New vs. Given

Angelika Kratzer and Elisabeth Selkirk
University of Massachusetts at Amherst

kratzer@umass.edu
selkirk@umass.edu

Katz & Selkirk (2011) tell a story about a New York art dealer that goes as follows:

(1) Gary is an art dealer. Lately he's been very picky about which museum he deals with; he doesn't do business with the Metropolitan or the Guggenheim.
So he would only offer that Modigliani to MoMA.

Suppose I ask you to read the story and then answer the question in (2):

(2) Which of his paintings would Gary only offer to MoMA?

If we insist on answering in full sentences, the correct answer is (3).

(3) He would only offer that Modigliani to MoMA.

(3) repeats what was already said in (1). But as Schwarzschild (2004) observes, we can't seem to get the prosody right for answers to questions like (2). As an answer to (2), (3) becomes unpronounceable. Since in (3), "Modigliani" is the only part that is new with respect to the question (2), there should be prominence on "Modigliani". But placing prominence on "Modigliani" seems to force "Modigliani" to associate with "only", which is not the intended interpretation.

Schwarzschild (2018) suggests that the source of the problem with (3) as an answer to (2) is that (3) is understood as an exhaustive answer. If exhaustive answers are represented via an EXHAUST operator with (roughly) the semantics of "only", (3) would be schematically represented as follows:

(4) EXHAUST_1 [he would only_2 [offer that Modigliani_{F1} to MoMA_{F2}]]

The problem with (4), according to Schwarzschild, is that there are crossing dependencies for focus association: "Modigliani" wants to associate with EXHAUST across "only", another focus sensitive operator.

A pretty consequence of Schwarzschild's diagnosis is that it explains why (3) is perfectly pronounceable in (1) above, the context where Katz & Selkirk placed it. In the context of their story, there is no way of understanding (3) as answering an implicit question like (2). There would be no EXHAUST operator that "Modigliani" would want to associate with, then, and thus no crossing dependencies.

When (3) appears in the context of (1), "MoMA" is contrastively focused, that is, it triggers the introduction of alternatives. "Modigliani", on the other hand, presents merely new information. Katz & Selkirk (2011) show that there is a systematic phonetic difference between focused phrases that introduce alternatives and those that are merely new. Crucially, that difference is independent of their respective syntactic positions. In one way or other, then, linguistic representations should distinguish the two types of focus.

If we want to hold on to the idea that focus is represented syntactically by features that mediate between prosody and semantic/pragmatic interpretation, we may draw the distinction between focused phrases that are merely new and those that introduce alternatives (and might or might not be new) with the

help of two features. Two-feature proposals in this spirit can be found in Selkirk (2002, 2007, 2008) and Beaver & Velleman (2011). Beaver and Velleman use F-marking for phrases that introduce alternatives and associate with focus sensitive operators, and N-marking for phrases that are 'new' (or 'unpredictable'). A merely new phrase, then, is a phrase that is N-marked, but not F-marked. Selkirk, on the other hand, follows Féry & Samek-Lodovici (2006) in representing 'givenness' rather than 'newness'. Instead of an N-feature, she has a G-feature. In her system, a merely new phrase is one that is neither F-marked nor G-marked. Both proposals can represent the distinction between focused phrases that introduce alternatives and those that are merely new. What, then, could be possible grounds for preferring one over the other?

Here is a possible research strategy that may help decide the question. Imagine an out-of-the-blue utterance of (5):

(5) Sarah mailed the caramels.

(a) $[\text{Sarah}_N\ [\text{mailed}_N\ [\text{the caramels}_N]_N]_N]_N$.
(b) Sarah mailed the caramels.

If languages used N-marking, the prosody of (5) would have to be read off the representation 5(a), which is peppered with nested N-marks. On the other hand, if languages used G-marking, the right prosody for (5) would have to be determined on the basis of 5(b), which does not contain any features related to Information Structure. If 5(b) is the right representation, then, there has to be a default prosody for English whose principles are unaffected by Information Structure. Consequently, any proponent of 5(b) would need to show what that default prosody is and how it can be derived within a typologically motivated general theory of prosody. Suppose that demonstration succeeds. We would now be in a strong position to rule out 5(a) on conceptual grounds: All N-marking in 5(a) would be superfluous – it couldn't possibly have any impact on prosody. What if the

demonstration fails? This would shed serious doubts on the viability of 5(b). Either way, the verdict about 5(a) versus 5(b), and, more generally, about N-marking versus G-marking, will have to be delivered by the phonology.

Schwarzschild (1999) recognizes the potentially questionable status of feature representations like 5(a). If these are plausible syntactic representations, the features appearing there should also have syntactic properties, that is, they should show at least some syntactic behavior in at least some languages. Borrowing what Schwarzschild (1999, p. 175) says about comparable structures with his F-markers, we might say that N-markers "have no significant syntactic properties. From the point of view of the grammar overall, they are a nuisance and do not shed light on the real question of what semantic information is relevant to phonology and what parts of the phonology see this information. Ultimately, they should be done away with."

Are there syntactic reflexes of G-marking? Evidence for syntactic effects of G-marking is not easy to come by. Discussions of word order changes driven by apparent 'givenness' tend to not distinguish the prosodically relevant notion of 'givenness' from related notions like 'presuppositionality' or 'definiteness' (see Rochemont 2016 for extensive discussion). If the distinction is made (as in Fanselow (2012, 2016) and Kučerová (2012)), the observed word order variations are usually not attributed to mere 'givenness'. A notable exception is the experimental study of Czech word order by Šimík and Wierzba (2015). Šimík and Wierzba argue (against Kučerová) that 'givenness' not presuppositionality is reflected in Czech prosody, and they show moreover that that same notion of 'givenness' also plays a role in Czech syntax. According to Šimík and Wierzba, Czech 'given' phrases avoid stress, but, unlike English 'given' phrases, they can move to left-peripheral positions, where they escape from the canonical, rightmost, stress position in Czech.

There is at least some evidence, then, that there is syntactic behavior associated with G-marking. It might drive syntactic movement. We don't know of any syntactic behavior that targets phrases that are merely new. If anything, material that is merely new likes to stay put.

References

Beaver, David & Dan Velleman. 2011. The Communicative Significance of Primary and Secondary Accents. Lingua 121. 1671-92.

Fanselow, Gisbert. 2012. Scrambling as Formal Movement. Contrasts and Positions in Information Structure, ed. by I. Kučerová & A. Neeleman, 267-95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—. 2016. Syntactic and Prosodic Reflexes of Information Structure in Germanic. The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure, ed. by C. Féry & S. Ishihara, 621-41. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Féry, Caroline & Vieri Samek-Lodovici. 2006. Focus Projection and Prosodic Prominence in Nested Foci. Language 82. 131-50.

Katz, Jonah & Elisabeth Selkirk. 2011. Contrastive Focus vs. Discourse-New: Evidence from Phonetic Prominence in English. Language 87. 771-816.

Kučerová, Ivona. 2012. Grammatical Marking of Givenness. Natural Language Semantics 20. 1-30.

Rochemont, Michael. 2016. Givenness. The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure, ed. by C. Féry & S. Ishihara, 41-63. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schwarzschild, Roger. 1999. GIVENness, AvoidF and Other Constraints on the Placement of Focus. Natural Language Semantics 7. 141-77.

—. 2004. Focus Interpretations: Comments on Geurts and van der Sandt. Theoretical Linguistics 30. 137-40.

—. 2018. 5 Minutes on Focus. Paper presented at Semantics 2018: Looking Ahead, University of Massachusetts Amherst. March 10, 2018.

Selkirk, Elisabeth. 2002. Contrastive FOCUS vs. presentational focus: prosodic evidence from right node raising in English. Paper presented to the Speech Prosody 2002: Proceedings of the First International Prosody Conference, Aix-en-Provence, 2002.

—. 2007. Contrastive Focus, Givenness, and the Unmarked Status of Discourse-New. Interdisciplinary Studies on Information Structure, ed. by C. Féry, G. Fanselow & M. Krifka, 125-45. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam.

—. 2008. Contrastive Focus, Givenness, and the Unmarked Status of “Discourse-New”. Acta Linguistica Hungarica 55.1-16.

Šimík, Radek & Marta Wierzba. 2015. The Role of Givenness, Presupposition, and Prosody in Czech Word Order: An Experimental Study. Semantics and Pragmatics 8.3. 1-103.