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Position, Word Order, Verbs, and Tenses of Reporting Clauses

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Abstract This study aims to explore which position, which word order, which verb, or which tense writers have a tendency to choose in writing reporting clauses. Two registers were used here: news (newsmagazines and newspapers), and fiction. With regard to position and word order of reporting clauses in news and fiction, there is some mention of them in Biber et al. (1999:921-26). Intriguing and instructive as their argument is, still it leaves some doubt. And as to which verb or which tense writers have a tendency to choose in reporting clauses there seems to be no coherent study including Biber et al.

With regard to position of reporting clauses, writers seem to have a tendency to put them in the following order: final position, medial position, and initial position. In final position in newsmagazines writers seem to prefer verb-subject order more frequently, while in newspapers they seem to prefer subject-verb order. In final position in fiction writers have a tendency to use subject-verb order rather than inversion. With respect to reporting verbs, writers tend to use *say* preeminently. In respect to tenses in newsmagazines writers tend to choose the present tense more often, whereas in the newspapers they tend to choose the past tense more frequently. In fiction writers prefer to use the past tense overwhelmingly.

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Key Words : Position, Word Order, Reporting Verbs, Tenses, Reporting Clauses

1. Introduction

Biber et al. (1999:921-26) say that reporting clauses occur most often in final position, and that, of initial and medial position, they occur more frequently in initial position. There is no objection whatever to reported clauses occurring most often in final position, but as to their occurring more often in initial position than in medial position, there is some objection. Biber et al. (1999:921-26) say further that, in fiction although both subject-verb and verb-subject order are used for reporting clauses, there is a slight preference for the regular subject-verb order, but that in news, inversion (with verb-subject order) is strongly preferred. With regard to the word order in fiction, all in all they may be right. However, it is doubtful whether there is a strong preference for inversion in news. Concerning reporting verbs, Biber et al. (1999:921) certainly refer to them, but it is very brief, and as to tenses of reporting verbs, there seems to be no mention of them at all in Biber et al. Somehow, one cannot find any book or articles that provide a

detailed description as to which reporting verb or which tense is preferably used in reporting clauses.

The aim of this article is to explore which position, which word order, which reporting verb, and which tense is preferably used in reporting clauses in present-day English. It also tries to examine what kinds of similarities or differences there are between the two registers, news and fiction, in the way reporting clauses are used. The newsmagazines and newspapers examined are *Newsweek* (Sept. 28, 1998), *TIME* (Sept. 28, 1998), *The New York Times* (Sept. 23, 1998)(pp. A1-A30), and *USA TODAY* (Sept. 22, 1998)(pp. 1A-16A). In regard to fiction, the short stories collected in *The Best American Short Stories 1997*¹ were referred to here. It is a collection of 21 short stories published in 1996, of which the short stories of 10 American authors were selected in my study².

Reporting clauses occur initially, medially, or finally. When they occur medially, or finally, they are either in subject-verb order or in verb-subject order³. When they occur medially, generally these

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two kinds of order seem to be interchangeably used, and there is no problem in this case, but when reporting clauses occur finally—since this article examines which of the two kinds of word order writers tend to choose—these two kinds of word order must be interchangeable. Therefore only the cases where these two are largely interchangeable were selected here. They are instances like the following where (b) is also possible:

- (1) a. "Look at it from his point of view," Mr. Dixon said. (*The N. Y. Times*)
 b. "Look at it from his point of view," said Mr. Dixon.
- (2) a. "Why are we having this appeal," his master, Karen Finn, said Monday. (*USA TODAY*)
 a. "Why are we having this appeal," said his master, Karen Finn, Monday.
- (3) a. "I had an egg-white omelet," Lewinski said matter of factly. (*ibid.*)
 b. "I had an egg-white omelet," said Lewinsky matter of factly.
- (4) a. "It was sort of a wash," said former Senator Bob Dole, summing up the prevailing view. (*The N. Y. Times*)
 b. "It was sort of a wash," former Senator Bob Dole said, summing up the prevailing view.

In end position, instances like the following are ruled out because they are not interchangeable: those where the phrase comprising the subject of reporting clauses is unusually long (5a), or where a subject is followed by an appositive phrase that adds information to the subject of reporting clauses (5b), or where the subject is followed by a non-defining relative clause in reporting clauses (5c). Subject-verb order in such reporting clauses is fixed and the inversion is undesirable:

- (5) a. "It's all Monica, all the time," says Richard of the Tobacco Products Liability Project at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston. (*USA TODAY*)
 b. "This is their moment to deal," says Richard Haas, a former member of the U.S. National Security Council who knows Talbot well. (*Newsweek*)
 c. "My life is on hold," said Riber, who sold her house and rented a temporary apartment recently. (*The N. Y. Times*)

In initial and final position, instances like the

following (6ab) are also excluded: those where reporting clauses cannot be positioned medially. In instances like these one cannot see precisely where reporting clauses appear most frequently.

- (6) a. Carla said, "Poor Paula."

(*The Best Am. Short Stories 1997*)

- b. "Look," said Carla. (*ibid.*)

In this study, all of the instances like (6ab) were found in the short stories and not in the newsmagazines or newspapers.

Instances like the following are also eliminated because they cannot be interchangeably used: those where the subject of reporting clauses is a pronoun, because at the end of reported speeches such expressions as said he (she, etc) are no longer used now.

With regard to reporting verbs, those that require two objects, such as *assure*, *inform*, *tell* are excluded because in sentences where these verbs occur only one word order is possible and there is no choice of an alternative word order.

This article examines, first, where reporting clauses occur most often, second, of the two kinds of word order in reporting clauses, subject-verb and verb-subject order, which of them writers prefer to use, third, what kinds of reporting verbs writers tend to use frequently, and fourth, of the two tenses of reporting verbs, present and past, which of them writers tend to choose in reporting clauses.

2. Position of Reporting Clauses

Reporting clauses occur in initial, medial, and final position:

- (7) a. Mr. Simon said: "The legislative has the power to pass laws"

(*The N. Y. Times*)

- b. "Son," the chaplain said, "you're coming with me." (*Newsweek*)

- c. "It comes down to a swearing contest," Allen said. (*USA TODAY*)

Table 1 gives the number of instances in respect to position of reporting clauses.

Table 1 demonstrates that of the three kinds of position, reporting clauses occur most frequently in final position. Of initial and medial position, they appear more frequently in medial position than in initial position. This latter statement is not in keeping with what Biber et al. (1996:921-26) say. Biber et al. claim that there are more occurrences in initial position than in medial position. Be that as it may, reporting clauses should be inconspicuous

in themselves. That seems to be why reporting clauses appear least frequently in initial position because they would be too conspicuous there, and conversely they appear most frequently in final position because they are most inconspicuous there.

Table 1 Position of reporting clauses

	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
<i>Newsweek</i>	2 (3.5%)	23 (40.4%)	32 (56.1%)
<i>TIME</i>	1 (2.6%)	9 (23.7%)	28 (73.7%)
<i>The New York Times</i>	13 (14.1%)	19 (20.7%)	60 (65.2%)
<i>USA TODAY</i>	12 (17.9%)	4 (6.0%)	51 (76.1%)
<i>The Best American Short Stories 1997</i>	9 (4.2%)	23 (10.6%)	184 (85.2%)

Table 1 also suggests that in initial position reporting clauses appear more often in the newspapers than in the newsmagazines. In addition, when reporting clauses appear initially in the newspapers, it seems to appear in a characteristic way: in 14 instances out of 25 in both of the newspapers, the part preceding a reporting verb and comprising the subject, or an adverbial participle clause modifying a reporting clause, is generally long as shown in the following instances:

- (8) a. Marie Dixon, a Briton who runs a poolside bar with her husband, Bill, in the coastal town of Benalmadena, said of Major, her 14-year old retriever: "Let's put it this way—I'd be in a mental institution if anything happened to him." (*The N. Y. Times*)
- b. Mr. Gore, who has said that he has not read the full Starr report, added: The videotaped testimony was not particularly new in light of the report that" (ibid.)
- c. Asked about his statement under oath that he was never alone with Lewinsky, Clinton replies: "Well, again, it depends on how you define 'alone.'" (*USA TODAY*)

In newspapers, who said would be also important to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, and it seems that this kind of lengthy statement prior to a reporting verb is part of an effort on the part of the newspapers to let the reader know as much and as precise information as possible within a limited space and time. This kind of lengthy statement preceding a reporting verb is comparatively few in the

short stories, where a long explanation before a reporting verb would be needless in most cases because one can understand easily who said which from the context.

3. Word Order in Reporting Clauses

As shown in the instances in (1ab) (2ab) (3ab) (4ab), in final position reporting clauses are in either subject-verb or verb-subject order. This is also the case with medial position:

- (9) a. "It goes without saying," Jennings said, "that the president would have preferred the whole world not to see his videotape on TV." (*USA TODAY*)
- b. "We won't give anything," says one Singaporean diplomat, "unless we get the water." (*Newsweek*)

Table 2 gives the number of occurrences in each word order of reporting clauses in respective position.

Table 2 Word order in reporting clauses

	Initial position		Medial position		Final position	
	SV	VS	SV	VS	SV	VS
<i>Newsweek</i>	2	0	13	10	6	26
<i>TIME</i>	1	0	3	6	4	24
<i>The New York Times</i>	13	0	19	0	57	3
<i>USA TODAY</i>	12	0	4	0	45	6
<i>The Best American Short Stories 1997</i>	9	0	15	8	136	48

When one looks at Table 2, an intriguing fact emerges. In final position, there is a difference even in the same register: there are more instances of inversion (verb-subject order) than those of subject-verb order in the newsmagazines, whereas in the newspapers the tendency is the reverse: in final position in the newspapers there are more instances of subject-verb order than those of the inversion, which is also the case with medial position in the newspapers. Biber et al. (1999:921-26) say that in news verb-subject order is strongly preferred, but this does not seem to be the case as long as my study shows.

In the short stories the regular subject-verb order also takes precedence over the inversion in medial and final position, but in this case it needs some comments. Although it is certain that on the whole there are more instances of subject-verb order in the

short stories, there are individual differences in literary authors, especially in final position. Of the 10 authors of the short stories examined, eight seem to have a strong preference for subject-verb order in final position, but at least two authors do not seem to favor it so much: one author (Karen Bender) uses subject-verb order as often as its inverted form in final position, and another one (Clyde Edgerton) uses only verb-subject order (10 instances) in final position and there is no instance of subject-verb order in his short story. That shows that generalization is somewhat precarious in the case of literary authors. It is said that Graham Greene, a British novelist, did not like the inverted word order and insisted on retaining the regular subject-verb order (Kahn 1985:301).

It is not very clear why in the newsmagazines the inverted word order is more prevalent than subject-verb order in final position. It may have to do with what Biber et al. call "right expansion" (1996:921-26). That is, by placing the subject after the verb, one can add information to the subject as much as, or as long as one pleases. In this word order, the part that adds information to the subject begins to expand rightward as more information is added. In fiction to add much information to the subject would be meaningless because one could guess the circumstances about the subject largely by the context. But still a mystery remains: whereas in the newsmagazines verb-subject order is more prevalent than subject-verb order in final position, in the newspapers in final position subject-verb order is in more use. It may be based on an editing policy of each company or on other causes.

4. Reporting Verbs

With regard to reporting verbs, in the newsmagazines *say* is used most often (77 instances) in both of the newsmagazines, followed by *write* (four instances), *complain* (three instances), *recall* (three instances), *concede* (two instances), and *declare* (two instances). Each of the following is used once: *add*, *argue*, *claim*, *conclude*, *growl*, *joke*, *sag*, *snap*, *sneer*, and *warn*.

In the newspapers *say* is also used most often (129 instances in both of the newspapers), followed by *add* (seven instances), *ask* (four instances), *reply* (four instances), *agree* (two instances), *answer* (two instances), *rule* (two instances), *warn* (two instances), and *write* (two instances). Each of

the following is used once: *argue*, *declare*, *note*, *predict*, and *state*.

Thus if the two registers are taken together, it follows that *say* is overwhelmingly used (206 instances), followed by *add* (eight instances), *write* (six instances), *ask* (four instances), *reply* (four instances), *complain* (three instances), *declare* (three instances), *recall* (three instances), *warn* (three instances), *agree* (two instances), *answer* (two instances), *argue* (two instances), and *rule* (two instances). Each of the following is used once: *claim*, *concede*, *conclude*, *growl*, *joke*, *note*, *predict*, *sag*, *snap*, *sneer*, and *state*.

In order to compare roughly the reporting verbs used in the newsmagazines and newspapers with those used in fiction, let us take a brief look at the reporting verbs used in the short stories. The reporting verb used most frequently in the short stories is *say* (164 instances), followed by *ask* (20 instances), *think* (six instances), *demand* (two instances), *explain* (two instances), *hiss* (two instances), and *mutter* (two instances). Each of the following is used once: *announce*, *begin*, *breathe out*, *crow*, *inquire*, *laugh*, *lie*, *marvel*, *offer*, *pause*, *pronounce*, *pursue*, *repeat*, *screech*, *squeal*, *urge*, *wail*, and *wonder*.

A comparison between the reporting verbs used in the newsmagazines and newspapers, and those used in fiction tells us that, although the reporting verbs examined here are limited in number, especially with respect to the short stories, it is only *say* and *ask* that are commonly used in the two, and that in other verbs the reporting verbs used in the newsmagazines and newspapers seem to be a little different from those used in fiction. Such verbs as *add*, *ask*, *write*, *reply*, *answer*, etc., which are seen in the newsmagazines and newspapers, are not emotive, while *crow*, *hiss*, *laugh*, *screech*, *squeal*, *wail*, etc., which are seen in fiction, are emotive, and contain much more information than the reporting verbs used in the newsmagazines and newspapers.

5. Tenses of Reporting Verbs

The present and past tenses of the verbs are used in reporting clauses.

Table 3 gives the number of instances of the present and past tenses that occur in reporting clauses.

Table 3 shows that in the newsmagazines in medial and final position the present tense of the verb is used more frequently than the past tense,

Table 3 Tenses of reporting verbs (R. V)

	Initial position		Medial position		Final position	
	Pres.	Past.	Pres.	Past.	Pres.	Past.
<i>Newsweek</i>	0	2	18	5	20	12
<i>TIME</i>	1	0	7	2	22	6
<i>The New York Times</i>	1	12	3	16	2	58
<i>USA TODAY</i>	4	8	0	4	8	43
<i>The Best American Short Stories 1997</i>	0	9	0	23	2	182

whereas in the newspapers the situation is the reverse: in these newspapers, in medial and final position, the past tense is used more frequently than the present tense. The tendency of these newspapers is also in keeping with that of the short stories.

The use of the present tense to refer to a past action like the following is a so-called historic present. It has the effect of making the reader feel as if a past incident were happening now.

- (10) a. "I had expected an opponent with deep pockets," jokes Leahy, "not someone with holes in his pockets."

(*TIME*)

- b. "She's just shy," says one confidant.

(*Newsweek*)

It is not very clear why the historic present occurs more frequently in the newsmagazines than in the newspapers. It may be based on an individual writer's stylistic idiosyncrasy or on the editing policy of a newsmagazine or newspaper. Or it may be based on other causes.

6. Conclusion

This study has revealed some points of interest like the following. All in all writers prefer to put reporting clauses more in final position rather than in medial or initial position. Of these latter two kinds of position they like to put them in medial position more often than in initial position, which disagrees with what Biber et al. (1999:921-26) argues. And contrary to what Biber et al. (1999:921-26) say, there are cases where inversion is not so strongly preferred. That is, while in final position in the newsmagazines, writers prefer to use verb-subject order more frequently than subject-verb order, in the newspapers they tend to choose subject-verb order more often than verb-subject order. In fiction they prefer to use subject-verb

order. With regard to reporting verbs, writers use *say* surprisingly often in both registers. With respect to the tenses of reporting verbs, in medial and final position writers have a tendency to use the present tense more frequently than the past tense in the newsmagazines, whereas in the newspapers they have a tendency to use the past tense more often. In fiction they prefer to use the past tense in many cases.

Since the corpus used in this study is somewhat limited with emphasis placed more on newsmagazines and newspapers than on fiction, and since the data are only those from AmE, to use a larger corpus and to examine data that are from BrE as well as from AmE would be needed in the future.

Notes

- 1 Proulex, E. Annie, and Katrina Kennison, eds. (1997) *The Best American Short Stories 1997*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- 2 The ten authors and their short stories are: Robert Stone, "Under the Pitons"; Carolyn Cooke, "Bob Darling"; Michelle Cliffe, "Transactions"; Richard Bausch, "Nobody in Hollywood"; Cynthia Ozick, "Save My Child"; Karen E. Bender, "Eternal Love"; T. C. Boyle, "Killing Babies"; Clyde Edgerton, "Send Me to the Electric Chair"; Jeffrey Eugenides, "Air Mail"; Michael Byers, "Shipmates Down Under".
- 3 Reporting clauses are also in verb-subject order in initial position like the following, but in my study such instances are excluded.

Says Campolo: "I still feel a genuine sincerity, but only time will tell." (*TIME*)

For a construction of this kind, see Sonoda, Kenji (1997) Subject-Verb Inversion before a Quotation in the Media Discourse. In: *Current English Studies*, No. XXXVI, Sept., 13-25. Tokyo: Kenkyusha.

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伝達節の位置，語順，動詞，時制

園 田 健 二

要 旨 伝達節は前位，中位，後位のいずれに最も多く生起するか，動詞にはSV，VSのいずれが最も多く使われているか，どういう動詞が使われているか，時制は現在が多いか過去が多いかをアメリカの新聞，雑誌，短編小説を資料に探究したものである。

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