

Focus affinity as prominence?

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The term *focus affinity* refers to the probability of different grammatical roles (subject, objects, adverbials etc.) to be the focus of a sentence ([1], [2]). Grammatical roles with high focus affinity are often focus, whereas those with low focus affinity are rarely focus. Differences in focus affinity have been reported, for example, between subjects and objects (objects exhibit a higher degree of focus affinity than subjects, [3], [4], [5]). Furthermore, hierarchies in which grammatical roles are ranked according to their focus affinity have been presented ([1], [2] [6], [7]). Despite recurring indications of differences in focus affinity, such as the one between subjects and objects, focus affinity remains an understudied phenomenon (e.g., no mention in [8]).

The main goal of this talk is to evaluate how focus affinity relates to prominence. To this end, I will apply the three key features of prominence proposed by von Heusinger & Schumacher (cf. [9]) to focus affinity and answer the following questions: (i) Is focus affinity a relational property?, (ii) Does focus affinity shift over time (as discourse unfolds)?, (iii) Are grammatical roles with high focus affinity structural attractors? Additionally, I will discuss a prominence paradox linked to the semantic-pragmatic basis of focus affinity.

Regarding the three key features of prominence, I will argue that focus affinity shows mixed behavior. First, as grammatical roles can be ranked with respect to focus affinity, focus affinity constitutes a relational property. Within a given sentence individual grammatical roles are singled out as being the best candidate for focus. For example, depictive secondary predicates, such as *drunk* in (1), have a high likelihood of being the focus of the sentence in which they occur (cf. [1], [2], [10], [11], [12]).

Second, with respect to dynamicity, i.e., the shift over time as a discourse unfolds, it is not obvious how this feature applies to focus affinity. At the level of grammatical roles, it does not seem reasonable to compare in a short discourse such as (2) the focus affinity of the subject in sentence S1 to the one of the subject in S2. At the level of discourse referents, however, the dynamic perspective is more promising: Comparing the focus affinity of the referent *CAR* in S1 and S2 shows a decrease from S1 to S2. The fact that the focus affinity of referents may change as discourse unfolds is akin to topic shift (cf. [9]). But while topic shift (and also topic continuity) genuinely concerns discourse referents, focus affinity is first and foremost about grammatical roles.

Third, I examine whether grammatical roles with high focus affinity serve as structural attractors. I will argue that there is no correlation between high focus affinity and structural attraction. Crucially, grammatical roles with low focus affinity serve as structural attractors as well. Data from French and Spanish focus marking suggests that grammatical roles with low focus affinity show more often special focus marking via clefting and focus movement than grammatical roles with high focus affinity ([13], [14]). In sum, focus affinity only partially exhibits the key features of prominence presented in [9].

Abstracting away from the specific notion of prominence proposed in [9], a prominence paradox becomes apparent when considering the semantic-pragmatic basis of focus affinity (cf. [1]). Although all grammatical roles typically contribute to the description of an event, they differ with respect to their degree of accessoriness. In (1), for example, the subject and the object express core participants of a buying event, while the state of the buyer during the event (expressed by the depictive) is accessory information for a buying event. In the face of the economy principle (cf. [15], [16]), the presence of grammatical roles expressing such accessory information must be justified. Being focus justifies the presence of even highly accessory information in a sentence, since focus must be overtly expressed. Consequently, grammatical roles that express accessory information (e.g., depictives) tend to be interpreted as focus whenever they occur in a sentence. This leads to the following prominence paradox: Grammatical roles that express non-prominent (= accessory) components of an event, become prominent (= focal) when they are overtly expressed in a sentence.

- (1) John bought the car drunk.
(2) [John bought a car.]_{s1} [It was green.]_{s2}

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