050.826   Research Seminar
Spring 2000
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Perspectives on Focus
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Week 9: *Synthesis Day, take 3*

Büring 1998 (borrowing from Schwarzschild 199x), rapid summary

Rule of Interpretation (GIVENNESS): If a constituent is not F-marked, it must be GIVEN.

(1)   **Avoid F**
All else being equal, F-mark as little as needed to be consistent with the Rule of Interpretation.

(2)   **Congruence**:
A move M is *congruent* within a D-tree D if it meets…
a.   **F-condition**: Any constituent that is neither T- nor F-marked must be Given wrt PRED(M) [the immediate explicit predecessor of M].
b.   **T-condition**: M^t indicates a strategy to answer IQUD(IQUD(M)) (provided M contains T-marking).

Evaluating GIVENNESS—treat T and F on a par when evaluating "existential TF-closure"; replace each with general expressions (*someone*, *something*, etc.).

> Summary of the system:
> • A constituent must be marked as T or F if not GIVEN.
> • F is to be avoided as much as possible.
> • T imposes additional restrictions (the existence of a [good] strategy).

T-marking means that there has to *be* a strategy. Consider:

(3)   No doubt Rufus and Eszter had an affair. The real question is who seduced whom. I bet…
a.   Eszter$_F$ hat Rufus$_F$ verführt.
b.   # Eszter$_T$ hat Rufus$_F$ verführt.

Once one has been asserted, both questions (Did E seduce R? Did R seduce E?) are answered.

Incidentally, this is a context which interacts with Superiority in German—Wiltschko "Superiority in German" (handout from 13th Comparative Germanic Syntax Workshop, LSA Institute at Cornell, July 18, 1997). German in general doesn't show much in the way of Superiority effects (though Wiltschko was trying to argue that this was because most German *wh*-words end up being "inherently D-linked"). You do get severe Superiority violations in cases like:

(4)   I have heard that Peter and Mary had an affair. Can you tell me:
a.   Wer hat wen verführt?
who has whom seduced
'Who seduced whom?'
b.   * Wen hat wer verführt?
whom has who seduced
'Whom did who seduce?'

These are kind of tricky because if D-linking has something to do with "having the members of the set in mind", it's hard to believe these *wouldn't* be D-linked—you have two members that make up the entire set, and that same set is being evaluated both for *who* and for *whom*.

So if it doesn't boil down to D-linking, what *does* it boil down to? Well, Büring says that the *answer* can't have topic marking, but must have focus marking corresponding to both *wh*-words. That means no strategy, no superquestion.

So, what if:
• German is "free to violate Superiority" because there are two ways to get *wh*-words into SpecCP. One is *wh*-movement, but the other is something like "topicalization" (for the moment, in the syntactic sense—i.e. whatever operation it is that gives German its V2-ness). So, if *wh*-movement is filling SpecCP, you have to take the topmost *wh*-word (Superiority is respected). If "topicalization" is filling SpecCP, you can overlook one of the *wh*-words in favor of the thing that carries the relevant "topicalization" feature (Superiority may appear to be violated).
• In these cases where the domain is restricted to two, the "topicalization" feature is not allowed—only *wh*-movement can fill SpecCP, and so Superiority must be respected.
• T-marking in the answer is not allowed; that is, no strategy, no superquestion.
• Ok, that's the *answer*—now what does it imply about the *question*, and why it is bad? Let's try to figure that out…

Where does this put is wrt our overall project?

Issue number one: Büring and his topics.
How does his notion of "topic" line up with what we've seen called "topics"?

We can be pretty sure that Büring's topics are not everybody's topics, because Büring's topics require a special accent:

(5)   John walked into the crowded room. [He]$_T$ sat down.

(6)   John walked into the crowded room. [He]$_B$ sat down. *What did everyone else do?*

One distinction: "Theme" vs. "Rheme" (=Topic vs. Comment)
Rheme: The "update potential" of the sentence.
Theme: Where the update should apply, what the sentence is "about."

Another distinction: "Link" vs. "Tail"

Link: A link to the previous discourse, what the sentence is about.
Tail: Things which are discourse-old, but yet not really what the sentence is about…?

None of these things seem to correspond to Büring's "topic".
In a discourse sense, though, you could say that (5) does answer a superquestion: *What about John?* or *What happened to John?* or *What did John do?* or something.

We *believe* Link vs. Tail because they are *syntactically* differentiated in Catalan.
We *believe* Theme vs. Rheme because it makes good information-update sense.

Moreover, there are "shifted topics" vs. "continuing topics" which seem to be differentiated by whether or not they are GIVEN. In Mayan languages, there is some reason to believe that shifted topics occupy a different *syntactic* position (specifically, further out, CP-external) from continuing topics.

Shifted topics have kind of a weird status. They are not GIVEN, but they are what the sentence is "about", the location of the information update. Are those two things even compatible?

(7)   *So, this guy, he walked up to me and asked me for a quarter.*

        "There was [this guy]$_F$. He$_T$ walked up to me and asked me for a quarter."

Can we exclude shifted topics from our domain of accountability by suggesting that they in some sense stand in for a prior sentence, at least for the purposes of discourse? They do seem to be CP-*external*, after all.

As for Büring's "topics", do they need to be contained in the Theme? Do they need to be coextensive with the Theme?

(8)   We are speaking today of topics.
        Some topics require no special accent.
        [[Büring's]$_B$ topics]$_T$ require a [B]$_F$-accent.

I don't think B-accent even needs to be in the Theme. Shouldn't the use of the pronoun *he* tell us that *he* (Bill) is the Theme?

(9)   What did Bill buy yesterday?
        Well, [he]$_T$ certainly didn't buy [me]$_B$ anything.
                        (strategy: *{Did Bill buy x anything yesterday?}*)

- Call Büring's topic **B-marking** (for "B-accent"? For "Büring"? Your choice.).
- Sentences can be split into [–Rheme] ("Theme") and [+Rheme] ("Comment").
- The [–Rheme] part of sentences (the part which *isn't* going to update the context) can be divided into "Link" and "Tail." Tail is informationally inert as far as I can tell, but it *does* seem to have syntactic effects.
  So: Question: Do we say "Link" is a positive specification (on a subconstituent of the [–Rheme] region), or do we say that each part of the [–Rheme] region is specified either for [+Link] or [–Link]? Despite Vallduví and his data, I'm leaning toward privative specification of "Link" leaving "Tail" as the totally unmarked case.
- B-marking and Theme/Rheme split are independent.

- Mark a constituent with B-marking (if there's a strategy for a superquestion, and the thing isn't GIVEN).
- Mark a constituent as "Link" if it locates the point of information update in the context. This constituent pretty much has to be GIVEN (assuming we dismiss shifted topics as above).
- Mark a constituent as "[+Rheme]" if it is the "context update potential", in general stuff that isn't GIVEN. (Not clear what *harm* there is in allowing GIVEN stuff in the Rheme, so perhaps *this* is what Büring/Schwarzschild are marking with "F").

Issue number two: Identificational focus vs. information focus.

Information focus: new stuff, not necessarily contrastive.
Identificational focus: new stuff, but contrastive, syntactically active.
        ("Kontrast"—associates with *only*, moves like a quantifier, moves in Finnish.)

So, these are both things which are not GIVEN, at least.

Note: Here is a mismatch between accounts—what's *really* focus?
        Is it "new stuff" or is it "F-marked stuff"?
                (since according to Büring/Schwarzschild, even GIVEN stuff is sometimes "F-marked.")

Suppose for now that we're going with Büring/Schwarzschild, and we're saying that "—focus" is the stuff that's F-marked, which can sometimes be GIVEN. This *doesn't distinguish* information focus from identificational focus.

Seems reasonable to suppose that "F-marked" is really closest to information focus, and that identificational focus is something over and above. Say, "Kontrast". Something operator-like, that moves in the syntax, *explicitly* quantifying over an alternative set.

É. Kiss distinguished *contrastive* focus from *noncontrastive* focus, basically along the dimension of being able to enumerate the set. Is this an important distinction? Maybe. Can we build it into a parameter of the [+Kontrast] operator? Maybe…

So maybe:
        - As above, F-marked stuff is [+Rheme].
        - Mark a constituent as [+Kontrast] (which is syntactically/semantically a quantifier)?

Issue number three: Interface conditions, numerations…

Deeper question: Büring and Schwarzschild take F-marking to be more of an *interface condition*—if we say that F marking is available in the syntax, are we saying that mis-F-marked sentences *crash* at the interface (if they don't meet the pragmatic conditions of the utterance)? Consider AVOIDF: It must be the case that numerations with different numbers of F's *compete*, since we need a sentence with "too many F's" to crash. Is this pro-OT-style-syntax-pragmatics-integration?

T-marking and the "numeration"

(10) Q   What did Fred and his friend eat?
    SQ   *What did Fred's FRIEND eat?*
    A.   Fred's friend ate the EGGS$_F$.
    A′.   [Fred's FRIEND$_F$]$_T$ ate the EGGS$_F$.
    A″.   # [FRED$_F$'s FRIEND$_F$]$_T$ ate the EGGS$_F$.

Büring claims that both A and A′ are ok in the context of Q. Pretend that's true.
Then: A and A′ must not be competing (wrt to AVOIDF), since otherwise A′ would lose
        (like A″ loses to A′).
Conclusion: "T-marking" is in the "numeration" determining the competitors.
        (cf. different choices of words
                I think it should be [*Minnie Driver*]
        vs.   *I think it should be* [*that British actress who played…*])

but fn. 14:

Yet:

(11) Q.   What did you do yesterday?
    SQ.   What did you do in the morning?
    A.   [In the MORning$_F$]$_T$ I went to SCHOOL$_F$.
    A′.   # [In the MORning$_F$]$_F$ I went to SCHOOL$_F$.
    A″.   # In the morning I went to SCHOOL$_F$.

Point: It looks like A′ loses to A. But it *can't* because they *differ in T-marking*.
        Instead, there's something wrong with A′: It *could* have used a T, but it used an F.
        Idea? If you're going to need an F anyway and you *could* use a T without
                violating the T-condition, use a T, not an F.
        Implementation: must be something like "even if you don't have a T in the input
                you can insert one if *can* use a T and you'd have to use an F otherwise."

Some other things to think about? How does focus work in questions?

• English multiple question: *Who bought what?* — are they really *Who bought what$_F$?*
Intonationally it kind of sounds like it.

• What are the discourse conditions on *Did John buy COFFEE yesterday?* Is that topic?
focus?

• Once we've settled these things, can we explain anything about the Wiltschko German
facts? That is, can we tie the syntactic availability of features to the pragmatic availability
of topic marking?