Notes on Givenness and Contrast

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Outline

- Basic notions
  - De-accenting, Focus, Givenness, and Contrast

- Does Givenness marking create Contrast?
  - Non-contrastive Givenness exists with a syntactic limitation
  - De-accenting after contrastively Focused elements applies in a broader range of environments

- Against a unified analysis of de-accenting

- A possible sketch of the information status-prosody interface
Basic notions

- Constituents outside the domain of Focus are de-accented in the sense of Ladd (1996)

  (1) Who shot J.R.?

  [ KRISTIN ] shot J.R.

- Focus is taken to be anaphoric to a set of alternatives (Rooth 1992), or indicative of a Question Under Discussion (Roberts 1996)
Examples like the following suggest a notion of GIVENness (Schwarzschild 1999) to augment Focus

(2) Mary’s rich uncle buys and sells high-end convertibles for a living. He’s coming to Mary’s wedding. I wonder what he got her as a present.

He got her [ a CHEAP convertible ]
Schwarzschild (1999, p.9): “An utterance U counts as GIVEN iff it has a salient antecedent A and:
- a. if U is of type e, then A and U corefer
- b. otherwise: modulo existential type shifting, A entails the Existential-F-Closure of U.”

Why don’t you have some French toast?

[I’ve forgotten how to MAKE French toast.] (Ladd 1996, p.175)

Non F-marked elements (‘‘French toast’’) must be Given

F-mark as little as possible
Basic notions

- Selkirk (2007): Focus feature is present only when a contrastive interpretation is present.

- Given-feature is responsible for de-accenting when no contrast is implied.

(4) A: Anscombe has been feuding with her colleagues

B: Wittgenstein brought a glass of wine over to Anscombe. Perhaps they have made up.
Givenness and Contrast

- Givenness marking requires a contrastive antecedent for the constituent to which the accent shifts.

(5) Mary's rich uncle buys and sells high-end convertibles for a living. He's coming to Mary's wedding. I wonder what he got her as a present.

He got her [a CHEAP convertible]

#He got her [a BLUE convertible]
Givenness and Contrast

- Contrast is defined as mutual exclusivity under universal type shifting
  - For all $x$: $x$ is a cheap convertible entails there is no $x$ s.t. $x$ is a high-end convertible

- Wagner claims this contrast requirement is always present, and thus Givenness is all we need to account for de-accenting motivated by information status

- Wagner notes two special cases:
  - Shifting accent from predicate to subject requires a weakened notion of Contrast
  - De-accenting of objects requires LF-movement
Mutual exclusivity is untenable for examples where only the subject is accented (Wagner 2010, p.22)

(6) Mary went swimming. Then, JANE went swimming.

The antecedent Mary went swimming must be excluded not by Jane went swimming, but rather by EXH(went swimming) (Jane)

[[EXH]] = λ a. λ b. [[ab]] ∧ ∀ b’ ∈ C : [[ab’]] = 1 → ([ab] ⇒ [ab’])
Shift to subject: Exhaustivity?

- EXH can’t be the right operator, because the antecedent can be entailed.

(7) When I got to the lake, Mary was swimming. Soon, EVERYBODY was swimming.

- EXH(was swimming)(everybody) does NOT exclude Mary was swimming.
Smith got away from the scene of the crime in Mary’s cheap convertible.

Q: What happened next?

A: The car broke down, and a detective ARRESTED Smith.

- If Given objects move to a propositional node at LF, then the contrast is between \( \lambda x . \text{got-away}(x) \) and \( \lambda x . \text{arrested}(\text{Smith},x) \)

- If EXH applies, then the license for de-accenting the DO becomes simply that something else happened to Smith in the discourse context.
Movement at LF?

- Wagner (2010, p.27):
  - You should hire a D.J.  #The PRESENCE of a DJ makes a big DIFFERENCE at a party.
  - De-accenting within the NP is claimed to require explicit contrast, brought on by the fact that the PP can’t move.

- Problem: “The presence of a DJ”, as with many examples that seem to support the contrast requirement, is entirely Given (People really LIKE the presence of a DJ)

- All-Given elements can receive default prosody.
My mother asked if we were moving to the city. I told her that the violence in the city is a turn-off.

compare to:

Q: What did Billie say on the phone?
A: She said the violence in the city is a turn-off.
De-accenting within a coordination structure

- Seems fine in the absence of contrast, so long as the accent doesn't fall on the conjunction itself.

- Violates an island constraint.

(10) *[PP From which store ] did you buy a necklace $t_{PP}$ and a belt from Macy's?

Oh you went to Sak's? Just yesterday I bought a NECKLACE from Sak's and a BELT from MACY's.
Conversation starters

- Sometimes elements are de-accented when salient in the visual (non-linguistic) context.
- Utterances of this type can start a conversation.
- It is difficult to apply any notion of contrast to these.

(11) (Passing a road sign reading Dayton, OH) I used to LIVE in Dayton.

(12) (Upon seeing you reading a biography of Tolstoy) My great-grandfather was FRIENDS with Tolstoy.
When is Contrast needed?

- We have seen that it is problematic to claim that de-accenting always requires contrast…

- But we can’t ignore Wagner’s insight
  - [ CHEAP convertible ] vs. #[ BLUE convertible ]

- Question: when must we have contrast to de-accent?

- Hypothesis: when the accent shifts onto an adjoining modifier
Convertibles can be very dangerous. So imagine my reaction when Jack felt it necessary to buy his NIECE a convertible.

vs.

#...imagine my reaction when Jack felt it necessary to buy his niece a BLUE convertible.
When is Contrast needed?

- Adjuncts can de-accent without creating contrast (from Sak’s in example 10)
- So can arguments of verbs (3, 8, 11)
- So can entire predicates (6, 7)
- Contrast is required to de-accent a modified element without de-accenting its modifying adjunct.
- Adverbs bear this out.
When is Contrast needed?

(14) We all know that Bill loves to dance. Just yesterday, I saw him in his OFFICE dancing.

vs.

...I saw him in his office WILDLY dancing.
Against Unification

- There is a syntactic restriction on non-contrastive Givenness.

- Contrast, on the other hand, can shift any accent.
  - Some say I use too many bullet points, but I think bullet points are UNDERutilized.
  - ...1% INspiration and 99% PERspiration (see Artstein 2004)

- The system behaves exactly as we’d expect if Givenness and Focus of Contrast were two different aspects of language with two different behaviors.

- This casts doubt on a unified analysis.
Against Unification

- Why do Givenness and FOC behave differently syntactically?
- Speculation: Givenness is a syntactic feature, while the less constrained FOC is a pragmatic phenomenon having to do with the structure of discourse (similar to Roberts 1996 or Vallduví 1990)
- Tentative support: some pronouns seem to be lexically Given, but can receive accent when contrastive

(15) What happened was this: [ our son BIT someone ]

but

He didn't bite anyone today? I'm sure he bit SOMEONE...
In most cases, GIVEN constituents de-accent as analyzed in Schwarzschild (1999).

In cases where de-accenting shifts prominence onto a modifier, an explicit contrast is needed, à la Wagner (2010).

This suggests two different forces at work: a syntactically constrained G-feature and a more promiscuous notion of contrastive Focus.

Further research will explore the difference between Givenness and Contrast in more depth, and probe how it relates to the linguistic system as a whole.
References

Contrasting events?

- If Mary swimming and EVERYBODY swimming are different events, Wagner’s original mutual exclusivity account could apply in an event semantics (Kroch, p.c.)

- This would certainly clean things up, but it’s not clear that any event antecedent is necessary.

(16)  I don’t think the city is safe anymore. My COUSIN lives in the city, and she says it’s deteriorating fast.

- Also, doesn’t ameliorate other problems