

# TOWARDS AN OPERATIONALISATION OF CONTRAST

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# OUTLINE

- 1 General research topic
- 2 The issue with the notion of Contrast
- 3 Contrast as alternativeness
  - Open vs. closed set of alternatives
  - Implicit vs. explicit mention of alternatives
  - Exclusion requirement
- 4 Topic + Contrast: Contrastive Topics
  - Parallel structures with two variables
  - Bridging relations
- 5 Contrast + Focus: Contrastive Focus
  - Parallel structures with one variable
  - Parallel structures with two variable
  - CF in non-parallel structures
- 6 Conclusion

## **Title:**

A prosodic approach to information packaging in Functional Discourse Grammar

## **Overarching RQ:**

How are the information-structural categories of Topic, Focus and Contrast *realised* in spoken British English? Is there a correlation between particular prosodic realisations and pragmatic categories, and if so, how systematic is this correlation?

## **Methodology:**

- ICE-GB (Nelson et al., 2002)
- pragmatic analysis using QUD approach (see Riester et al., 2018)
- prosodic analysis using ToBI (see Silverman et al., 1992)

## Problem:

- no generally accepted definition available
- often only defined intuitively
- not clearly distinguished from Focus → hence imprecise terminology

Consequence: *Contrast* may mean quite different things in different studies

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# CRITERIA W.R.T. IDENTIFYING CONTRAST

(MOLNÁR, 2002, P. 149)

## Hierarchy of Contrast (HoC):

- highlighting
  - dominant contrast
  - membership in a set
  - limited set of candidates
  - explicit mentioning of alternatives
- } Focus
- } possible criteria for Contrast

**Basic requirement:** existence of a membership set

$$M = \{\dots, a, \dots\}$$

**Alternativeness** involves several notions:

- 1 Open vs. closed set of alternatives
- 2 Implicit vs. explicit mention of alternatives
- 3 Exclusion requirement

# ALTERNATIVENESS: OPEN VS. CLOSED SET

(I.A., CHAFE, 1976; HALLIDAY, 1967; KISS, 1998)

## Open set:

- membership set  $M$  not restricted by context
- Focus generates “a coherent class of possible contrasts” (Jackendoff, 1972, p. 243)

## Closed set:

- membership set  $M$  restricted by context, i.e. contextually anchored (cf. Molnár & Winkler, 2010)
- alternatives must be identifiable in discourse context, encyclopedic knowledge, lexicon, etc. ( $\neq$  explicit mention, see Riester & Baumann, 2013)

(2) John introduced BILL to Sue.

(Vallduví & Vilkuna, 1998, p. 84)

## **Implicit mention:**

= identifiability

## **Explicit mention (overtness condition):**

→ alternatives must be explicitly given in discourse context

(3) John, Pete and Josie all offered help. I asked *John*.

(adapted from Repp, 2016, p. 272)

further restriction possible → Contrast as binary opposition? (cf. Geluykens, 1992)

# EXCLUSION REQUIREMENT

(I.A. KENESEI, 2006; NEELEMAN & VERMEULEN, 2012; REPP, 2010, 2016)

## Basic idea:

- substituting expression *a* by alternative *b* results in false statement
- i.e. there must be at least one element for which the proposition expressed does not hold

(4) John didn't smile, Pete smiled.

(Repp, 2016, p. 273)

## INTERIM CONCLUSION I: ALTERNATIVENESS

An expression  $b$  counts as an alternative to an expression  $a$ , iff:

$b \in M$ , wherein the membership set  $M = \{a, b, \dots\}$  is contextually anchored, i.e. closed, and contains explicitly mentioned alternatives to the expression  $a$ .

Open questions:

- binary opposition, i.e.  $|M| = 2$ ?
  - adoption of the exclusion requirement?
- } Correction?

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## Questions under discussion (QUD):

- pragmatic method for information-structural analysis
- each assertion comes with an implicit QUD
- QUD determines which part of assertion is focused / backgrounded / not-at-issue

## Criteria for QUD formulation:

- Q-A-CONGRUENCE  
Assertion of target utterance must be a possible answer to QUD
- MAXIMIZE Q-ANAPHORICITY  
Questions must consist of as much given (or highly salient) material as possible
- Q-GIVENNESS  
Questions can only consist of given (or salient) material

- 1 Parallel structures with two variables
- 2 Bridging relations

# CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: PARALLEL STRUCTURES

(CF. BÜRING, 2003; MOLNÁR & WINKLER, 2010; REPP, 2010; RIESTER ET AL., 2018)

## Parallel structures (2 variables):

- two (or more) assertions contrasted at two positions
- often considered best examples of contrastiveness (→ prosody)

(5) John bought chicken and Peter (bought) veal.

(Repp, 2010, p. 1339)

$$M_1 = \{\text{John, Peter}\} \quad | \quad M_2 = \{\text{chicken, veal}\}$$

# CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: PARALLEL STRUCTURES

(CF. RIESTER ET AL., 2018)

## Contrastive Topics (CT):

- involve a super-question ( $Q_1$ ) and sub-questions ( $Q_{1.1}$  &  $Q_{1.2}$ , etc.)
- CTs background w.r.t.  $Q_{1.1}/Q_{1.2}$ , but foci w.r.t.  $Q_1$
- $Q_1$  entails  $Q_{1.1}$  &  $Q_{1.2}$  (see Roberts, 2012)

## CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: PARALLEL STRUCTURES

- (6) Q<sub>1</sub>: {What have different organisations said about climate change?}
- > Q<sub>1.1</sub>: {What has the ARK said about climate change?}
  - >> A<sub>1.1</sub>: [The organisation ARK]<sub>CT</sub> has said that sea-level will rise by one metre if present pollution levels and conditions continue.
  - > Q<sub>1.2</sub>: {What has the government of the UK said about climate change?}
  - >> A<sub>1.2</sub>: [The Government of the UK]<sub>CT</sub> has said twenty centimetres sea-level rise and one point four degrees centigrade increase.

(S1B-007 #199 / #204)

- (7) Q<sub>1</sub>: {What is a casualty where?}
- > Q<sub>1.1</sub>: {What is the first casualty in war?}
  - >> A<sub>1.1</sub>: [In war]<sub>CT</sub> uh perhaps the first casualty is truth
  - > Q<sub>1.2</sub>: {What is the first casualty in business and politics?}
  - >> A<sub>1.2</sub>: [In business and politics]<sub>CT</sub> the first casualty of difficult times can all too easily be the future.

(S2A-023 #022 / #023)

# CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: BRIDGING RELATIONS

(CF. CLARK, 1977; RIESTER ET AL., 2018)

## Bridging relations:

- semantic relation between referent and antecedent in context  
e.g. set membership, necessary parts, probable parts, etc.
- similar to parallel structures (see Riester et al., 2018, p. 423)  
→ analysed as CT w/o parallel sub-questions

(8) I met two people yesterday. *The woman* told me a story.

(Clark, 1977, p. 415)

→ not all bridging relations likely to give rise to CTs

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## CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: BRIDGING RELATIONS

### Necessary parts:

(9) I looked into the room. *The ceiling* was very high.

### Probable parts:

(10) I walked into the room. *The windows* looked out to the bay.

### Inducible parts:

(11) I walked into the room. *The chandeliers* sparkled brightly.

### Necessary roles:

(12) John was murdered yesterday. *The murderer* got away.

### Optional roles:

(13) John died yesterday. *The murderer* got away.

(Clark, 1977, pp. 415–417)

## Issues w.r.t. bridging relations & CT

- not all bridging relations seem to give rise to contrastive interpretation
  - relations involving roles
  - minor relations, e.g. reasons, causes, concurrences, etc.
- further restriction needed
  - construability of set membership
  - restricts CTs in bridging relations to set membership and -parts relation

## CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: BRIDGING RELATIONS

(14) Q<sub>1</sub>: What does it mean to you, music?

> Q<sub>1.1</sub>: {What does some music mean to you?}

>> A<sub>1.1</sub>: [Some music]<sub>CT</sub> means a very great deal.

(S1B-046 #025)

(15) A<sub>0</sub>: I certainly believe that the police system in the United Kingdom and in England and Wales should be nationally organised.

Q<sub>1</sub>: {What about the structure of policing?}

> Q<sub>1.1</sub>: {What about many of its services?}

>> A<sub>1.1</sub>: ~~but I also believe that uh~~ [many of its services]<sub>CT</sub> should be locally delivered.

(S1B-033 #006)

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(S1B-033 #006)

## CONTRASTIVE TOPICS: NEITHER

There are examples which show neither parallelism, nor any obvious bridging relation:

(16) A<sub>0</sub>: I honestly don't know. People always ask me this about my novels, too. What made you write them? What inspired you to do it? And it's a question that simply can't be answered. [...]

Q<sub>1</sub>: {What inspired you to write poetry?}

> A<sub>1</sub>: As for [poetry]<sub>CT</sub>, it's awfully difficult to talk about you know.

(S1B-048 #014)

→ *poetry* contrasted with *novels* (*as-for* construction indicates Topic switch)

### Open questions:

- CT = aboutness Topics? (cf. Repp, 2010; Riester et al., 2018)
  - e.g. Riester et al. (2018): polarity contrasts (i.e. verum focus) as CT
  - from FDG perspective → aboutness
- Frame-setting Topics can also be contrastive (in parallel structures)
- restriction on kind of bridging relation

**Focus:** answer to explicit/implicit QUD

(17) A<sub>0</sub>: There can over time be a widening gap between the positions taken by the two groups [= orthodoxy and reform].

Q<sub>1</sub>: {There can be a widening gap between the positions on WHAT?}

> A<sub>1i</sub>: [sexual ethics]<sub>Foc</sub>

> A<sub>1ii</sub>: [homosexuality]<sub>Foc</sub>

> A<sub>1iii</sub>: [the role of women]<sub>Foc</sub>

> A<sub>1iv</sub>: [the ordination of women as rabbis]<sub>Foc</sub>

(S1B-047 #085)

→ Contrastive Focus also answer to QUD though

# CONTRAST + FOCUS: CONTRASTIVE FOCUS

(CF. MOLNÁR, 2002, 2006)

## Hierarchy of Contrast (HoC):

- highlighting
  - dominant contrast
- } Focus
- membership in a set
  - limited set of candidates
  - explicit mentioning of alternatives
  - (exclusion requirement)
- } possible criteria for Contrast

→ necessary, but not sufficient conditions for Contrastive Focus

→ i.e. presence of alternatives does not always trigger contrastive interpretation

# CONTRAST + FOCUS: CONTRASTIVE FOCUS

- 1 Parallel structures with one variable
- 2 Parallel structures with two variables
- 3 CF in non-parallel structures

## Parallelism with one variable:

(18) A<sub>0</sub>: This [= Gulf war] is an action authorised by the Security Council of the United Nations [...]

Q<sub>1</sub>: {Calling it a United States action does WHAT to history?}

> A<sub>1</sub>: [To talk of it as a United States operation ]<sub>Top</sub>  
[simply misreads]<sub>Foc/CF</sub> history or [intentionally  
misinterprets]<sub>Foc/CF</sub> history.

(S1B-027 #119)

## Parallelism with one variable:

(19) A<sub>0</sub>: Roy Hattersley if you were not Shadow but actual Home Secretary would you change the structure of the police forces in a national direction?

Q<sub>1</sub>: {What is a national police force accountable to?}

> A<sub>1</sub>: [A national police force]<sub>Top</sub> is either responsible to [the Government]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>, which is undesirable, or responsible to [nobody]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>, which is almost as undesirable perhaps even more undesirable.

(S1B-033 #031)

## Parallelism with two variables:

- (20) Q<sub>1</sub>: {What is a casualty where?}
- > Q<sub>1.1</sub>: {What is the first casualty in war?}
  - > > A<sub>1.1</sub>: [In war]<sub>CT</sub> uh perhaps the first casualty is [truth]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>
  - > Q<sub>1.2</sub>: {What is the first casualty in business and politics?}
  - > > A<sub>1.2</sub>: [In business and politics]<sub>CT</sub> the first casualty of difficult times can all too easily be [the future]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>.

(S2A-023 #022 / #023)

## Parallelism with two variables:

- (21) Q<sub>1</sub>: {What do different groups of Jews say is the only way to protect Judaism?}
- > Q<sub>1.1</sub>: {What does one group say about how to protect Judaism?}
  - >> A<sub>1.1</sub>: So [a group of Jews]<sub>CT</sub> say the only way we can protect Judaism is [to withdraw]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>
  - > Q<sub>1.2</sub>: {What does another group say about how to protect Judaism?}
  - >> A<sub>1.2</sub>: [another group of Jews]<sub>CT</sub> say the only way we can sustain Jewish identity is [to redefine its terms]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>.

(S1B-047 #095-096/ #097-098)

## Parallel structures and CF:

- Parallel structures with one variable:
  - membership set closed + explicit mention of alternatives
  - mutual exclusion may be related to contrastiveness (?)
  
- Parallel structures with two variables:
  - membership set closed + explicit mention of alternatives
  - exclusion requirement holds
  - intuitively more/less contrastive cases
  
- Three ways of dealing with this
  - 1 all parallel structures → Foc  
OR
  - 2 all parallel structures → CF  
OR
  - 3 one variable structures → mutual exclusion  
two variables structures → CF

# CONTRASTIVE FOCUS: THE ISSUE

Contrastiveness often seen as a gradient property of Focus:

- Bolinger (1961, p. 87): “every semantic peak is contrastive”
- Lambrecht (1994, p. 290):
  - “clear and less clear instances of contrastiveness”
  - Contrast is conversational implicature
- Baumann et al. (2006): the more narrow focus, the more contrastive interpretation
- Calhoun (2009): the higher the prosodic prominence, the more contrastive interpretation
- Cruschina (2021): different kinds of Foci
  - information focus > exhaustive focus > mirative focus > corrective focus

# CONTRASTIVE FOCUS: CRUSCHINA (2021)

- **Information Focus:** conveys new information, i.e. not contrastive
- **Exhaustive Focus:** excludes alternatives (e.g. in Hungarian)
- **Mirative Focus:** new information that is unexpected for addressee
- **Corrective Focus:** corrects preceding assertion

## Basic idea:

The greater the contrast, the greater potential to be syntactically marked.

## Focus vs. Contrastive Focus: Corrective Focus

- Contrast often involves element of rejection/correction (Repp, 2010, p. 1338)
- Correction strongest possible contrast (→ marking?)
- CF as correction (in non-parallel structures)?

(22) Q<sub>1</sub>: Where does the licence [which banks require in order to practice] come from?

A<sub>0</sub>: I think from the Department of <unclear word>.

A<sub>1</sub>: It's actually the Department of [Trade and Industry]<sub>CF</sub>.

(S1B-011 #024)

## Weak correction:

(23) A<sub>0</sub>: So even if we try to say that the constitution is that body of of rules we discover that it's not just rules

Q<sub>1</sub>: {What is the constitution then?}.

A<sub>1i</sub>: It's [systems]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>.

A<sub>1ii</sub>: [electoral]<sub>Foc/CF</sub> systems within parties

A<sub>1iii</sub>: [institutions]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>

A<sub>1iv</sub>: [the way those institutions there are run]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>

A<sub>1v</sub>: and [governed internally]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>

(S1B-011 #143)

## Alternativeness:

- existence of membership set  $M$ 
  - $M$  must be contextually anchored, i.e. closed
  - elements in  $M$  must be mentioned explicitly
- exclusion requirement + binary opposition as conditions?

## Contrastive Topics:

- parallel structures with two variables
- bridging relations (construability of set membership)

## Contrastive Focus:

- parallel structures
  - inconclusive (several options of how to code them)
    - 1 all parallel structures as Foc
    - 2 all parallel structures as CF
    - 3 distinctions within one variable structures (mutual exclusion)
- CF as Correction in non-parallel structures
  - Correction often used as criterion
  - Correction coded categorically in other languages (e.g. Greek, see Stavropoulou & Baltazani, 2021)
  - stronger contrast more likely to be marked (cf. Cruschina, 2021)
  - exclusion requirement + binary opposition?

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**Contrastive Focus: Subsets?**

(24) A<sub>0</sub>: And Indonesia is the largest island archipelago in the world with some seventeen thousand islands

> Q<sub>1</sub>: {Which of these islands do you study?}

> A<sub>1</sub>: However, [I]<sub>Top</sub> uh only look at [a small group of islands]<sub>Foc</sub>.

(S2A-046 #017)

## Contrastive Topics: Parallelism?

- (25)  $A_0$ : More much more is being spent on public transport
- >  $Q_1$ : {What have different public transportation companies done?}
  - > >  $Q_{1.1}$ : {What have British Rail and London Transport done?}
  - > >  $A_{1.1}$ : Both [British Rail]<sub>Top/CT</sub> and [London Transport]<sub>Top/CT</sub> [have increased their capital expenditure plans considerably]<sub>Foc</sub>.

(S2A-023 #094)

**Contrastive Topics: Proper subsets**

(26) Q<sub>2.0</sub>: {What is the cost it [= the fact that very young infants survive] comes with?}

Q<sub>2.1</sub>: {What about the healthy babies that survive?}

A<sub>2</sub>: And [the cost]<sub>TOP</sub> is that [[a number of these infants]<sub>CT</sub> come through with disabilities of some form]<sub>FOC</sub>.

(S2A-046 #113)

**Listing: Contrastive?**

(27) A<sub>0</sub>: I'm bound to say there are a whole series of things that one has to consider when one's examining matters to do with the leadership of the Conservative Party.

> Q<sub>1</sub>: {What are those things that one has to consider?}

> A<sub>1.1</sub>: [Charisma]<sub>Foc</sub> is certainly one.

> A<sub>1.2</sub>: [Policy]<sub>Foc</sub> is another.

> A<sub>1.3</sub>: [The ability to unite the party]<sub>Foc</sub>.

(S1B-043 #009)

## Negative expressions: Contrastive?

(28) A<sub>0</sub>: Uh so if if we're to include sign language as evidence for genetic basis for language

> Q<sub>1</sub>: What's the genetic basis?

> A<sub>1.1</sub>: [It]<sub>Top</sub> [is not going to be just speech any more]<sub>Foc</sub>.

(S1B-003 #160)

# CONTRAST AS A DISCOURSE RELATION

(CF. REPP, 2016; UMBACH, 2004)

## OPPOSE<sup>1</sup>

- contrast results from exclusion of additional elements
- both propositions can be true in evaluation world (Repp, 2016, p. 278)

## CORRECTION

- contrast results from exclusion exclusion by substitution
- proposition cannot both be true

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<sup>1</sup>CONTRAST in Umbach (2004)

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# CONTRASTIVENESS AS A DISCOURSE RELATION

(CF. REPP, 2016; UMBACH, 2004)

## OPPOSE:

(29) A<sub>0</sub>: Then I should think uh before the time of Deuteronomy  
you've got a specialist class emerging, the Levites

Q<sub>1</sub>: {What about the Levites?}

A<sub>1</sub>: but [they]<sub>TOP</sub> [don't have any legal rights]<sub>Foc</sub>.

(S1B-001 #090)

- contrastive w.r.t. preceding utterance
- Focus structure seems to be unaffected by discourse relation  
→ simple Focus

# CONTRASTIVENESS AS A DISCOURSE RELATION

(CF. REPP, 2016; UMBACH, 2004)

## CORRECTION:

(30) A<sub>0</sub>: Look at Chapter Three Verse Three how God will purify the children of Levi like silver and gold like gold and silver and they will be offering sacrifices to the Lord in righteousness

Q<sub>1</sub>: {Who will be offering sacrifices?}

A<sub>1</sub>: Not [the children of Aaron]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>, [the children of Levi]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>.

(S1B-001 #053)

- exclusion of explicit alternative
- Focus structure unclear → simple vs. contrastive Focus

# CONTRASTIVENESS AS A DISCOURSE RELATION

(CF. REPP, 2016; UMBACH, 2004)

## CORRECTION:

(31) Q<sub>1</sub>: Emma, what are you going to write about  
<unclear-words>?

A<sub>1</sub>: Not [individual countries]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>, but [basically  
areas]<sub>Foc/CF</sub>.

(S1B-007 #208)

## Open questions:

- CORR possible without IP Contrast, i.e. with simple Focus?
- CORR + CF → stronger contrast (i.e. contrast as cumulative)?

→ What are the criteria to distinguish simple Foc and CF in CORR?

## Three perspectives:

- 1 Contrast entails Focus  
e.g. Chomsky (1972) and Jackendoff (1972)
- 2 Contrastiveness as a conversational implicature  
e.g. Lambrecht (1994)
- 3 Contrast autonomous notion  
e.g. Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2008), Molnár (2002, 2006),  
and Molnár and Winkler (2010)

## Issues with Contrast (-Overlap) as an independent dimension:

- Contrast qualitatively different
  - Topic & Focus can occur independently
  - Contr seems to be dependent on either Topic or Focus, i.e. Contrastive Topic or Contrastive Focus
- Contr shares aspects of both Topic (i.e. discourse linking) & Focus (i.e. highlighting) (see Molnár & Winkler, 2010)