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

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1 Two Modern Classics in Focus Interpretation

1.1 Rooth 1992

- $B \sim C \ldots A_F \ldots$

  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: $g(C) \in [B]^f$ and $g(C) \neq [B]$

- informally: the context must provide some antecedent of the form
  $[\ldots A^* \ldots]_{B'}$

- A focus alternative to $[\ldots A_F \ldots]_B$ is, roughly, the meaning of any
  phrase $[\ldots A^* \ldots]_{B'}$, 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) $[\text{she recommended Paul}_F \text{ for the job}] \sim C$
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]$_\sim C$.
   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]$_\sim C$
   a. antecedent to $C$: Zelda’s mom recommend Mike for the job (‘Mike’ contrasts with ‘Paul’)

(8) a. [she recommended Paul$_F$]$_\sim C$ for the job
   b. [she recommended Paul$_F$ for the job$_F$]$_\sim C$
1.1.4 Aside: Two trivial types of focus domains

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

Completely uninformative, since anything qualifies as an antecedent.

(10) \[ \ldots ]_B \sim C \]

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!

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{B} & \quad \ldots A_F \ldots \\
\text{B} & \quad \ldots A_F \ldots \sim C
\end{align*}
\]

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

\[ \Rightarrow \text{some } [\ldots A^* \ldots]_B \text{ must be Given} \]

Rooth: the context must provide some antecedent (for \( C \)) of the form \([\ldots A^* \ldots]_B \).

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
- build as many domains as possible
- domains contain F-marked as well as F-less constituents

• Avoid F!

Speculation on Rationale behind these:

• Don’t Overloop Anaphoric Possibilities (Williams, 1997)
• Maximize Presuppositions (??)

2.1.1 Illustration

(12) Did Zelda’s mom recommend Mike for the job? — No, she recommended PAUL for the job.

(13) a. [she recommended PaulF for the job]∼ C
b. *[she recommended PaulF]∼ C for the job
   domain could be bigger

c. *[she recommended PaulF for the job]F∼ C
   F could be avoided

d. she recommended Paul for the job
   domain could be bigger (duh!)

2.2 Differences

(14) Did you hitchhike? — No, I rented a car.

S: I [ rentedF a carF]F
R: [I [rented a car]F]F∼ C

Not:

\[
\begin{align*}
TP & \sim C5 \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
TP \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
DP \\
& \sim C1 \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
V \\
& \sim C2 \\
\right) \\
\right) \\
\left( \begin{array}{c}
DP_F \\
& \sim C3 \\
\right) \\
\end{array} \right) \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

But:

\[
\begin{align*}
TP & \sim C \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
TP \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
I \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
VP_F \\
& \sim C4 \\
\end{array} \right) \\
\end{array} \right) \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
I \\
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
rented \\
& \sim C5 \\
\end{array} \right) \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
VP_F \\
& \sim C4 \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
rented \\
& \sim C5 \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
a \\
& \sim C5 \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
DP \\
& \sim C3 \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
& \left( \begin{array}{c}
a car \\
& \sim C3 \\
\end{array} \right)
\end{align*}
\]
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 Rooth and Schwarzschild

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NP} \\
\text{NP} \sim C \\
\text{RED}_F \text{ convertible}
\end{array}
\]

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

- $C \in [\text{RED}_F \text{ convertible}]^f$
- $C \neq [\text{RED}_F \text{ convertible}]$
Since ‘high-end convertible’ ∈ [REDₚ convertible]ᵀ, this structure is well-formed.

3.3 Wagner’s Proposal

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

\[ A \overset{G}{\rightarrow} B \]

...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
   a. given: high-end convertible \( (A^*={\text{high-end}}, A={\text{cheap}}) \)
   b. high-end is a True Alternative to cheap

(19) he brought her a red convertible
   a. given: high-end convertible \( (A^*={\text{high-end}}, A={\text{red}}) \)
   b. high-end is not a True Alternative to red

The correct structure:

(20) he brought her a red convertible

(21) [he brought her]ₚ 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 redₚ convertible]≈ C

If [redₚ]ᵀ only gave us True Alternatives to ‘red’, thus excluding ‘high end’, C cannot be ‘high-end convertible’ (since that’s not in [REDₚ convertible]ᵀ). Nothing like ‘blue convertible’ etc. (which presumably is a True Alternative) is provided by the context.

Correct structures could be:
(23) \[\text{he brought [a red convertible]}_F \sim C\]

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) \[\text{RED}_F\text{ convertible} \] is Given if \textit{convertible} is Given.

Possible manoeuvre:

(26) \text{RED}_F \text{ is only Given if some True Alternative to ‘red’ is given}

(27) a. given: convertible
   b. not given: red, red convertible
      \Rightarrow \text{red}_F\text{ convertible}
   c. requires some True Alternative X to ‘red’ to be Given
   d. only candidate: \textit{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) \[\ldots A_F \ldots]_B \sim C\]
   a. is well-formed if the context provides a value for \textit{C} s.t. \textit{C} is an alternative to, but different from, \textit{B}
   b. if well-formed, it triggers an (adversative) implicature about \textit{C}

(30) I’ll bring \textit{ZELDA}_F to the party, not Lesley.

(31) He brought her a \textit{CHEAP}_F convertible, not a high-end one.
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}] \sim_1 C] \sim_2 C'  

(40) (John read the menu and) [he [ordered a hamburger]_{F1}] \sim_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 the-
  ory.

4.4 More concretely

(41)

\[
\begin{aligned}
&\text{TP} \\
&\quad \sim_2 C' \\
&\quad \sim_1 C \\
&\quad \text{he} \\
&\quad \text{VP} \\
&\quad \text{DISSED}_{F1} \text{ SUE}_{F2}
\end{aligned}
\]

(42) \[ A \sim_i C \]

a. is well-formed if
   (i) some focus alternative \( A* \in [A]^f \) is Given
   (ii) the value of \( C \) is in \([A]^i\)

b. if well-formed, it asserts \([A]\) and implies \(![C]\)

(43) a. \([\text{TP}]^f = \text{‘he X-ed y’}\) 
    e.g. ‘he quoted Mary’
b. \( \text{[TP]}^f_1 = \text{‘he X-ed Sue’} \) e.g. \( C = \text{‘he quoted Sue’} \)
c. \( \text{[TP]}^f_2 = \text{‘he dissed y’} \) e.g. \( C’ = \text{‘he dissed Mary’} \)

Note modifications:

- Foci can be selectively bound (not new, cf. Krifka, 1991/2; Wold, 1996; Büring, 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 Giveness 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


