Partial inversion in English

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This study concerns the representation within SBCG (Sag 2012, Sag et al. 2012, Michaelis 2012) of five English constructions that combine special grammatical form with a special discourse pragmatics.[1] The **grammatical features** include agreement between an intransitive verb and an argument that appears in what is usually thought of as direct object position. While the postverbal nominal argument has certain subject properties (in particular, controlling verb agreement), the preverbal argument has others (including undergoing raising and occupying pre-verbal position). We refer to this 'split' in subject properties as *partial inversion*. The **discourse-pragmatic** features are presentational illocutionary force and a postverbal focused argument. The constructions are:

- Presentational-*there*: *The earth was now dry, and there grew a tree in the middle of the earth.*
- Deictic Inversion (DI): *Here comes the bus.*
- Existential-*there*: *There's a big problem here.*
- Presentational Inversion (PI): *On the porch stood marble pillars.*
- Reversed Specificational-*be*: *The only thing we've taken back recently are plants.* (Corbett, 2006, 63-64)

Although some of these constructions have been treated extensively in the literature (especially PI and Existential-*there*), to our knowledge no previous analyses have attempted to account for both the formal and interpretational similarities among all five, or the details of their formal and interpretive differences. Our observations, based on web attestations of the relevant patterns, include the following:

1. The post-verbal, focal NP cannot be characterized as having a particular (structural or inherent) case; both nominative and accusative variants are attested.
2. DI is an aspectually sensitive construction, yielding progressive construals of simple-tense dynamic verbs (e.g., *Here came the waitress*).
3. Some of the maximal constructions specify verbal and adverbial LID values, while others do not.
4. The 'setting' argument of PI is not as constrained as it is typically said to be: it need not fill the discourse-pragmatic role of topic (*pace* Webelhuth 2011 *inter alia*), it need not be a location (Postal 2004) and it need not be a PP

[1]The paper abstracted here is available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303874961_Partial_Inversion_in_English, and can be cited as: Kay, Paul and Laura A. Michaelis. 2017. Partial Inversion in English. Unpublished ms., Stanford University and University of Colorado Boulder.

(contra Postal 2004), but it might be appropriately characterized in notional terms, as a reference point or 'origo' (cf. Partee & Borschev 2008's notion of 'perspectival center').

5. As also noticed by Salzmann (2013), the 'setting' argument of PI need not be a selected argument of the verb (pace Bresnan 1994); this is shown by attested tokens like (5a-b):

   a And there, in the midst of the swirl, was smiling Sam Waksal—a reedy, charming bachelor biotech entrepreneur.

   b From the mast flapped the banner of King Aurelius and of Braime.

6. The argument-realization properties associated with PI are found in a variety of structural configurations: Raising, Cleft, Nonsubject *Wh*-interrogative and Auxiliary Initial (including *do*-support contexts, *pace* Bruening 2010); this is shown by attested tokens like (6a-b):

   a Out of the woodwork during their show seemed to emerge all of these really big meat-head type guys and they started moshing hard. (raising)

   b Did out of this impasse come existentialism, a belief that man could define his temperament and impose meaning on the world? (polar interrogative)

Observations (4-5) suggest that PI is not, as some analysts (including Bresnan 1994) have contended, a kind of topicalization (filler-gap) structure: the fact that PI permits verbs, like *smile* and *flap* in (5a-b), that assign no locative argument damages the case for topicalization, since in such examples there is no gap within the clause to share f-structure attributes with the pre-clausal oblique expression. Observation (6) suggests that the PI pattern is a fact of argument structure rather than phrase structure. Accordingly, we see the partial-inversion pattern as the product of a lexical derivation. No phrasal construction is required to license any of the examples that is not also required to license clauses exhibiting canonical subjects and canonical agreement. Thus, for example, the PI sentence *Down came the rain* is analyzed as a Subject-Predicate construct whose head daughter is the Head-Complement construct *came the rain*.

To account for the unity among the five cases, we propose a type hierarchy in which each pattern of partial inversion inherits syntactic and discourse-pragmatic constraints from a non-maximal type, the **Split Subject (SS) construct type**. As a derivational construction, SS licenses a unary branching structure, that is, a mother with a unique daughter. Constructions of this kind implement the concept of lexical rule (Müller & Wechsler 2014). The single daughter of SS is of the type *intransitive-verb-lexeme*. The mother is of the type *split-subject-intransitive-verb-lexeme*. Unselected 'setting' arguments are readily accommodated by this analysis: to rely on a derivational construction as the licensor of PI lexemes is in fact to anticipate a valence mismatch between the two lexemes mediated by the rule. The

verbs and verb classes permitted in each partial-inversion pattern are represented in the mother's FRAMES set, where semantic frames, like syntactic patterns, also participate in the type hierarchy (Davis & Koenig 2000).

In the mother of a SS construct, the agreement trigger is not the XARG; it is an internal argument that is identified with the XARG of the daughter. In creating an external argument that is not the agreement trigger, SS effectively splits canonical subject properties between the 'new' and 'old' XARGs. Since in each case the preverbal, non-agreeing constituent appears in subject position in a simple declarative clause, this analysis contrasts with many approaches to PI (e.g., Bresnan 1994, Postal 2004, Kim 2003, Bruening 2010), which analyze the preverbal constituent of PI as occupying a filler position in an extraction structure. One virtue of our approach is that it permits us to separate the XARG role from that of agreement trigger. While agreement features are included in referential indices (as per Pollard & Sag 1994, CH2), subject behaviors like raising and control of a tag subject are a function of XARG status—a status occupied, e.g., by the 'setting' argument in PI.

This account also decouples partial inversion from the 'setting subject' phenomenon; it applies as well to those cases in which the preverbal, non-agreeing constituent is a non-oblique nominal expression (i.e. predications with *Reversed Specificational-be*). In so doing, it captures agreement variability—attestation of both canonical and 'backwards agreement' patterns in specificational clauses, the latter being licensed by a split-subject derivational construction.

Unlike the lexical rules that modulate between usual valence patterns, we find that lexical rules involved in marked phenomena like partial inversion tend to produce derived lexical items with properties not usually found in listemes, for example, an external argument that does not control agreement. This should not be surprising, since such facts define the marked phenomena that call for a lexical analysis in the first place.

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