

## **The interface interpretation of Topics. A phase-based «compositional» account**

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It is commonly assumed that utterances are information-structurally (IS) composed of two major «domains» defined as Topic and Comment, the former implementing given information, the latter encoding the informative part of the sentence. In addition, a second partition can be recognized in the Comment, distinguishing a focused and a backgrounded part (Krifka 1992, 2007). In this paper the question is addressed as to whether an internal partition can also be recognized within the Topic domain and, if so, how its subparts (described in terms of discourse features) are characterized at the interfaces.

As a matter of fact the notion of Topic is not treated uniformly in the literature (see Krifka 2007 for an overview), though givenness is usually assumed as its basic property. Indeed, discourse analysis shows that Topic constituents are very often given and realized with a low tone; accordingly, this can be considered as their unmarked IS-characterization.

However, recent analyses have shown that different types of Topics must be identified (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007, Frascarelli 2007), which can either combine givenness with other features (e.g., contrast, aboutness) or be totally discourse-new. It is assumed that these are cases of IS-marked Topics which, accordingly, are interpreted at the PF interface through marked intonational contours. In particular, interface analysis will show a systematic correlation between prosodic and discourse markedness, as well as the existence of specific output restrictions in feature compositionality.

Moreover, a crucial connection can be also proved between discourse features and illocutive force. Following Bianchi & Frascarelli's (2010) analysis, different types of Topics are shown to have a different impact on conversational dynamics. In particular, shifting Topics implement a specific conversational move and, as such, constitute an independent (specifically, an «initiating») speech act. This means that this type of Topic does not belong in the CP-phase and is not in the scope of the Force operator. On the other hand, Contrastive Topics provide an instruction for the hearer and must be in the scope of the assertion operator to be interpreted. Finally, Given (Familiar) Topics never instantiate a conversational move and do not affect conversational dynamics. Consequently, they can be found in any type of subordinate clause.

Based on these analyses, the present paper is intended to show the existence of a crucial correlation between IS-markedness, conversational dynamics and the interface interpretation of different Topic-related discourse features. In particular, evidence will be provided that different IS-features are interpreted at specific «structural layers», which can be profitably identified with «phases» in the Minimalist program. Finally, it will be shown that not all discourse features pertain to the CP phase and that the correlation between a phase (i.e., either CP or DP) and a specific type of discourse features depends on illocutive force.

Intonational contours will be provided concerning the realization of Topics combining different discourse features. Special attention will be devoted to the notions of «contrast» in the case of «shifting contrastive Topics» and in the so-called «parallel structures» (cf. Büring 2008). Furthermore, the present approach also allows for a fine-grained analysis of the notion of givenness, and a feature-based solution is proposed for the dichotomy between Schwarzschild's (1999) «strong» givenness and Roberts' (2003) «weak familiarity».

## References

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