

Contrast, Givenness, and Yet Another Theory of Focus in English

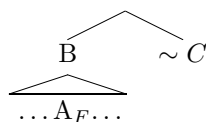
Daniel Büring, UC Los Angeles

UCL Information Structure Workshop, Sept. 12–15, 2008

1 Two Modern Classics in Focus Interpretation

1.1 Rooth 1992

•



is well-formed if the context provides a value for the variable C s.t. C is a focus alternative to, but different from B

- formally: $g(C) \in \llbracket B \rrbracket^f$ and $g(C) \neq \llbracket B \rrbracket$
- informally: the context must provide some antecedent of the form $[\dots A^* \dots]_{B'}$
- A focus alternative to $[\dots A_F \dots]_B$ is, roughly, the meaning of any phrase $[\dots A^* \dots]_{B'}$, where B' is identical to B, except that A is replaced by some A^* of the same semantic type.
- In other words, a focus A and its alternative A^* have to be paradigmatic (within B), but no stronger condition of ‘contrastiveness’ is imposed on them.

1.1.1 Examples:

- (1) a. Did Zelda’s mom recommend Mike for the job?
b. No, she recommended PAUL for the job.
- (2) [she recommended Paul_F for the job]~ C

- a. let C = Zelda's mom recommended Mike for the job
 - b. since C has an antecedent, (1a), and is a focus alternative to (2), and is different from (2), the condition is met.
- (3) American farmers often buy from CANADIAN farmers.
- (4) American farmers often buy from [Canadian_F farmers]~ C .
- a. let C = American farmers
 - b. since C has an antecedent, and is a focus alternative to, but different from, *Canadian farmers*, the condition is met.

“The rule [which R contemplates; DB] . . . is incomplete, in that it refers to an undefined notion of contrast. In applying it, we would have to know exactly what it is to construe two phrases as contrasting. Possibly there is a lot to say about this [. . .] [M]y strategy in this paper will be a different, more formalist one which will eventually strip away any reference to contrast.” (Rooth, 1992, p.82)

- (5) F to prosody mapping (guessed)
- a. within a focus domain, a node dominated by F is stronger (no weaker) than any node not dominated by F
 - b. otherwise, apply default prosody

1.1.2 Overfocussing and Domain Microsomia

Problem w/ Rooth's account:

- tells us whether F-marking and domain choice are legitimate . . .
- . . . but not when to start an F-domain to begin with
- . . . or how much to F-mark

1.1.3 Diminutive Domains and Frivolous Foci

- (6) a. Did Zelda's mom recommend Mike for the job?
b. No, she recommended Paul for the job.
- (7) [she recommended Paul_F for the job]~ C
- a. antecedent to C : *Zelda's mom recommend Mike for the job* ('Mike' contrasts with 'Paul')
- (8) a. [she recommended Paul_F]~ C for the job
b. [she recommended Paul_F for the job_{F}]~ C}

1.1.4 Aside: Two trivial types of focus domains

$$(9) \quad [A_F]_B \sim C$$

Completely uninformative, since anything qualifies as an antecedent.

$$(10) \quad [\dots]_B \sim C$$

Excluded, since the only possible value for C would have to be A , but by definition $C \neq A$.

Otherwise, would require that $C=B$ (really: that the value of C be the same as the denotation of B), i.e. that B has a literal antecedent.

1.2 Schwarzschild 1999

- Givenness: Anything that is not F-marked must be Given.
- Avoid F!

$$(11) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} & B & \\ & \wedge & \\ \dots & A_F & \dots \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{ccc} & & \\ & B & \sim C \\ & \wedge & \\ \dots & A_F & \dots \end{array}$$

Schwarzschild: everything in B except A must be Given, and A will not be (since else it shouldn't be F-marked)

\Rightarrow some $[\dots A^* \dots]_{B'}$ must be Given

Rooth: the context must provide some antecedent (for C) of the form $[\dots A^* \dots]_{B'}$

So we can think of Schwarzschild's theory as Rooth's, plus...

- every node is a focus domain
- AvoidF!

2 A Mix

2.1 A different way to get Rooth's theory to do the right thing

- Maximize F-Domains!
 - build domains as big as possible

3 Wagner's (2006) Challenge

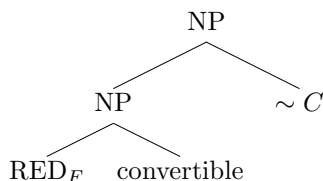
3.1 Deaccenting requires local contrast

- (15) Mary's uncle, who produces high-end convertibles, is coming to her wedding. I wonder what he brought as a present.
- a. He brought a [CHEAP convertible].
 - b. #He brought a [RED convertible]
 - c. He brought a red convertible.

3.1.1 Further Examples

- (16) A n (preferred over a N and acceptance rating of at least 50%)
- a. Mary plays many instruments, her favorite being the Spanish guitar. So I asked if she would play on my birthday. She agreed to play some electric guitar. [or perhaps]
 - b. Steve is a Steinway dealer (the finest pianos in the world). He's also my daughter's godfather. I wonder what she'll get from him for her 5th birthday. He'll probably get her a cheap piano. [or perhaps]
- (17) A N (A n acceptance below 30%)
- a. Sarah is well known for her delicious chocolate cakes. So when we had a potluck dinner, guess what she signed up for bringing? She signed up to bring a small cake. [not]
 - b. Kate has this amazing record collection, which is the apple of her eye. But when she was strapped for cash, guess what she sold? She sold some classical records. [not]

3.2 The Challenge for Root and Schwarzschild



... is well-formed if the context provides an antecedent for the variable C s.t.

- $C \in \llbracket \text{RED}_F \text{ convertible} \rrbracket^f$
- $C \neq \llbracket \text{RED}_F \text{ convertible} \rrbracket$

Since ‘high-end convertible’ \in $\llbracket \text{RED}_F \text{ convertible} \rrbracket^f$, this structure is well-formed.

3.3 Wagner’s Proposal

- An expression and its alternative(s) must contrast. *high-end convertible* and *cheap convertible* contrast, but *high-end convertible* and *red convertible* do not. Call these *True Alternatives*.
- Grammar marks Givenness, but not focus.
- any structure of the form



... is subject to the following constraint (paraphrased):

- there must be a True Alternative to A^* to A s.t. $[A^* B]$ is Given

- (18) he brought her a cheap convertible
- given: high-end convertible ($A^* = \textit{high-end}$, $A = \textit{cheap}$)
 - high-end* is a True Alternative to *cheap*
- (19) he brought her a red convertible
- given: high-end convertible ($A^* = \textit{high-end}$, $A = \textit{red}$)
 - high-end* is not a True Alternative to *red*

The correct structure:

- (20) he brought her a red convertible
- (21) [he brought her]_G a red convertible

3.3.1 Big Question:

Could We Just Add the Contrast Requirement to the Older Theories?

3.3.2 Rescuing Rooth

- (22) he brought [a red_F convertible] $\sim C$

If $\llbracket \text{red}_F \rrbracket^f$ only gave us True Alternatives to ‘red’, thus excluding ‘high end’, C cannot be ‘high-end convertible’ (since that’s not in $\llbracket \text{red}_F \text{ convertible} \rrbracket^f$). Nothing like ‘blue convertible’ etc. (which presumably *is* a True Alternative) is provided by the context.

Correct structures could be:

(23) [he brought [a red convertible]_F] ~ *C*

OK since the set of True Alternatives (‘he brought candy’, ‘he brought a harp’, ‘he brought a red convertible’, ‘he brought a red convertible’,...) is given by the question.

(24) he brought a red convertible

Also ok (as would be F on VP or S).

3.3.3 Rescuing Schwarzschild?

(25) [*RED_F convertible*] is Given if *convertible* is Given.

Possible manoeuvre:

(26) *RED_F* is only Given if some True Alternative to ‘red’ is given

- (27) a. given: convertible
b. not given: red, red convertible
⇒ red_F convertible
c. requires some True Alternative X to ‘red’ to be Given
d. only candidate: *high-end*
e. since ‘high-end’ isn’t a True Alternative to ‘red’, this is illegitimate

But how about the (ostensibly) correct structure?

- (28) a. *he brought [a red convertible]_F
b. *he brought a red convertible_F
c. *he brought a red_F convertible_F

3.4 Explicating contrast (at least a little bit)

So far we’ve dodged the question what is contrasting and what is not.

Tentatively, I want to suggest that Rooth’s condition be amended along the following lines:

- (29) [... *A_F* ...]_B ~ *C*
a. is well-formed if the context provides a value for *C* s.t. *C* is an alternative to, but different from, B
b. if well-formed, it triggers an (adversative) implicature about *C*
- (30) I’ll bring ZELDA_F to the party, not Lesley.
- (31) He brought her a CHEAP_F convertible, not a high-end one.

- (32) He brought her a RED_F convertible
- a. #... not a high-end one (not a relevant or plausible thing to imply)
 - b. #... not a blue one (not contextually provided)
(... and probably also not an intended contrast)

3.5 Interim Summary

- Wagner's examples argue that alternatives must be contrastive.
- This is incompatible with Schwarzschild's idea that anything that is not Given is F-marked.
- There is no inherent reason, however, to use G (as Wagner does), rather than F. One can amend Rooth's system to capture Wagner's contrasts, using F only.
- Question: Are there independent reasons to choose G marking over F marking, or *vice versa*?

4 Kehler's (2005) Challenge

4.1 Data

- (33) John cited Mary, but...
- a. he DISSED SUE. [x]
 - b. ?he dissed SUE.
- (34) Fred read the menu and then...
- a. he ordered a HAMburger.
 - b. #he ORdered a HAMburger.

Pretheoretically speaking, this is the difference between one focus and two foci.

- (35) a. Mary is very generous. She bought her husband a Rolex.
 b. Mary wouldn't give her father enough money to see a doctor, but she bought her husband a Rolex. [x]

4.2 Proposal

I want to suggest that the same adversative implicatures are triggered here:

(36) John DISSED SUE ... he didn't quote her and he didn't diss Mary

(37) John ORDERed a HAMburger # ... he didn't read a hamburger and didn't order the menu

NB: It is important that the contrast be construed relative to the actual environment of the focus. The point is not that ordering and reading can't contrast, but that ordering a hamburger doesn't contrast with reading a hamburger.

(38) In the store, John read the hardcover, but then he ORDERed the PAPERback.

4.3 Representations

(39) (John quoted Mary, but) [[[he dissed_{F1} Sue_{F2}]_{~1} C] _{~2} C']

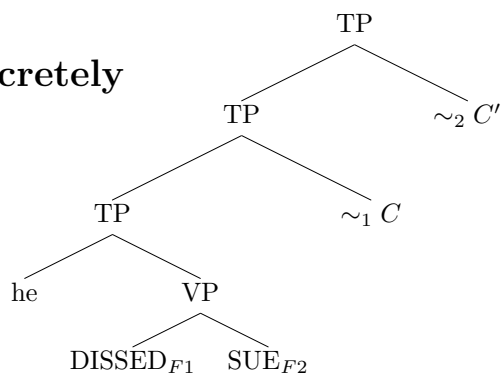
(40) (John read the menu and) [he [ordered a hamburger]_{F1}]_{~1} C

The crucial point of the argument:

- In these examples, we want to interpret the foci as contrastive.
- But, unlike in the Wagner-type examples, the foci aren't adjacent to Given elements.
- So this may be reason to prefer F-marking over G-marking in our theory.

(41)

4.4 More concretely



(42) $[A \sim_i C]$

- is well-formed if
 - some focus alternative $A^* \in \llbracket A \rrbracket^f$ is Given
 - the value of C is in $\llbracket A \rrbracket^{f_i}$
- if well-formed, it asserts $\llbracket A \rrbracket$ and implies $\neg\llbracket C \rrbracket$

(43) a. $\llbracket \text{TP} \rrbracket^f =$ 'he X-ed y' e.g. 'he quoted Mary'

- b. $[[TP]]^{f_1}$ = ‘he X-ed Sue’ e.g. C = ‘he quoted Sue’
 c. $[[TP]]^{f_2}$ = ‘he dissed y’ e.g. C' = ‘he dissed Mary’

Note modifications:

- Foci can be selectively bound (not new, cf. Krifka, 1991/2; Wold, 1996; Buring, to appear, a.o.).
- The non-focused part of the focus domain simpliciter needs to be Given, but the implicature is based on only the selected focus.

4.4.1 Summary

- Schwarzschild’s Givenness based focus theory can be seen as a generalization of Rooth’s proposal.
- Both Rooth and Schwarzschild define a weak notion of alternative, which doesn’t involve any contrast.
- Examples by Wagner and Kehler argue for a stronger, contrastive notion of alternative.
- A slightly different way of generalizing Rooth’s system can be amended to capture these examples, and to explicate the notion of contrast.
- Kehler’s double focus examples may provide a tentative argument in favor of F-marking over G-marking.

References

- Buring, Daniel (to appear). “Been There, Marked That — A Tentative Theory of Second Occurrence Focus.” In Christina Kim and Ananda Lima, eds., *UCLA Working Papers in Linguistics*.
- Kehler, Andrew (2005). “Coherence-Driven Constraints on the Placement of Accent.” In *Proceedings of the 15th Conference on Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT-15)*.
- Krifka, Manfred (1991/2). “A Compositional Semantics for Multiple Focus Constructions.” In ?, 17–53.
- Rooth, Mats (1992). “A Theory of Focus Interpretation.” *Natural Language Semantics* 1:75–116.

- Schwarzschild, Roger (1999). "GIVENness, AvoidF and Other Constraints on the Placement of Accent." *Natural Language Semantics* 7(2):141–177.
- Wagner, Michael (2006). "Givenness and Locality." In Jonathan Howell and Masayuki Gibson, eds., *Proceedings of SALT 16*. Ithaca: CLC Publications.
- Williams, Edwin (1997). "Blocking and Anaphora." *Linguistics Inquiry* 28:577–628.
- Wold, Dag (1996). "Long distance selective binding. the case of focus." In Teresa Galloway and Justin Spence, eds., *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) VI*, 311–328. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.