Broad Subject

Edit Doron

In G. Khan (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*,

Leiden: Brill. 2013.

In Hebrew one finds a construction in which an initial noun phrase has the properties associated with a subject, despite the apparent similarity to, and in some cases ambiguity with, Left Dislocation (the latter also known as → Extraposition). Such an initial noun phrase has been called "broad subject" (Doron and Heycock 1999):

1.   מילים אלה הוראתן ברורה

    milim ʾele   horaʾat-an   brura
    these words denotation-their   (is) clear
    'These words have a clear denotation.'

The predicate related to a broad subject is a full clause. In (1), the broad subject 'these words' is the subject of the clausal predicate 'their denotation is clear', which in turn contains an (ordinary) subject 'their denotation' together with its own predicate 'is clear'. The construction thus involves recursion of the subject-predicate relation.

Broad subjects can be non-referential noun phrases such as *wh*-phrases and other negative quantifiers, e.g. *no one*:

2.   a.   ?מי יש לו זמן לדברים האלה

    mi yeš   lo   zman la-dvarim haʾele
    who there-is to-him time   to these things
    'Who has time for these things?'

    b.   אף הצגה לא מעלים אותה רק פעם אחת

    ʾaf haṣaga lo   maʿalim   ʾota raq paʿam ʾaxat
    no play   not (they) perform   it   only once
    'No play is performed only once.'

    c.   אף אחד אין לו סבלנות לדברים האלה

    ʾaf ʾexad ʾen lo   savlanut la-dvarim haʾele
    no one   NEG to-him patience to these things
    'No one has patience for these things.'

    d.   אף אחד לא מצפים שיגלה סבלנות לדברים האלה

    ʾaf ʾexad lo   meṣapim   še- yegale   savlanut la-dvarim haʾele
    no one   not (they) expect that (he) will show patience to these things
    'No one is such that people expect that he would show patience for these things.'

On the other hand, non-referential noun phrases are known not to be possible in left dislocation; clearly in English they are ruled out, whether or not accompanied by inversion:

3.   a.   * *No one, I would expect him to be patient.*
    b.   * *No one would I expect him to be patient.*

A second distinction which has been made between broad subjects and left dislocation is that broad subjects can occur in a wide range of non-peripheral positions, including subordinate clauses, while left dislocation is essentially restricted to main-clause

initial position. Thus where a broad subject appears following constituent negation, adverbs, or in the antecedent of a conditional, it cannot be analysed as an instance of left dislocation:

4. a.   **לֹא דני** אין לו סיכויים, אלא **רותי**

        *lo **dani** ʾen lo   sikuyim, ʾela **ruti***
        not Dani NEG to-him chances   but Ruti
        'It's not Dani who doesn't have a chance, but Ruti. '

    b.   באנגלית כל משפט יש לו נושא

        be-ʾanglit kol mišpaṭ yeš   lo   nose
        in English each sentence there-is to-it subject
        'In English each sentence has a subject.'

    c.   אם באמת רותי יש לה סבלנות, היא מתאימה למשרה הזאת

        ʾim beʾemet ruti yeš   la   savlanut,
        if   indeed Ruti there-is to-her patience,

        hi matʾima   la-misra ha-zot
        she (is) suitable to this job
        'If indeed Ruti has patience, then she is suitable for this job.'

A third indication that broad subjects are indeed subjects is found in examples of coordination where a single initial noun phrase may be "shared" between two conjuncts, in one of which it functions as the broad subject, and in the other as an ordinary subject:

5.   אף מתמודד אין לו בעיה מולה, ולא מהסס לתקוף אותה

        ʾaf mitmoded   ʾen lo   beʿaya mul-a
        no contestant (there is) NEG to-him problem facing-her

        ve lo mehases litqof   ʾot-a
        and not hesitates to-attack ACC-her
        'No contestant has a problem facing her or hesitates to attack her.'

The second conjunct in (5) cannot be analyzed as a sentence with a null pronoun in subject position, since pro-drop is not licensed in Hebrew in the present tense. Thus, the first conjunct could not be a case of left dislocation (even setting aside the absence of negative quantifiers from left dislocation), since there is no corresponding pronoun in the second conjunct. Such a pronoun would be required in true left dislocation. In a language like English where the relation between *that guy* in (6) and the pronoun *him* in the first clause can only be that of left-dislocation, the pronoun *he* in the second clause is indeed required (this is indicated by placing the asterisk outside the parentheses):

6.   *That guy, I just gave him a glance and *(he) immediately attacked me!*

These and additional arguments for broad subjects were given by Doron 1995, 1996, Doron & Heycock 1999, Heycock & Doron 2003, Alexopoulou, Doron and Heycock 2004. They were contested by Landau 2009, to which Doron and Heycock 2010 is a reply.

References

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Edit Doron, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem