

Deconstructing Information Structure

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We will begin by reviewing arguments that the grammar is blind to newness, that is, the theory of grammar makes no morphological or syntactic feature available to mark constituents of the sentence that are new: they are featurally *unmarked*. It follows from the morphosyntactically unmarked status of discourse-new constituents in syntactic representation that the newness of a constituent could have no influence on the positioning of a new constituent in syntactic representation. And (assuming Chomsky's T-model) it also could have no effect on the interfaces, that is, it could have no effect on semantic or pragmatic interpretation, and could have no special realization in phonological representation. Constituents that are discourse-new, on this view, constitute a kind of baseline—they occupy a default position in the syntax, show only the phonological properties that default phonology would predict, and make no contribution to semantic or pragmatic interpretation.

By contrast, we will make a case for a morphosyntactic representation of a feature [*FoC*] that marks syntactic constituents that are interpreted as invoking alternatives (Rooth 1985, 1992). The [*FoC*]-feature is syntactically and semantically comparable to the [*wh*]-feature. It may give rise to syntactic movement to a designated position in the left periphery of a sentence (hence is criterial in the sense of Rizzi 1997), and, depending on the language, it may be spelled out phonologically as a specific segmental particle, as a specific tonal morpheme, as a prosodic phrasal head prominence (stress), or as nothing at all.

Finally, we will argue for a distinct representation for the property of discourse-givenness. In some languages the discourse-givenness of a syntactic constituent may be spelled out via a non-segmental morpheme [*G*], which, we argue, can be likened to a discourse particle. In Standard American and British English and other West Germanic languages, the constituent that is the scope of [*G*] typically shows an absence of phrasal head prominence and the consequent absence of a tonal pitch accent in phonological representation. Crucially, the presence of [*G*] is independent of [*FoC*]-marking, and, moreover, has no impact on the compositional semantics of a sentence. Like a discourse particle, it contributes a mere conventional implicature (Kratzer 2004, Potts 2005). As for syntactic movement that might be taken to be associated with discourse-givenness, we conjecture that such movements might involve discourse-given constituents that are also Topics, and thus carry the movement-inducing (criterial) feature [*Top*], which all by itself has no semantic/pragmatic interpretation (McKenzie 2014).