

Markedness

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Markedness

Markedness describes asymmetries in the encoding and behavior of related linguistic expressions.

Greenberg 1966

Croft 1990 / 2003

Markedness

	SG	PL
English	car	car- s
Tartar	botak	botak- lar
Zulu	umu -ntu	aba -ntu
M. Mlabri	ʔεεw	ʔεεw

Markedness

	SG marked	SG unmarked
PL marked	+	+
PL unmarked		+

Markedness

- Language-specific: The English plural is structurally marked because it involves an extra morpheme.
- Cross-linguistic: The plural is marked because there is no language in which the plural is expressed by fewer morphemes than the singular.

Markedness

If a language uses an overt inflection for the singular, then it also uses an overt inflection for the plural.

Markedness

The marked and unmarked forms must be “paradigmatic alternates” (Croft 1990).

→ The marked and unmarked forms (i.e. the forms we compare) must be related categories (e.g. singular and number; but not gender and passive).

Structural markedness

The marked value of a grammatical category will be expressed by at least as many morphemes as is the unmarked value of that category. (Croft 2003: 92)

Local markedness

SG

car

pair of pants

PL

car-**s**

pants

Local markedness

	SG	PL
the Turkana (people)	ɲiturana-it	ɲiturana

Local markedness

	SG	PL
the Turkana (people) wild animal	ɲiturana-it ɲityaŋ-it	ɲiturana ɲityaŋl

Local markedness

	SG	PL
the Turkana (people)	ɲiturana-ɪt	ɲiturana
wild animal	ɲityaŋ-ɪt	ɲityaŋɪ
ear	ak-ɪt	ɲaki

Local markedness

	SG	PL
the Turkana (people)	ɲiturana-it	ɲiturana
wild animal	ɲityaŋ-it	ɲityaŋl
ear	ak-it	ɲaki
shoe	amuk-at	ɲamuk



Examples of structural markedness in English

Structural markedness

	Marked	Unmarked
Number marking	car	car-s

Structural markedness

	Marked	Unmarked
Number marking	car	car-s
Adjective comparison	big	big-ger / big-est

Structural markedness

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Grammatical relations	Peter	Peter's to Peter

Structural markedness

	Marked	Unmarked
Number marking	car	car-s
Adjective comparison	big	big-ger / big-est
Grammatical relations	Peter	Peter's to Peter
Tense	walk	walk-ed will go have gone

Structural markedness

Aspect	walk	is walk-ing

Structural markedness

Aspect	walk	is walk-ing
Mood	go	would go

Structural markedness

Aspect	walk	is walk-ing
Mood	go	would go
Voice	kick	is / get kick-ed

Structural markedness

Aspect	walk	is walk-ing
Mood	go	would go
Voice	kick	is / get kick-ed
Negation	happy have	un-happy don't have

Structural markedness

Aspect	walk	is walk-ing
Mood	go	would go
Voice	kick	is / get kick-ed
Negation	happy have	un-happy don't have
Clause type	∅	that if / when / since

Structural markedness

Are these examples of structural markedness?

go

went

be

was

bad

worse

good

better

Structural markedness

Are these examples of structural markedness?

sing

sang

bring

brought

keep

kept

see

saw

Structural markedness

Are these examples of structural markedness?

hable

'I spoke'

Spanish

hablo

'he spoke'

habla

'he speaks'

Behavioral markedness

There are two types of behavioral markedness:

- Inflection
- Distribution

Behavioral markedness

If the marked value has a certain number of formal distinctions in an inflectional paradigm, then the unmarked value will have at least as many formal distinctions in the same paradigm. (Croft 2003: 97)

Inflectional markedness

	SG			PL		
	MASC	FEM	NEUT	MASC	FEM	NEUT
1st	I	I		we	we	
2nd	you	you		you	you	
3rd	he	she	it	they	they	they

Inflectional markedness

	SUBJ	OBJ
3 rd person	he / she / it	him / her / it
Interrogative pronouns	who	who(m)
Demonstrative pronouns	that	that
Lexical nouns	car	car

Inflectional markedness

	SG	PL
3 rd person	he / she / it	they
Interrogative pronouns	who	who
Demonstrative pronouns	that	those
Relative pronouns	that	that
Lexical nouns	car	car-s

Inflectional markedness

	Present	Past
1 st SG	walk	walked
2 nd SG	walk	walked
3 rd SG	walks	walked
1 st PL	walk	walked
2 nd PL	walk	walked
3 rd PL	walk	walked

Inflectional markedness

	<i>be</i>		<i>walk</i>	
	Present	Past	Present	Past
1 st SG	am	was	walk	walked
2 nd SG	are	were	walk	walked
3 rd SG	is	was	walks	walked
1 st PL	are	were	walk	walked
2 nd PL	are	were	walk	walked
3 rd PL	are	were	walk	walked

Inflectional markedness

	<i>be</i>		<i>walk</i>	
	Present	Past	Present	Past
1 st SG	am	was	walk	walked
2 nd SG	are	were	walk	walked
3 rd SG	is	was	walks	walked
1 st PL	are	were	walk	walked
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Inflectional markedness

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1 st SG	am	was	walk	walked
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1 st PL	are	were	walk	walked
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Inflectional markedness

Strong	SG	PL
NOM	stan	stan-as
GEN	stan-es	stan-a
DAT	stan-e	stan-um
ACC	stan	stan-as

Inflectional markedness

<i>that/the</i>	Masc	Neut	Fem	Plural
NOM	se	þæt	seo	þa
GEN	þæs	þæs	þære	þara
DAT	þæm	þæ:m	þæ:re	þæm
ACC	þone	þæt	þa	þa
INST	þy:	þy:		

Inflectional markedness

<i>that/the</i>	Masc	Neut	Fem	Plural
NOM	se	þæt	seo	þa
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ACC	þone	þæt	þa	þa
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GEN	þæs	þæs	þære	þara
DAT	þæm	þæ:m	þæ:re	þæm
ACC	þone	þæt	þa	þa
INST	þy:	þy:		

Inflectional markedness

Indicative	Present	Past
1. Sg	sing-e	sang
2. Sg	sing-est	sung-e
3. Sg	sing-eð	sang
1. Pl.	sing-að	sung-on
2. Pl	sing-að	sung-on
3. Pl	sing-að	sung-on

Inflectional markedness

Subjunctive		
1. Sg	sing-e	sung-e
2. Sg	sing-e	sung-e
3. PL	sing-e	sung-e
1. PL	sing-en	sung-en
2. PL	sing-en	sung-en
3. PL	sing-en	sung-en

Distributional markedness

If the marked value occurs in a certain number of distinct grammatical environments (i.e. construction types), then the unmarked value will also occur in at least those environments that the marked value occurs in. (Croft 2003: 98)

Distributional markedness

Personal pronouns vs. reflexive pronouns

- (1) a. **He** saw Mary.
b. Mary saw **him**.
- (2) a. Peter saw **himself**.
b. ***Himself** saw Peter.

Distributional markedness

Process vs. stative verbs

- (1) a. She played the piano.
b. She was playing the piano.
- (2) a. She liked bananas.
b. *She was liking bananas.

Distributional markedness

Activity verbs vs. psych verbs in active/passive

- (1) a. My sister kicked the ball.
b. The ball was kicked by my sister.
- (2) a. My sister likes bananas.
b. *Bananas are liked by my sister.

Distributional markedness

Main clauses vs. subordinate clauses

- (1) a. I met my old friend Peter **on the bus**.
- b. **On the bus** I met my old friend Peter.
- (2) a. When I met my old friend Peter **on the bus**, we ...
- b. *When **on the bus** I met my old friend Peter, ...

Neutral value

Roman Jakobson

Nicholas Trubetzkoy

Neutral value

The archiphoneme

- | | |
|---------|-------|
| a. Bund | Bunde |
| b. bunt | bunte |

Neutral value

- (1) a. man and women
b. mankind
- (2) a. dog (canine)
b. dog (male dog) vs. bitch (female dog)
- (3) a. How old are you?
b. *How young are you?

Neutral value

- (1) English
the child/person. He ...

- (2) Maasai
ainjai na-ewno?
It.is.who who.FEM-has.come
'Who has come?'



How do we account for the various markedness patterns?

Frequency and markedness

- Text frequency
- Cross-linguistic frequency

Frequency and markedness

Zipf's law (1935: 29)

Frequency correlates with length:

Frequent words tend to be short.

Frequency and markedness

Frequent forms tend to be pronounced less carefully than infrequent forms, and thus frequent forms are often shortened.

airplane > plane

omnibus > bus

going to > gonna

Infrequent forms often require an extra element to explicitly distinguish it from the default.

der vs. der nicht

Frequency and markedness

Frequency correlates with irregularity (= number of morphemes in a paradigm):

Frequent inflectional categories tend to be ,irregular'
(= diverse)

Distributional markedness

Distributional markedness is semantically motivated.

- Reflexive pronouns are not permissible in subject position because of their function/meaning (= subject coreference).
- Stative verbs are not permissible in the progressive because states have no inherent structure.
- Subordinate clauses do not allow for certain word order patterns because they are pragmatically presupposed.

Neutral value

Phonetic motivation: There is a natural tendency to devoice speech sounds at the end of a word.