

Owing to its typological characteristics, English displays limited positional mobility of clause constituents, their position within the clause being an important signal of their syntactic function. At the same time, clause constituents may move out of their usual position if prompted by factors such as emphasis, structural complexity, information status, etc.

What is true of clause constituents also applies to some extent to whole clauses.

Unlike coordinate clauses in a compound sentence, subordinate clauses, particularly adverbial, may vary in their position, either preceding, following or even being inserted into their superordinate clause, with the resulting linear arrangement reflecting the relative weight of information which they convey, with the informationally heavier element placed finally. The position of nominal clauses and nominal relative clauses is determined largely by the usual position of the syntactic element they represent (i.e. the object clauses following the matrix clause predicate, etc.). Subject clauses, which represent the focus of this dissertation, are basically limited to two positions in relation to their matrix clauses: they either occupy the canonical initial position (i.e. before the matrix clause predicate) or are extraposed towards the end of the sentence, following the matrix clause predicate. The distribution of these two positional options is far from equal; on the whole, cases of extraposition significantly outnumber the non-extraposed variants. As a matter of fact, with some of the subtypes of subject clauses the initial position is so rare in authentic, naturally occurring texts that a unique combination of factors must be in operation to allow it. ...