

Topic vs. Focus Dichotomy

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논문초록

본 논문에서는 주제와 초점이 한가지 기준에 의해 분류될 수 있는 것을 보이려고 한다. 이를 위해서 Rooth의 대안 의미론의 요점인 대안 집합이 어떤 방식으로 결정되고 그 대안 집합의 크기가 얼마가 되느냐에 따라서 여러 가지 주제와 초점이 분류되었다. 또한 정보초점에 나타나는 초점의 한정성은 초점자체의 본성이라기보다는 이전 발화의 전체에 의한 상호작용의 결과라는 것을 보였고, 대조 초점과 대조주제의 구분을 위하여 대화함축이 일어나는지 여부를 기준으로 이 두 개념을 구분하려고 하였다.

1. Introduction

This paper claims that topic vs focus dichotomy is not a discrete one but a contiguous one. I will review some of the claims made by Engdahl and Vallduvi (1996), Gundel (1999) and Kiss (1998). The main criteria for distinguishing between different kinds of focus are from two sources. One is Gundel's distinctions among different kinds of focus. The other will be Rooth's (1985) alternative set involving focus. By investigating into the size of the alternative set and by looking at how the size of the alternative set is determined, different kinds of pragmatic notions will defined.

2. Previous Studies

Rooth's contribution to focus theory seems to be the claim that the semantic value of focus lies in having an alternative set rather than newness of information or presupposition. In many previous studies information packaging involving focus is seen as structuring information on a focus-ground partition basis.

2.1 Engdahl and Vallduvi

Engdahl and Vallduvi (1996, E&V, hereafter) defined focus as an update potential in a file-like structure and ground is further divided into link and tail. The link of a sentence helps find a particular file card as a locus of update and tail points at a particular (possibly underspecified) record on a file card. E&V's approach may partly account for what are called contrastive focus and informational focus, the notions proposed by Gundel (1999) and Kiss (1998), respectively, but cannot deal with identificational focus suggested by Kiss (1998). To see what is missing in E&V's analysis, consider the following.

(1) A: Did John and Mary came to the party?

B: JOHN came.

B': JOHN came.

(Large capitals are used for A-accented and small capitals for B-accented)

According to E&V, there are four combination types of *focus*, *link* and *tail*: link-focus, link-focus-tail, all focus and focus-tail. In (1B) *JOHN* is a focused element and *came* may be considered tail. In (1B'), however, the B-accented phrase *JOHN* is to be dubbed as the link and *came* as the tail if we employ E&V's logic and terms but the link-tail type of combination is precluded within E&V's analysis. Thus, E&V's analysis cannot deal with cases such as (1B') and this has to be remedied in any theory of information packaging.

Secondly, E&V's does not take care of exclusiveness or exhaustivity implicature expressed by identificational focus as in (1B). In (1B), *JOHN came* implicates that Mary did not come, whereas there is no such implicature in (1B'). According to Rooth (1985), Szabolci (1981) and Kiss (1998), focus cannot be characterized on the basis of informational novelty but in terms of existence of alternatives and in terms of the nature of exclusiveness implicature.

Thirdly, this paper also points out that what Gundel calls semantic focus alter truth value of the utterance whereas contrastive focus does not. This aspect is not incorporated in E&V's analysis. Consider the following examples.

- (2)
- a. The largest demonstration took place in PRAGUE in NOVEMBER 1989.
 - b. The largest demonstration took place in PRAGUE in NOVEMBER 1989.
 - c. The largest demonstration took place in Prague in NOVEMBER 1989.

(2a) and (2b) have the same truth condition whereas (2b) and (2c) may have different truth values. We can see the same pattern of truth condition shift if we assign the same accent variation to *November* in (2). This sort of truth value shift seems to be peculiar in that it is restricted to adverbial phrases since complement arguments in general do not seem to show such variation as shown in (3):

- (3) a. THIS COAT THAT I BOUGHT YOU, you should take to the trip.
 b. THIS COAT THAT I BOUGHT YOU, you should take to the trip.
 c. You should take to the trip this coat that I bought you.

In (3), the three different versions of packaging information do not show different truth conditions in contrast with the examples in (2).

2.2 Gundel's (1999) Categorization

2.2.1 Psychological Focus

Gundel distinguishes three different kinds of focus: psychological focus, semantic focus and contrastive focus. First, psychological focus is a current center of attention that requires activation. Activation is a necessary status for appropriate use of pronoun forms, stressed or unstressed. Psychological focus requires unstressed personal pronouns or zeros. For instance, the examples in (4) carry psychological focus.

- (4) a. Emily hasn't changed much. *She* still looks like her mother, doesn't *she*?
 b. (Speaker sees addressee looking at a picture of a woman and says:)
She looks just like her mother, doesn't *she*? (Gundel 1999: 294)

- (5) a. Emily-nun manhi byenci anhasse. acikto kkok emmalul talmasse.
 top much change not still just mother resembles
 'Emily hasn't changed much' '(*She*) still looks like her mother'

Here, the speaker's attention is focused solely on the individual under discussion that we cannot think of an alternative members. I will call this a discourse topic.

2.2.2 Semantic focus

According to Gundel semantic focus carries new information as opposed to common ground or background. One such case is the part of the sentence that answers the relevant *wh*-question as shown in (6)

(6) A: Do you know who called the meeting?

B: (It was) BILL (who) called the meeting.

However, in some sense, Bill is not new but familiar to the discourse participants. Otherwise the answer should have been like (7):

(7) A person called Bill called the meeting.

Thus, in (6) Bill should be part of common ground, i.e, Bill must be one of their friends, or one of their colleagues, so the speaker and the addressee mutually know about him. In this sense informational focus would be a better term for BILL in (6) as proposed by Kiss (1988), since 'semantic' usually implies something related to semantic denotations of words or phrase as shown in (8).

(8) A: What kind of book did you buy yesterday?

B: I bought a NOVEL.

NOVEL is part of our background knowledge, but its alternative is restricted by the expression '*What kind of book*', especially by the lexical word *book*. In this sense, (8b) has a kind of semantic focus. The alternative set is determined by the semantic knowledge of *book*. On the other hand in (6), alternative set is determined by the discourse context, that is, who the speaker is, where the conversation takes place, what kind of meeting they are told to attend, etc.

It should be noted that *wh*-questions carries a presupposition as shown below. For instance in (8), the speaker knows/presuppose that the addressee bought some kind of book yesterday. Otherwise (8A) should be something like this: I wonder if you bought anything. In this sense (8A) has presupposition like (9)

(9) $\exists x$ [you-bought' (x) & kind-of-a-book'(x)]

Given this presupposition *and what is it?* is an interrogative element and the answer like (8B) can be translated as [such x is a novel]. In this sense informational focus and semantic focus can be definite and produces a uniqueness effect if they are answers of wh-questions.

On the other hand, yes-no questions do not trigger definiteness, as shown below in (10).

(10) A: Did anyone came to the party yesterday?

B: JOHN came.

A: Anyone else?

B: MARY came, too.

But such extension of conversation is awkward with (8)

(10) A: What kind of book did you buy yesterday?

B: I bought a NOVEL.

A: ??Any other books?

Thus it seems that definiteness of uniqueness comes not from the A-accent of informational or semantic focus but from the presupposition of wh-questions.

2.2.3 Contrastive Focus

Gundel claims that some constituent can be made prominent because the speaker doesn't think the addressee is focused on a particular entity and for one reason or another would like it to be, or because one constituent is being contrasted with something else, or because a new topic is being introduced or reintroduced. Some of her examples are shown below:

(11)A: I can't decide what to take on the trip. Should I take the coat you bought me?

B: Yes. *THIS COAT* I bought you, I think you should TAKE. (LH*)

(12) What did Bill's sisters do?

Bill's *YOUNGEST* sister kissed JOHN.

(LH*)

Contrastive focus has a peculiar accent called B-accent, and contrastive focus is not a

new information in the sense that it has been mentioned in the previous discourse as in (11) or it is part of mutually shared background knowledge as in (12). Furthermore, if we consider its alternative sent, it is not very large since in case of (11), the proximal interpretation of *this* seems to trigger an alternative entities within a limited location and in (12) youngest is contrasted with a few other siblings. In this respect, contrastive focus is pragmatically oriented type of focus, if it is a kind of focus.

2.3 Kiss (1998)

Kiss proposes that focus can be informational or identificational. Informational focus has been mentioned in connection with examples in (6) and (8). Identificational focus is a constituent which represents exhaustive subset of the set of contextually given elements for which the predicate phrase actually holds. This is exemplified in (13).

(13) It was a hat that Mary picked for herself.

As one of the attributes of Identification Focus is exhaustivity as shown in (14)

(14) It was a hat and a coat that Mary picked for herself.

-/-> It was a hat that Mary picked for herself.

cf. Mary picked a hat and a coat for herself.

--> Mary picked a hat for herself.

Another characteristics of identificational focus is that 'inclusive' expressions are incompatible: universal quantifiers, also-phrase, even, etc. Consider (15):

(15) a. *It was every hat that Mary picked for herself.

b. *It was even a hat that Mary picked for herself.

c. *It was also a hat that mary picked for herself.

Identificational focus can also have a scope relation as shown in (16)

(16) a. Minden fiú MARIVAL akart táncolni. (Hungarian)

every boy Mary-with wanted to dance

'For every boy, it was Mary that he wanted to dance with ___'

b. MARIVAL akart táncolni minden fiú.

It was Mary that every boy wanted to dance with __.

3. Focus-topic Contiguity

Based on the discussions presented so far, I will claim that topic-focus distinction can be made by using the same criteria by investigating into the size of the alternative set and by looking at how the size of the alternative set is determined, different kinds of pragmatic notions will be defined.

In the case of psychological focus, which I would call discourse topic, has no meaningful alternative set. Even if there were any, it would have no other members than the topic itself. So if the alternative set of an expression has only one member, then we can call it a *topic*. Of course, the alternative set has to be formed by contextual factors, such as preceding text or physical speech context.

In the case of informational focus, we can approach it from pragmatic and semantic dimensions as mentioned before. Pragmatic informational focus has an alternative set determined by contextual factors such as common background knowledge of the context, or previous utterances, or common mutual knowledge. So the alternative set is fairly small. In the case of semantic informational focus, the set size is pretty large because the set is determined by the denotation of a lexical meaning. What the two kinds of informational focus have in common is the definiteness effect and uniqueness effect.

Contrastive focus also has a pragmatically determined alternative set and its size is fairly small although its cardinality can go up to 7 to 9, depending on the context. On the other hand, identificational focus connotes exhaustivity as discussed in connection with (14) and it is also characterized by a small alternative set.

4. Contrastive Focus vs. Contrastive Topic

Is there any distinction between contrastive focus and contrastive topic? According to the above discussion of contrastive focus, the set size should be contextually defined and its size must be fairly small, but its cardinality can be as large as 7 to 9. There is neither definiteness or uniqueness effect nor exhaustive meaning involved.

What is a contrastive topic? If it is a topic its set must be determined by contextual

factors, especially its membership must be licensed by textual evocation, i.e., its member must be among the entities spoken about already, or must be a part of the discourse topic. One characteristic of contrastive topic is that it cancels the conversational implicature which would otherwise be present. Consider (17):

(17) A: Did John and Mary went to the meeting?

B: JOHN went.

B': JOHN went

(17B') implicates that Mary did not go, but such implication is cancelled in(17B) by giving LH* accent to *John*. So I claim that contrastive topic is possible where conversational implicature can possibly arise. Also let us contrast (17) with (18).

(18) A: Who went to the meeting?

B: MARY did.

B': MARY did.

In (18) there is no cancellable conversational implicature, so *Mary* in (18b) seems to be a contrastive topic. (18B') has a definiteness or uniqueness effect but does not has such an implicature as (17B') does. Consider (19).

(19) A: Do you have any money?

B: I have some DIMES.

B': ??I have some DIMES.

In (19) *dimes* is part of the topic money and it s contrasted with the rest of the topic.

5. Conclusion

I have claimed that definiteness effect of informational focus does not come from focus itself but from the presupposition of the preceding utterance. I have also distinguished between contrastive topic and contrastive focus on the basis of whether or not there is any possibility of conversational implicature. I attempted to distinguish various kinds of discourse notion by investigating into the size of the alternative set and by looking at

how the size of the alternative set is determined, different kinds of pragmatic notions will be defined.

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