Cross-linguistic variability (and uniformity) in focus-background partitioning

Academy Colloquium *Language Variation in Action*

Koninklijke Nederlands Academie van de Wetenschapen, Amsterdam, Trippenhuis, 19 February 2016
Malte Zimmermann, Universität Potsdam

Objectives:

Discussion of variation and universals in
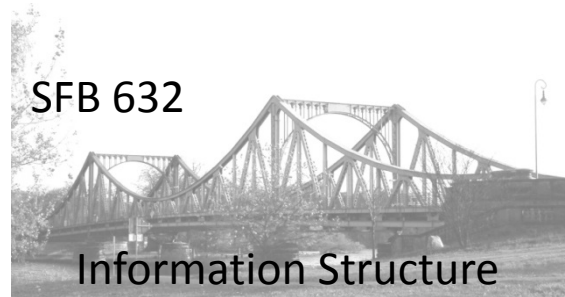
i.   Expression of information-structural partitions,

and

ii.   Interpretation of formal partition-markings

$\Rightarrow$ Empirical focus on focus-background partitions

Objectives:

Based on results of SFB632 „Information Structure",
DFG-financed, 2003-2015

SFB 632

Information Structure

Project A5 „Focus realization, focus interpretation,
and focus use from a cross-linguistic perspective"
(PI: Zimmermann; 2007-2015)

Objectives:

Based on results of SFB632 „Information Structure", DFG-financed, 2003-2015

Project A5 „Focus realization, focus interpretation, and focus use from a cross-linguistic perspective" (PI: Zimmermann; 2007-2015)
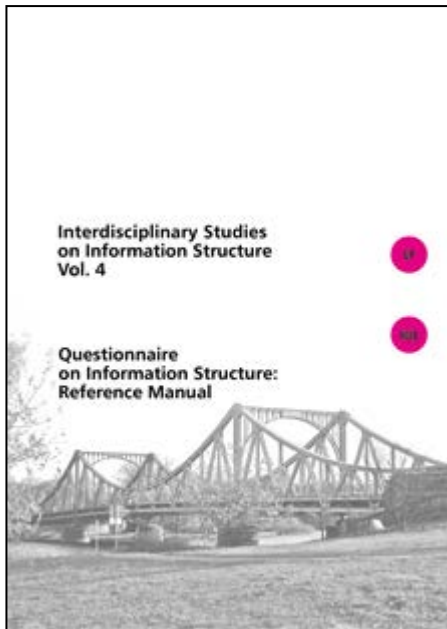
Methodology:

- Controlled Elicitations / Questionnaires:

Interdisciplinary Studies
on Information Structure
Vol. 4

Questionnaire
on Information Structure:
Reference Manual

QUIS, QUISsem

#speakers: 2-8

- Corpora (Narratives, Traditional Stories etc.)

Central Claims:

i. Every language has (optional) formal means for expressing focus-background partitions

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reflecting the cognitive grounding of abstract language faculty in conditions on language use in information transfer (weak functionalism)

Central Claims:

ii. Languages vary in how focus-background partitions are formally marked,

depending (at least) on

- General grammatical properties of language in question (e.g. intonation languages...)

and

- Diachronic development paths in grammaticalization

Central Claims:

ii. Languages vary in how focus-background partitions are formally marked

$\neq$ strongly functionalist models

$\neq$ syntax-based cartographic approaches (Rizzi 1997)

$\Rightarrow$ Need to mark focus-background partitioning is not a predictor of HOW partitions are marked cross-linguistically

Central Claims:

iii. Focus prominence is NOT a cross-linguistic universal

Background (marking) plays an important role, too!

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iii. Focus prominence is NOT a cross-linguistic universal

Background (marking) plays an important role, too!

$\Rightarrow$ One out of two viable candidates for universals in the expression of focus-background partitions is background-centred!

Central Claims:

iv. Interpretational effects with partition markers vary depending on whether the marker in question is

Focus marker ($\Rightarrow$ EXH-effects)

OR

Background marker ($\not\Rightarrow$ EXH-effects)

General methodological lesson:

When you identify a formal marker of focus-background partitioning in a language, make sure to establish whether it marks focus or background

Overview of talk:

i.   Background: Terminology + Focus Realization

ii. Cross-linguistic variation in realization of Focus-Background partitioning

iii. Universals in the realization of Focus-Background Partitioning & Sources for cross-linguistic variation

iv. Variation in interpretation of partition markers

v.   Conclusion

Terminology

Focus: At-issue part of utterance meaning,

answers the pertinent *Question under Discussion* (Roberts 1996/2014, Tonhauser et al. 2013)

Activation of salient (answer) alternatives in context (Rooth 1992, Krifka 2008)

Terminology

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answers the pertinent *Question under Discussion* (Roberts 1996/2014, Tonhauser et al. 2013)

Activation of salient (answer) alternatives in context (Rooth 1992, Krifka 2008)

$\Rightarrow$ Focus $\neq$ New !

Terminology

Background: Not at-issue part of utterance meaning,

treated as settled and not subject to questioning by interlocutors (Kratzer & Selkirk 2007, Krifka 2008, Katz & Selkirk 2011)

typically, though not necessarily given

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typically, though not necessarily given

$\Rightarrow$ Background ≠ Given !

Cross-linguistic realization of information structure

Cross-linguistic investigations of information structure focus traditionally on the different formal strategies for marking a particular information-structural category across languages:

focus (e.g. Büring 2010, Zimmermann & Onéa 2011, Güldemann, Zerbian, Zimmermann 2015)

topic (e.g. Gundel 1988, Güldemann, Zerbian, Zimmermann 2015)

e.g. cross-linguistic realization of focus

Cross-linguistically, focus can be marked by pitch accenting (English, Selkirk 1984), prosodic phrasing (Chichewâ, Kanerva 1990), syntactic movement to designated syntactic positions (Hungarian, Horváth 1986, É. Kiss 1998, Rizzi 1997), morphology (Gùrùntùm, Hartmann and Zimmermann 2009), or prosodically driven syntax (Zubizarreta 1998, Szendröi 2003, Féry 2013), …

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Formal accounts of focus-background typically concentrate on Focus

(Chomsky 1971, Jackendoff 1972, Rooth 1985, Reinhart 1995, Truckenbrodt 1995, Rizzi 1997, Gussenhoven 2008, Büring 2010, Féry 2013)

i. Prominence Theories of Focus (e.g.Truckenbrodt 1995)

ii. Alignment Theory of Focus (Féry 2013)

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

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(Chomsky 1971, Jackendoff 1972, Rooth 1985, Reinhart 1995, Truckenbrodt 1995, Rizzi 1997, Gussenhoven 2008, Büring 2010, Féry 2013)

$\Rightarrow$ Background is most often neglected as mere complement of focus, but see É. Kiss & Pinter (2014)

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Prominence Theories of Focus:

Focus is highlighted, i.e. easily identifiable, by acoustic or metrical or positional prominence

„from a cognitive point of view, focus should be recognizable by the hearer and identified as being this new or contrasted or corrective element which the whole sentence is about." (Féry 2013: 727)

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Prominence Theories of Focus:

Focus is highlighted, i.e. easily identifiable, by acoustic or metrical or positional prominence

$\Rightarrow$ Correlation between postulated relative importance of focus from the perspective of information transfer and structural prominence

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

(1) *FOCUS*: If F is a focus and DF is its domain, then the highest prominence in DF will be within F. (Truckenbrodt 1995: 134)

(2) *Focus Prosody Correspondence Principle*: The focused constituent (or F-marked constituent) of a phrase must contain the intonational nucleus of that phrase. (Zubizaretta 1998: 38)

(3) *FocusProminence*: Focus needs to be maximally prominent. (Büring 2010: 178)

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Syntactic Prominence: Cartography (Rizzi 1997)

Focus constituents move to designated structural positions (Spec,FP) in the left periphery of clause/VP:

(4) $[_{\text{TopP}} \ldots [_{\text{FP}} \ldots [_{\text{VP}} [_{\text{FP}} \ldots]]]]$

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Predictions of Prominence Theories of Focus:

i.   Focused material will be structurally prominent one way or other (prosody, syntax, morphology)

ii. Focus-Background partition is linguistically marked on focus constituent

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Alignment Theory of Focus (Féry 2013):

Focused material not necessarily prominent, but aligned with the edge of prosodic units:

(5) ALIGN-FOCUS

a. ALIGN-FOCUS R, ɩ-PHRASE R (ALIGN-FOC-ɩ-R):Align a focus with the right boundary of an intonation phrase.

b. ALIGN-FOCUS L, ɩ -PHRASE L (ALIGN-FOC-ɩ-L): Align a focus with the left boundary of an intonation phrase.

    …

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

⇒ Focus alignment results in focus-background partitioning (aka *information packaging,* Chafe 1976)

„Aligning a focus and separating it from given constituents and from topics, serve the aim of separating the constituents in as many 'packages' to use a well-known concept. Aligning a focus introduces a boundary at its end or at its beginning and in this way, parts of discourse with different information structural roles are clearly separated from each other." (Féry 2013: 727)

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

$\Rightarrow$ Focus alignment results in focus-background partitioning (aka *information packaging,* Chafe 1976)

$\Rightarrow$ Alignment theory acknowledges the inherent relational nature of focus as but one part of the focus-background partition

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

⟹ Focus alignment results in focus-background partitioning (aka *information packaging,* Chafe 1976)

⟹ Alignment theory acknowledges the inherent relational nature of focus as but one part of the focus-background partition

… more in line with what is to come…!

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Predictions of AlignmentTheory of Focus:

i.   Focused material will be aligned to prosodic edges

ii. Alignment will target the focus of the utterance

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

Predictions of AlignmentTheory of Focus:

i.   Focused material will be aligned to prosodic edges

ii.   Alignment will target the focus of the utterance

BUT: Focus still the active part as far as grammatical realization is concerned!

Modelling focus-background partition in grammar

The next section will show that focus-background partitions are not necessarily marked (exclusively) on the focus part of an utterance, be it in terms of prominence or in terms of alignment.

$\Rightarrow$ Background Marking matters, too!

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

beyond intonation languages and Hungarian

Natural languages exhibit four basic strategies for marking focus-background partitions, where [+X] stands for explicit structural marking of information-structural category X, and [-X] for the absence thereof.

Patterns of focus-background partitioning
beyond intonation languages and Hungarian

(6)   i. [+F, -B]:   only focus marking

ii. [-F, -B]:   zero marking (incl. indirect marking)

iii. [+F, +B]: focus and background marking

iv. [-F, +B]: only background marking
                (Grubic 2015, Güldemann, to appear)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Focus-only marking (6i): [+F, -B]

- Well described and analyzed in the literature (see above)

- Expected on Prominence and Alignment Theory

- Attested in intonation languages (pitch accenting) – assuming that deaccenting of postfocal background due to givenness (Katz & Selkirk 2011), (7a).

- Also attested in languages with morphological focus markers, (7b), or structural focus positions (7c).

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Focus-only marking (6i): [+F, -B]

(7) a.   The FULANI is chewing colanut.

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

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    b. **Á** fúrmáyò   bà   wúm   kwálíngálá.
       FOC fulani   IPFV   chew   colanut
       'THE FULANI is chewing colanut.' [Gùrùntùm, Chadic]
                    (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2009)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

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'THE FULANI is chewing colanut.' [Gùrùntùm, Chadic]

c. Mari   PÉtert   hívta fel.   [Hungarian]
Mari   Peter.ACC   call   up
'It was PETER that Mary called up. (É. Kiss 1998: 256)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Zero-marking (6ii): [-F, -B]

- No marking of either focus or background by non-canonical linguistic structures

- Unexpected/unpredicted on prominence theory of focus; compatible with alignment theory

- Acknowledged in recent literature (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007, Büring 2010, Féry 2013, Zimmermann 2015a, Grubic 2015)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Zero-marking (6ii): [-F, -B]

(8)   Kule   sal-ko   bano   a Potiskum
         Kule   build-PFV   house at Potiskum
         'Kule built A HOUSE in Potisum.' [Ngamo, Chadic]
                                                    (Grubic 2015)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

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                                                    (Grubic 2015)

⇒   Some zero-marking structures make compensatory
        use of topic marking devices for indirectly marking
        the focus/background status of constituents

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Zero-marking + indirect marking (6ii): [-F, -B]

(9) Tɛprɛ **ná**,   Boukar taɗ   djùm   tɛ́ŋ   **ná** ngal kudj nii kii
yesterday TOP Boukar PFV.do gruel millet TOP in house DET DEM
'Boukar cooked millet gruel IN THE HOUSE yesterday.

[Bagirmi, Nilo-Saharan] (Jacob 2010)

(10) Audù **fa**,   hùulaa **kàm**,   yaa   sàyaa.
Audu TOP   cap   TOP   3SG.M.PFV bought
'As for Audu, regarding his cap, he BOUGHT (it).'

[Hausa, Chadic] (Newman 2000:617)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Focus-Background marking (6iii): [+F, +B]

- Overmarking of focus and background part of partition by independent structural devices

- Compatible with Prominence and Alignment theory

- Rarely discussed in literature (but see Güldemann, to appear; Zimmermann 2015b)

- Attested in cleft structures, but e.g. also in syntactic focus constructions in Hausa and Fulani.

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Focus-Background marking (6iii): [+F, +B]

(11)   It is FISH   that Hawwa cooked.
         pitch+cleft: +F   REL: +B

see Delin (1992) on backgrounding nature of clefts and É.Kiss (2014, 2015) on backgrounding in Hungarian

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Focus-Background marking (6iii): [+F, +B]

(12) Kiifii (nèe) Kànde ta-**kèe**   dafàa-waa [Hausa]
fish   PRT   Kande 3SG.F-IPFV.REL cooking
'Kande is cooking FISH.'
(Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007, Zimmermann 2015b)

⇒ Focus-fronting accompanied by special form of
backgrounded person-aspect complex (Tuller 1986,
Newman 2000, Jaggar 2001)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Focus-Background marking (6iii): [+F, +B]

(12)   Kiifii (nèe) Kànde ta-**kèe**   dafàa-waa [Hausa]
          fish   PRT   Kande 3SG.F-IPFV.REL cooking
          'Kande is cooking FISH.'

(13)   (Aali)   **ko** hannde (Aali) sood-**i**   pucc-u ngu
          Ali   FOC today   Ali   buy- DEP-PST horse-10 DEF.10
          '(As for) Ali (he) has bought the horse TODAY.'
          [Fulani] (Sylla 1993: 110; Güldemann, to appear)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking (6iv): [-F, +B]

- No active focus licensing in terms of prominence or alignment

- Unpredicted by Prominence/Alignment Theories of focus

- Expected if focus and background are equally important in information transfer!

Background: anaphoric, coherence, backward-looking

Focus: at-issue, forward-looking
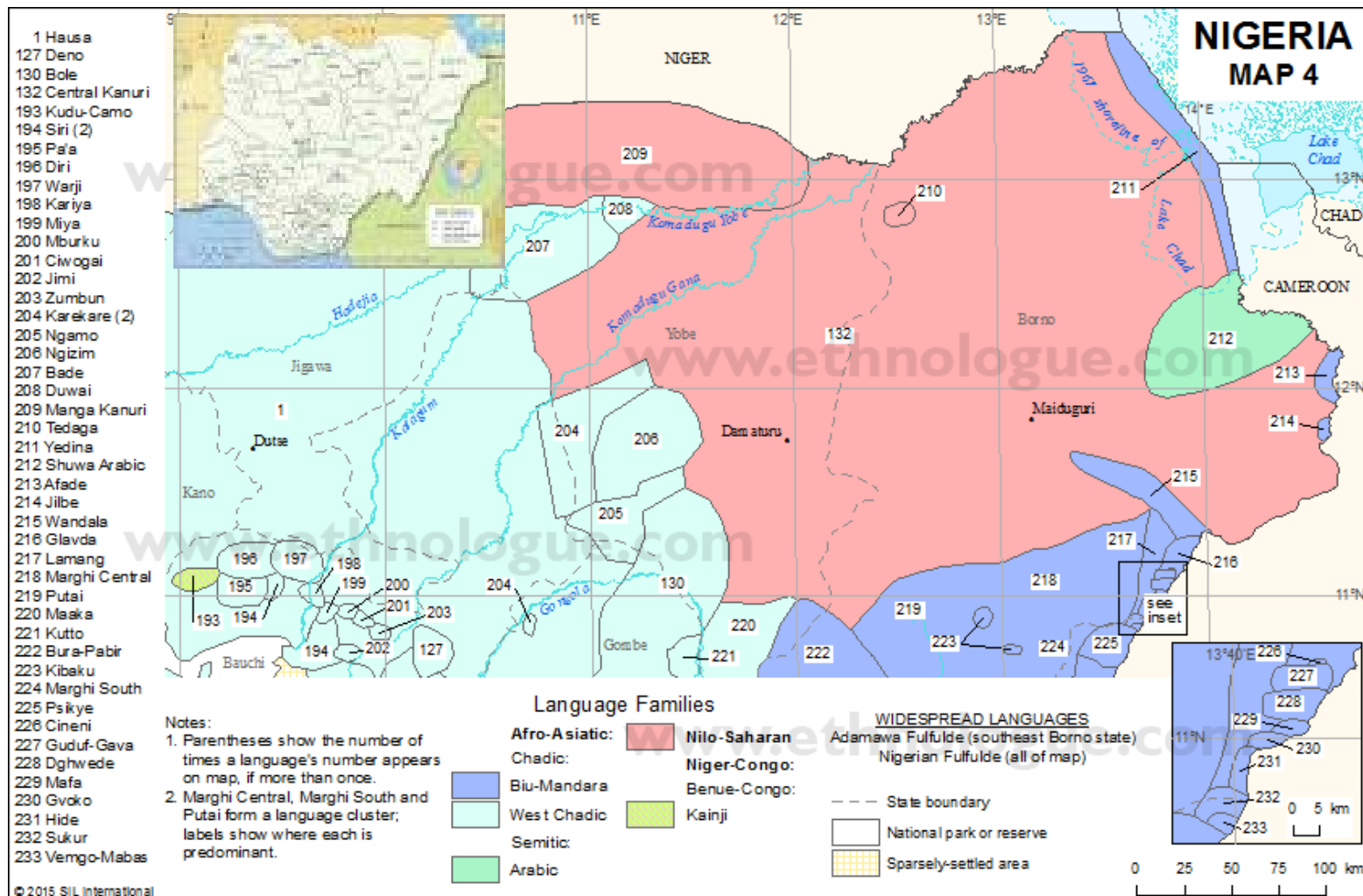
(Sgall et al. 1986)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking (6iv): [-F, +B]

- Only recently acknowledged in theoretical literature (Grubic 2015, drawing on ideas in Schuh 2005)

$\Rightarrow$ *Backgrounding-only* is found e.g. in Ngamo (West Chadic), cf. Grubic (2015) for detailed discussion!

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking in Ngamo (Grubic 2015):

(12)   Kule   sal-ko-**i/ye**   bano   a Potiskum

Kule   build-PFV-PRT   house   at Potiskum

'Kule built A HOUSE in Potisum.'

⇒   No marking of focus bano in terms of prosodic or structural prominence, nor in terms of alignment; cf. Grubic (2015)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking in Ngamo (Grubic 2015):

(12)   Kule   sal-ko-**i/ye**   bano   a Potiskum
            Kule   build-PFV-PRT   house   at Potiskum
            'Kule built A HOUSE in Potisum.'

$\Rightarrow$ *-i/ye*:   Focus marker to the right?

                          OR

                Background marker to the left?

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking in Ngamo (Grubic 2015):

(12)   Kule   sal-ko-**i/ye**   bano   a Potiskum
         Kule   build-PFV-PRT   house   at Potiskum
         'Kule built A HOUSE in Potisum.'

$\Rightarrow$ *-i/ye*:   Background marker to the left!

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking in Ngamo (Grubic 2015):
-*i/ye* as a background marker to the left

i. -*i/ye* cannot co-occur with focus in fragment answers:

(13)   Q: Who answered?
        A: **i/ye** Jajei.

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking in Ngamo (Grubic 2015):
-*i/ye* as a background marker to the left

i.   -*i/ye* cannot co-occur with focus in fragment answers:

ii.   *i/ye* can occur more than once in a clause on discontinuous backgrounds:

(14)   Kule   sal-ko-**i**   bano   a Potiskum**-ye**
         Kule   build-PFV-PRT   house   at Potiskum-PRT
         'Kule built A HOUSE in Potisum.'

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

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i. -*i/ye* cannot co-occur with focus in fragment answers:

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iii. Other functional morphemes in Ngamo (e.g. NEG, DEF) take scope to the left as well (Schuh 2005)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

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iii.   Other functional morphemes in Ngamo (e.g. NEG, DEF) take scope to the left as well (Schuh 2005)

iv.   *-i/ye* is homophonous and diachronically derived from definite masc determiner on nominals!

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Background-only marking in Ngamo (Grubic 2015):
-i/ye as a background marker to the left

-i/ye is homophonous and diachronically derived from definite masc determiner on nominals!

$\Rightarrow$ Central function of definite determiners: anaphoric, leftward looking, establishing coherence

= background

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Other instances of background markers in literature:

e.g. Ameka (1991): Ewe (Kwa), Larson (2003): Fon and Haitian Creole, Baker and Travis (1997): Mohawk, Hole (2011): adnominal linker *de* in Mandarin *shi-de* clefts:

(15) Zhāngsān shì zuótiān lái-**de**.
Zhangsan COP yesterday come-DE
'It was YESTERDAY that Zhangsan came.'
(Hole 2011: 1707)

Patterns of focus-background partitioning

Other instances of background markers in literature:

NLZ in Burmese (Hole & Zimmermann 2013:297)

(16) [*pol: pe:ris-hma. we-khe.-**ta**(-ka.)*] <u>*naji-ta̱-loun:*</u> (***hpji'*** *te*)
Paul Paris-LOC   bought-**NLZ**-TOP clock-one-CL COP RLS
'It was a WATCH that Paul bought in Paris.'

Co-existence of partition-marking strategies:

As evidenced e.g. by (7a)/(11) for English and (12)/(14) for Ngamo, more than one partition-marking strategy can be found in a single language.

	+F, -B	-F, -B	+F, +B	-F, +B
+F, -B	x	✓ Ewe	✓ English	
-F, -B	✓ Ewe	x	✓ Hausa	✓ Ngamo
+F, +B	✓ English	✓ Hausa	x	✓ Ngamo (inversion)
-F, +B		✓ Ngamo	✓ Ngamo (inversion)	x

Co-existence of partition-marking strategies:

So far no evidence for co-existence of focus-only (6i) and background-only (6iv) in a single language, possibly for general economy considerations.

$\Rightarrow$ Diachronic development of functional markers of one part of the focus-background partition is sufficient.

$\Rightarrow$ Synchronic co-existence of [+F,-B] and [-F,+B] for marking the same information-structual partition makes languages overly expressive, raising learnability issues:

Don't mark same partition in two equally expressive ways!

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

Absolute (prosodic, metric, structural) prominence of focus is NOT a cross-linguistic universal!

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

Empirical-methodological consequence:
There exist languages in which focus marking plays little or no grammatical role!

also see Matic & Wedgwood (2013)'s skeptical view of focus as a universal *linguistic* category

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

Theoretical consequence: No universal applicability of Prominence or Alignment Theories of focus!

see Büring (2015)'s Unalternative Semantics, for a formal semantic analysis in terms of two interpretive processes:

No formal licensing of focus in grammar, but (language- specific, possibly parametrized) interpretation instructions for canonical and non-canonical sentences

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

Theoretical consequence: No universal applicability of Prominence or Alignment Theories of focus!

see Büring (2015)'s Unalternative Semantics, for a formal semantic analysis in terms of two interpretive processes:

strong restriction: calculates alternatives based on explicit (= non-canonical) focus marking

weak restriction: calculates backgrounded unalternatives based on canonical realization, ...

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see Büring (2015)'s Unalternative Semantics, for a formal semantic analysis in terms of two interpretive processes:

strong restriction: calculates alternatives based on explicit (= non-canonical) focus marking

weak restriction: calculates backgrounded unalternatives based on canonical realization, ...

but possibly also based on explicit background marking?

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

Two potential candidates for universals:

U1: Wide focus (VP, sentence) can go unmarked in any language $\Rightarrow$ canonical realization

U2: Backgrounded VPs are marked by non-canonical realization (= special structure) in any language

---

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

U1: Wide focus (VP, sentence) can go unmarked in any language $\Rightarrow$ canonical realization

Motivated by the fact that default focus of utterance is on or inside the VP-predicate or, with thetic statements, on the entire sentence predicating over a covert topic situation (Erteshik-Shir 1997, Zimmermann 2015a)

$\Rightarrow$ Focus as psychological predicate of utterance (Paul 1880 i.a.)

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

U1: Wide focus (VP, sentence) can go unmarked in any language $\Rightarrow$ canonical realization

Default focus-background partition:

Focus = syntactic predicate (VP, sentence)

$\Rightarrow$ Default partitions do not require explicit linguistic marking of focus-background partition: zero marking (Zimmermann 2015a)

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

U1: Wide focus (VP, sentence) can go unmarked in any language $\Rightarrow$ canonical realization

Default focus-background partition:

Focus = syntactic predicate (VP, sentence)

BUT: Categorical statements show indirect marking by topic-comment organization of the clause (compensation)

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

U2: Backgrounded VPs are marked by non-canonical realization (= special structure) in any language

Motivated by other side of same coin:

Backgrounded VPs constitute non-default mapping from information-structure to syntax

$\Rightarrow$ Explicit marking of focus and/or background

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

Ex.   In Burmese, the particle *pɛ:* marks focus-background partition in sentences with non-default mapping (Ozerov 2010):

In sentences, with given/backgrounded VP-material

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

(16)

kədi.	_pe:_	_ca._	_tɛ_ ‖	_shwã:θeĩ:_	_pwɛ:_	_twe_
promise	give	PL	R	festival	show	PL
_ka._	_lɛ:_	_mo:le_		_wəθa.kĩ:_	_hma._	_sho_
S	CON	weather		good weather	only	say
_tɔ._	_lou?_	_mɛ_	_sho_	_yĩ_	_lɛ:_	_phyi?_
TOP	do	IRR	say	if	CON	be
naĩ	_tɔ._	_lwɛlwɛ_	_pɛ:_	_kədi._	_pe:_	_lai?_
can	TOP	easily		promise	give	TERM
_ca._	_tɛ_					
PL	R					

,They **gave promises**. As the festival shows can only be given when there is good weather, they EASILY gave promises.'

(Non-) Universals in marking focus-background:

U2: Backgrounded VPs are marked by non-canonical realization (= special structure) in any language

$\Rightarrow$ U2 also responsible for subject/non-subject asymmetries in focus marking (Fiedler et al. 2010)

Subject focus = VP background

$\Rightarrow$ Obligatory marking not due to focus status of subject, but to background status of VP!

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

Cross-linguistic investigations of focus-background partitioning show that general functional or discourse-semantic pressures interact with language-specific grammatical properties in non-trivial ways.

Whilst non-default partitions universally require marking in order to allow for more efficient processing and information update, …

there is no cross-linguistically stable functional architecture for achieving this goal !!!

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

$\Rightarrow$ Different languages avail themselves of different structural means for marking focus or background constituents, depending on overall properties of the grammatical system (e.g. intonation languages $\Rightarrow$ pitch accents)

Focus clefting and phrasing/alignment seem widely available mechanisms cross-linguistically

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

More generally, the marking of focus-background partitions is subject to cross-linguistic variation in at least three ways:

i. Extent to which obligatory marking of non-default partitions generalizes to default partitions (VPfocus), resulting in consistent F/B-marking systems

$\Rightarrow$ Not triggered by language-external cognitive factors, but by language internal developments towards homogeneity/ consistency

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

More generally, the marking of focus-background partitions is subject to cross-linguistic variation in at least three ways:

ii. Development of predominantly focus-marking or background-marking systems

$\Rightarrow$ focus-marking systems appear to be more common, but perhaps this is a Euro-centric misconception?

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

More generally, the marking of focus-background partitions is subject to cross-linguistic variation in at least three ways:

iii. Diachronic source of partition markers (FOC, BG)

BG: DEF (Ngamo), nominal linker (Mandarin), Nominalizer (Burmese, Japanese)

FOC: copula, cleft (Heine and Reh 1983)

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

More generally, the marking of focus-background partitions is subject to cross-linguistic variation in at least three ways:

iii. Diachronic source of partition markers (FOC, BG)

$\Rightarrow$ Diachronic development of FOC/BG-markers is arbitrary to a certain extent, depending on original functional inventory as well as on additional contingent language-internal decisions...

(Non-) Universals - Taking Stock:

More generally, the marking of focus-background partitions is subject to cross-linguistic variation in at least three ways:

iii. Diachronic source of partition markers (FOC, BG)

⇒ e.g. Ngamo:

Why diachronic development to DEF-based BG-marking system, rather than to COP-based FOC-marking system?

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

i. The observed cross-linguistic variation offers ample reason for being sceptical about universal and deterministic functionalist or formal approaches to the realization of focus-background partitions.

⇒ The actual marking of F/B-partitioning in a language depends on a number of intertwined factors (general grammatical properties, diachronic development, …)

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

i.   The observed cross-linguistic variation offers ample reason for being sceptical about universal and deterministic functionalist or formal approaches to the realization of focus-background partitions.

$\Rightarrow$ Universal focus-based generalizations are inaccurate!

$\Rightarrow$ Focus-based generalizations may not be applicable to particular languages!

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

i.   The observed cross-linguistic variation offers ample reason for being sceptical about universal and deterministic functionalist or formal approaches to the realization of focus-background partitions.

⟹   Theoretical models of the grammar–information structure interface must refer to the more abstract notion of focus-background partitioning, which may be linguistically expressed in a number of ways

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

Constraint-based models of grammar should incorporate two discourse-driven constraints:

i.   EXPRESS PARTITION

ii. MARK BACKGROUNDED VPs (marking = non-canonical structure)

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

Constraint-based models of grammar should incorporate two discourse-driven constraints:

i.   EXPRESS PARTITION

ii. MARK BACKGROUNDED VPs (marking = non-canonical structure):

   (ii.) = strong constraint $\Rightarrow$ Falsifiable!

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

Structural models of sentences should contain an anaphoric element: s_{TOP} (Kratzer 2011)

[TOP [s_{TOP} [SUBJ ... [$_{vP}$ ...s ...

(Non-) Universals: Consequences

ii. Need for more diachronic work on possible grammaticalization paths of partition markers in typologically different languages (see e.g. Heine & Reh 1983 on African languages) and for work on ongoing grammaticalization processes of partition markers:

(17) Die ist für die NACHT, und diese **so** für TAGsüber **so**.
  this is for the night   and this.one so for day.over so
  'This one is for the NIGHT, and this one, for DAYtime.'
                                        (Wiese 2011: 993)

Variability in Interpretation:

Shared discourse-semantic motivation for laying open the focus-background partition does not entail parallel interpretation of marked foci and marked backgrounds!

Variability in Interpretation:

Focus marking: points to the existence of alternatives, which can be accessed and operated on by all kinds of exhaustivity operators.

Exhaustification is contingent on the existence of alternative sets.

Variability in Interpretation:

Focus marking: points to the existence of alternatives, which can be accessed and operated on by all kinds of exhaustivity operators.

$\Rightarrow$ Truth-functional or presuppositional exclusion operators, such as English *only* (Beaver and Clark 2008) and Awing *lə́* (Fominyam & Simik 2016)

Variability in Interpretation:

> **Focus marking:** points to the existence of alternatives, which can be accessed and operated on by all kinds of exhaustivity operators.

(18)   Ayafor a-yó-yíə   **lə́**   ndé   nɨ́ ŋkap   ʒíə
       Ayafor SM-F1come EXH   house with money his
       'It's to the house that Ayafor will come with his money.'
                                                    (Fominyam & Símík 2016)

Variability in Interpretation:

Focus marking: points to the existence of alternatives, which can be accessed and operated on by all kinds of exhaustivity operators.

$\Rightarrow$ In the absence of semantic EXH-operators, focus alternatives are typically pragmatically exploited for expressing contrast, exhaustivity, or mirativity (Onéa and Beaver 2009, Fanselow & Skopeteas 2011)

Variability in Interpretation:

Background: anaphoric, mainly concerned with the identification of salient background or topic situations (Hole 2011, Grubic 2015).

$\Rightarrow$ Background marking does NOT entail exhaustivity, mirativity, or other scale-related effects!

$\Rightarrow$ Background marking often, though not necessarily, (Grubic 2015) triggers existence presuppositions

Variability in Interpretation:

Background: anaphoric, mainly concerned with the identification of salient background or topic situations (Hole 2011, Grubic 2015).

English clefts (Rooth 1996):

(19)   It was John that stole the cookies.

⇒   Somebody stole the cookies.

Variability in Interpretation:

Background: anaphoric, mainly concerned with the identification of salient background or topic situations (Hole 2011, Grubic 2015).

Ngamo *i/ye*-marking (Grubic 2015):

(20) Q: Who did Njelu call yesterday?

Esha=**i** **ngo** **bu** nzono.
call.PFV=BM person NEG yesterday
‚He called NOBODY yesterday.'

Variability in Interpretation:

Background: anaphoric, mainly concerned with the identification of salient background or topic situations (Hole 2011, Grubic 2015).

$\Rightarrow$ Cross-linguistic variation in the interpretation of background marking!

Variability in Interpretation:

General methdological lesson:

Identification of non-canonical partition-markers per se does not allow for any predictions about their interpretive effects!

Variability in Interpretation:

> General methdological lesson:
>
> Identification of non-canonical partition-markers per se does not allow for any predictions about their interpretive effects!

$\Rightarrow$ Establish if partition-marker is FOC- or BG-related

$\Rightarrow$ Check for conventionalized or pragmatic alternative-related (if FOC) or existence-related (if BG) effects!

Conclusions:

i.   Marking of FOC/BG-partitions more varied than typically assumed in theoretical literature

ii.   Structures with FOC- AND BG-marking
        Structures without FOC-marking

iii.   Different kinds of partition-markers trigger different interpretive effects: e.g. +/- EXH

Conclusions:

iv.   Default partitions (VP-focus) need not be marked, Non-default partitions (VP-background) must be across languages

v.   Formal models of the grammar of languages should incorporate a (cognition-based) constraint: Mark VP-Background

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