Subparts of contrastive topics and the syntax–information structure interface

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- The syntax–information structure interface
  — competing approaches and their predictions for focus movement

- New empirical observations about contrastive topic movement

- Theoretical consequences

- Open questions

Syntax–information structure interface

Competing approaches

Cartographic approaches: IS notions are directly represented in narrow syntax as formal features

Strong Modularity Hypothesis (SMH): No IS notions are encoded in narrow syntax as formal features

Syntax–information structure interface

Competing approaches

Cartographic approaches:
IS notions are directly represented in narrow syntax as formal features

goes back to: Rizzi (1997)

Strong Modularity Hypothesis (SMH):
No IS notions are encoded in narrow syntax as formal features

cited from: Horvath (2010)

Syntax–information structure interface

Competing approaches

Cartographic approaches: IS notions are directly represented in narrow syntax as formal features

Strong Modularity Hypothesis (SMH): No IS notions are encoded in narrow syntax as formal features

goes back to: Rizzi (1997)

for German: Frey (2005)

cited from: Horvath (2010)

for German: Fanselow & Lenertová (2011)

Syntax–information structure interface

Cartographic approach: movement is triggered by a formal feature

(1)   Was hat Peter gebacken? ('What did Peter bake?')
      — Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

Syntax–information structure interface

Fanselow & Lenertová 2011: Main observations

- **Subparts** of the IS category focus can appear in the Vorfeld.
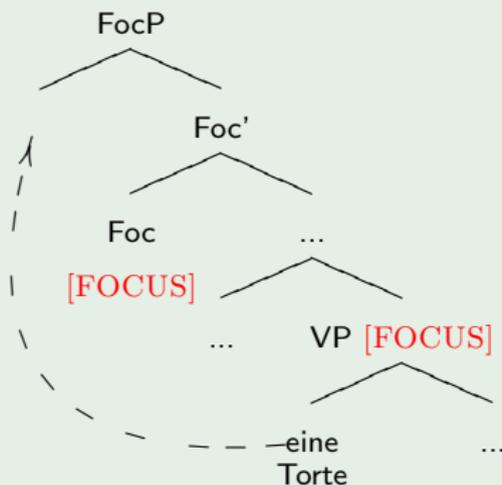 - $\rightarrow$ Problematic for cartographic approaches

Examples

(1) Was hat Peter gebacken? ('What did Peter bake?' — **DP focus**)
     — Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

(2) Was hat Peter gemacht? ('What did Peter do?' — **VP focus**)
     — Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

Syntax–information structure interface

Problematic: $[\text{FOCUS}]$ feature on VP, but only a part of it moves

(3) Was hat Peter gemacht? ('What did Peter do?' — **VP focus**)
— Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

Syntax–information structure interface

Fanselow & Lenertová 2011: Main observations

- **Subparts** of the IS category focus can appear in the Vorfeld; more precisely, units smaller, larger or identical with the semantic focus can be moved to the left periphery, **as long as no structurally accented elements are crossed**.

Examples

(4) Was hat Peter gebacken? ('What did Peter bake?' — **DP focus**)
— Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

(5) Was hat Peter gemacht? ('What did Peter do?' — **VP focus**)
— Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

(6) Was ist passiert? ('What happened?' — **TP focus**)
— #Eine Torte hat Peter gebacken. ('A cake Peter baked.')

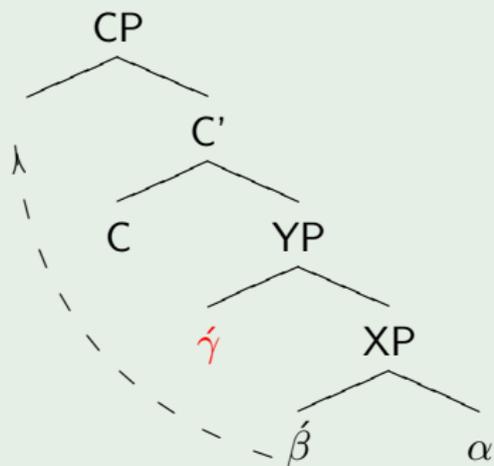# Syntax–information structure interface

Alternative approach: Movement is triggered by an unspecific edge feature in C
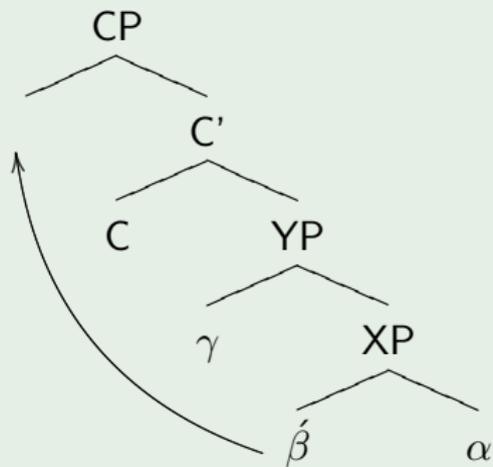
Syntax–information structure interface

Alternative approach: Structural accents cannot be crossed

Summary so far:

- The fact that **subparts of focus** can easily be fronted is an argument in favor of the SMH approach by Fanselow & Lenertová (2011)
- F & L assume a close link between linearization and accentuation which **prohibits the crossing of structural accents**.

New data about CTs as a test case

Main claim:

- In the cartographic approach, movement is **too limited**.
- In the SMH approach, movement is **not limited enough**.
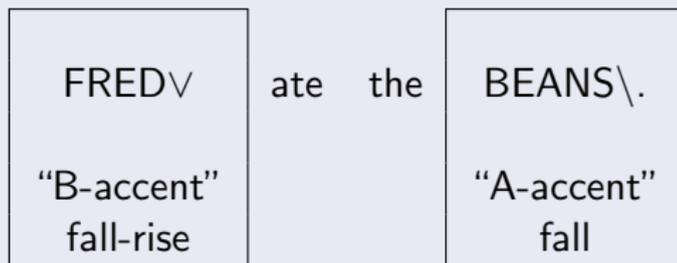
Background: contrastive topics

(7)   A: Well, what about Fred? What did he eat?
           B: FRED∨ ate the BEANS\.

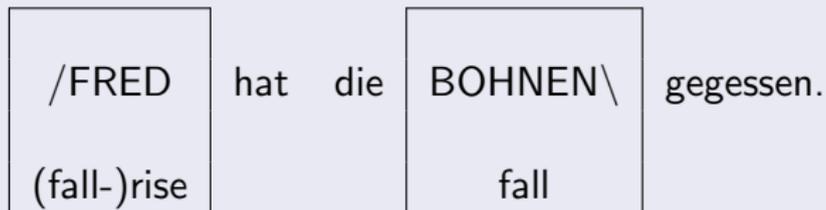FRED = Contrastive Topic (CT); BEANS = Focus

Background: contrastive topics

Phonological properties — English

FRED∨ ate the BEANS\.

"B-accent" fall-rise

"A-accent" fall

Phonological properties — German

/FRED hat die BOHNEN\ gegessen.

(fall-)rise

fall

Background: contrastive topics

Büring's (1997, 2003) observations about semantics / pragmatics

- (8) implies that someone else ate something else
  → **double contrast**.
- Alternatives based on 'Fred' (John, Clara...) and alternatives based on 'the beans' (the steak, the salad...) are involved.

Examples

(8)   FRED∨ ate the BEANS\.

Subparts of contrastive topics

Example

(9)   Das /PAKET hat er NICHT\ zur Post   gebracht...
      The parcel   has he not   to   post.office taken
      'He didn't take the parcel to the post office...'

Possible continuations:

- ...aber die Briefe. ('...but the letters' — **DP contrast**)
- ...aber wenigstens hat er sein Zimmer aufgeräumt.
  ('...but at least he tidied up his room' — **VP contrast**)

Observation 1

$\rightarrow$ **Subparts of contrastive topics** can appear in the **left periphery**.

Subparts of contrastive topics

Example

(10) a. Das /PAKET hat er NICHT\ zur Post gebracht, aber
          wenigstens hat er sein Zimmer aufgeräumt.
     b. #Zur /POST hat er das Paket NICHT\ gebracht, aber
          wenigstens hat er sein Zimmer aufgeräumt.

Observation II

$\rightarrow$ **VP contrast** is possible when the DP is fronted, and impossible when the PP is fronted.

Proposed generalization

(11)   Either the whole contrastive topic or a part of it can be fronted in German.

        In the case of *partial fronting*, it has to be *the left directly dominated sub-constituent* that moves.

Subparts of contrastive topics

Predicted judgements

(12) Das /PAKET hat Peter NICHT\
zur Post gebracht...
... ✓ aber die Briefe schon. (DP)
... ✓ aber er hat eingekauft. (VP)
... × aber er hat es verpackt. (V')

(13) Zur /POST hat Peter das Paket
NICHT\ gebracht...
... ✓ aber in den Flur. (PP)
... × aber er hat eingekauft. (VP)
... ✓ aber er hat es verpackt. (V')

Syntactic structure
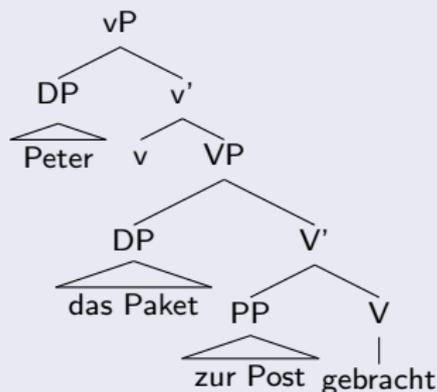
Subparts of contrastive topics

Design: 2×2

- Factor 1: Fronted XP
    - Level 1: Fronted DP
    - Level 2: Fronted PP
- Factor 2: Type of contrast (determined by context)
    - Level 1: DP/PP contrast ("narrow contrast")
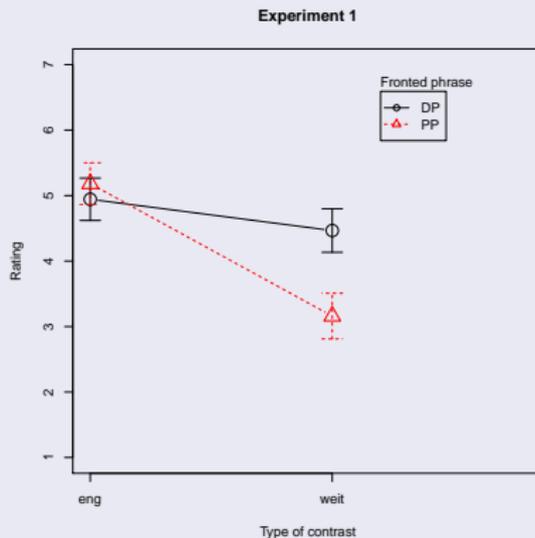   - Level 2: VP contrast ("wide contrast")

Dependent variable:

Acceptability rating on a 7 point scale

Subparts of contrastive topics

Results

- highly significant interaction between the factors
- no significant difference between narrow and wide contrast in "fronted DP" condition ($p > 0.01$)

Experiment 1

Rating (y-axis), Type of contrast (x-axis: eng, weit)

Fronted phrase: DP, PP

Generalization confirmed

$\rightarrow$ What are the consequences for the two approaches?

Theoretical consequences

Frey (2005) — Feature-checking analysis

Assumes the following structure for the German left periphery:
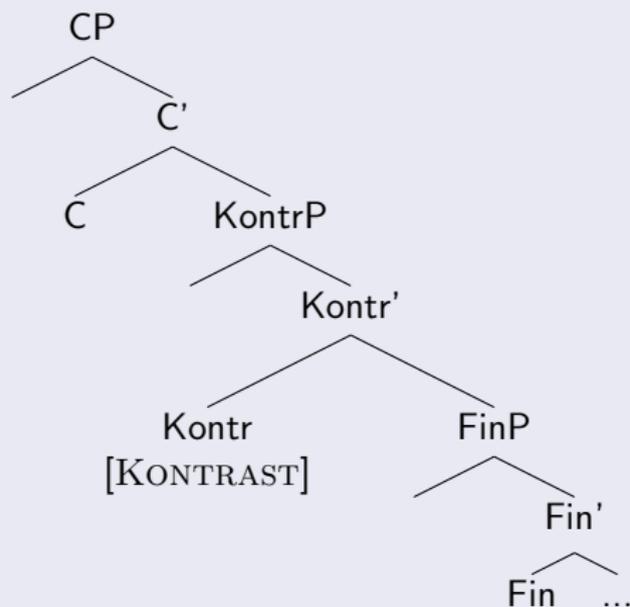
Frey (2005) — Feature-checking analysis

Assumes two different types of movement to the Vorfeld:

- **Genuine $\bar{A}$-movement**: An element with a contrastive interpretation can be moved to SpecKontr (triggered by an EPP feature associated with the feature [KONTRAST]).
- **Formal Fronting**: The highest element of the Mittelfeld can be moved to SpecFin without any pragmatic effect (triggered by an EPP feature).

Theoretical consequences

Frey (2005) — Feature-checking analysis

Can this approach account for my data?

Examples

(14)   [Das Paket]$_i$ hat er t_i nicht zur Post gebracht.

If this is genuine $\bar{A}$-movement, the only available interpretation should be that "das Paket" alone is contrasted.
→ **incompatible with my results**

(15)   [Zur Post]$_i$ hat er das Paket nicht t_i gebracht.

If this is genuine $\bar{A}$-movement, the only available interpretation should be that "zur Post" alone is contrasted.
→ **compatible with my results**

Theoretical consequences

Frey (2005) — Feature-checking analysis

But is it correct that (10) has to be analyzed as genuine $\bar{A}$-movement?

— No, it could also be **Formal Fronting**! 'Das Päckchen' can be the highest element of the Mittelfeld.

Examples

(15)   [Das Paket]$_i$ hat er [$_{\text{Mittelfeld}}$ t_i nicht zur Post gebracht].
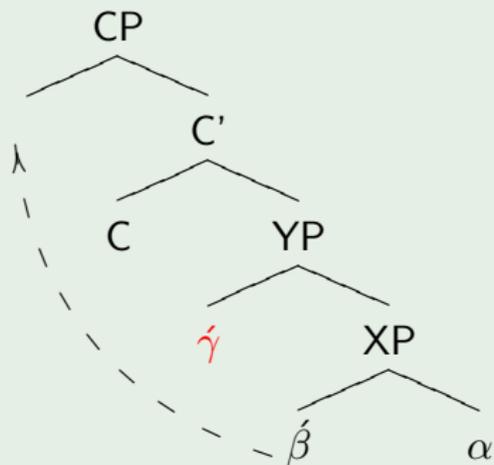
Summary of the consequences

- **Frey (2005): Feature-checking analysis**
  $\rightarrow$ Genuine $\bar{A}$-movement is **too limited** to account for the experimental results, but the data can be captured by Formal Fronting — further research necessary.

Fanselow & Lenertová 2011 — recapitulation

- Movement to the left periphery is unlimited as long as no **structural accents** are crossed.

  $\rightarrow$ What is meant by structural accents, and what follows for contrastive topics?
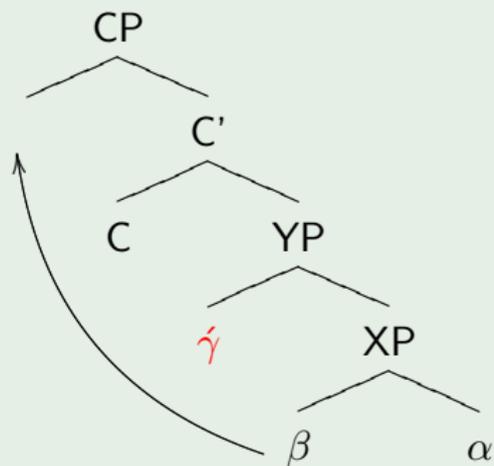
Theoretical consequences

Structurally accented elements are immediately linearized

Theoretical consequences

Unaccented elements are not immediately linearized

Theoretical consequences

Summary

How freely an element can move to the left periphery depends on its accentuation status:

- Fronting of **structurally accented elements** is limited: No other structural accent must be crossed, because structural accents are immediately linearized in relation to each other.

- Fronting of **structurally unaccented elements** — including elements with **contrastive accents** — is **not constrained**

Can this approach account for my data?

Since CTs carry a contrastive (= non-structural) accent, the model predicts that **any subpart of a CT** should be able to move to SpecCP.

$\rightarrow$ The experiment has shown that movement of elements with non-structural accents is **more restricted** than the model predicts.

Summary of the consequences

- **Frey (2005): Feature-checking analysis**
  $\rightarrow$ Genuine $\bar{A}$-movement is **too limited** to account for the experimental results, but the data can be captured by Formal Fronting — further research necessary.

- **Fanselow & Lenertová (2011): SMH approach**
  $\rightarrow$ The movement of elements with contrastive accents is **more restricted than expected**.

Outlook

Open questions

- Are **further predictions of my generalization** borne out? (fronted PP → V' contrast)

- Does the **Formal Fronting explanation** make correct predictions for other cases?

- Are there **other (pragmatic, non-syntactic) factors** which might have caused the difference between the conditions?

References

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