

Topicalisation and pronominalisation across genres
A usage-based approach to left-dislocation and pronominal
resumption in Vera'a (North Vanuatu)

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Topicalisation constructions involving the dislocation of NPs and pronominal expression of the respective argument within the clause – potentially developing into argument agreement - have since Givón's (1976) seminal paper often been regarded as closely related processes marking 'topicality'. In this paper, I will investigate the functions of both operations in two text genres from the Oceanic language Vera'a. Findings suggest that topicalisation and pronominalisation are two independent operations with quite different functions in terms of information structure (cf. Naess 2012 for a similar point regarding topicalisation and differential case marking in).

The paper is structured as follows: an outline of the issue sketched above is followed by an overview of basic features of Vera'a morphosyntax as relevant for the understanding of information structure (including types of referential expression and marking of information status, and information structure in the sentence). I then present findings from a (partly quantitative) corpus study of two types of text from Vera'a, namely narratives and descriptive texts. The two genre differ significantly in the frequency and functions of topicalisation constructions and pronominalisation with different syntactic functions, and these differences can be attributed to differences in discourse topic and communicative goals of the two types of text. As indicated above, topicalisation and pronominalisation are in both genres entirely independent of each other, and bear different pragmatic functions.

REFERENCES

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