

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Notions and definitions

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NOTIONS TO BE DISCUSSED

Three binary oppositions, where the first member is positively defined.

Krifka 2008

- given–new
- focus–background
- (contrastive) topic–comment

GIVENNESS (AND PROSODY)

Givenness

Šimík & Wierzba 2017

An expression is GIVEN if it has an appropriate antecedent in the immediate discourse.
Any non-given expression is NEW.

An appropriate antecedent is (i) semantically identical or (ii) hyponymic.

- (1) A I put some CARROTS_{antecedent} in the soup.
B Oh, I HATE carrots_{given} / vegetables_{given}.

- (2) A I put some VEGETABLES_{antecedent} in the soup.
B₁ Oh, I HATE vegetables_{given}.
B₂ Oh, I hate CARROTS_{new}, I hope you haven't used any?

SMALLCAPS = sentence stress

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→ Givenness clearly interacts with stress in English.

Schmerling 1976; Ladd 1980

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(3) Czech

- A Dala jsem do polívky trochu MRKVE_{antecedent}. (s)vo
gave AUX to soup a.bit carrot
'I put some carrots in the soup.'
- B Ach jo, já mrkev_{given} / zeleninu_{given} NESNÁŠÍM. SOV
EMPH.PRT I carrot vegetables hate
'Oh, I hate carrots / vegetables.'

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→ Givenness in Czech seems to interact with word order (svo → sov).

But is prosody also relevant?

Petřík 1938; Daneš 1957

A FOCUSED expression indicates the relevance of alternative meanings of the same type. Whatever is not focused is called the BACKGROUND.

(4) A Who cooked the soup? [Dave or Sue?]

B DAVE_{FOCUS} cooked the soup.

(5) A Sue's soup is great.

B Actually, DAVE_{FOCUS} cooked the soup.

- *Relevant alternatives indicated by B:*
{Dave cooked the soup, Sue cooked the soup}
- *Inference that we can draw based on the alternatives:*
Dave cooked the soup.
Sue did not cook the soup.

ENTAILMENT
IMPLICATURE?

FORMAL REFLEXES OF FOCUS

Focus, like givenness, interacts with prosody:

- (6) A Who cooked the soup?
B₁ DAVE_{focus} cooked the soup.
B₂ #Dave_{focus} cooked the SOUP.

In flexible word order languages, focus interacts with word order, but prosody is also (if not more) important; cf. B₂:

(7) *Czech*

- A Kdo vařil tu polévku?
who cooked the soup
'Who cooked the soup?'
- B₁ Myslím, že ji vařil DAVID_{focus}. (o)VS
think.1SG that it cooked David
'I think that David cooked it.'
- B₂ DAVID_{focus} ji myslím vařil. s(o)v
David it think.1SG cooked
'I think that David cooked it.'

Aboutness topic

Reinhart 1981

ABOUTNESS TOPIC is the expression that refers to the entity which a sentence is *about*.
COMMENT is what is being said about the topical referent.

- (8) A How's your grandma doing?
B Thanks, she_{topic} is recovering quickly.

There are no generally acknowledged and well-defined formal reflexes of aboutness topics – cross- or intra-linguistically – leading to skepticism about the very existence of this linguistic category.

Büring 2016; Tomioka 2021

CONTRASTIVE TOPIC

Contrastive topic

Büning 2003

CONTRASTIVE TOPIC is a subtype of aboutness topic which involves contrast with an alternative referent. It is a bit like a combination of focus and topic.

(9) A How's your grandma doing?

B Oh my GRANDMA_{contr. topic} is FINE_{focus}, but my GRANDPA_{contr. topic} was just [taken to HOSPITAL]_{focus}.

Characteristic of contrastive topic constructions: double contrast (focus):

- grandma vs. grandpa → contrastive topic
- fine vs. taken to hospital → focus

FORMAL REFLEXES OF CONTRASTIVE TOPIC

- Contrastive topics tend to be sentence-initial.
- Contrastive topics are often (though optionally) encoded by rising intonation, followed by falling intonation on focus (English-specific: rise-fall-rise on CT; Constant 2012)
- Contrastive topics are sometimes (although typically optionally) accompanied by particles.

(10) *Czech*

KAREL_{CT} jel DO OLOMOUCE_F a JITKA_{CT} **zase** DO BRNA_F.
Karel went to Olomouc and Jitka _{PRT} to Brno
'Karel went to Olomouc and Jitka to Brno.'

READING TIPS

- Rochemont, Michael. 2016. Givenness. In Caroline Féry and Shinichiro Ishihara (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of information structure*, 41–63. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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