Contrast For Two

This talk proposes a novel account of the pragmatics of German bridge accent (BA) sentences. A previous analysis by Büring (1997, 1999) is shown to leave some issues unresolved, and an analysis is presented that fixes these issues while keeping Büring’s correct predictions.

Bridge accents in German give rise to certain well-known interpretative effects often referred to under the heading of contrastive topic. (1) is an example from Büring (1999) (’/’: rising pitch accent; ’\': falling pitch accent).

(1) Die /WEIBLICHEN Popstars trugen KAFTANE\.
    the female pop stars wore caftans

Such a sentence can typically not be uttered in the same range of contexts as its counterpart with less marked intonation. Specifically, the use of the BA is restricted to contexts where alternatives to the accentuated phrases play some role.

Proposal. The BA comes with the conventional implicature that there is some true proposition (besides the one the sentence expresses) which can be obtained by substituting both accentuated elements with alternatives. This pattern correlates to pair-list enumeration contexts like (2), where every item of the enumeration is a pair that receives a BA. Thus, a BA sentence can be seen as implicating an enumeration which may be unexpressed. (We will call this the enumeration hypothesis.)

(2) /PETER hat mit ANNA\ getanzt, und /HANS hat mit MARIA\ getanzt. (Peter danced with Anne and John danced with Mary.)

E.g., the implicature of (1) is that there is another group of pop stars (male pop stars, say) whose members wore different clothes (maybe overalls). The intuition that alternatives to the accentuated phrases play a role is thus captured.

Comparison to Büring. The classical analysis by Büring (1997, 1999) is an extension of Rooth’s (1985) alternative semantics. The analysis presented above also refers to alternatives, but is somewhat less complex in that it does not make use of topic values.

Büring introduces the notion topic value in order to account for the pragmatic effects discussed. The topic value of a sentence is a set of sets of propositions calculated from the focus value (which is a set of propositions) by substituting the topicalized (i.e. rise-accented) element by suitable alternatives. Büring’s claim is that (part of) the pragmatic effect of the BA is the (conventional) implicature that there is a residual topic, i.e. an element of the topic value containing at least one proposition of unknown truth value. Here, too, the intuitive importance of alternatives is built in directly.

The following cases seem to support the enumeration hypothesis in comparison to Büring’s residual topic analysis:

In sentences like (3), the latter cannot account for the infelicity of B’s answer (given that Fritz is the only contextually salient person).

(3) A: Which devices did Fritz turn on?

B: # /FRITZ hat (unter anderem) das RADIO\ eingeschaltet.
    Fritz has among others the radio turned on

‘Fritz turned on the radio (among others).’

The topic value of (3B) contains e.g. a set containing the proposition Fritz turned on the TV set, the truth value of which is arguably unknown (especially in presence of among others). The key point is that for the topic value analysis, it is sufficient that only one of the accented items be replaced by an alternative, which in the actual context of (3) is not enough. The
enumeration hypothesis, of course, takes up exactly this point and, by requiring alternatives to Fritz as well as to das Radio, correctly predicts (3B) to be infelicitous.

**Scope Inversion Sentences.** Two further issues concern scope inversion (SI) sentences like (4, 5).

(4) /ALLE Politiker sind NICHT\ korrupt. (obligatory SI)
    all politicians are not corrupt
(5) /VIELE Politiker sind NICHT\ korrupt. (optional SI)
    many politicians are not corrupt

The fact that (4) shows obligatory SI, while in (5) it is optional, is accounted for by both analyses: The (unavailable) non-SI reading of (4) leaves no residual topic; neither is it possible to find alternatives to alle and nicht, yielding a proposition consistent with (but not equivalent to) this non-SI reading.

However, (4) conventionally conveys an implicature that there are corrupt politicians, which is not explained by the topic value analysis. On the enumeration account, this "existential" implicature arises naturally because every possibility of replacing the universal quantifier and negation by respective alternatives (while changing the actual proposition expressed) results in a proposition that ascribes corruptness to some subset of politicians (in the form of a quantifier over politicians).

Secondly, (5) in its non-SI reading constitutes a possible answer to the question 'Are there any corrupt politicians?'. But the topic value of (5), approximately (6), violates the constraint, assumed by Büring, that the semantic value of the question (a set of propositions) must be included in the topic value of the answer.

(6) \{ \{ MANY(politician')(\lambda x[¬corrupt'(x)]) \}, MANY(politician')(corrupt') \},
    \{ ALL(politician')(\lambda x[¬corrupt'(x)]) \}, ALL(politician')(corrupt') \},
    \{ SOME(politician')(\lambda x[¬corrupt'(x)]) \}, SOME(politician')(corrupt') \},
    \{ FEW(politician')(\lambda x[¬corrupt'(x)]) \}, FEW(politician')(corrupt') \}, ..., \}

Furthermore, the topic value does not capture the intuitive notion of "residual topic" in this case. Intuitively, the residual topic (or open question) would be something like "Which exact number/quota of politicians is corrupt?". In the enumeration hypothesis, the implicated proposition will be an answer (partial at least) to this question.

**Enumerations.** Analyzing BA sentences in terms of enumerations requires an explanation for the prosody of enumerations. Observe first that in simple (non-pair-list) enumerations, the standard intonation involves rise accents on every item except the last one. This is in line with the widely acknowledged connection of rising intonation and "openness" in a wide sense (at least in German). Pair-list enumerations show more complicated intonation, which is to be expected in view of their higher complexity, but still contain obligatory rise accents. An account of the prosody of enumeration may give more insight into the phenomenon of contrastive topic.

**References**

