

"BASIC WORD ORDER" AND FUNCTIONAL SENTENCE PERSPECTIVE IN BONI

H. J. SASSE

0. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The present paper attempts to show that the notion of "basic word order" (BWO) cannot always be defined in terms of grammatical relations (GR). Boni, for example, is a language whose word order (WO) is to a large extent determined by pragmatic facts. Postulating a certain relationally based BWO for this language would be equivalent to claiming the existence of a pragmatically neutral WO variant, which is not corroborated by the actual facts. It can be demonstrated, however, that there is some sort of BWO, describable in pragmatic rather than in relational terms. Since it happens that Boni sentences constructed on the basis of its own specific WO regularities sometimes show structural similarities to sentences in languages with relationally determined WO, linguists are likely to take it for granted that Boni WO may be interpreted in terms of subject, object and verb. Clearly such an interpretation does not tell us anything about the WO regularities of Boni, because it relies on superficial translational correspondences: what is described is in fact not the BWO of the language under consideration, but the relational structure of the sentence as translated into the language of the examiner. The language is thus described in terms of its translation rather than on the basis of its own structure. Since I assume that the same problem may be encountered in a good many further languages, related or unrelated to Boni, I will take the data presented here as a point of departure for the discussion of the notion of BWO and its interferences with pragmatically determined WO in general.

1. THE PROBLEM

Boni is a member of the East Cushitic family, closely related to Somali and Rendille, together with which it constitutes the Eastern section of the so-called Omo-Tana subgroup of East Cushitic.¹ In accordance with the methodological premises of WO classification proposed by GREENBERG (1963 etc.) the BWO of these languages is usually described as SOV.² Boni is in fact a verb-final, or rather predicate-final, language, and it is doubtlessly not uncommon that the order of nominal and pronominal constituents is such that the subject precedes the object, as shown by the following examples:

- (1) *háči idohóo sóor karissa*
this woman food cooks
- (2) *ii sóor karissa*
she food cooks
- (3) *an idohóodi á-ʔarki*
I woman-DEF saw
- (4) *an ii á-ʔarki*
I her saw

There can likewise be no doubt, however, that sentences (1) to (4) represent only one possible alternative. There are many others. For example, (3a) and (4a) represent the same propositional content as (3) and (4) respectively:

- (3a) *idohóodi an á-ʔarki*
woman-DEF I saw
- (4a) *ii an á-ʔarki*
her I saw

In order to justify the choice of one alternative over the other, it is therefore necessary to establish selectional criteria on the strength of which basicness of WO can be ascertained. Let us assume that these criteria include (i) frequency, (ii) dominant order in neutral descriptions,³ (iii) markedness. If "basicness" of WO were to be measured in terms of statistical prevalence, the SOV order would perhaps not count as a possible candidate for Boni,

since it would seem on the whole that all variants that the language permits for a given sentence type are more or less of equal frequency, notwithstanding the fact that in *certain* discourse types sentences with an *animate* subject ordered before the object may run well over 90%. At first blush, the neutral description hypothesis seems more promising. One may construct an impressively strong argument in favor of SOV as a BWO from the fact that, when isolated from any concrete context, sample sentences with transitive verbs are translated by native speakers almost exclusively in the form represented by examples (1) to (4). Standard examples of classroom linguistics such as "The man saw the woman" or "Peter kissed Mary" are constantly rendered in the order subject — object — verb; in this situation informants may even go so far as to deny the grammaticality of the opposite order. Unfortunately this path does not lead any farther, because other instances of neutral description (one-sentence-messages, opening passages of discourses etc.) do not necessarily show SOV order; as a matter of fact, for the most part they do not. On the whole, it cannot be proved that the alleged "basic order" is in any sense more dominant, more prominent, less marked, or whatever metaphor we may wish to use, than any other possible WO, provided that the predicative part of the sentence remains in final position:⁴ once embedded in the appropriate context, the SO order appears to be as conditioned as any other possible order of constituents. This rules out the markedness hypothesis as well: it is unlikely that pragmatic neutrality or unmarkedness should manifest itself only in such a highly restricted and unnatural context as giving responses to the questions of a field linguist. WO in Boni is thus obviously not dependent on fixed positions of constituents bearing certain GRs: such as subject and object; one must look for a quite different principle governing the sequence of elements in a Boni sentence.

Let us start by considering the following examples:

- (5) *mín qwēera kawáyɗ' aadéed'i idohóo d'isa*
house Boni-GEN usually women build
'the houses of the Bonis are usually built by women'
- (6) *áɣal qwēer hákéed'i booki ni- kí- fala*
honey-wine Boni place-their barm one with makes
'in the Boni area honey-wine is made with barm'

- (7) *moor d'éeká ká- habta*
home children at remain
'it is the children who remain at home'
- (8) *miindiidé nyíd ni- kí- kpa*
knife-this meat one with cuts
'this knife is used for cutting meat'
- (9) *bilaabili yáa háa- n- kí- bihiya*
'bilaabili' baobab hither one from takes-out
'bilaabili is produced from the baobab tree'
- (10) *áñal kóo máluu ni- birahi*
honey-wine when honey-DEF one has-dissolved
kawáyá' aadiisi málii bé ni fedó ni- fala
usually when ever one wants-and one makes
'when the honey has been dissolved, honey-wine can be made at any time'
- (11) *laakíni durubáa tamán saa haandeti falki*
but old-people-DEF ten hour began-and made
'but the old people began to make it at ten o'clock'
- (12) *lói ijií óoné kic'ée lí- bahée*
cattle Somali and Orma with went-out
'it was the Somali and the Orma who went away with the cattle'
- (13) *bó'oriidé sikuhtidiita cáy ni- kariya*
liquor-this nowadays tea one cooks
'as for this liquor, nowadays one makes tea'

All these examples are taken from recorded texts and represent very characteristic and recurrent sentence patterns. When analyzed in terms of GRs, the first thing to be observed is that none of these sentences conforms to SOV order. To represent GRs formally, I will use the following symbols: S = Subject, O = Object, V = Verb, V_{imp} = Impersonal Verb, I = Instrumental, L = Locative, C = Comitative, T = Temporal, Adv = Adverb or Adverbial Clause, X = unidentifiable GR. Sentences (5)–(13) will then be assigned the following relational structures:

- (5) O—Adv—S—V
(6) O—Adv—I—V_{imp}
(7) L—S—V
(8) I—O—V_{imp}
(9) O—L—V_{imp}
(10) O—Adv—Adv—T—V_{imp}
(11) Adv—S—T—V
(12) C—S—V
(13) X—Adv—O—V_{imp}

Some additional information is necessary in order to clarify how GRs may be identified in Boni. The dialect described here (Bireeri) possesses no formal means of distinguishing subjectival from objectival nouns.⁵ The only feature by which subjects may be identified as syntactically different from objects is the gender/number/person agreement with their predicates:

- (14) *áñal á-šira*
honey-wine (Masc.) there-is (Masc.)
'there is honey-wine'
- (15) *soor á-šid'a*
food (Fem.) there-is (Fem.)
'there is food'

Since agreement in Boni is a problem in itself — agreement rules are complex and occasionally violated by the speakers, so that there is a good deal of confusion — one should not overestimate its contribution to the identification of GRs. The language lacks morphological case marking in nouns, but direct objects can be distinguished from oblique objects since the latter are indicated by preverbs (particles procliticized to the verb form and forming a phonological word with it) such as *kí-* 'Instrumental/Ablative/Locative', *lí-/ní-* 'Comitative', *ú-* 'Benefactive-Directive'. We may thus distinguish three types of GRs which correspond to three different syntactic constructions, namely, *subjects* (indicated by agreement with the predicate), *direct objects* (indicated by non-agreement and the absence of preverbs), and *oblique objects* (indicated by preverbs).

In spite of this relatively simple and obvious structural classification of GRs it is not always easy to determine the exact relation

of a given noun to the predicate. One of the most difficult problems is posed by the "impersonal verb construction" (V_{imp}), i.e. the verb formed with the preposed particle *ni-* or its variants *li-*, *n-*, *l-* (as in examples 6, 8, 9, 10 and 13), a particularly frequent construction. The particle *ni-* is structurally and functionally reminiscent of an impersonal pronoun such as English *one*, French *on*, German *man*, etc. The verb form to which it is attached is always the 3rd person singular masculine; this would support its analysis as a masculine singular noun standing in a subject relation to the predicate indicated by the verb form and consequently showing gender/number/person agreement with it. The subject character of *ni-* is further confirmed by the fact that direct objects of transitive verbs formally remain objects. Given the general lack of nominal case marking the object status cannot, of course, be proved on the basis of the form of the noun; nevertheless its lack of agreement with the verb form is an obvious indication that the *ni*-construction does not trigger "relation promotion" (i.e. movement up the hierarchy of GRs):

- (16) *sóortí á-n- keena*
 food-DEF (Fem.) one brings (Masc.)
 'the food is brought'

- (17) *biyáa á-n- keena*
 water-DEF (Pl.) one brings (Masc.)
 'the water is brought'

There is, however, slight evidence for the object status of these constituents in the case of non-3rd person pronouns. Boni possesses a residue of four personal pronouns that distinguish object from subject forms: *ani* 'I' (obj. *í-*), *adi* 'thou' (obj. *kl-*), *uni* 'we' (obj. *nú-*), and *isani* 'you' (obj. *dá-*). Counterparts of (16) and (17) with non-3rd person pronouns are always constructed with the object forms:

- (18) *á-n- í- keena* 'I am brought'
 one me brings
- (19) *á-n- kú- keena* 'You are brought'
 one thee brings

The subject status of *ni-* is finally confirmed by the fact that it may function as an antecedent for reflexivization:

- (20) *iraatli si- ni- kl-barsiisa*
 running REFL one by teaches
 'one teaches oneself running (by it)'

However, one is reluctant to assign the particle *ni-* the status of a grammatical subject in spite of all this evidence as it seems quite normal for the Boni speaker to have the agent noun side by side with *ni-*:

- (21) *kíla sa'áa idohóo óo rēg nísóo dúur tiyéel*
 every morning women and men half-one forest "tiyeel"
háa- n- kura
 hither one cuts
 'every morning tiyeel is cut in the forest by the women and one half of the men'
- (22) *wēlāa háa- l- ne'edi*
 calves-DEF hither one returned
 'the calves returned' (lit. 'it was returned by the calves')

How are these sentences to be interpreted? What kind of GR would we like to assign to phrases such as *wēlāa* in (22) or *idohóo óo rēg nísóo* in (21)? One may resort to an analytical trick and regard these phrases as appositions to *ni-*, but it is doubtful whether this agrees in any way with the spirit of the native construction. Since Boni has no morphological passive, the *ni*-construction is used as a passive equivalent; and perhaps the appearance of the agent noun indicates the first step towards the development of a hybrid between impersonal and passive. In any case, the relational status of the agent phrase remains doubtful.

There are many other cases of unclear relations. An example of a different type is found in (13) where the initial phrase *bó'oriidé* obviously bears none of the grammatical relations described above. It cannot be the subject because of the *ni*-construction and also because the sentence would make no sense. Object status is likewise precluded (the object being *cáy*), unless one takes it to represent an apposition to the object (in the sense "as an equivalent

to this liquor nowadays one makes tea”), again with the same reservations as above.

To sum up, the system of GRs appears to be quite lax. They are not distinguished by overt morphosyntactic marking, whether by case morphemes or by word order; the relational status of nouns is not always clear; and finally there is no elaborate system of diatheses that would imply subjectivalization or objectivalization rules. This makes our argument against relationally based BWO even stronger: it appears to be generally impossible to describe Boni BWO in terms of GRs.

What is, then, the governing principle of WO in Boni? A cursory glance at the examples may suggest that Boni would best be described as a free word order (FWO) language with the sole restriction that the predicate constituent must occur in sentence-final position, while all other elements may be ordered in an arbitrary sequence. This will not, however, suffice to do justice to the facts. It appears that Boni WO is by no means arbitrary; on the contrary, it is relatively fixed. Within the context of the texts they are taken from, examples 5–13 can be constructed only in the way they are quoted above; as soon as the order or elements is changed, they sound awkward or downright ungrammatical in the given context. Moreover, quite independently of their relational structure these sentences all show a very similar structural pattern. Example (5) is the introductory sentence of a text describing the method of house-building in the Boni area. It begins with a *thematic* element (grammatically the object), “the Boni houses”, i.e. the subject the whole story is about. This is followed by an optional adverbial construction restricting the predicate phrase. The final part is made up of the predicate phrase which typically consists of a nominal element (in this case the agent noun, grammatically the “subject” of the sentence) plus a cliticized verb form. It makes a predication about what happens with the referent of the thematic element “the Boni houses”, namely that they are built by women. This sentence is hardly conceivable with a different order, e.g.

- (23) *idohóo* [*kawáyð'aadéed'i*] *mín* *qweérá* *d'isa*
 women usually house Boni-GEN build

but if it were constructed like this it could only be interpreted as a predication about women in a generic sense: “women usually

build Boni houses”. That is, in (5) I am speaking about Boni houses, while in (23) I am speaking about women. English is forced to use the passive to render the information content of (5); in Boni this is performed by the order of constituents. It is interesting to note that Boni sentences are indeed characterized by some sort of subject-predicate structure (formally (NP(NP(V))) structure), but the first NP is not necessarily the subject and the second NP not necessarily the object in a grammatical sense. Regardless of how many constituents a sentence contains and what kind of GRs they bear to the verb, there is always a basic split into two elements: an initial NP and a sentence-final VP (consisting of either a simple verb or a noun + a verb).

Sentences (6) to (13) exhibit a very similar structure. Example (6) is taken from a text that deals with the preparation of honey-wine (*áñal*). It is again the subject of the story that furnishes the initial NP of the sentence (grammatically, the object of an impersonal verb construction). Here the NP member of the predicate phrase is an Instrumental, *bóoki*. The opposite order can be observed in (8), where a predication is made about an instrumental (“this knife”), while the object of the impersonal verb construction appears as a member of the predicate phrase. To render the information structure of such a sentence in English, the verb “is used to” is required. In most cases it will be possible to imitate the information structure of the Boni sentence in English by translating the initial NP of Boni by the English subject. This does not always work, as example (13) shows: here we have an initial phrase entirely independent of the case frame of the verb; in this case, the only adequate approximation in English is the “as for . . .” construction. The sentence deals with the ritual drink prepared for ceremonies such as circumcisions and the initiation of boys that are to become members of the warrior group. Nowadays one serves tea on such occasions, while in pre-islamic times the Bonis used to prepare *áñal* (honey-wine).

In short, Boni WO seems to be entirely discourse-dependent. ←
 What is taken as a point of departure for the construction of the sentence is a subject of discourse rather than a grammatical relation “subject”. This is the element that furnishes the first NP of the sentence, regardless of whether or not it bears any GR to the main verb. The predicate phrase, placed at the other end of the sentence, does not indicate a predication about a *grammatical*

subject (the grammatical subject may even constitute a part of the predicate phrase itself as in examples 3a, 4a, 5, 7, 12), but about the referent of this initial NP.

2. DISCOURSE CATEGORIES

Given this extreme discourse-sensitivity of WO in Boni, it seems reasonable to attempt a formulation of its principles in terms of discourse categories. As a necessary prerequisite for the analysis and description of the details of Boni BWO we will thus have to establish a notional framework.

To begin with, human speech is normally organized such that one entity is picked out as the one about which the speaker wants to make a point and which consequently acts as a starting point for a predication. It constitutes, as it were, the hook on which the information is hung. A number of reasons for this phenomenon are given by ZUBIN (1979); there can be no doubt that it constitutes a universal organization principle of human language. Following traditional terminology I will call this element the TOPIC. TOPICs may manifest themselves on different levels of discourse. The widest concept is that of a DISCOURSE TOPIC or TEXT TOPIC (as described e.g. in KEENAN and SCHIEFFELIN 1976), i.e. the subject of a text as a whole deals with or, so to speak, its heading or title. On a lower level we may distinguish a PARAGRAPH TOPIC (in the sense of HINDS 1979 and LONGACRE 1979), defined as the subject that is spoken about for a while but does not constitute the subject of the whole discourse. On the lowest level of discourse, the sentence level, there is a SENTENCE TOPIC which we may define as the entity about which a predication is made within the limits of a sentence. In the present connection it is mainly this SENTENCE TOPIC that interests us; in the following I will therefore simply use the term TOPIC (without any specification) to refer to the SENTENCE TOPIC.

It makes no sense to speak of a TOPIC unless there is something that is *said about* the TOPIC. The information a sentence contains *about* its TOPIC is called a COMMENT. A COMMENT asserts that its TOPIC is involved in a certain state of affairs. In the most simple case the COMMENT predicates of its TOPIC a state or a property, in more elaborate instances the COMMENT contains information about relations between the TOPIC and other participants in the

state of affairs the TOPIC is involved in. Accordingly, COMMENTS may be simple (consisting of a single element expressing the predication) or complex (consisting of the element that expresses the predication + elements denoting further participants in the state of affairs the TOPIC is involved in). The central element or the core of a COMMENT, viz. the element expressing the predication, is called a PREDICATE. In complex COMMENTS, PREDICATES are modified by additional elements, mostly nominal or adverbial, that modify, restrict, or otherwise determine them. These elements will be called SPECIFIERS.

Note that TOPIC and COMMENT as defined here are notions entirely independent of concepts such as GIVEN and NEW. The basic idea that underlies the framework in which I will describe BWO in Boni is that the TOPIC-COMMENT structure is a layer different from the so-called INFORMATION STRUCTURE ('GIVEN' vs. 'NEW'). The latter will likewise be found to manifest itself in the syntactic structure of Boni, but in a different manner. In order to define the notions GIVEN and NEW I will make use of the concept of *registry*, borrowed from KUNO (1972). At the time they begin their conversation, the discourse partners already share a body of common knowledge they may refer to, whether it be knowledge of the common environment in which the discourse takes place, specialized knowledge emerging from a common occupation, or general knowledge about certain facts of the real world. This is called the PERMANENT REGISTRY. Note that by using the word 'knowledge' we are of course not referring to encyclopedic knowledge but to the body of knowledge necessary to identify certain persons or things that the speaker is talking about. As the discourse proceeds, this body of knowledge is constantly enlarged by the addition of further pieces of information. These newly added elements constitute a separate division of the inventory of shared knowledge which is valid only for the limited time of the discourse; it is called the TEMPORARY REGISTRY. Elements whose referents constitute shared knowledge of speaker and hearer (or rather, are presumed to do so by the speaker) because they either belong to the PERMANENT REGISTRY or have been previously mentioned and are thus part of the TEMPORARY REGISTRY, are said to be GIVEN. The opposite of GIVEN is NEW; all elements in a sentence that do not belong to any subdivision of the registry are said to be NEW. In the course of the

discourse, elements not belonging to the PERMANENT REGISTRY are NEW at the moment of their first appearance; afterwards they count as members of the TEMPORARY REGISTRY. The notions of GIVEN and NEW presuppose each other; information is NEW not in itself, but in relation to other pieces of information. The degree of information an element adds (i.e. whether it counts as GIVEN or NEW in a certain sentence) will be said to be its INFORMATION VALUE.

It cannot be overemphasized that TOPICS as defined above may be either GIVEN or NEW. It seems normal for TOPICS to be GIVEN, because one normally talks about entities one supposes the hearer to know. Nevertheless, TOPICS may be set without having been mentioned previously or being elements of the PERMANENT REGISTRY; i.e. they may be introduced and commented upon in one and the same sentence.

Elements that set a spatial or temporal frame within which the predication holds must be distinguished carefully from the notion of TOPIC as defined here. This category is always GIVEN and commonly expressed by adverbs or adverbial phrases such as *yesterday, in the morning, at Whiteley's* etc. There may be languages (such as Chinese, according to LI and THOMPSON 1976) for which the postulate of two distinct categories is unnecessary, a single category TOPIC being able to handle both. Since this does not seem to be the case for Boni, I will refer to such elements as FRAME.

DEFINITENESS is defined according to CHAFE (1976: 38) as identifiability. The speaker assumes that the hearer can "pick out, from all the referents that might be categorized in this way" the one he has in mind.

Two further discourse categories remain to be defined: CONTRAST and FOCUS. By CONTRAST we mean a constituent that is presented as contrastive to other constituents that the discourse may lead the addressee to expect in a particular position. Of the different types of contrastiveness, the one for which KUNO has coined the term "exhaustive listing" is most relevant here; it specifically identifies one member of a limited set of possible alternatives. By FOCUS we refer to a constituent that is specifically marked as bearing the highest information value in a given sentence, i.e. the one that the speaker singles out as the most relevant contribution. Focalized elements are often, but not necessarily, contrastive.

Finally, a category must be mentioned that does not count as a discourse category in a strict sense. It is always possible for a speaker to mark specifically a constituent of an utterance with an emotive overtone. This phenomenon, commonly called EMPHASIS, will not be of much concern to us here except for one special sub-case which I call EMPHATIC FOREGROUNDING. This refers to a constituent being presented, for whatever reason, as exceedingly remarkable in the given context. In such cases, the speaker not only draws the hearer's attention to a specific expression, but tries to achieve a certain 'just fancy' effect.

3. "BASIC WORD ORDER" IN BONI

On the basis of these notions we are now ready to formulate rules for the order of constituents in Boni.

Sentences in Boni are generally constructed in such a way that they present two constituents as centres of information. The first is often a carrier of GIVEN information; it is, so to speak, the communicative starting point of the sentence; it is this constituent about whose referent the "thread of discourse" leads the speaker to make a predication. It comes as no surprise that there is a tendency for this element to coincide with, refer to or stand in some relation to the DISCOURSE or PARAGRAPH TOPIC; in general, its function is to connect the thread of discourse with the latter. In agreement with the notional framework set out above, this element will be called the TOPIC.

The other centre of information is the element that modifies the PREDICATE, i.e. its closest SPECIFIER.

The formal device by which this bipolar structure of Boni sentences is established is WO. The unmarked order is always such that, independently of the grammatical status of the constituents, the first NP of a sentence represents the TOPIC, and the last NP (or adverbial phrase) before the verb represents the SPECIFIER. Between these two poles, the remainder of the constituents are generally ordered in a relatively consistent hierarchical sequence proceeding from lower to higher information values.

The TOPIC constituent is not necessarily the first word of the sentence; it may be preceded by connective particles and/or adverbial phrases or clauses indicating FRAME. FRAME may alternatively be ordered after the TOPIC.

In summary, the unmarked WO of Boni can be represented by the following formula:

- (24) (Connective) $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{(FRAME) (TOPIC)} \\ \text{(TOPIC) (FRAME)} \end{array} \right\} \dots \dots \dots \begin{array}{c} \text{(SPECIFIER)} \\ \text{PRED} \\ \hline \text{COMMENT} \end{array}$
- Low High
Inf. Inf.

Below I give an additional example to illustrate the formula (24); the reader will not find it difficult to analyse examples (5)–(13) in a similar way:

- (25) *idohóodi fúngóo n- úu- bihiya*
 women-DEF share one for takes-out
 TOPIC SPECIFIER PREDICATE
 COMMENT

Sentence (25) is to be translated “the women are given a share” (i.e. a portion of a certain ritual food that is mainly eaten by men). It must be noted in passing that only the context makes it clear whether a preverb refers to a TOPIC, a SPECIFIER or some other element in the sentence. In (25) the preverb indicates the benefactive relation of the TOPIC noun, while in the following example (26) the preverb *kí-* refers to the instrumental function of the SPECIFIER noun:

- (26) *kól hálíi makóosa falé-ʔe*
 now who mistake makes-SUBORD
 FRAME TOPIC
šibíd(i) ní- kí- d'ifida
 rod-DEF one with beats
 SPECIFIER PREDICATE
 ‘he who makes mistakes is beaten with the rod’

The basic split into TOPIC and COMMENT is nearly always indicated by the *pausal structure* of the sentence. As a rule there is a slight pause after the TOPIC NP, whereas the elements of the COMMENT phrase are never separated by a pause. Furthermore, the COMMENT phrase is characterized by a specific intonational structure: As a rule, the tone pattern of the SPECIFIER is modified in such a way that it receives a high tone on the last syllable.⁶

Sometimes final vowels are lengthened. On the other hand, verb forms are normally low-toned, except for the second and third person plural and a “habitual” paradigm which occurs relatively rarely in final position (being mainly used in subordinate clauses preceding the main verb). All these suprasegmental characteristics of the end of the sentence contribute to a tonal structure featuring a high-toned element followed by a sequence of sentence-final low tones. An intonation is superimposed on this tone pattern providing the final syllable of the specifier with an extra high tone and extra strong stress and the predicate with a downdrift pattern, thus creating the impression that there is no word boundary between SPECIFIER and PREDICATE. The SPECIFIER appears to be *incorporated* into the PREDICATE:

- (27) *hác-idoho biyóq taʔaka* ‘the woman drinks water’
 woman-DEF water drinks (‘the woman water-drinks’)
 TOPIC COMMENT
 - - - - | - - - - ||

In other words, the pragmatic peak of the sentence is the COMMENT rather than the TOPIC. This COMMENT-oriented tendency will become even more apparent in the following section.

It is indicated in the formula (24) above that the only obligatory constituent in a sentence is the PREDICATE. The TOPIC constituent may be omitted and is in fact often omitted when coreferential with the TOPIC of the preceding sentence:

- (28) *wéeli cáa sukúur l- úu-šúšua / gáari l- úu-*
 boy-DEF small oil one to pours eyebrow one to
k'awa . . . misóokíi la gáari l- úu-k'awa
 anoints companion-his also eyebrow one to anoints
éene idohóodi ú- amaana
 and women-DEF for sing-amaan
 ‘the small boy is splashed with oil; his eyebrows are anointed . . . , his companion’s eyebrows are also anointed, and the women sing the *amaan* (song of praise) for him’

In general, the TOPIC-COMMENT structure is so consistently grammaticalized that it will not only be found characteristic of

declarative main sentences, but will underly other sentence or clause types as well. It is apparent in subordinate clauses despite the fact that the TOPIC-COMMENT distinction is less relevant to the information structure of such clauses:

- (29) *kóo bęęrámoiidé kíkqlów adí fetto*
 when "beeramo"-this to-enter you want
 TOPIC COMMENT
 'when you want to enter this "beeramo"'

It is equally well represented in interrogative clauses. Yes-no-questions are constructed in exactly the same way as declarative sentences, the only difference being their intonational patterns:

- (30) *kól kóo muidi isin háa- ú- gašée-ʔe*
 now when village-DEF you(2p) hither to go-home
 Connect. FRAME
náttita hálii há- kí- širne kusí n- úu- koodâ
 meat-this who NEG at being also one for divides
 TOPIC SPECIFIER PREDICATE

The question intonation is marked by a high-falling tone on the final syllable of the last word. Sentence (30) is to be translated as 'now when you return home to the village, are those who were not there also given a share of this meat?' In WH-questions the question word obligatorily occupies the SPECIFIER position (for more on the treatment of question words cf. section 4):

- (31) *birtiidé ayáa fali*
 arrow-this who made
 TOPIC SPECIFIER PREDICATE
 'who made this arrow?'

In short, BWO in Boni is determined by the discourse categories of TOPIC and COMMENT rather than by GRs; it is a TOPIC-SPECIFIER-PREDICATE order rather than an SOV order. The alleged SOV order alluded to earlier turns out to be nothing more than a variant of the pragmatically determined BWO, that appears under certain pragmatic and semantic conditions. The fact that it is frequently observed in isolated sentences can be considered as

a direct consequence of the pragmatic base of Boni WO, as conditions for "natural", i.e. unmarked, topicality automatically come into play in sentences that lack any connection with possible contexts (as sample sentences in field-work situations usually do). In a transitive sentence the agent phrase is most normally interpreted as a TOPIC, while the patient phrase is most naturally interpreted as a SPECIFIER of the PREDICATE. The English sentence pattern may have served as an additional hint: the native speaker identified the English subject with his TOPIC and the English object with his SPECIFIER, the result being the impression of an SOV structure for both languages. In pragmatic terms, however, the only correct formulation is that the subject precedes the object if and only if it is TOPIC. In texts dealing with abstract entities, subjects, by virtue of their being representatives of agent and perceiver rather than undergoer roles, seldom occur as TOPICs. In texts that deal with animate beings, on the other hand, SOV sentences are frequently encountered.

Before we proceed, a short remark on TOPIC selection is in order. The TOPIC is normally characterized by its orientation in both directions; it "looks backward" in that it often has a GIVEN or DEFINITE referent, it "looks forward" in that it sets a base on which the following predication is built up. There is one exception to this, namely, sentences that introduce a TOPIC and simultaneously make a predication about it (cases of so-called "neutral description" often belong here). Such sentences occur only in situations where no backlooking is possible (opening statements etc.). Even in these cases the TOPIC NP often refers to an imaginary DISCOURSE TOPIC as, e.g., in examples (5) and (6). A statistical analysis of some of my texts proved that the most frequent sources for TOPICs are the DISCOURSE TOPIC, the PARAGRAPH TOPIC, and the SPECIFIER of the preceding sentence. Interestingly enough, there are striking differences as to the relative frequency of these in different text categories. Particularly conspicuous is the difference between descriptive texts (those dealing e.g. with the preparation of certain kinds of food, artefacts, rituals etc.) and narrative texts (anecdotes, fables, fairy-tales, historical events, etc.). While for the former, sentences whose TOPIC is identical with the DISCOURSE or PARAGRAPH TOPIC are exceedingly characteristic, in the latter, sentences that use the SPECIFIER of a preceding sentence as their TOPIC are much

more frequent. Some examples of percentages are shown in the table below.

SUBJECT OF TEXT	CATEGORY	NUMBER OF SENTENCES	TOPIC= DISCOURSE or PARAGRAPH TOPIC	TOPIC= SPECIFIER of preceding sentence
preparation of honey-wine (<i>áñal</i>)	descriptive	18	7 (39%)	3 (17%)
description of a game (<i>hərtutəq</i>)	descriptive	11	7 (64%)	2 (18%)
description of circumcision rituals	descriptive	82	38 (46%)	18 (22%)
animal story (discourse topic: honey)	narrative	31	2 (6%)	24 (77%)
"hunter's yarn" (discourse topic: an elephant)	narrative	27	6 (22%)	13 (48%)
fighting with Somalis (discourse topic: fighting, war)	narrative	45	4 (9%)	24 (53%)

As a rule, in narrative texts the TOPICs do not represent the subject of the story (its "title"), but rather the *dramatis personae*, who act upon each other by turns.

4. FOCUS STRUCTURE

While the TOPIC-COMMENT structure is expressed exclusively by means of WO, another important feature of Boni syntax, the FOCUS system, is expressed by both WO and additional morpho-syntactic devices.

In a Boni sentence one (and possibly only one) constituent can be marked as *focalized*. The focalized constituent is normally a member of the COMMENT. The neutral situation for a complex COMMENT is such that its components (SPECIFIER and PREDICATE) are of equal information value — most frequently, both will be NEW. In case one of them possesses a higher information value than the other, the component with the higher information

value is marked as focalized. Depending on whether the focalized element is a SPECIFIER or a PREDICATE, one of the following FOCUS markers (FM) is used to signal the constituent with the higher information value⁷:

SPECIFIER focalized: *é* ~ *éene* (enclitic to the focalized element)

PREDICATE focalized: *á* (proclitic to the focalized element)

The following are simple sentences consisting of TOPIC, SPECIFIER and PREDICATE, in the three possible FOCUS forms, neutral, SPECIFIER FOCUS and PREDICATE FOCUS, respectively:

- (32) (a) *an biyóq ajika* 'I drink water'
 I water drink
 (b) *an biyóq-é ajika* 'It's water that I drink'
 I water FM drink
 NEW GIVEN
 (c) *an biyq á- ajika* 'I drink water'
 I water FM drink
 GIVEN NEW

- (33) (a) *ábúqé dád badi arki*
 brother-my people many saw
 'My brother saw many people'
 (b) *ábúqé dád badi-é arki*
 brother-my people many FM saw
 NEW GIVEN
 'It was many people that my brother saw'
 (c) *ábúqé dád badi á- arki*
 brother-my people many FM saw
 GIVEN NEW
 'My brother saw many people'

It will be observed that the characteristic tonal structure of the SPECIFIER phrase is retained in the *é* FOCUS construction, whereas in the *á* FOCUS construction it is not (cf. *biyóq* vs. *biyq* in (32), *dád badi* vs. *dád badi* in (33)). An examination of FOCUS constructions yields that, as a general rule, the SPECIFIER bears its normal lexical tone pattern in sentences with focalized PREDI-

CATES. SPECIFIERS are thus specifically marked by a change in their tone pattern only if they possess the same or a higher information value than the PREDICATE. The fact can be best interpreted to the effect that in PREDICATE-FOCUS constructions the SPECIFIER is *excluded* from the COMMENT and thus loses its SPECIFIER status. This enables us to assign to the marked tone pattern (having the high tone on the last syllable) the function of indicating the SPECIFIER status of a constituent. Furthermore, it would seem that the tripartite structure of the TOPIC-SPECIFIER-PREDICATE sentence is changed to a bipartite TOPIC-PREDICATE structure in the case of PREDICATE focalization. In other words, the PREDICATE-FOCUS construction is always "intransitive" in the sense that no NP is recognizable as a complement to the PREDICATE.

Let us now turn to the WO conditions in sentences with FOCUS constructions. A focalized SPECIFIER normally retains its position in front of the PREDICATE, cf. examples (32b) and (33b). As a matter of fact, a SPECIFIER is not separated from a sentence final verb form except by certain aspect particles, personal pronouns, and a limited number of other function words. Deviations from this general rule are interpreted as marked WO and will be discussed in section 5.

As for the order of constituents in a sentence with PREDICATE FOCUS, it is always dependent on which constituent is taken a TOPIC; i.e. regardless of whether or not the sentence contains a focalized constituent, the first NP of the sentence is always determined by the speaker's TOPIC choice. A nice example is

- (34) *áŋal qweɛr á- taʔaka laakini siddar féeha*
 honey-wine Boni FM drink but extent much
múu- taʔako
 NEG drink
 'honey-wine, the Bonis do drink it, but they do not drink it very much'

The sentence is taken from the same text as examples (6), (10) and others; the DISCOURSE TOPIC is *áŋal*, this furnishes the head NP of the sentence.

The intermediate constituents of all Boni sentences, regardless of whether or not they contain focalized elements, are subject to

hierarchical ordering from lower (TOPIC-like) to higher (SPECIFIER-like) information value:

- (35) *kudɔw qweɛr weeli kudɔw kóo ni- fedo*
 circumcision Boni children circumcision when one wants
máa hálla horée hálli kudɔw fedó fala
 what of-all first who circumcision wants makes
 'speaking of circumcision, when the Bonis want to circumcise children, what is the very first thing to do for the one who wants the circumcision?'
- (36) *hortéɛs kawáyd'aadéed'i aasidi labáa*
 competition usually bow-DEF everybody
áasidíisi málii ii kartó reebto kusi ni- kí- fiiriya
 bow-his if she can resist also one with checks
 'during the competition it is usually also checked by everybody if his bow is able to resist (the pull)'

FOCUS is generally employed in cases of CONTRAST as defined in section 2. The focalized constituent is understood to be set in contrast to other possible entities that the hearer may expect as part of the COMMENT in question. In particular, FOCUS constructions usually allow the following interpretations:

PREDICATES provided with the PREDICATE FM *á* are usually understood to be contrastive to

(a) the set of all other PREDICATES possible in the particular context. This is the normal interpretation of *á* with isolated verb forms (where it is always obligatory)⁸ as in

- (37) *á jiyaada* 'he will come'
 FM will-come

(b) the set of typical antonyms such as 'come' vs. 'go away', 'sleep' vs. 'be awake' etc.

(c) alternative PREDICATES mentioned earlier in the discourse

(d) the negation of the PREDICATE in question

(e) a different aspectual interpretation of the PREDICATE in question (i.e. CONTRAST to imperfective if the verb form is marked for perfective, contrast to perfective if the verb form is marked for imperfective).

SPECIFIERS provided with the SPECIFIER FM *é* are usually understood to be contrastive to

(a) the set of all other SPECIFIERS possible in the particular context; this is the common interpretation of focalized SPECIFIERS of verbs of existence as in

(38) *lúb-é šid'a* 'there is (a certain institution called) *lúb*'
Lub FM is

(b) the set of typical antonyms such as 'night' vs. 'day', 'big' vs. 'small' etc.

(c) alternative SPECIFIERS mentioned earlier in the discourse

(d) the negation of the same SPECIFIER.

The examples below illustrate some of the most frequent interpretations of focal constructions.

(39) (a) *adéeg oa* 'I have work' (neutral description)
work I-have

(b) *adéeg á- oa* 'I *do* have work' (CONTRAST to negation)
work FM I-have
'I *will* have work' (CONTRAST to perfective)

(c) *adéeg-é oa* 'I have something *to do*' (CONTRAST to being unemployed or not occupied with something else)
work FM I-have

(40) (a) *áddigéé jidi* 'my father came' (neutral description; presentative function)
father-my came

(b) *áddigéé á- jidi* 'my father *came*' (i.e. 'it was coming that my father did' = CONTRAST to some other activity)
father-my FM came
'my father *did* come' (CONTRAST to negation)
'my father *has* come' (CONTRAST to imperfective)

(c) *áddigéé-é jidi* 'it was my father who came'
father-my-FM came

(41) (a) *šiwá-é šid'a* 'there is (a certain) horn'
horn FM is
(b) *šíwa á- šid'a* 'there is a horn' ('a horn is present')
horn FM is

Certain restrictions on the occurrence of the FMs as well as certain other idiosyncrasies are worth mentioning.

(a) The PREDICATE FM *á* is incompatible with the sentence (or PREDICATE) negations *húu-*, *múu-*, *mí-* etc. (the different negation variants are determined by morphophonemic regularities that do not concern us here). It seems that negation particles are inherently focalized; they carry the characteristic high tone of FMs and appear in the same position: *á-jahana* 'he will eat': *húu-jahana* 'he will not eat'. The negation is not infrequently found in contrast with the FOCUS-marked assertion of the positive version of the same PREDICATE, cf. e.g., example (34).

(b) The PREDICATE FM *á* does not occur in subordinate clauses. PREDICATES of subordinate clauses are mostly considered irrelevant for the GIVEN-NEW distinction; when the focalization of such a verb form is desired, a main sentence must be formed.

(c) There are certain types of expressions that allow only PREDICATE focalization. E.g. weather expressions often consist of a noun and a verb, both denoting the same meteorological event:

(42) *róob á- ta'a* 'it is raining'
rain FM rains

In these and in similar cases the noun seems to function as a kind of "dummy"-TOPIC whose task is to preserve the bipartite structure of the expression. Such nouns can never occur as SPECIFIERS (by virtue of their non-contrastiveness: what else can be raining?) and consequently never be focalized.

(d) When two or more SPECIFIERS are explicitly enumerated as alternatives (e.g. in expressions like 'X and also Y'), each member will take the FM *é* separately:

(43) *kudôw d'él rahee d'eši -é šid'a*
circumcision child Rahe-GEN children FM are

d'él luwee d'eši -é šid'a

child Lub-GEN children FM are

'as for circumcision, there exist children who are called "child of Rahe", and children who are called "child of Lub"'

Certain conjunctions are, however, incompatible with *é*, possibly for reasons of redundancy. One of these is the word negation marker *mé'a* 'not' which inherently indicates FOCUS and is thus a FOCUS marker in itself. Interestingly enough, in expressions of the kind "not X but Y" the positive alternative is not normally provided with a FM, either:

- (44) *hál-ręga mé'a hác-idohóo tiidi*
man-DEF not woman-DEF came
'not the man but the woman came'

(e) The SPECIFIER FM *é* may occur in isolation (i.e. without a SPECIFIER noun or adverb preceding it) as in

- (45) *é jiyaada*
FM will-come

- (46) *éene bo'ór asa-a*
FM gourd he-will-prepare-is

In this case a zero pronoun has to be imagined in the position in front of the FM; the examples can then be properly glossed as (45) 'he is the one who will come' (which is semantically equivalent to *us-é jiyaada*), and (46) 'it is then that he will prepare the gourd'. It can be assumed that in such cases the whole preceding passage that contains the description of the SPECIFIER is focalized.

(f) Question words are either obligatorily connected with the SPECIFIER FM, as *mal-é* 'when?', *int-é* 'where?', or incompatible with it as *ayáa* 'who?' and *máa* 'what?'. It is possible that the latter have incorporated FMs. In any case, no question word is ever connected with the PREDICATE FM *á*.

To conclude this section, I will give an example that shows how a number of different FOCUS constellations may be played through for the same basic propositional content. The examples do not cover the full range of possible constructions, but the rest can easily be

inferred from the principles described in this section. English renditions are approximative; they are meant to imitate the information structure rather than the grammatical structure of the examples.

- (47) *fíli kadi* 'he bought a comb'
comb bought

- (48) *fíli {éene} kadi* 'he bought a comb'
comb FM bought

- (49) *fíli á- kadi* 'he has bought a comb'
comb FM bought

- (50) *fílúu á- kadi* 'he has bought the comb'
comb-DEF FM bought

- (51) *hác-hablo fíli ú- kadi*
girl-DEF comb for bought
'he bought a comb for the girl'

- (52) *fílúu hác-hablóo ú- kadi*
comb-DEF girl-DEF for bought
'the comb, he bought it for the girl'

- (53) *fílúu hác-hablóo-é ú- kadi*
comb-DEF girl-DEF FM for bought
'it is for the girl that he bought the comb'

- (54) *hác-hablo fíli {éene} ú- kadi*
girl-DEF comb FM for bought
'it was a comb that he bought for the girl'

- (55) *hác-hablo fílúu {éene} ú- kadi*
girl-DEF comb-DEF FM for bought
'it is the comb that he bought for the girl'

- (56) *hál-ręga hác-hablo fíli ú- kadi*
man-DEF girl-DEF comb for bought
'the man bought the girl a comb'

- (57) *filúu hál-ręga hác-hablóo ú- kadi*
 comb-DEF man-DEF girl-DEF for bought
 'the comb was bought by the man for the girl'
- (58) *filúu hál-ręga hác-hablóo {éene / -é} ú- kadi*
 comb-DEF man-DEF girl-DEF FM for bought
 'it was for the girl that the comb was bought by the man'
- (59) *hál-ręga fili/filúu hác-hablóo ú- kadi*
 man-DEF comb/comb-DEF girl-DEF for bought
 'the man bought a/the comb for the girl'
- (60) *?filúu hác-hablo hál-ręga ú- kadi⁹*
 comb-DEF girl-DEF man-DEF for bought
 'the comb was bought for the girl by the man'
- (61) *hál-ręga hác-hablo filúu šáli ú- kadi*
 man-DEF girl-DEF comb-DEF yesterday for bought
 'the man bought the comb for the girl yesterday'
- (62) *hál-ręga hác-hablo filúu šáli*
 man-DEF girl-DEF comb-DEF yesterday
 {éene / -é} ú- kadi
 FM for bought
 'it was yesterday that the man bought the comb for the girl'

5. MARKED WORD ORDER CONSTELLATIONS

So far we have restricted ourselves to the discussion of what we may call the "unmarked" case. However, both the grammatical structure of the language and the overlapping of certain discourse categories give rise to conflict situations that pose practical problems for the speaker if he wants to maintain the unmarked order TOPIC-SPECIFIER-PREDICATE, and it is interesting to observe how these problems are solved. The general strategy followed is the establishment of marked order constellations with specific functions: the normal order of constituents is distorted as a signal of a specific pragmatic interpretation.

A relatively unproblematic case of marked order is the shifting of FRAME clauses to the third or a still later position as a result

of the exbraciation of topical (or GIVEN) elements. This situation regularly obtains when two nominal constituents of the FRAME clause are simultaneously TOPIC candidates, the first normally being identical with that of the whole sentence, the second being the basis for the following predication, as in:

- (63) *tiyéel idohóodi kóo us ú- kuuri ...*
 Tiyeel women-DEF when he to shift
 'when the women move to the Tiyeel (a fruit) area ...'

Here the initial NP (*tiyéel*) is the DISCOURSE TOPIC, while the second NP functions as a SUB-TOPIC, setting the basis for the following predication. The SPECIFIER of a subordinate clause is regularly exbraciated when it is GIVEN, even if the TOPIC is not a constituent of the subordinate clause. For an example, cf. (35) above.

An exbraciated SPECIFIER often leaves a trace in the form of a pronominal copy before the PREDICATE as, for example, in (63).

Schematically, the exbraciation type can be represented as:

- (64) TOPIC + SUB-TOPIC₁ + SUB-TOPIC₂ ... FRAME ...

The function of this type is to be described as signalling the border-line between elements with low and elements with high information value.

There are a number of cases with more radical changes in the arrangement of constituents, all involving a placement of constituents *to the right* of the PREDICATE. By and large it can be said that all WO variants that present the PREDICATE in non-final position are highly marked. The conditions under which the transposition takes place are different and depend on the nature of the element shifted to the sentence-final position. In the following I will describe some of the relevant constellations and their functions without pretending to be exhaustive.

1. When a sentence contains simultaneously a noun and a verb in contrastive function, it is always only the verb that is provided with a FM. As *á* and *é* are mutually exclusive, the contrastiveness of the noun cannot also be marked by a FM. In this case, there is a specific marked WO that takes over the task of signaling the

contrastive function of the NP: the NP that is to be interpreted as contrastive is shifted to sentence-initial position, it is immediately followed by the focalized verb form, and the rest of the nominal constituents of the sentence are placed at the end, to the right of the PREDICATE:

- (65) *idohóodi húu- deɛttɔ hákɛ́i*
 women-DEF NEG go there
 'women do not go there (while men are allowed to)'
- (66) *áddigéé á- jì'iki áɲali*
 father-my FM drank honey-wine
 'my father has drunk the honey-wine (while I have not)'

It seems reasonable to interpret the contrastive noun as a TOPIC. It need not be the subject of the sentence:

- (67) *šáli á- jidi wɛɛšɛɛ*
 yesterday FM came child-my
 'as for yesterday, he did come, my child (although today he did not)'

We will call this construction CONTRASTIVE TOPIC and represent it by the following formula:

- (68) TOPIC_{CONTRAST} + PRED_{FOC} + X

2. Superficially very similar but not to be confused with the CONTRASTIVE TOPIC construction is a construction that left-dislocates complex verb complements or object clauses in the case of focalized PREDICATES:

- (69) *bír kóo ni- falé-ʔe hassá kuunyáa*
 arrow when one makes especially shafts-DEF
á- n- fiiriya kóo k'oomí iyo kí- bɔɔdɛ́i
 FM one examines if evenness they with fly
óo iyo wirwiríi
 or they flutter
 'when the arrows are made, especially the shafts, it is checked whether they fly properly or flutter'

The ultimate function of this construction is unclear; the fact that only complex constructions are treated in this way suggests that it has something to do with their bulk, but this is all that can be said at the moment.

3. The following constructions may be called "TOPIC-Inversion". They appear in cases where the topical constituent of the sentence is pushed away from its initial position, because this is occupied by some other constituent, and is placed *after* the PREDICATE. There are several conditions under which such a shift takes place. One is EMPHATIC FOREGROUNDING:

- (70) *idohóo adéegkíis -a tiyéel*
 women work-their is Tiyeel
 'Tiyeel-picking is women's work'
- (71) *sidde šeer li- beriji wɛɛlɛ́i*
 three days one stay-overnight calves-these
 'these calves had been away for three days'

The effect of this inversion often is a deictic one: 'Note that it is the women who do the work of tiyeelpicking' (70). In the case of (71) it is best rendered by 'already': 'the calves had already been away for three days'. In any case, there is an emotional overtone in all occurrences of this type of inversion. Schematically, this type of marked WO can be represented by the following formula:

- (72) X_{EMPH} + PRED + TOPIC

Another context in which "TOPIC Inversion" is quite common is the foregrounding of a focalized SPECIFIER. As explained in section 4, focalized SPECIFIERS normally occupy the same position as non-focalized SPECIFIERS, i.e. the position immediately preceding the PREDICATE; the only elements that may come between the SPECIFIER and the verb form are certain aspect particles, subject and object pronouns, reflexive and impersonal particles, all proclitic to the verb form. However, in order to foreground the focalized SPECIFIER, it is possible to put it in front of the sentence, with the effect that the TOPIC is pushed away from its functionally important position. In order to compensate for this, the TOPIC is placed after the PREDICATE:

- (73) *šáli* $\left\{ \begin{smallmatrix} \acute{e}ene \\ -\acute{e} \end{smallmatrix} \right\}$ *fílúu* *hác-hablo* *ú-*
 yesterday FM comb-DEF girl-DEF for
kadi *hál-ręga*
 bought man-DEF
 'it was yesterday that the man bought the comb for the girl'

Slightly less prominence is given to the focalized SPECIFIER if it remains in the pre-PREDICATE position, and only the TOPIC is moved to the end:

- (74) *fílúu* *hác-hablo* *šáli* $\left\{ \begin{smallmatrix} \acute{e}ene \\ -\acute{e} \end{smallmatrix} \right\}$ *ú-*
 comb-DEF girl-DEF yesterday FM for
kadi *hál-ręga*
 bought man-DEF
 (same translation as (73) above)

Note that, although Boni does not have a rule of "wh-movement", question words are sometimes fronted with TOPIC inversion.

A foregrounded SPECIFIER may sometimes push away FRAME phrases:

- (75) (a) *hál-ręgá* $\left\{ \begin{smallmatrix} \acute{e}ene \\ -\acute{e} \end{smallmatrix} \right\}$ *hác-hablo* *fíli* *ú-* *kadi* *šáli*
 man-DEF FM girl-DEF comb for bought yesterday
 (b) *hác-hablo* *fíli* *hál-ręgá* $\left\{ \begin{smallmatrix} \acute{e}ene \\ -\acute{e} \end{smallmatrix} \right\}$ *ú-* *kadi* *šáli*
 girl-DEF comb man-DEF FM for bought yesterday
 'it was the man who bought a comb for the girl yesterday'

The "foregrounded SPECIFIER construction" may be represented by the following formula:

- (76) SPEC_{FOC} + X + PRED + TOPIC

Finally, TOPICs are sometimes moved to the end of the sentence when there is a choice between equally suitable TOPIC candidates, especially when there are two or more GIVEN participants. In the following example there is an animate non-agentive TOPIC; the agent phrase is moved to the end as a sort of "anti-TOPIC":

- (77) *hác-hablo* *fíli* *ú-* *kadi* *hál-ręga*
 girl-DEF comb for bought man-DEF
 'the girl was bought a comb, by the man'

4. I know of only one case where a conflict situation caused by the coincidence of discourse categories is not solved by a marked WO constellation, but rather by mentioning the same element twice, in different functions. This is normally the case when one and the same element appears simultaneously as TOPIC (particularly when it is also the DISCOURSE or PARAGRAPH TOPIC) and as a SPECIFIER to the PREDICATE. Cf. the following examples:

- (78) *hóon* *labáa* *hóoníi* *gqada*
 goal everybody goal-his watches
 'the goal (TOPIC), everybody watches his goal (SPEC.)'
 (79) *aasídi* *labáa* *áasidíisi* ... *ni-* *kí-* *fíriya*
 bow-DEF everybody bow-his one with checks
 (cf. 36)

Cf. also (35), where the word *kudów* occurs twice, the first time as a TOPIC, the second time as an exbricated SPECIFIER to the verb of the *kóo*-clause.

These examples must suffice to give an impression of how Boni copes with problems of interference between BWO and discourse strategies. One final remark on the frequency of marked WO constructions is in order. Though a conclusion on the basis of a limited text corpus may be premature (especially in view of the fact that not all text categories are covered), I feel that the score of 32% of marked constructions that my text material yielded is quite representative. One can say, then, that the basicness of the TOPIC-SPECIFIER-PREDICATE order is confirmed by its frequency alone, other things being equal.

6. THE TYPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF BONI SYNTAX

The first part of this section is devoted to a short description of a number of further characteristics of Boni syntax in order to demonstrate that the extreme context-sensitivity of both its marked and its unmarked WO is only part of a general tendency

of this language to organize its morphosyntax in terms of pragmatic rather than syntactic categories. This is followed by an examination of how this kind of syntax is to be characterized in terms of universal typological parameters.

During the discussion of the FOCUS system it has already been shown that the pragmatically determined phenomena of Boni grammar are not confined to the order of phrase constituents, but extend to all kinds of morphosyntactic devices such as inflection, tone patterns, use of function words, etc. This pragmatically oriented character is further underlined by the fact that the constituents *within* a phrase are likewise ordered according to their information value, i.e. the order of modifier and head depends on which element is GIVEN and which is NEW. For reasons of space I must confine myself to one phrase type, the genitive phrase, because a discussion of other attributive constructions (adjectives, relative expressions, etc.) would require much more extensive morphological background information largely irrelevant to the present subject.

There are three basic ways of forming nominal possessive constructions in Boni, two of which interest us here:

(a) The possessed is placed before the possessor; the possessor is followed by a subordinator particle *e*:

- (80) *téel ói e* 'tail of a dog'
tail dog SUBORD
- (81) *inní dieer e* 'eyes of a donkey'
eyes donkey SUBORD

This construction is used when the possessor is of higher or equal information value than the possessed. The lower information value of the possessed may be indicated by attaching the relativizing suffix *-íi*:

- (82) *téelíi ói e* 'the tail of a dog'
tail-REL dog SUBORD
- (83) *dádíi mín e* 'the person of the house'
person-REL house SUBORD

(b) The order of the two constituents may be reversed such that the possessor is placed before the possessed. In this case the pos-

essor NP provides the GIVEN and the possessed the NEW information:

- (84) *óidi téeléd'i* 'the tail of the dog'
dog-DEF tail-its
- (85) *hál-rega merísi* 'the man's food'
man-DEF food-his

As the examples show, the two nouns are linked by means of a possessive element suffixed to the possessed noun.

Context-sensitivity is also evident in the realm of the demonstrative suffix system. The deictic system of the language distinguishes seven categories: definiteness, near-deixis, far-deixis, particularizing, spatio-temporal deixis, habitual, and an indicator of a GIVEN head of an attributive construction (the suffix *-íi* mentioned above). While definiteness and spatial distance are rather frequent reference-oriented deictic categories in the languages of the world, Boni has gone a step further by indicating a number of additional relations of entities to the context. The particularizing suffix (invariably *-óo* for all genders and numbers) is often used to emphasize singularity and is thus, given the appropriate context, often used to express the numeral 'one', which is lacking in the language. Its main function, however, is to pick out *one particular and specific* referent: *mín* 'house', *mín-óo* 'one particular house that I have in mind, not any house'. The spatio-temporal deictic suffix *-iidé* characterizes an entity that has been mentioned earlier or is to be mentioned next and may thus be glossed 'the aforementioned' or 'the next', according to the circumstances. This essentially temporal deixis is occasionally transferred to spatial circumstances, in which case it is to be interpreted as referring to something behind or in front of the speaker. For example, *šimírt-iidé* may be interpreted as 'the aforementioned bird', 'the next bird', 'the bird behind', or 'the bird in front' according to the context. The habitual suffix *-íiya* characterizes an entity that has been mentioned many times or has been established by the speaker (in the preceding context) as habitually connected with the topic of the utterance. In most cases it can be glossed by the English 'the usual': *mín-íiya* 'the usual house', e.g. the one that I pass every day on my way to X..., *aan-íiya* 'the usual milk' (e.g. that we find on the table every morning), etc.

These few remarks must suffice to make it clear that in addition to BWO Boni displays many other highly context-oriented morpho-syntactic traits. How can such a language be characterized in terms of universal typological parameters? In a sense, Boni syntax is reminiscent of the syntactic structure of languages such as Chinese for which LI and THOMPSON (1976) introduced the term "topic-prominent". In these languages sentences are constructed in such a way that there is an initial NP called the "topic" which "sets a spatial, temporal or individual framework within which the main predication holds" (CHAFE 1976: 50). But the similarity ends here; in Boni there is more to it than that. First of all, one cannot say that the TOPIC sets a spatial or temporal framework in Boni; this would much more be true of what we called the FRAME constituent. The TOPIC, Boni style, is a cataphoric element that introduces an entity about which a predication is to be made. In fact, the predication (i.e. the COMMENT) is much more central, interesting, and dominant in the syntactic apparatus than the TOPIC. It is the COMMENT rather than the TOPIC for which a number of very subtle distinctions are made (cf. FOCUS system, marked order etc.). However, a simple change in terminology from "topic-prominence" to "comment-prominence" would not suffice. What is characteristic of a language such as Boni is not so much the TOPIC-COMMENT structure of its WO, but rather its pragmatically oriented character as a whole. More appropriately, then, one may use VAN VALIN's term "reference-oriented" to characterize the syntactic structure of Boni. Given the two main functions of syntactic categories, namely to convey information about the content of a sentence and its "packaging" (CHAFE), we may divide languages into several types on the basis of how they cope with the task of characterizing these functions. Some languages will turn out to separate semantic categories strictly from those that give information about "packaging" (information structure, viewpoint etc.), while others will set a high value on diffuse categories such as GRs that amalgamate the two functions. Those languages whose syntax lays stress on the separation of semantic and discourse-oriented (pragmatic) categories may in turn be divided into those that are predominantly semantically oriented and those that are predominantly pragmatically oriented. Finally, there is also a third group whose syntax is both semantically and pragmatically oriented. In these terms, then, it would seem that Boni can be

characterized as a language whose syntactic categories are largely pragmatically oriented; most of them have the function of conveying information about relations of the content to the context (including the speaker himself), rather than just about the content itself.

7. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Let us return to the problem of WO. I have discussed in this paper the case of a language whose BWO cannot be described in terms of GRs. After demonstrating the weak status of GRs in the grammatical system of this language, I pointed out, in the second and third section, that it is possible to establish a BWO for Boni in terms of Functional Sentence Perspective. In the fourth section I presented and analyzed one of the most remarkable characteristics of Boni syntax, the FOCUS system, and I tried to show how this system, together with the WO, constitutes the cardinal point of the syntactic structure of Boni. In the fifth section I demonstrated the existence of marked WO constellations in spite of the pragmatic orientation of the BWO, and I gave examples of functions which these marked constellations possibly have. In the sixth and last section I tried to show how this BWO/FOCUS system may be related to the typological overall habit of the language. I made a suggestion concerning the question of how such a language can be characterized in terms of universal typological parameters, namely as a language having a pragmatically oriented syntax.

The question remains of what Boni teaches us with respect to a general theory of BWO. I hope that I have made it sufficiently clear that at least for *this* language an analysis of BWO is not possible in GREENBERG's terms. The same is true for one of Boni's closest kin, Rendille, which displays a very similar syntactic structure. Like Boni, Rendille possesses rudimentary GRs which do not, however, play a substantial role in its syntactic organization; on the other hand, it has a TOPIC-FOCUS system which is probably even more rigorously grammaticalized than that of Boni (cf. OOMEN 1978). Given that these languages are problematic with respect to the determination of their BWO in terms of GRs, what about languages that lack GRs altogether? How can a BWO be arrived at in terms of subject, object and verb for a language whose system does not allow the identification of subjects and objects?¹⁰ What

about even "unproblematic" languages such as German (cf. HAFTKA 1978)?

It is probably time to establish a new descriptive framework for the analysis of word-order phenomena that takes the pragmatic basis of syntactic phenomena into account. As KUNO put it, "much (in fact, too much) has been done in search of syntactic phenomena that, I believe, are basically controlled by nonsyntactic factors . . . It is time to reexamine every major "syntactic" process and every major "syntactic" constraint from a functional point of view" (1976: 438). As early as 1915 MATHESIUS pointed out the intimate connection of WO and discourse categories in English, a language in which GRs play a dominant role. Many other languages that are now regarded as unproblematic may turn out to possess more pragmatically oriented WO phenomena than hitherto expected. The analysis of an alleged BWO in terms of GRs is of little help as long as the GRs remain functionally undefined. It has been sufficiently demonstrated in the recent literature, however, that the pragmatic ingredients of GRs in some languages may be made responsible for much of the syntactic behavior of constituents bearing these relations, including the relative positions of these constituents. A thorough consideration of these pragmatic functions of GRs would probably shed some light on BWO constellations in quite a number of "unproblematic" languages.

Address of the author: *H. J. Sasse*
Sprachwissenschaftliches Seminar
der Universität München
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1
D-8000 München 2

NOTES

¹ For a detailed discussion of the linguistic position of Boni cf. HEINE (1978). The literature on Boni is still scanty. Except for a short descriptive sketch (HEINE 1977) only SASSE (1980) is worth mentioning here because it contains a text collection with additional material illustrative of the syntactic phenomena discussed in this paper. Two larger monographs (HEINE MS 1981 and SASSE MS 1981) will appear in the near future. All examples used in this paper stem from my own material collected during two months' field work on Boni in Kenya in 1977, sponsored by the DFG.

² For Somali as early as KIRK (1903: 36), echoed by all authors who present surveys of BWO in the languages of the world.

³ I borrow this term from KUNO (1972).

⁴ All sentences in which the predicate does not occur in final position are instances of marked order, for which cf. section 5.

⁵ It cannot be ruled out that the northern dialects of Boni distinguish subject nouns by means of tone (as in Somali), although the dialects described by HEINE (MS) behave like the one described here in this respect.

⁶ The rule governing these tonal changes are too complex to be described in detail here. For example, nouns with lexical low tone throughout receive a high tone on the final syllable (*bijə* → *bijóq*); feminine nouns in -i shift their high tone to the final syllable (*bóoki* → *booki*); feminine nouns in other vowels get an extra high tone on the final syllable (*d'éeka* → *d'éeká*); in certain constructions, a final unstressed vowel is deleted (*šibidi* → *šibid*), etc.

⁷ Personal pronouns have special focalized forms.

⁸ To avoid the focalization of verb forms in isolation, the independent personal pronouns must be used. In this case, however, the pronouns are interpreted as focalized.

⁹ Most informants considered this sentence "awkward", but this is probably due to the silly example. The sentence

filúuka hác-hablo áddigééd'í ú- kadi
 comb-this girl-DEF father-her for- bought
 'this comb was bought for the girl by her father

was unhesitatingly accepted. It is a common phenomenon that informants refuse perfectly grammatical sentences in cases where the situations in which these sentences would be appropriate are difficult to imagine.

¹⁰ Thus, in the light of what has been said about the subject in Philippine languages it is meaningless to speak of "VSO" or "VOS" as a basic word order in Tagalog.

REFERENCES

- CHAFE, W. L. 1976.
 "Givenness, Contrastiveness, Definiteness, Subjects, Topics, and Point of View", in: LI, ed., 25—55.
- GREENBERG, J. H. 1963 (1966).
 "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements", in: J. H. GREENBERG, ed., *Universals of Language*, 73—113. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- HAFTKA, B. 1978.
 "Bekanntheit und Neuheit als Kriterien für die Anordnung von Satzgliedern", *Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, 15, 157—164.
- HEINE, B. 1976.
 "Notes on the Rendille Language (Kenya)", *Afrika und Übersee*, 59, 176—223.
- HEINE, B. 1977.
 "Bemerkungen zur Boni-Sprache (Kenia)", *Afrika und Übersee*, 60, 242—295.
- HEINE, B. 1978.
The Sam Languages. A History of Rendille, Boni and Somali (= Afroasiatic Linguistics 6/2). Malibu: Undena.
- HEINE, B. MS 1981.
Boni Dialects (= Language and Dialect Atlas of Kenya, Vol. X).
- HINDS, J. 1979.
 "Organizational Patterns in Discourse", in: T. GIVÓN, ed., *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 12 (*Discourse and Syntax*), 135—157. New York: Academic Press.
- KEENAN, E. Ochs and B. B. SCHIEFFELIN. 1976.
 "Topic as a Discourse Notion: A Study of Topic in the Conversations of Children and Adults", in: LI, ed. 335—384.

KIRK, J. W. C. 1903.

Notes on the Somali Language. London: Henry Frowde.

KUNO, S. 1972.

"Functional Sentence Perspective: A Case Study from Japanese and English", *Linguistic Inquiry*, 3, 296—320.

KUNO, S. 1976.

"Subject, Theme, and the Speaker's Empathy — A Reexamination of Relativization Phenomena", in: LI, ed. 417—444.

LI, C. N., ed. 1976

Subject and Topic. New York: Academic Press.

LI, C. N. and S. A. THOMPSON. 1976.

"Subject and Topic: A New Typology of Language", in: LI, ed., 457—489.

LONGACRE, R. E. 1979.

"The Paragraph as a Grammatical Unit", in: T. GIVÓN, ed., *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 12 (*Discourse and Syntax*), 115—134. New York: Academic Press.

MATHESIUS, V. 1915.

"O passivu v moderní angličtině", *Sborník filologický* 5, 198—220.

OOMEN, A. 1978.

"Focus in the Rendille Clause", *Studies in African Linguistics*, 9, 35—65.

SASSE, H. J. 1980.

"Textproben der Boni-Sprache (West-Dialekt)", *Afrika und Übersee*, 63, 79—101.

SASSE, H. J. 1981.

A Grammar of Boni (Bireeri Dialect). Ms.

VAN VALIN, R. D. and W. FOLEY. 1980.

"Role and Reference Grammar", in: *Current Approaches to Syntax*, ed. by E. A. MORAVCSIK. New York: Academic Press.

ZUBIN, D. A. 1979.

"Discourse Function of Morphology: The Focus System in German", in: T. GIVÓN, ed., *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 12 (*Discourse and Syntax*), 469—504. New York: Academic Press.