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Hans-Christian Schmitz and Bernhard Schröder - University of Bonn On focus and VP-deletion

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Kratzer (1991) discusses syntactic restrictions on the construction of focus alternatives in the sense of Rooth 1992. She presents an example with a focus in the antecedent of a deleted VP.

- (d0) Peter: “What a copy cat you are! You went to Block Island because I did. You went to Elk Lake Lodge because I did. And you went to Tanglewood because I did.”
Jane: “I only went to TANGLEWOOD because you did.”

By reconstructing the deleted VP, Jane’s objection becomes “I only went to TANGLEWOOD because you went to TANGLEWOOD.” For this sentence standard alternative semantics allows for the construction of an alternative set **A0** which comprises predicates like “went to Block Island because Peter went to Block Island” and “went to Block Island because Peter went to Tanglewood”, i.e. predicates of the form “went to x because Peter went to y”. Jane’s objection therefore excludes that she went to Tanglewood because Peter went to Block Island. Kratzer claims that this is not intended. The alternative set (**A1**) may only comprise predicates of the form “went to x because Peter went to x”. This restriction is due to syntactic, and not contextual reasons. In constructing an alternative set the focus in a formerly deleted VP must always be replaced by the same value as the corresponding focus in the antecedent VP. Kratzer’s view is widely accepted.

We did an experiment to test whether listeners always interpret utterances like Jane’s according to Kratzer’s hypothesis. We integrated a German analogue of Jane’s objection into two different German dialogues (d1,d2). As there is no VP-deletion in German, the German and English examples differ in their anaphoric means. The English example employs VP-deletion, the German ones pronominal anaphora. We placed the dialogues into a context where Peter went to Berlin (resp. Tanglewood), which inspired Jane, who then went to Dortmund (Block Island), Kiel (Elk Lake Lodge) and Berlin. After she came back, Peter went to Kiel and Dortmund, too.

- (d1) Peter: “Dich habe ich wohl zum Reisen angeregt. Du bist nach Berlin gefahren, weil ich nach Berlin gefahren bin. Du bist nach Kiel gefahren, weil ich nach Berlin gefahren bin. Und Du bist nach Dortmund gefahren, weil ich nach Berlin gefahren bin.”
(I inspired you. You went to Block Island because I went to Tanglewood. You went to Elk Lake Lodge because I went to Tanglewood. And you went to Tanglewood because I went to Tanglewood.)
Jane: “Nein, ich bin nur nach BERLIN gefahren, weil Du es gemacht hast.”
(I only went to TANGLEWOOD because you did.)
(d2) Peter: “Nachmacherin! Du bist nach Berlin gefahren, weil ich nach Berlin gefahren bin. Du bist nach Kiel gefahren, weil ich nach Kiel gefahren
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bin. Und Du bist nach Dortmund gefahren, weil ich nach Dortmund gefahren bin.”
Jane: “Nein, ich bin nur nach BERLIN gefahren, weil Du es gemacht hast.”
(cf. d0)

We asked 23 test persons (tps) for (d1) and 24 tps for (d2) whether Jane was telling the truth. We further asked the tps to justify their answers by choosing possible reasons like “Jane went to Dortmund because Peter went to Berlin” or “Jane did not go to Dortmund because Peter went to Dortmund” from a list. From the answers we inferred which alternative sets the tps constructed in interpreting Jane's objection.

The majority (61%) of the tps for (d1) judged Jane's objection as false. The majority (67%) of the tps for (d2) judged her answer as true. According to the Fisher-test there is a marginally significant dependency of the tendency to judge Jane's objection as true on the dialogue context (p-value = 0.08198). This result together with the reasons given by the tps shows that most recipients of (d1) construct an alternative set **A2** which comprises predicates of the form “went to x because Peter went to Berlin (*Tanglewood*)”. A2 is different from A1, both A1 and A2 are subsets of A0.

Tendencies of the interpretation of Jane's objection are dependent on the discourse context. We conjecture that this context dependency would be similar for the English examples in spite of the aforementioned linguistic difference. We expect a similar test with native English speakers to show that most recipients of (d1) construct an alternative set (A2) not compatible with Kratzer's hypothesis.

References

- Kratzer, A. (1991) “The Representation of Focus”, in A. von Stechow and D. Wunderlich eds, *Semantics. An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, de Gruyter, Berlin/ New York, 831-834.
- Rooth, M. (1992) “A Theory of Focus Interpretation”, *Natural Language Semantics* 1, 75-116.