

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Information structure: Terms and concepts

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TERMS FOR “INFORMATION STRUCTURE”

Information structure:

- Satzperspektive Mathesius 1929
 ↪ functional sentence perspective Firbas 1964; Sgall 1967
- Aktuální členění věty (“sentence division according to current discourse needs”) Mathesius 1939
- Information structure Halliday 1967
 → acquired broader meaning over time (now the most common cover term)
- Information packaging Chafe 1976; Vallduví 1992

Useful overviews: Molnár 1993; Krifka 2007, 2008; Krifka & Musan 2012; Šimík 2021

TERMS FOR BINARY OPPOSITIONS OR SCALES

Given–new and related oppositions:

- point of departure – goal of utterance Weil 1844
- point of departure – nucleus (*východisko – jádro*) Mathesius 1939
- psychological subject – psychological predicate von der Gabelentz 1869
- theme – rheme Ammann 1925–28
- less – more communicatively dynamic Firbas 1971
- topic – comment Hockett 1958
- background – focus Chomsky 1971; Jackendoff 1972
- topic – focus Sgall et al. 1973
- given – new Halliday 1967

TERMINOLOGICAL TRADITIONS AND DEPENDENCIES

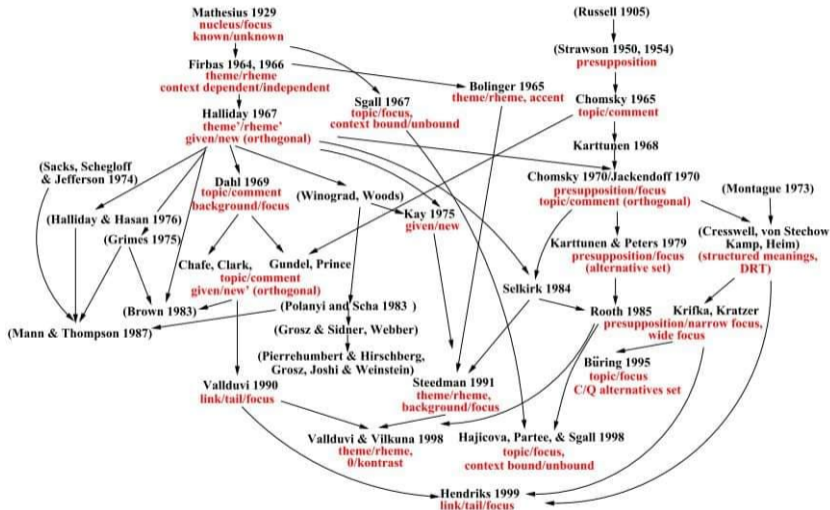


Figure: From Kruijff-Korbayová & Steedman 2003

TWO ASPECTS OF INFORMATION STRUCTURE

Two pragmatic aspects relevant for information structuring of utterances

Halliday 1967

- 1 **Context:** previous discourse
 - Mainly given–new
 - Partly focus–background
 - Halliday’s original “information structure”
- 2 **Speaker intention:** what the speaker intends to highlight
 - Mainly topic–comment
 - Partly focus–background

CURRENTLY USED OPPOSITIONS

Prague School (prominent nowadays: Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics) Sgall et al. 1980

- TOPIC–FOCUS articulation: bipartition of each clause, essentially from left to right
- degree of COMMUNICATIVE DYNAMISM: assigned to each word (node), from left to right

Firbas 1992

→ strongly word order-driven, relatively broad in empirical scope

Generative syntax and formal semantics

Krifka 2008; Šimík 2021

• GIVEN–NEW

Rochemont 2016

• FOCUS–BACKGROUND

Wagner 2021

• (CONTRASTIVE) TOPIC–COMMENT

Büring 2016; Tomioka 2021

→ defined semantically and pragmatically, independently of word order or other formal aspects, relatively narrow in empirical scope

READING TIPS

Hajičová, Eva. 2012. Vilém Mathesius and functional sentence perspective, and beyond. In Markéta Malá and Pavlína Šaldová (eds.), *A centenary of English studies at Charles University: From Mathesius to present-day linguistics*, 49-60. Praha: Charles University.

Kruijff-Korbayová, Ivana and Mark Steedman. 2003. Discourse and information structure. *Journal of Logic, Language and Information* 12(3), 249–259. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024160025821>

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