An Appraisal of the Discourse Content and Discourse Management Functions of Left-Dislocation and Topicalization

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The Problem

Subsequent refinements to Prince's (1998) model for the function of left-dislocation (and topicalization) have revealed new discourse content functions (Manetta, 2005) and/or related them to discourse management functions (Netz and Kuzar, 2004); it remains to see how the new content functions enact discourse management and assay data for instances of new types. The present study attempts to synthesize these two somewhat disparate treatments of the phenomenon and to subsume some ambiguous corpus data, and finds that Manetta's "unexpected" left-dislocation fits comfortably within Netz and Kuzar's discourse management classificatory scheme.

The Study

Candidate sentences were gleaned from the Switchboard corpus. This was accomplished by seeking the "TPC" tag among those parsed utterances found within the subset of the Switchboard corpus processed by Penn Treebank. 541 such candidate sentences were found, then threshed and coded for discourse content and management function. On the whole, the correspondences between content and management functions as propounded in Netz and Kuzar recur here.

The Consequences

This study synthesizes and further refines the existing research on topicalization and left-dislocation. No claim can be made, however, that this is a plenary treatment of all possible instances of the phenomenon; further research is bound to yield more nuanced insight into the various functions of these syntactic constructions.