Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

Seminar für Sprachwissenschaft

**Contrastive Dialogues Involving Ellipsis:  
A Pilot Study**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This research co

# 1. Introduction

The pronunciation of a sentence holds significance, encompassing not only the stressed word but also the elements emphasized in the conversation, impacting the naturalness perceived by native speakers. This becomes particularly intriguing in dialogues that involve contrastive focus, as illustrated in the following example (1).

1. A: Where is John travelling from?

B: John is travelling with Mary from Africa.

C: No, Asia.

C’: No, to.

C’’: No, Susan.

C’’’: No, without.

From an intuitive standpoint, it seems that one would encounter any of speaker C’s responses unexpectedly. On one hand, it is evident that speaker C is correcting a specific part of speaker B's utterance, as *Africa* and *Asia* and *from* and *to*, etc. contrast. However, on the other hand, speaker C’s responses seem odd, as the reader, first, has to determine what the word contrasts with. This might be because the reader is not primed for the contrast. Instead, in dialogues, in which the contrasting words are orthographically marked (e. g. *africa* and *asia*), may be perceived more naturally by native speakers.

The present paper aims to determine the best medium for reliably obtaining judgments about such dialogues. That is, we tested whether dialogues such as (1) are rated more naturally if the contrasting words are marked and comparing the results to the verbal equivalents of (1), including stimuli with and without pitch accent on the contrasting words. We hypothesize that stimuli with orthographic marking or pitch accent, respectively, on the contrasting words are deemed more natural by native speakers. Moreover, we hypothesize that auditory stimuli are more likely to be accepted by native speaker than written stimuli. Regarding the contrasting words, we hypothesize that stimuli with content words in contrastive focus received higher acceptability rating than stimuli with functional words in contrastive focus and that stimuli with at-issue content in contrastive focus are rated more natural than stimuli with not-at-issue content in contrastive focus.

# 2. Literary review

According to Krifka (2008), “[f]ocus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expression” (p. 247).

Koev (2018) proposes to replace the former understanding of at-issueness, according to which at-issueness includes the so-called main point of an utterance. Instead, he argues in favor of a differentiation between three notions of at-issueness. That is, the first notion of at-issueness is what he calls question-at-issueness and describes the “part of the utterance meaning that is intended to address the question under discussion, where the intention is felicitous if this meaning is presented as relevant to that question” (Koev 2018, p. 3). 🡪 more on issueness, only ones James said it’s important

# 3. Data and method

The data used in

## 3.1 Study design

X

## 3.2 Participants

X

# 4. Findings

Using

# 5. Discussion

Since

# 6. Conclusions

This paper gives an overview of the

# 7. References

# 8. Appendix

## 8.1 Abbreviations, symbols and other notational conventions

? questionable/marginal acceptability

\* unacceptable

capitals**/bold** pitch accent

FocP focused position

## 8.2 List of stimuli

*Insert stimuli here*

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby confirm that this paper and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others this is always clearly stated. All statements taken literally from other writings or referred to by analogy are marked and the source is always given. This paper has not yet been submitted to another examination office, either in the same or similar form.

Tübingen, September 30th, 2023



Miriam Schiele