m mo-k'l-a irem-i ([Precisely this hunter]T killed a deer.)
here.is this.Erg hunter-Erg Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 deer-Nom

namdvilad (really) **am monadirem** mo-k'l-a iremi ([Really this hunter]T killed a deer./ This is really so that this hunter (and not other) killed a deer./ It is really this hunter who killed a deer.)

sc'ored (just, exactly) (**rom**(that,)) **am monadirem** mo-k'l-a iremi ([Exactly this hunter]T killed a deer./ This is exactly true, that this hunter killed a deer. It is just this hunter who killed a deer.)

martlac (indeed, right-also) (**rom** (that,)) **am monadirem** mo-k'l-a iremi ([Indeed this hunter]T killed a deer./ It is indeed this hunter who killed a deer.)

martlacda (indeed-and), **am monadirem** mo-k'l-a iremi (Indeed, this is true that it is this hunter who killed a deer.)

es is monadire-a, vinc iremi mo-k'l-a (This is that hunter who killed a deer)
this.Nom that.Nom hunter.Nom=be.Prs.S.3 who deer Prev-kill-Aor.S.3

ici-t rame am irm-is shesaxeb? (Do you know something about this deer?)
know-Prs-S.2.Pl something.Nom this.Gen deer-Gen about

es irem-i mo-k'l-a monadire-m (The hunter killed [this deer]T)
this.Nom deer-Nom Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Erg

ai es irem-i mo-k'l-a monadire-m (The hunter killed [precisely this deer])
here.is this.Nom deer-Nom Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Erg

sc'ored rom es irem-i mo-k'l-a monadire-m (The hunter killed [just this deer])
just that this.Nom deer-Nom Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Erg

martlac rom es irem-i mo-k'l-a monadire-m (The hunter killed [indeed this deer])
indeed that this.Nom deer-Nom Prev-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Erg

And so on.

Same constructions are usual also for the corresponding passive constructions:

ai es irem-i mo-i-k'l-a monadir-is mier ([This deer]T is killed by the hunter)
here.is deer-Nom Prev-Pass-kill-Aor.S.3 hunter-Gen by

And so on.

In Georgian specific constructions more often classified as ways to introduce topics, like “As for”, “As far as ... is concerned”, “Concerning”, “As regards ...”, represent mostly syntactic devices of topicalization:

ra-c she-e-x-eb-a monadire-s,
 what.Nom-Part Prev-Pass-concern-Th.Suf-Pass.Pres.3.Sg hunter-Dat

sts'ored rom is klav-s irem-s
 exactly that he.Nom kill-Pres.3.Sg deer-Dat
 (Concerning the hunter, [just it is he]T who kills a deer.)

Summarizing all the data, we can distinguish the following models for the Topicalization:

1. Marked Intonation (different from focus and neutral intonations);
2. Reordering (Fronting) (+Intonation)
3. Syntactic Constructions (+Intonation)
4. Particles (+Syntax+Intonation)

4. Mixed Forms of Foregrounding

Different kinds of foregrounding can co-occur and we can speak about the different degrees of 'Foregrounding': It is supposed that increasing of formal devices represents rising of the degree of foregrounding and 'stages' can conventionally represent this complicated process.

As an example, let us consider the sentence:

kal-ma gat'exa magida (The woman broke the table)
 woman-Erg broke Table.Nom

1st stage (Conceptual Foregrounding):

Ergative construction represents the Patient (*magida* 'table.Nom') foregrounding;

2nd stage (Functional Foregrounding):

Active construction denotes the Agent (*kal-ma* 'woman-Erg') foregrounding

3rd stage: Intonation emphasis shows different kinds of different foregrounding. It depends on the wider context and on the type of intonation are these highlighting parts Focus or Topic ones? (Underlining in the below examples mark specific changes of an intonation):

kalma *gat'exa magida*
kalma *gat'exa* *magida*
kalma gat'exa *magida*

4th stage: The reordering also works as the marker of foregrounding:

kalma gat'exa magida (neutral word order)
kalma magida gat'exa (neutral word order)
gat'exa kalma magida
gat'exa magida kalma
magida gat'exa kalma
magida kalma gat'exa

But the reordering with a certain pitch accent shows clearly a higher degree of foregrounding. The most usual position for Topic is the beginning of the sentence and for the Focus the position before the verb. Fronting together with intonation emphasis gives the highest degree of foregrounding:

5th stage: *kalma* *gat'exa magida*
gat'exa *kalma magida*
magida *gat'exa kalma*

It is also possible to use specific particles:

6th stage: *ai kalma* *gat'exa magida* (The woman (not the other one) broke the table)
ai magida *gat'exa kalma* (The table (not the other thing) was broken by the woman)
ai gat'exa *magida kalma* (The woman was broken (neither bought, nor made or etc.)
the table')

(The particle *ai* ('here is') implies also fronting and specific intonation.)

Specific syntactic constructions (cleft, split...) along with the certain particles show the highlighted part of information as well.

7th stage: *es magidaa, kalma rom gat'exa* ('It is the table that the woman broke')
magida, gat'exa kalma, xis ('The table, the woman broke, wooden')
sts'ored rom magida gat'exa kalma
('It is) precisely the table that the woman broke')

If we change the active construction into the passive one, the sentence *magida gat'q'da* (*kalis mier*) would show the different foregrounding on the **2nd stage** where *magida* has turned into the Subject. All the possibilities which are characteristic for the topicalization or focusing in active constructions can be used in the passive construction as well:

3rd stage: *magida* *gat'q'da* (*kalis mier*)
magida *gat'q'da* (*kalis mier*)
magida gat'q'da *kalis mier*

4th stage: *gat'q'da* *magida* (*kalis mier*)
kalis mier *gat'q'da* *magida*

5th stage: *ai magida* *gat'q'da* (*kalis mier*)
ai gat'q'da *magida* (*kalis mier*)
ai kalis mier *gat'q'da* *magida*

6th stage: *es magidaa, (kalis mier) rom gat'q'da*
magida *gat'q'da* (*kalis mier*), *xis*
sts'ored rom magida *gat'q'da* (*kalis mier*)

So, the following hierarchy occurs:

1st stage – Aorist and Perfect show Patient’s foregrounding, while the Present shows Agent’s foregrounding;

2nd stage – Passive construction shows Patient’s further foregrounding in Present;

3rd stage – Marked intonation shows different kinds of Topics or Focuses;

4th stage – Reordering+Intonation (Fronting+Intonation);

5th stage – Syntactic constructions (+Intonation);

6th stage – Particles (+Syntax+Intonation).

The first and second stages are obligatory, other stages are optional. We assume that the hierarchy of stages (1<2)<3<4<5<6 presents the rising of the degree of foregrounding.

References

Asatiani, R. 2000. subiekt’isa da obiekt’is akt’ualizaciis dziritadi mekanismebi kartulshi (Main devices of the subject and object topicalization in the Arabic language). Typological Researches, IV. Tbilisi: mecniereba.

Asatiani, R. 2002. aktualizaciis dziritadi tipologiurad gansxvavebuli modelebi (Main typologically different models of topicalization). Tbilisi: TSU publ.

Büring, D. 1995. Topic. Cologne University: Electronic publication.

Chikobava, A. 1968. mart’ivi c’inadadebis problema kartulshi (Problem of the simple sentence in Georgian). Tbilisi: mecniereba.

Shanidze, A. 1973. kartuli gramat’ik’is sapudzvlebi (The foundations of the Georgian language). Tbilisi: mecniereba.

Vallduvi, E. 1995. Discourse Configurational Languages. edited by Katalin E. Kiss. New York-Oxford: Oxford Un.Press.