Subparts of contrastive topics and the syntax–information structure interface

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## Syntax–information structure interface

### Competing approaches

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 goes back to: Rizzi (1997)  
 cited from: Horvath (2010)
### Competing approaches

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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.’)
Subparts of the IS category focus can appear in the Vorfeld.

→ 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.’)
Problematic: [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.’)
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.’)
Alternative approach: Movement is triggered by an unspecific edge feature in C
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**.
Example (Jackendoff 1972)

(7) A: Well, what about Fred? What did he eat?
B: \texttt{FRED}$\lor$ ate the \texttt{BEANS}.

\texttt{FRED} = Contrastive Topic (CT); \texttt{BEANS} = Focus
Background: contrastive topics

Phonological properties — English

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{FRED} & \text{ate the} & \text{BEANS}. \\
\text{“B-accent”} & \text{fall-rise} & \text{“A-accent”} \\
\end{array}
\]

Phonological properties — German

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{/FRED} & \text{hat die} & \text{BOHNEN}. \\
\text{(fall-)rise} & \text{fall} & \text{gegessen}. \\
\end{array}
\]
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

→ 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

→ VP contrast is possible when the DP is fronted, and impossible when the PP is fronted.
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: $2 \times 2$

- 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 ($p > 0.01$)

Generalization confirmed

→ What are the consequences for the two approaches?
Frey (2005) — Feature-checking analysis

Assumes the following structure for the German left periphery:

```
CP

C'

C

KontrP

Kontr'

Kontr

[KONTRAST]

FinP

Fin'

Fin...```
Theoretical consequences

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 \([\text{Kontrast}]\)).

- **Formal Fronting**: The highest element of the Mittelfeld can be moved to SpecFin without any pragmatic effect (triggered by an EPP feature).
Frey (2005) — Feature-checking analysis

Can this approach account for my data?

Examples

(14) [Das Paket]; hat er \( t_i \) nicht zur Post gebracht.

If this is genuine Æ-movement, the only available interpretation should be that “das Paket” alone is contrasted.
→ incompatible with my results

(15) [Zur Post]; hat er das Paket nicht \( t_i \) gebracht.

If this is genuine Æ-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 A\-movement?

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

Examples

(15) [Das Paket]; hat er [Mittelfeld t; nicht zur Post gebracht].
Theoretical consequences

Summary of the consequences

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

Fanselow & Lenertová 2011 — recapitulation

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

  → 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
Theoretical consequences

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.

→ The experiment has shown that movement of elements with non-structural accents is more restricted than the model predicts.
Theoretical consequences

Summary of the consequences

- **Frey (2005): Feature-checking analysis**
  → Genuine Ā-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**
  → 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 $\rightarrow V'$ 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