

1 Syntactic overview

■ Information-packaging constructions

Our concern in this chapter is with a number of clause constructions which we refer to collectively as **information-packaging constructions**, and which differ syntactically from the most basic, or canonical, constructions in the language. These information-packaging constructions characteristically have a syntactically more basic counterpart differing not in truth conditions or illocutionary meaning but in the way the informational content is presented. Compare, for example:

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| [1] | CANONICAL VERSION | NON-CANONICAL VERSION |
| | i a. <i>Kim wrote the letter.</i> | b. <i>The letter was written by Kim.</i> |
| | ii a. <i>Two doctors were on the plane.</i> | b. <i>There were two doctors on the plane.</i> |
| | iii a. <i>We rejected six of the applications.</i> | b. <i>Six of the applications we rejected.</i> |

In each pair [b] is an instance of one of the information-packaging constructions, while [a] is the syntactically more basic counterpart. In each pair the truth conditions are the same, so that [a] entails [b] and [b] entails [a]; and there is no illocutionary difference between them: all six examples are declaratives and would normally be used as statements. The syntax makes available different ways of ‘saying the same thing’, with the various versions differing in the way the content is organised informationally.

We have said that information-packaging constructions **characteristically** enter into relationships of the kind illustrated in [1]. The qualification is needed for two reasons. In the first place, for most of the constructions there are conditions under which the syntactically more basic counterpart is in fact unacceptable for syntactic or pragmatic reasons:

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| [2] | i a. <i>*The nanny said Kim to have been devoted to the children.</i> | b. <i>Kim was said by the nanny to have been devoted to the children.</i> |
| | ii a. <i>#An accident was at the factory.</i> | b. <i>There was an accident at the factory.</i> |
| | iii a. <i>*I find that he got away with it for so long quite incredible.</i> | b. <i>That he got away with it for so long I find quite incredible.</i> |

Secondly, the canonical and non-canonical versions do not invariably have the same truth conditions:

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| [3] | i a. <i>Kim didn't sign many of them.</i> | b. <i>Many of them weren't signed by Kim.</i> |
| | ii a. <i>Many MPs weren't in the House.</i> | b. <i>There weren't many MPs in the House.</i> |
| | iii a. <i>I haven't met many of her friends.</i> | b. <i>Many of her friends I haven't met.</i> |

In each pair the relative order of the quantifier *many* and the negative is different in [b]