

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Givenness and its types

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TAKING STOCK

Three basic information structure notions/oppositions:

- 1 topic–comment
→ what the sentence is about (topic) and what is said about it (comment)
- 2 focus–background
→ focus gives rise to alternative denotations; background remains constant
- 3 given–new
→ closer look in this lecture

PRINCE'S (1981) TAXONOMY

- given_p (predictability)
- given_k (knowledge)
- given_s (salience)

- nowadays: discourse givenness

PRINCE'S (1981) TAXONOMY: GIVEN_p

Givenness_p [\approx predictability/recoverability]

The speaker assumes that the hearer CAN PREDICT OR COULD HAVE PREDICTED that a PARTICULAR LINGUISTIC ITEM will or would occur in a particular position WITHIN A SENTENCE.

- (1) a. John_i paid Mary and \emptyset _i bought himself a new coat.
b. *Mary paid John_i and \emptyset _i bought himself a new coat.

Subject can be dropped in (1a) because it is recoverable from the previous subject. This is impossible in (1b).

- (2) a. John called Mary a Republican and [then she INSULTED him].
b. John called Mary a Republican and [then SHE insulted HIM].

The pattern in (2b) is special: since the verb *insulted* is not accented, its meaning must be recoverable from the context. **Implication:** x calls y a Republican \rightarrow x insults y.

PRINCE'S (1981) TAXONOMY: GIVEN_k

Givenness_k [\approx shared knowledge, assumed familiarity]

The speaker assumes that the hearer “knows”, assumes, or can infer a particular thing (but is not necessarily thinking about it).

Very close to pragmatic presupposition. It does not have any systematic and well-defined formal reflexes.

(3) Have you seen Jane recently?

In (3), Jane is given_k simply because the discourse participants are all familiar with Jane (or also, could identify the referent of *Jane*).

PRINCE'S (1981) TAXONOMY: GIVEN_s

Givenness_s [\approx saliency]

The speaker assumes that the hearer has or could appropriately have some particular thing/entity/...in his/her CONSCIOUSNESS at the time of hearing the utterance.

Despite the psychological definition, it comes very close to discourse givenness (= previous mention).

- (4) a. We got **some beer** out of the trunk. **The beer** was warm.
b. We got **some picnic supplies** out of the trunk. **The beer** was warm.

In (a), *the beer* is given_s because the hearer thinks about it thanks to the previous mention of the same referent.

In (b), *the beer* is not given_s because the speaker realizes that the fact that there was beer in the supplies is new information for the hearer.

DISCOURSE GIVENNESS

Our definition of what we could call DISCOURSE GIVENNESS, requiring explicit **previous mention**, combines the features of Prince's (1981) givenness_p and givenness_s and represents now the dominant approach to givenness.

Rochemont 1986, 2016; Schwarzschild 1999; Wagner 2012

Givenness

Šimík & Wierzba 2017; Kratzer & Selkirk 2020

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.

Two advantages:

- 1 ease of manipulation (by context)
- 2 ease of detection (prosody, word order)

DISCOURSE GIVENNESS

Compare the effect of givenness_k (pragmatic presupposition) in (5) with the one of discourse givenness (previous mention) in (6):

(5) *Situation*: A and B are in a café, both are very well aware of a sugar container on their table.

A₁ Could you pass me the SUGAR please?

sugar is given_k

A₂ #Could you PASS me the sugar please?

(6) B Oh there's even SUGAR here!

A₁ Cool, could you PASS me the sugar please?

sugar is discourse given

A₂ #Cool, could you pass me the SUGAR please?

→ Only discourse givenness systematically affects form.

READING TIPS

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