

English Locative Inversion: Grammatical Interfaces and Constructions

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English Locative Inversion: Grammatical Interfaces and Constructions*

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1. Introduction

Locative inversion (LI) is a general term applying to cases of inversion with the locative PP in the preverbal and the theme NP in the postverbal position. The examples of LI given in (1) are cases found in the ICE-GB (British Component of the International Corpus of English) that contains about one million words from 500 different spoken and written texts:

- (1) a. And then suddenly from the bottom [appears] a motor car. (ICE-GB:S1B-038)
- b. Then behind him [came] Eton Lad who fluttered. (ICE-GB:S2A-006)
- c. Within this quotation are [engraved] astrological zodiacal symbols, clockwise from Pisces uppermost.(ICE-GB:W2A-040)
- d. In the top drawer of her desk [lay] her letter of resignation from Jupiter Services.(ICE-GB:W2F-008)

As noted by Birner and Ward (1998), such examples have syntactically more basic counterparts differing not in truth conditions but only in the way the informational content is presented. Several attempts have been made to account for how the grammar makes it possible to say the same thing in different ways in such LI constructions, focusing on the following questions:¹

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¹There have two main perspectives in the treatment of English LI: transformational and lexicalist. The transformational perspective has treated LI in terms of movement and configurational structures.

- How can we generate such locative constructions and what triggers the inversion?
- What are the grammatical properties of the preverbal PP and the postverbal NP, and the status of the verb in LI?
- How can we account for various grammatical (syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) constraints in LI?

This paper is another attempt to answer these questions within the framework of constraint-based grammar, HPSG (Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar). In particular, in order to account for intriguing and mixed properties of the constructions in question, the paper argues for a grammar that allows tight interactions among different grammatical components: valence, argument-structure, discourse-function (information structure), and constructions.

2. Mixed Properties of the Preverbal PP and the Postverbal NP

One of the controversial issues in English locative inversion (LI) is the functional status of the preverbal PP and the postverbal NP. As noted by Bresnan (1994) and many others, the preverbal PP functions both as a subject and topic, while the postverbal NP has subject as well as non-subject properties at the same time.

2.1. Subject and Topic Properties PP

Subject Properties: There seem to exist several phenomena that support the assumption that the preverbal PP is subject. In particular, as noted by Coopmans (1989), Bresnan (1994), Culicover and Levine (2001), among others, LI behaves just like subject with respect to phenomena such as raising, tag question, *that*-trace effect, weak cross-over effect, and *do* support phenomena. Let us compare canonical and LI sentences:

- (2) a. An entire army of ants seems to have crawled over my windowsill.
- b. There are whales in the ocean, aren't there?
- c. That bunch of gorillas, Terry claims *(that) __ walked into the room.

This view can be at large divided into two main approaches: topicalization approach (cf. Bowers 1976, Rochemont and Culicover 1990), and unaccusative approach (cf. Coopmans 1989, Hoekstra and Mulder 1990). The basic idea of the topicalization approach is to move the PP into a topic position and the subject NP to a VP-adjoined position. Meanwhile, the unaccusative analysis takes the NP to be the object of an unaccusative verb and moves to the locative PP into a subject position. Meanwhile, the lexicalist perspective has been proposed in Levine (1989, 2002), Bresnan (1994), Green (1992), Kathol and Levine (1992) among others. The central assumption of this lexicalist perspective is that the lexical properties of the inversion verb play an important role in projecting LI sentences.

English Locative Inversion

- d. ??Who_i does his_i mother think [t_i is genius]?
 - e. Which portrait of the artist hung/*did hang on the wall?
- (3) a. Over my windowsill seems to have crawled an entire army of ants.
b. In the ocean are whales, aren't there?
c. Into the room Terry claims *(that) _ walked a bunch of gorillas.
d. Into every dog_i's cage peered its_i owner.
e. In which garden *did stand/stood a fountain?

The postverbal PP in (3)a functions as the raised subject just like the canonical NP subject in (2)a. The postverbal PP in (3)b also, like the subject NP in (2)b, functions as the target for the pronoun agreement in tag questions. Also, when the PP in LI is extracted from an embedded clause as in (3)c, the presence of an overt complementizer is obligatory: this is the situation we find with the canonical NP subject in (2)c. In addition, though the movement of a *wh*-phrase to an A'-position induces weak cross-over effect as in (2)d, the postverbal PP exhibits no such an effect, implying that the PP is in a A-position. Finally, just as the *wh*-NP subject in (2)e, the *wh*-PP in (3)e does not allow the presence of the so-called dummy *do*.

Topic Properties: As argued in Schachter (1992), one strong argument for the topichood of the PP concerns the usage of an indefinite PP. As shown in the contrast (4), it is possible to have an indefinite locative proform in a noninverted sentence but not in an LI sentence:

- (4) a. A child was found somewhere.
b. *Somewhere was found a child.

A topic element in general represents established information, and it is thus preferred to be definite. The unacceptability of the indefinite locative phrase *somewhere* in (4)b could thus be attributed to the topichood of the PP in LI.

The PP also exhibits distributional similarities with a topic phrase. For example, just like a true topic phrase, the preverbal PP in LI appears neither in a nonfinite clause nor in an embedded *if* or *whether* clause as illustrated in (5):

- (5) a. *Bill asked if [such books] John only reads at home.
b. *Bill asked if [near John's house] lies buried treasure.

The co-occurrence with the complementizer also indicates the topichood of the PP. When LI or topicalization occurs in an embedded clause, the overt complementizer *that* must appear, as shown in (6) (cf. Schachter 1992, Bresnan 1994, Ginzburg and Sag 2001):

- (6) a. Mary said [*(that) the dog, the man kicked].
b. Mary said [*(that) under the tree sat a woman].

2.2. Subject, Object, and Focus Properties of the Postverbal NP

Subject Properties: The examples in (7) show that even though the postverbal NP is not in a canonical subject position, it plays the role of subject with respect to subject-verb agreement.

- (7) a. In the garden stand/*stands two fountains.
b. Down through the hills and into the forest flows/*flow the little brook.
(Levine 1989)

Object Properties: In LI, there is a strong tendency for an adverb to occur after the adjoined NP, implying that the NP is a direct object of the locative verb (Coopmans 1989, Penhallurick 1984, Kathol and Levine 1992):

- (8) a. Into the room strode (*boldly) Robin boldly.
b. Outside the door sat (*uncomfortably) a young man uncomfortably.

Focus Properties: As noted by Rochemont (1986) the postverbal NP must be identified as a presentational focus. Strong support can be found from the fact that LI sentences can freely alternate with their noninverted counterparts as responses to *wh* questions:

- (9) A: Who ran into the forest?
B: Into the forest ran ROBIN HOOD.
B: ROBIN HOOD ran into the forest.

A similar case has been provided by Bresnan (1994). The focus property of the postverbal NP can explain why the reply B in (10) is infelicitous.²

- (10) A: I am looking for my friend Rose.
B: # Among the guests of honor was sitting Rose.

Since Rose is already mentioned in A, it cannot be reintroduced on the discourse as a presentational focus.

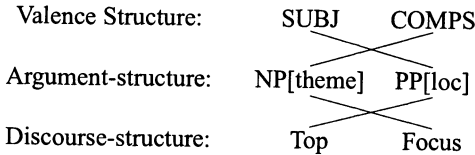
²Corpus research results also show that the postverbal NP represents new information, that is, information which the speaker assumes not be in the consciousness of the hearer at the time of the utterance. See Penhallurick (1984) and Birner and Ward (1998).

3. A Constraint-Based Approach

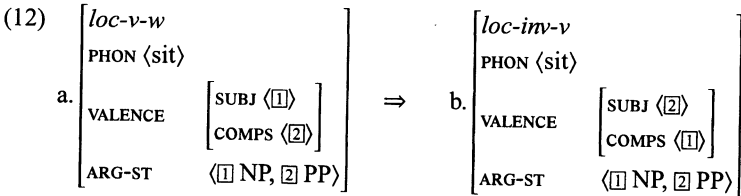
3.1. Constraints on the Mapping Relation

In generating English LI sentences, as a starting point we assume that that LI is a result of different mapping relations among grammatical function structure (valence structure), argument structure, and discourse structure. In particular, the paper takes discourse functions to be the main trigger for LI (cf. Schachter 1992 and Bresnan 1989, 1994). In canonical sentences with locative verbs, the theme NP is mapped onto SUBJ and the locative PP onto COMPS. However, as represented in (11), when the locative PP carries topic and the theme NP is assigned to have focus, this mapping relation is reversed:

(11) Mapping in the LI case:



For example, a *loc-v* word like *sat* will take an NP and PP as its arguments and these are realized on the appropriate valence list (grammatical functions): SUBJ and COMPS as in (12)a.³ However, as a *loc-inv* word, this mapping relation is reversed as in (12)b:



The reverse condition is possible only when the PP is mapped onto TOPIC and the NP is onto FOCUS, respectively. As a generalization, we could formulate this as

³It is hard to claim that LI is limited to unaccusative verbs. LI seems to include certain unergatives but exclude certain unaccusatives as shown in (i) (see Birner 1994, Levin and Rappaport 1995, Birner and Ward 1998):

- (i) a. *On the top floor of the skyscraper broke many windows.
- b. Behind the mayor's car marched police officers.
- b. On the third floor worked two young women.

the following Locative Inversion Argument Realization Constraint:⁴

(13) Locative Inversion Argument Realization Constraint:

$$loc-v-lxm \Rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} loc-inv-v \\ VALENCE \left[\begin{array}{l} SUBJ \langle [2] \rangle \\ COMPS \langle [1] \rangle \end{array} \right] \\ ARG-ST \langle [1] NP[can-ss], [2] PP \rangle \\ INFO-STR \left[\begin{array}{l} TOPIC \langle [2] \rangle \\ FOCUS \langle [1] \rangle \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

Such dissociations between valence structure (grammatical functions) and argument structure motivated by the discourse functions directly reflect the basic properties of LI.⁵ This analysis clearly indicates that the NP functions as subject at argument-structure level and an object at valence level, whereas the PP is a complement at argument-structure but a subject at valence-structure. Let us consider some immediate consequences of this line of approach.

Verb Types and Adjuncts The analysis first does not allow transitive verbs to occur in LI as in (14):⁶

- (14) a. *In the room rolled John the ball.
 b. *Onto the track ran the jockey the horse. (Rochemont 1986)

Transitive verbs like *roll* in (14)a are not *loc-v-lxm* and thus cannot serve as the input to the *loc-inv-v*. This also means that LI is possible only when the locative PP is a complement as noted in Bresnan (1994):

- (15) a. ??/*At the corner of Wright and Green turned the instructor.
 b. *On his bicycle appeared John.

In the present analysis, these examples are unacceptable simply because an adjunct locative cannot be in the ARG-ST and thus cannot serve as an input to the LI lexicalization.

Weak crossover and Binding: The analysis also presents an account of binding facts.

⁴The mapping from *loc-v-lxm* to *loc-inv-v* could be captured either by a lexical rule or an elaborated type hierarchy system. For the meaning of *can-ss* (*canonical synsem*), see the discussion after (24).

⁵See Manning and Sag (1999) for a similar dissociation between argument structure and valence features in ergative languages.

⁶However, as discussed in Birner (1994), Birner and Ward (1998), and Culicover and Levine (2001), LI allows incorporated nouns in complex verbs., e.g. *take place, take root.*, as in *In that year took place a great renewal.*

English Locative Inversion

- (16) a. [Two handsome young boys_i] sat [beside each other_i].
 b. [Beside each other_i] sat [two handsome young boys_i].

The postverbal NP behaves like the subject since in the LI, the NP binds the anaphor *each other*. Within the binding theory of HPSG where argument-structure is the locus of binding, we then can predict that the ‘outranking’ NP in (17) can function as the binder of the PP.⁷

- (17) [ARG-ST ⟨ [1] NP[boys_i], [2] PP[each other_i] ⟩]

Agreement: The subject-verb agreement fact also follows from the assumption that ARG-ST is the locus of the agreement. Since the postverbal NP is the subject at the ARG-ST, the verb will agree with this NP even though it is realized in the postverbal position as a complement. For example, let us see the lexical entry of the singular verb *stands*:

- (18)
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \langle \text{stands} \rangle \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \text{NP } [1], \text{PP } [2] \rangle \\ \text{CONTENT} \left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{RELATION} & \textit{stand} \\ \text{THEME} & [1] [3rd \textit{sing}] \\ \text{LOC} & [2] \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

As represented in (19), the verb *stands* requires its theme NP to be 3rd singular. This restriction holds whether the NP is realized as a postverbal complement NP or as subject in a canonical sentence.

Adverb Position: Within the analysis, we also would not expect an adverb to intervene between the verb and the theme NP since the NP is the direct complement of a locative verb. This explains the contrast in (19):

- (19) a. Outside the door sat a young man in an attitude of despondency.
 b. *Outside the door sat in an attitude of despondency a young man (Penhalurick 1984)

In a similar spirit, this would mean that a heavy object NP in LI could be right-shifted over an adverb as in (20):

- (20) a. I read last Tuesday a wonderful book about Korean grammar.
 b. On my rug sat on most occasions a magnificent waterpipe that I brought back from Nepal.

⁷See Sag and Wasow (1999) for the binding theory of HPSG.

Extraction: In terms of extraction, only the PP can be extracted:

- (21) a. *What does in the garden stand __ ?
 b. In which garden stands a fountain?
- (22) a. *The fountain that in the garden stands __ is my favorite.
 b. She stood on the corner on which was standing another woman.

There are even cases where the PP has undergone a long-distance extraction:

- (23) a. *What did John say in the garden stood __ ?
 b. In which garden did you say __ stood a lamp?

Examples like (23) indicate that we cannot simply specify that LI is a root phenomenon. Why do the NP and the PP in LI behave differently in terms of extraction? We attribute this to the fact that the theme NP in LI cannot be a gapped element: the focused theme NP argument must be a type of canonical syntax-semantics element (*canon-ss*) in order to serve the designated function, the focus of the LI (as represented in (13)).⁸ That is, if this NP is realized as a gap element, the LI construction would lose one of its basic functions: making the postverbal NP as representing new information (see section 3.2).

As noted by Bouma et al. (2001), in English there are also peculiar cases where lexemes specify their arguments as being of type of *gap-ss*. One example can be found from the usage of a verb like *assure*:⁹

- (24) a. This candidate, they assured me __ to be reliable.
 b. *They assured me this candidate to be reliable.

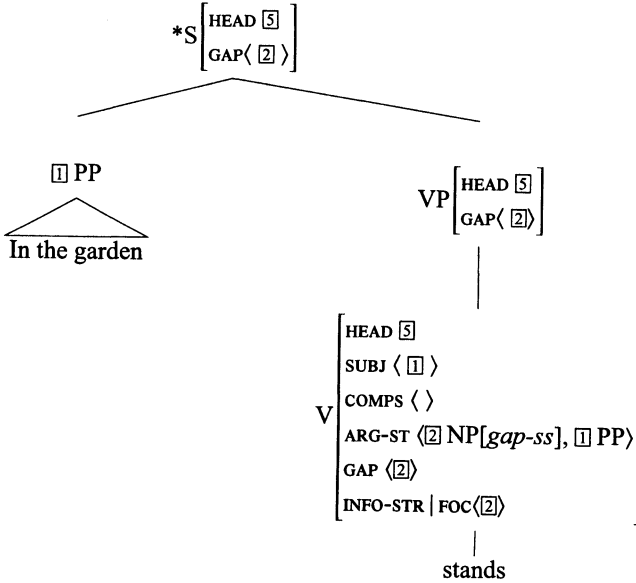
What we can observe in (24) is that the understood subject of the infinitive VP cannot be realized as a canonical NP. Given such a lexical case, it would not be reasonable to assume that the words of *loc-Inv-v* impose a specific constraint on the type of its focused NP. The lexical specification in (23) means that the NP cannot be realized as a gapped element, blocking examples like (23)a. The structure further explains why this sentence is unacceptable:

⁸Following Bouma et al. (2001), we accept the view that *synsem* has *canon-ss* and *noncan-ss* as its subtypes, the latter of which in turn has *pro-ss* and *gap-ss*. As default, arguments are *synsem* elements which can be realized either as *canon-ss* or *noncan-ss*. See Bouma et al. (2001) for details.

⁹One can argue that this is not about the lexical properties of *assure*, but the general properties of English VP. That is, English allows two NP sisters within VP only when they are the order of Goal-Theme. However, such an ordering restriction is hard to support cases like (24) since thematically *this candidate* is unrelated to *assure* in any way. In addition, there is no problem with *I assure you this candidate is reliable*.

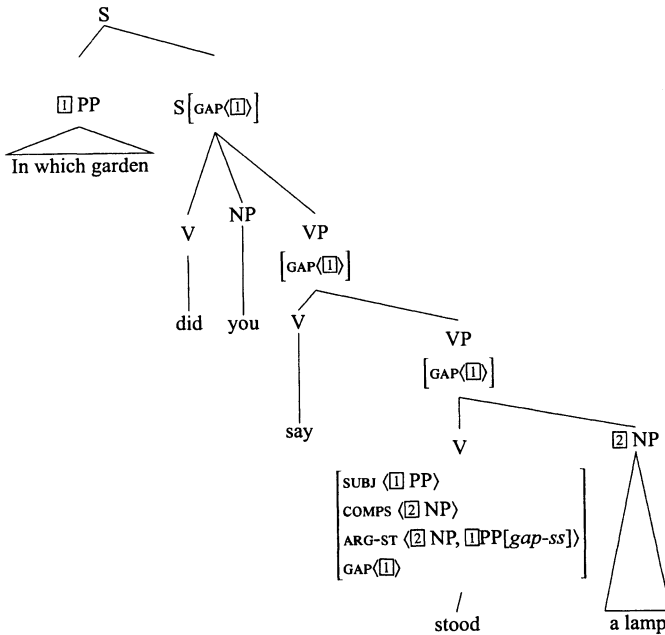
English Locative Inversion

(25)



The present analysis, however, does license cases like (21)b, (22)b, and (23)b. In these examples, what is extracted is not a complement NP but the subject PP. The grammar places no restrictions on the type of this subject PP, implying that it can either be realized as a canonical element or a gapped element. The structural representation of (24) could show us this more clearly:

(26)

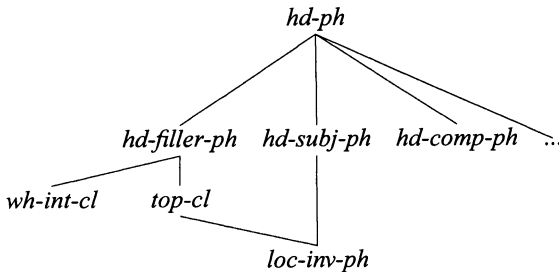


As represented in (27), the subject PP of the *loc-inv-v* is realized as a *gap-synsem* element. This gapped element has been passed up until it is discharged by the filler PP *in which garden*. The sentence thus observes all the constraints in question.

3.2. Constructional Constraints

As pointed out earlier, at stake in LI is the fact that the preposed PP has both topic and subject properties, whereas the postposed NP acts like an object and a focus. We attribute these mixed properties to the fact that LI phrases are subtypes of both *hd-subj-ph* and *top-cl*, as represented in a simplified multiple inheritance hierarchy in (27):

(27)



English Locative Inversion

Within a multiple inheritance system, a phrase assigned to a type obtains all the constraints associated with its supertypes, in addition to its own constraints.¹⁰ This then allows us to factor out clausal functions of each phrase while capturing generalizations about particular constructions. The hierarchy in (27) thus makes sure that an instance of *loc-inv-ph* inherits both the constraints of the *topic-cl* (a subtype of *hd-filler-ph*) and those of the *hd-subj-ph* in addition to its own constraint.

A *hd-subj-ph* (e.g., a sentence) and *hd-filler-ph* (like a phrase consisting of [*Fido*, [*John likes* _]]) independently have the following constraints:

(28) *hd-subj-ph*:

$$[\text{SUBJ} \langle \rangle] \rightarrow \boxed{\square}, \mathbf{H} \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{phrase} \\ \text{SUBJ} \langle \boxed{\square} \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

(29) *hd-filler-ph*:

$$[] \rightarrow \boxed{\square}, \mathbf{H} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD verb} \\ \text{GAP} \langle \boxed{\square} \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

(28) says that the *hd-subj-ph* consists of a subject and a VP looking for its subject. Meanwhile, the constraint on *hd-filler-ph* in (29) ensures that the head daughter must be a verb projection and its SLASH value is identified with the LOCAL value of the filler daughter. As expected, the *topic-cl* is a subtype of the *hd-filler-ph*, and requires to have at least the following constraints to capture its basic properties:

(30) *topic-cl*:

$$[] \rightarrow \boxed{\square}[\text{TOPIC +}], \mathbf{H} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{VFORM fin} \\ \text{IC +} \end{array} \right]$$

According to the constraint in (30), the non-head daughter of a *topic-cl* will carry the topic value, similar to the traditional notion of topic. The constraint also ensures that topicalized clauses are built from independent finite clauses, e.g., the declarative head-subject clause, which can serve as independent clauses (as marked by the

¹⁰The concept of hierarchical classification is essentially assigning phrases (like words) to specific types, and an assignment of those types to superordinate types. Each type is declared to obey certain constraints corresponding to properties shared by all members of that type. This system then allows us to express cross-classifying generalizations about phrases (like words), while accommodating the idiosyncracies of individual types on particular subtypes of words. See Ginzburg and Sag (2001) for a comprehensive study of English interrogative constructions developed within such a multiple inheritance system.

the feature IC (independent clause)).¹¹ Such basic constraints on topic clauses thus block us from generating sentences like (31):

- (31) a. *Bill asked if [such books] John only reads at home.
 b. *[Mary tried [the man]_i to kill __i].

Since clauses headed with *if* or *whether* cannot be independent clauses (thus [IC -]), and thus cannot be topicalized. Also the condition on the finiteness blocks examples like (31)b. In a similar manner, the constraints in (30) predict the contrast in LI:

- (32) a. Mary said [that under the tree sat a woman].
 b. *Mary said [under the tree sat Mary].

As shown in Bouma et al. (2001) and Ginzburg and Sag (2001), an embedded clause can be an independent main clause only if the complementizer *that* appears. A *that*-less embedded clause cannot be an independent clause.

One thing to note here is that since *loc-inv-ph* is a subtype of *hd-sub-ph* and *topic-cl* (which is in turn a subtype of *hd-filler-ph*), the phrase inherits the constraints of these supertypes. This in turn means that the phrase will have at least the constraints given in (33):¹²

- (33) Constraints on the *loc-inv-ph* which are inherited from its supertypes:

$$[] \rightarrow \boxed{[\text{TOPIC } +]} \mathbf{H} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{VFORM } \langle \text{fin} \rangle \\ \text{IC } + \\ \text{SUBJ } \langle \boxed{ } \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

Any instance of *loc-inv-ph* as being a subtype of the two types needs to satisfy the constraints in (33) at least. The only thing we then need to specify on the *loc-inv-ph* is its own constraint as in (34).¹³

- (34) *loc-inv-ph*:

$$[] \rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD } \langle \text{prep} \rangle \\ \text{LOCATION } i \end{array} \right], \mathbf{H} [\text{INFO-ST } | \text{FOC } \langle \text{nelist} \rangle]$$

¹¹Thus cases like relative clauses cannot have a topic nonhead daughter. See Ginzburg and Sag (2001).

¹²The phrase *loc-inv-ph* is specified not to inherit from *hd-filler-ph* the constraint that the topic phrase is the filler of the gap value of the head.

¹³Following Engdahl and Vallduvi (1996), I assume that the FOCUS value of a daughter is inherited up to its mother.

What the constraint in (34) says is that a *loc-inv-ph* consists of a locative phrase as non-head daughter and a head element which has a focus value. All the other constraints, such as the assignment of topic value to the PP, will be inherited from its supertypes.

By cross-classifying *loc-inv-ph* as a subtype of *topic-cl* and *hd-subj-ph*, we could account for why *loc-inv-ph* has various filler properties. For example, as pointed out by Bresnan (1994), raising asymmetries in (35) could be another indicator for the filler properties of the preverbal PP.

- (35) a. *I [_{VP} expect] [_{PP} on this wall] [_{VP} to be hung a portrait of our founder].
 b. [On this wall] [is likely to be [hung a portrait of our founder]].

Within our system, (35)a violates two constraints at least. First of all, the PP and the VP does not form a constituent as given by the bracket, thus not forming a *loc-inv-ph*. Another violation relates to the topic-hood of the locative PP. Since it carries a topic value, a locative phrase should serve as the nonhead daughter or a filler of a finite clause. This is not the case in (35)a.¹⁴

Such a construction view of grammar also provides an answer to the lack of Yes-no question:

- (36) a. *Did [into the room] [walk a woman]?
 b. *[Into the room] I expected _ to [walk Robin].

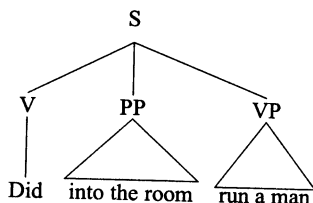
Adopting the idea of Fillmore (1999) and Ginzburg and Sag (2001), we accept the view that English has the construction of *sai-ph* whose constraints are given in (37):

- (37) *sai-ph*:

$$[\text{SUBJ} \langle \quad \rangle] \rightarrow \mathbf{H} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INV} + \\ \text{AUX} + \\ \text{SUBJ} \langle \text{I} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \langle \Delta \rangle \end{array} \right], \text{I}, \Delta$$

What this means is that a *sai-ph* consists of an auxiliary head, its subject (I) and complement(s) (Δ). This will then assign the following structure to a yes-no sentence like (36)a:

- (38)



¹⁴If this forms a small clause, it violates the finiteness condition of a topic clause.

The S structure in (38), however, is not a *loc-inv-ph* since the topic PP *into the room* does not form a phrase (constituent) with the head VP *run a man*. As given in the *loc-inv-ph* constraints in (33) and (34), a topic phrase can occur only as the non-head daughter with a finite head phrase. In (38), the VP headed by the locative verb *run* is neither finite nor the head: the head is the auxiliary verb *did*. The present grammar thus would not generate an yes-no LI sentence.

4. Conclusion

In the English LI construction, the preverbal PP and postverbal NP have mixed functional properties. This paper presents a simple way of dealing with mixed functional properties in HPSG. This paper is very similar to the analysis of Schachter (1992) and Bresnan (1994) in that the PP in LI is a topicalized subject whereas the NP is a focus.

However, this analysis differs from such previous analyses in several respects. In syntax the preverbal PP is not in the topic position, but it is in the subject position. In addition, the postverbal NP is a direct complement of a locative verb, not adjoined to the VP. The analysis also accepts the existence of *loc-inv-ph* in English that is a subtype of both *topic-cl* and *hd-sub-ph*. We have shown that the mixed, intricate properties are due to the interaction between the lexical information of the verbs in LI and its constructional constraints.

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Jong-Bok Kim

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