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Topic/Focus vs. Given/New: Information Structure and Coreference Relations in an Annotated Corpus

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Keywords: Topic/Focus, Given/New, Information Structure, Coreference

Schedule: Fri 16.00 Room 9

1. Research question

We put under scrutiny two dichotomies discussed in the information structure literature, namely the dichotomy of topic and focus based on the relation of *aboutness*, and the dichotomy between *given* and *new* information (Halliday 1967; for a discussion of some further aspects and more subtle divisions, see Krifka 2008). In particular, we examine whether the topic/focus dichotomy (theme/rheme, or whatever terms may be used) can be based on the distinction between given and new information, or whether the ‘aboutness’ relation is a more appropriate basis.

2. Approach

With the approach we subscribe to (Sgall et al. 1986; Hajičová et al. 1998), information structure of the sentence (its Topic-Focus articulation) is understood as based on the relation of *aboutness* (Krifka 2008 mistakenly interprets our approach as based on the given–new strategy), that is as a *linguistic* rather than a *cognitive* structuring, as illustrated by the following examples:

- Mary called Jim a Republican.
(a) Then he insulted HER.
(b) Then he INSULTED her.

In both (a) and (b), Jim and Mary are (cognitively) ‘known’ since they are referred to in the preceding sentence, but only (b) is linguistically structured as being about them and the information in the Focus

is the event of insulting. This interpretation is supported by the different intonation patterns indicated by the capitals.

3. Method

We start from the hypothesis that a ‘given’ item in a sentence must be somehow anchored in the previous sentence(s) while a ‘new’ item lacks such an anchoring, i.e. we study the Topic/Focus dichotomy vis-a-vis coreference relations (cf. Prince 1981; Kuno 1972).

4. Data

For our study, we use the annotated Czech data from the Prague Discourse Treebank 2.0 (PDiT 2.0; M. Rysová et al., 2016), which provides (i) the bipartition of the sentence into Topic (T) and Focus (F), and (ii) basic anaphoric relations, incl. some types of bridging. Such an annotation has allowed us to follow both the absence and the presence of anaphoric links leading from some element of the Focus of the sentence to the preceding context. In case of an absence of such a link, we may conclude that the Focus of the sentence is ‘new’; a presence of such a link indicates the presence of a ‘given’ element in the Focus.

5. (Achieved) observations and (expected) results

We put under scrutiny Czech documents of 10 different genres containing more than 20 sentences each. In 7286 cases (37%), there was no anaphoric link leading from the Focus of the given sentence to some element of the previous sentence(s); and there were 12159 cases (63%) where there was a link from an element in the Focus of the sentence to some element occurring in the previous sentence(s), out of which in 6453 cases (53% of 12159) the link led to the Focus and in 5706 cases (47%) the link led to the Topic.

The following preliminary observations can be stated:

(a) The observed numbers show that in most cases (63%), the Focus part of the sentence does not represent ‘new’ information.

(b) In case the coreferential link from an element of the given sentence led to an element in the Focus of the preceding sentence, the anaphoric relation is mostly of the type of bridging and is often interpreted as a contrast.

In the presentation, we (i) illustrate the above observations by actual corpus examples, (ii) present more detailed statistical data, and (iii) discuss the limits of the applied approach to givenness, also with regard to the syntactic coding (Givon 1983, Ariel 1990).

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The systematicity behind blending

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Keywords: blends, prosodic morphology, regularity

Schedule: We 16.30 Room 10

This paper aims to show that blending is a largely systematic process, contrary to the traditional claim that blends or portmanteau words are irregular. The data discussed in this presentation come from the literature about blends and are mainly English.

Blends are a concatenation of portions of two words:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---------------|---|-----------|
| (1) brunch | < | breakfast | + | lunch |
| smog | < | smoke | + | fog |
| (2) stagflation | < | stagnation | + | inflation |
| advertorial | < | advertisement | + | editorial |

Since the cutting off point in these blends seems to be unpredictable, Bauer (2003:47) questions whether blends form a real part of morphology.

In the first part of this presentation, a short overview of the traditional and of the cognitive linguistic literature on blends will be given. Most of this research concentrates on classifying blends within different types (Cannon 1986 & Kemmer 2003). The result of this taxonomy is a range of different types of blends in which hardly any regularity can be detected.

In the second part of the presentation it will be demonstrated how the work of Kelly (1998) can be seen as a next step in the analysis of blends. Kelly studied the differences between the two source words that are fused in blends. Although he found already some interesting differences and tendencies, Kelly's observations did not lead to clear word formation conditions or constraints. The same can be said about the very sophisticated statistical studies of Gries (2004a, b, c). However, the finding of Gries that the first source word contributes its left part to the blend, where it becomes the beginning of the resulting form, and the second source word its final part, will turn out to be of great importance for the formation of blends.

In the third part of the presentation formal aspects of blend formation will be studied. It will be demonstrated how an Optimality Theory approach of morphological prosodic aspects may reveal the systematicity of blend formation.

Beard (1998:57) was the first to observe that the prosodic structure of the derived forms, thus the blends, must be identical with that of the model, which is the second source word. This observation