

ENCODING FOCUS, TOPIC AND CONTRAST IN RUSSIAN

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Abstract: In my talk I will look at two information-structural phenomena, contrastive focus (CF) and contrastive topic (CT), as in (1) and (2) below. These are traditionally analysed as separate notions because they occur in sentences with distinct interpretation and are marked with distinct intonational contours. Thus, a sentence containing CF conveys the interpretation of counter-assertion to a proposition in the context, with CF carrying falling intonation (see (1)). A sentence with a contrastive topic, on the other hand, triggers the interpretation of a set of sets of propositions (Büring 1997), and the intonation assigned to CT has a (fall)-rise contour (see (2)).

Based on the identical syntactic behaviour of CF and CT in languages like Russian, as well as on their association with identical interpretative features, I will argue that CF and CT should be analyzed as one and the same information-structural notion, with the difference between sentences containing CF, on the one hand, and CT, on the other, reduced to the distinct nature of an additional non-presupposed element obligatorily present in the sentence. In sentences with CF, as in (1), this additional element is a contrastive verum focus (i.e. focus on the truth-value of the utterance). In sentences with CT, as in (2), it can be any non-presupposed non-contrastive element.

- (1) a. [Ivan čitaet knigi.]_{CONTEXT} Russian
 Ivan reads books
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 Net, Ivan [gazEty]_{CF} čitaet (a ne knigi)
 no Ivan newspapers.ACC reads (and not books)
'Ivan reads newspapers (but no books).'
- b. [John reads books.]_{CONTEXT} English
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 John reads [newspapers]_{CF}, (not books).
- (2) a. [Kto čitaet knigi?]_{CONTEXT} Russian
 Who reads books?
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 [Gazety]_{CT} čitaet [IvAn]_{FOC} (a nasčët knig ja ne znaju.)
 newspapers.ACC reads Ivan (and about books I not know)
'Ivan reads newspapers (but I don't know about books).'
- b. [Who reads books?]_{CONTEXT} English
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 [John]_{FOC} reads [CT newspapers]_{CT}, (but I'm not sure who reads books).