

**Predicate initiality in Hawai'i Creole**  
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**Overview:** Hawai'i Creole (HC) is a default SVO language, but it has a family of predicate-initial constructions. I show that this family has two main branches—neutral (1) and focus (2)—based on the contexts in which the constructions appear.

- (1) *Nice (ah), Megan.*  
 'Megan's nice.'
- (2) *Ho, (some) NICE (ah), Megan!*  
 'Wow, Megan's (super) nice!'

The types of licit initial predicates in neutral and focus (emphatic and Q-A pair) contexts are listed in the table in (3). I argue that verbs cannot be sentence-initial in these constructions because the

(3)

	Neutral	Emphatic	Q-A Pair
Verbs	*	*	??/*
Nominals	*	✓	✓
Adjectivals	some	✓	✓

constructions are relatively small syntactic objects, i.e. they lack T, and so cannot support verbs. I argue that these constructions are, at largest, PolPs. Evidence from within HC and from comparison with Japanese, one of HC's input languages, indicates that predicate

initiality is derived by subject postposition, not predicate raising.

Of the nonverbal predicates, only adjectivals can be sentence-initial in both neutral and focus cases. Further, not all adjectival predicates can be sentence-initial in neutral contexts. The restrictions on neutral initial adjectival predicates (4) do not apply to focus constructions (5).

- (4) \**Vegan (ah), da cookies.*  
 Intended: 'The cookies are vegan.'
- (5) *VEGAN (ah), da cookies!*  
 '[Oh!] The cookies are vegan!'

I argue that if a predicate is initial in a neutral context, it must be evaluative. That is, the full construction must reference a degree that exceeds a contextual standard (Bartsch & Vennemann 1972, Rett 2015, a.o.). I propose that considering the semantics and pragmatics of evaluativity suggests a unified analysis of neutral and focus predicate initiality. In this analysis, a pragmatically-triggered focus fronting causes subject postposition, in the absence of the possibility of PredP movement.

**Predicate-initial sentences are (at most) PolPs:** Both neutral and focus initial predicate constructions are relatively small syntactic objects. Three characteristics of these constructions suggest that they lack a CP layer: (1) they cannot be embedded; (2) they cannot form polar questions; (3) they cannot form *wh*-questions. There is also evidence to suggest that these constructions lack a TP layer as well. They cannot occur with any overt TAM markers, and verbal predicates are altogether prohibited from being sentence-initial.

The negation marker *not* can occur in neutral predicate-initial constructions. Elicitation is presently underway to determine what position *not* resides in. However, combined with the apparent absence of T and C, it's reasonable to assume that *not* is, at the highest, a Pol head. These predicate-initial constructions, then, can be assumed to be PolPs at the largest.

**Subject postposition derives predicate-initiality:** In both neutral and focus predicate-initial constructions, the predicate-initial order is derived by subject postposition to a right peripheral position. Although predicate raising is also possible in principle, there is no evidence of predicate movement. There is, however, evidence for subject movement. In both neutral and focus predicate-initial constructions, the discourse particle *ah* may occur between the predicate and the subject (6).

- (6) (a) *Nice ah, Megan.*  
'Megan is nice, huh.'
- (b) *NICE ah, Megan!*  
'Megan is really nice, huh!'

I argue that HC *ah* comes from the Japanese discourse particle *ne*, and that it behaves similarly to *ne* syntactically (and semantically/pragmatically). Japanese *ne* has been shown to be a high-attaching right peripheral element (Davis 2011, a.o.). The Japanese translation of (6a), shown in (7), has exactly the same word order—*ne* occurs in the same position as *ah*.

- (7) *Yasasii ne, Taro-wa.*  
kind NE Taro-TOP  
'Taro is kind, huh.'
- I argue that HC *ah*, like Japanese *ne*, is a right peripheral adjunct. If this is so, the only way for the subject to surface to the right of *ah* is for the subject to raise to a right peripheral position above *ah*. The subject postposition analysis is also nice because, on it, it is fairly simple to derive predicate initiality while allowing the full structure to remain small.

**The evaluativity hypothesis:** How can we characterize and account for the restrictions on licit neutral initial predicates? I hypothesize that in neutral contexts, only evaluative predicates can be sentence-initial. This condition does not hold in focus contexts.

To test the evaluativity hypothesis, I compiled a list of 154 adjectival predicates (Kennedy 1997, Rett 2015, a.o.). I employed the *find*-test (Sæbø 2009) to identify evaluative predicates. For instance, *Siena finds him handsome* is felicitous, so *handsome* is evaluative, while *#She finds him vegan* is infelicitous, so *vegan* is non-evaluative. I predicted that all licit neutral initial predicates would be among the 120 predicates identified as evaluative. The results, summarized in (8), provide strong support for the evaluativity hypothesis. The crucial column is the ✓ initial one:

(8)

	✓ initial	* initial	Total
Evaluative	108	12	120
Non-evaluative	6	28	34
Total	114	40	

Of the 114 predicates that speakers judged to be licit initial predicates in neutral contexts, 108 are evaluative. With this generalization in hand, I argue that predicate initiality in HC could all be pragmatically-motivated focus-fronting. I propose that the semantics and pragmatics of evalua-

tives give them an inherent "emphatic" meaning. This would allow them to be focus-fronted in neutral contexts. Non-evaluatives, then, can only be focus-fronted if emphasis/focus comes from another source, e.g. a preceding question or the speaker's wish to express surprise.

**Conclusions & further questions:** I have made three main arguments: (1) that predicate-initial constructions in HC are relatively small syntactic objects (PolP at most); (2) that HC predicate initiality appears to be derived by subject postposition; and (3) that the set of licit neutral initial predicates includes only evaluative predicates. (3), in turn, suggests the possibility of a unified analysis of HC predicate initiality.

Among the many remaining questions, one empirical question and one theoretical question stand out: (1) Is there a subtle distinction in meaning between Sub-Pred and Pred-Sub orders? How can it be detected in elicitation, and what can it tell us about the role of pragmatics in the phenomenon? (2) What is the nature of the apparent interactions between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics here? What theoretical machinery do we need to capture these interactions? I leave these and more questions for future work.

**References:** Bartsch, R. and Vennemann, T. (1972). In *UCLA Papers in Syntax*, 2, 80-107. Davis, C.M. (2011). Constraining interpretation. Manuscript. Kennedy, C. (1997). *Projecting the adjective: the syntax and semantics of gradability and comparison*. Rett, J. (2015). *The Semantics of Evaluativity*. Sæbø, K.F. (2009). In *Linguistics and philosophy*, 32:4.