

Topless and Salient — Convertibles in the Theory of Focus

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Abstract This paper tracks recent developments of focus semantics, emanating from Schwarzschild’s (1999) *convertible* examples. It discusses the theoretical impact of the various variations on these examples. The paper ends up arguing that we need contrastive focusing as a precondition for deaccenting, but that in turn we need to give up the idea that focusing is anaphoric. This in turn opens up crucial gaps in our coverage of the data, which should be closed by making deaccenting—but not backgrounding in general—subject to: a givenness condition.

1 Introduction

No-one is sure how and when convertibles came into the picture. They first seem to appear in print in Roger Schwarzschild’s 1999 paper *GIVENness, AVOIDF and Other Constraints on the Placement of Accent* (pp.146 and 161), but if memory serves they had been around for several years prior on various handouts, used first by Schwarzschild, and then adopted by various people inspired by his work, including the present author; neither Schwarzschild (p.c.) nor I have been able to track their first occurrence. In Schwarzschild (1999), convertible examples served to illustrate various points, but their most important impact in that paper was, as I discuss in section 2, that they (together with various examples involving drunk presidents) drove home the point that focus projection from adjuncts is not in principle impossible (*pace* Rochemont, 1986; Selkirk, 1984, 1995; von Stechow and Uhmman, 1986, and virtually any other theory of F-projection at the time).

The arguments and proposals in Schwarzschild (1999), henceforth COPA (*Constraints On the Placement of Accent*) proved enormously influential over the follow-

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. In: Daniel Altshuler and Jessica Rett (eds)(2019) *The Semantics of Plurals, Focus, Degrees, and Times – Essays in Honor of Roger Schwarzschild*. 137–155.

ing decade, but, almost uncannily, it would be convertible examples again, that were used in Wagner (2006b) (later published in Wagner, 2012) to illustrate the first, to my mind, substantial objection to the ‘GIVENness...’ theory, which I would sum up as: givenness alone is not sufficient to license deaccenting; we need contrastive focusing.

I believe that Wagner’s objections in that paper were as compelling as they were consequential; taken to their logical conclusion, as discussed in section 3, they imply that COPA’s successful unification of focusing and givenness deaccenting is in fact empirically problematic. I also believe that no account to this date successfully covers the range of cases on focus theoreticians’ plates since Wagner’s papers. In the present paper I would like to make a modest step towards that goal, trying to pinpoint exactly where I think the theory needs adjustments, and what kind of adjustments.

In a nutshell, I argue in the final section 4 that we need contrastive focusing as a precondition for deaccenting (as Wagner showed), but that in turn we need to give up the time-honored and generally accepted idea that focusing is anaphoric; this in turn opens up crucial gaps in our coverage of the data, which should be closed by making deaccenting—but not backgrounding in general—subject to, wait for it: a givenness condition. The whole picture is schematized in figure 1.

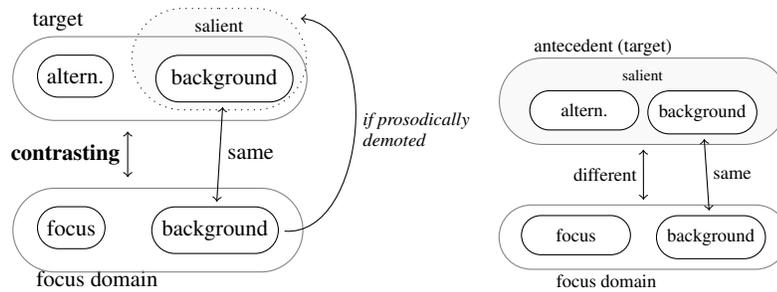


Fig. 1 The present paper argues for a view in which focal targets need to be truly contrastive, but not contextually salient (‘focus is not anaphoric’), as in the figure on the left; not even the background of a focus domain needs to be given, unless it has been prosodically demoted (e.g. deaccented). The (more) standard picture (right figure), on the other hand, requires the entire focal target to be contextually salient, but merely requires it to be different from (not contrastive to) the focus domain.

To set all these ideas on context though, it will be worthwhile to retrace our steps in detail, or more aptly: the theoretical tire tracks of the convertible examples.

2 No roof for F-projection

In their simplest form, convertible examples present an instance of DEACCENTING INSIDE A BROADER FOCUS, as in (1) (ex. (12) in COPA).

- (1) {John drove Mary's red convertible. What did he drive before that?}
 A: He drove her BLUE convertible.

Since the question in (1) asks for an object answer, standard theories of focusing would predict that *her blue convertible* should be the focus in A's utterance, by what is called QUESTION-ANSWER CONGRUENCE. Yet the nuclear pitch accent on the adjective (indicated by capitals in (1)) seems to be indicative of a narrow focus on the adjective (phrase) alone.

Similar configurations and their implications had been discussed for example in Selkirk (1984:214ff), and, subsequently Selkirk (1995) using her *bat* examples; about (2) (ex. (12) there) Selkirk (1995) writes:

A sentence such as this, which lacks accent on *about bats*, would be appropriately uttered in a discourse where (*about*) bats is "given." ... The "deaccenting" puzzle is that a higher phrase, even the sentence, may be a Focus with this utterance, despite the absence of accent on *about bats*. This projection of focus is explained by the present theory, since focus may project from a head, in this case *book*.

- (2) MARY bought a BOOK about bats

Schwarzchild's (1999) point with example (1) was that the Selkirk (1984, 1995) theory systematically *excludes* focus projection from an attribute like *blue*, and hence (1) should *not* qualify as an answer to an object-question. His suggestion on p.146 was to simply jettison question-answer congruence and rely on GIVEN-ness alone: It doesn't matter that A's utterance in (1) answers an object-question, what matters is that the previous sentence makes salient that John drove Mary's red convertible, so that all of *John drove Mary's X convertible* in A's answer is given, licensing narrow focus on the adjective alone.

This mitigates the challenge the convertible example poses to Selkirk's theory of focus projection: If no F-marking on the object DP in (1) is required by focus pragmatics, it doesn't matter that focus projection rules would prohibit such marking on the basis of an accented attributive adjective alone.

Not for long, however; the formal discussion of (1) on p.161 already mentions an anonymous reviewer's observation that a parallel problem emerges in the following variant of (1) (ex. (i) in FN6):

- (3) {John drove Mary's red convertible. What did she drive?}
 She drove her BLUE convertible.

COPA picks up the discussion of this type of example in sec. 6, using the example *he said the FRENCH president drinks*.¹ Sticking with our theme of convertible sentences, though, the main point of that discussion can be illustrated with the simpler (3).

¹ Which is said to be similar to one in an earlier handout of mine. Said handout has since disappeared into the orcus of obsolete file formats, so I can not trace this back any further; as hinted at in the introduction, neither Roger nor I are so sure anymore that my earlier example wasn't in turn inspired by a yet earlier one of his.

The subject of the answer in (3) is not John, but Mary. And while the preceding declarative makes driving (one of) Mary’s convertible(s) salient, it doesn’t make salient that *Mary* drove one of her convertibles, so focusing the adjective alone should not suffice in the answer. On the other hand, the question makes salient that Mary drove something, so if the entire object DP in the answer were allowed to be F-marked, the answer would pass GIVENness and hence be correctly predicted to be well-formed.

In other words, any one of the F-markings (4a)–(4c) would predict the answer to meet GIVENness, but (4d), marking the adjective alone (as COPA proposed for (1)), does not.

- (4) a. she_F drove her blue_F convertible
 b. she [drove her blue_F convertible]_F
 c. she drove [her blue_F convertible]_F
 d. #she drove her blue_F convertible

(4a) wouldn’t challenge Selkirk’s restrictions on F-projection, provided the subject were accented; but it does not have to be, and for those realizations in which it is not, one of (4b) or (4c) must be assumed, and in either, the higher F would need to project from the adjective.

Not one to fear grabbing the bull by the horns, Schwarzschild (1999:169) goes on to say ‘[t]his conclusion entails that we abandon the rules of F-Projection. The strongest claim we can make is that F-markers are freely assigned’.

Thus goes the tale of the first appearance of convertible examples in print, and I have seen no argument since that has attempted to contradict the main morale drawn there: that F-projection is much less constrained than previously thought.²

Note incidentally that adopting (4c) would void the initial argument against a rule of question-answer congruence, since the putative answer focus, the object DP, *is* F-marked here. It is, however, unclear that such a rule would add anything useful to the overall theory at this point.

It is worth stressing that the term ‘salient’ is used here in the same sense as in COPA. A concept is salient if an expression denoting it has been *uttered* previously (or something falling under it has been at the center of attention, such as the convertible that just crashed through the front window of the cafe in which the conversation takes place). Expressions whose denotation is, modulo existential closure, entailed by a salient concept are given, and expressions whose existential *focus* closure is entailed are GIVEN. The convertible that crashed the window, just as an utterance of the word *convertible* makes the concept ‘convertible’ salient, and it makes given

² I took up the task of bolstering this argument in Büring (2006), concluding that F-projection was even less restricted than assumed at the end of COPA. I concluded from that that F-markers weren’t needed for purposes of ‘traffic ruling’ F-projection in the way Selkirk, Rochemont or von Stechow and Umann had assumed. In recent work (Büring, 2015, 2016a) I embarked on the logical follow up step to that, to eliminate F-markers completely; once again the way there had been paved significantly earlier in the brilliant Schwarzschild (1997).

expressions such as *convertible* and *car*; concepts like ‘engine’, ‘rear view mirror’ or ‘injury’ are *not* made salient in this sense, and the words denoting them are not given. Thus ‘salient’ is crucially different from something like ‘inferable’, ‘accessible’ or the like.

3 More than just a fender bender: Wagner’s convertible objection

In his talk at 2006’s *Semantics and Linguistic Theory* (SALT) conference, Michael Wagner presented a type of argument that was aimed straight at the heart of GIVENness theory and involved, you guessed it, convertibles.

- (5) {Mary’s uncle, who produces high-end convertibles, is coming to her wedding. I wonder what he brought as a present.}
- a. He brought a [CHEAP convertible].
 - b. #He brought a [RED convertible]
 - c. He brought a red conVERTible. (Wagner, 2006b, p.297)

In the context of (5), (5a), with a deaccented noun, is an acceptable answer. This is as expected, as (5) is essentially parallel to (3); in particular, allowing F to project from *cheap* to *cheap convertible* would make this answer GIVEN, taking the question as its antecedent.

The unexpected observation is that parallel deaccenting in (5b) is unacceptable; the natural response in the context provided in (5) in this case is (5c), without any deaccenting. This is completely unexpected in the COPA system: What licenses (5a), according to that theory, is the fact that the concept ‘convertibles’, as well as the proposition that Mary’s uncle brought something, are salient, plus the aforementioned permission for an F-mark on the adjective to project to the object DP. The identity of the F-marked element itself cannot, by COPA’s assumptions, be relevant for this at all, so GIVENness does not predict any difference between (5a) and (5b).

As Wagner goes on to argue, there is a fairly strong intuition about what in fact sets the two cases apart: ‘cheap’ and ‘high end’ stand in contrast to one another, but ‘red’ and ‘high-end’ do not. In Wagner’s words, “‘high-end’ is not a relevant alternative to ‘red’”; and he goes on to say:

However, in order to even state this, we have to use a vocabulary that falls outside of the scope of the givenness presupposition, namely we have talked about “contrast” and “alternative”.’ (Wagner, 2006b, p.297)

Note that this problem is not intrinsically related to the ‘projection from AP’ question. Though less easily, one finds similar ‘failures to deaccent’ in other configurations.

- (6) {Hey, they're offering free checking accounts!}
 a. Let's get a CHECKing account!
 b. #?Let's GET a checking account!
- (7) {Books make the apartment look cozy.}
 a. I am going to buy some BOOKs
 b. #?I am going to BUY some books.
- (8) {In this weather it makes so much sense to have a convertible.}
 a. Can we please buy a conVERTible?
 b. #?Can we please BUY a convertible?

While in these contexts deaccenting the object may be possible, it is much more natural not to; and deaccenting, as in the (b)-examples, seems to add an extra contrastive flavor of 'at last' or 'what the hell', as if *not* having a checking account/books/a convertible had been a point of policy for the speaker so far.

This failure of deaccenting jibes well with a contrast requirement à la Wagner: *BUY a convertible* in (8b) has to take 'have a convertible' (in the lead-in) as its antecedent, but there is no contrast 'let's buy, rather than have, a convertible'.³

The failure to deaccent becomes even stronger if explicit alternatives are provided:

- (9) The school wants you do something for the community. You can clean up a public park, or help out in an old-peoples home, or help renovate the school.
 a. Uh, ok, I'll renovate the SCHOOL.
 a'. #Uh, ok, I'll RENovate the school.
 b. But I HATE the school! b.' (SCREW the school!)
- (10) Forget about your children and experience the fastest convertible in the world!
 a. Uhm, I'd rather read to/see my CHILdren.
 a'. #Uhm, I'd rather READ to/SEE my children.
 b. But I'd like to CALL my children at least/first.

Even though the contexts in (9) and (10) do allow for deaccenting *school/children* in principle, as shown by the (b)-answers, they do not in the (a)-cases, where the targeted alternatives (explicitly given in (9), and implicitly in (10), where the speaker declines experiencing the fastest convertible in the world) are not about school/children. Again, an account that insists on deaccenting given material wherever possible seems unequipped to deal with such contrasts.

Similarly, and perhaps less obviously, the problem is not specific to the GIVENness approach. The exact same conundrum pops up for example if we apply the mechanisms of Rooth (1992) to this example; in a nutshell: if *cheap_F convertible* is a

³ I will argue below that there is in fact no identifiable contrasting alternative to 'buy' in *Can we please buy a convertible?* at all in this context, so that even if the focus is allowed to target something non-salient, deaccenting in these examples remains odd.

well-formed focus domain, on account that a $\sim C$ could be adjoined to it, where C anaphorically denotes ‘high-end convertible’, so should be *red_F convertible*, because in both cases we get the same focus alternatives, just like in both cases we get the same existential focus closure.

The problem, as Wagner, to my mind entirely correctly, points out, is that both Rooth (1992) and COPA impose very *weak* conditions on the relation that has to hold between a focus domain and its antecedent. For COPA, the existential closure of the antecedent must entail the existential F-closure of the focus domain. This is the case in all of (5): ‘there exist convertibles’ (= existential closure of *convertibles* in the lead-in sentence) entails that ‘there exists a property P s.t. convertibles with property P exist’ (= existential F-closure of *cheap_F convertible* as well as of *red_F convertible*). For Rooth (1992), the denotation of the antecedent ‘high-end convertible’ must be among the focus alternatives of the focus domain *AP_F convertible*, which, again, is the case regardless of whether $AP=cheap$ or *red*.⁴

So for starters, what is needed is a stronger constraint on this relation, one that includes a formal implementation of the intuitive concept of ‘contrast’, allowing us to define what should count as a ‘relevant alternative’ in Wagner’s sense. Wagner (2006b) and Wagner (2012) contain proposals to that effect, significantly refined in Katzir (2013), to my mind the most adequate modelling available today. I will not go into the details of this in this paper but refer to the sources just quoted.⁵ I am more interested in what needs to happen once we *have* such a notion at our disposal, something that has received considerably less attention in the literature. So for now, I adopt United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s dictum about hardcore pornography to contrast: I know it when I see it. Specifically, I am ready to call A and B contrastive if and only if it sounds felicitous to say ‘blahblahblah A, rather than B’ or ‘blahblahblah A, as opposed to B’; for example *He brought a cheap convertible, rather than a high-end one* (okay), but not: *He brought a red convertible, rather than a high-end one*.

In fact, there are two aspects to this that are worth teasing apart. To say ‘A rather than B’, it must be possible to construe the choice between A and B as exclusive, as is done in the papers discussed just above. In addition, it must be the case that the choice between A and B is of concern at all.

- (11) That picture of your old convertible just fell right on
 a. #my NEW convertible. b. my new conVERTible.

(11a) sounds odd, despite the contextual presence of a contrasting alternative ‘old convertible’, just as it sounds odd to say *It fell on my new convertible, rather than my old one*. The reason, I would like to suggest, is that, first, it presupposes that

⁴ As long as both are of the same semantic type. While one might have doubts about that in the case of *red* and *cheap* —*cheap* is not intersective, but *red* presumably is— I do not think that something similar could save us in the general case; replace, for example, *red* by *fast* or *big*, neither of which is, I believe, intersective either; the (in)felicity of the examples does not change.

⁵ See Biring (2016b), ch.5.3 for a summary of the discussion.

the speaker has an *old* convertible, too, and secondly, it contrasts falling on the speaker's new convertible with falling on their old one, and it is hard to see why that distinction should be *of concern* at this point.

The next step, then, is to replace the GIVENness condition of COPA by a strong condition involving contrast. Remaining informal, let us use (12), taken from COPA's (22), with the boldfaced parts added.

- (12) An utterance U counts as GIVEN iff it has a salient antecedent A and modulo \exists -type shifting,
- a. A entails the result of replacing F-marked parts of U with existentially bound variables, **and**
 - b. **A and S are**
 - (i) **either contrastive,**
 - (ii) **or A entails S.**

To understand how (12) is supposed to work, take again *He brought a CHEAP_F convertible* in Wagner's context (5): for *convertible*, we take *convertibles* from the previous utterance as our antecedent A: as 'there are convertibles' entails 'there is a convertible', the original clause (12a) is met, and so is (12b-ii) (the latter will generally be the case if U in the sense of (12) does not contain F marks, as in that case the existential F-closure of U is identical to its existential closure).

The case of *cheap_F* is equally trivial, taking 'high-end' as antecedent A: 'there are high-end things' entails that 'there are things with some property' (=existential F-closure of *cheap_F*), and contrast with 'there are cheap things' (cf. 'there are high end things, as opposed to cheap things'), satisfying (12b-ii).

Finally, for *cheap_F convertible* we take A='high-end convertibles', 'there are high-end convertibles' entails that 'there is a convertible with some property' (check! (12a)) and contrast with 'there is a cheap convertible'.

The two latter steps would not work if *cheap* were replaced by *red*, on account of the new conditions (12b-i) and (12b-ii): 'red (things exist)' does not contrast with 'high-end (things exist)' (nor does it entail it), nor 'red convertibles (exist)' with 'high-end convertibles (exist)' —cf. #'there are red, as opposed to high-end, convertibles'.

All of this looks promising, but problems are far from over...

3.1 Ramifications for F-marking

As discussed in the previous section, adding a contrast requirement to GIVENness successfully blocks focusing *red* vis-à-vis salient 'high-end' in (5). Unfortunately, it also blocks (5c), the acceptable variant without deaccenting. The reason is that (12) not only correctly stops us from F-marking *red*, it also stops us from *not* F-marking it, for obvious reasons: *red* is not given; we cannot find a contextual antecedent

which would entail its EC (recall that EC and EFC are identical here, since *red* is not focus-marked). So *red* is too little contrastive to bear F, and too new not to.

The intuitively plausible answer here might be to insist that, instead, *red convertible* as a whole should be F-marked. Indeed, if it were, *red convertible* and every constituent containing it would be GIVEN according to (12). But still, *red* itself would fail to be, and since GIVENness has to hold of every constituent, the sentence should still be out. If, on the other hand, we chose to loosen the requirement for *every* node to be GIVEN or else F-marked, we'd lose any motivation to deaccent *convertible* in (5a)—or any given elements within a focus ever, for that matter—since deaccenting within a focus would now *add* F-markers, rather than reducing them: if (13a) is legitimate, regardless of whether *red* is given or not, what's to force the additional F on *cheap* in (13b) in case the adjective is contrastive?

- (13) a. [red conVERTible]_F b. [CHEAP_F convertible]_F

Wagner (2012) and Büring (2012) propose different, but related solutions to this: in essence, AVOIDF is replaced by a condition that wants to maximize the number of F-less nodes that c-command an F-marked one. That way, for every constituent one will prefer to have *some* F-marking inside it so as to get others to c-command it (and only lack of contrasting antecedent could stop one), but try to F-mark the smallest constituent possible, so as to maximize the number of c-commanders.

3.2 *Ramifications for accenting*

If we allow (13a) or something like it, we have to address a new question: What determines the placement of accents (or stresses) within an F-less focus? The answer might seem obvious: in this case, the accent will fall on the rightmost phrase; this is the answer given in Jackendoff (1972), adopted e.g. in Truckenbrodt (1995), and presumably to be silently assumed in Rooth (1992) and works following that.

But it is explicitly not the position of Selkirk (1984, 1995) or Rochemont (1986): in these works, the accent distribution within a broad focus, and accent distribution in general, is exclusively determined by F-marking; there are no structural defaults for locating accents above the word level. COPA inherits this property, most directly in the form of Selkirk's Basic Focus Rule, which prohibits pitch accents without F-marks on the corresponding terminals.

If we give up that assumption—and the previous section has strongly urged us to—we need to add a notion of default prosody to the account, such as those in Truckenbrodt (1995) or Büring (2016b, ch.6+7).

3.3 *Ramifications for anaphoric deaccenting*

Finally, we come to the perhaps most obvious consequence of Wagner’s convertible examples. Contrastiveness must be a *necessary* condition for deaccenting/focusing. There can be no such thing as ‘anaphoric deaccenting’. For if there were, we would have blocked *RED convertible* in (5) as an instance of focusing, but still allow it as a case of anaphoric deaccenting, and nothing is won. It is important to become clear about this. Schwarzschild’s F-markers, particularly those dominated by other F-markers (see sec.6.2.1 in COPA) were in fact non-givenness markers (as were Rooth’s), and by turning them into bona fide *contrast* markers, we have exorcised anaphoric deaccenting, as intended.

But what then of cases which originally motivated the postulation of anaphoric deaccenting, from Halliday (1967) to Ladd (1980) to COPA, such as Ladd’s (14)?

- (14) {A: Why don’t you have some French TOAST?}
 B: I’ve forgotten how to MAKE French toast.

Here, the argument goes, there is no contrast between ‘make French toast’ and (having forgotten how to) do something else with French toast. And clearly, while ‘having French toast’ would count as a givenness antecedent in the original weak Schwarzschild sense, or as a possible value for *C* in Rooth’s, it would not pass as contrastive in any intuitive or formal sense.

The whole point of the embedded-F exercise in Selkirk (1984), Rochemont (1986) and COPA seems to have been to get these cases into the fold of F-marking theories (and, perhaps contrary to popular belief, the same is true for Rooth, 1992, which explicitly opts to *not* include any notion of contrast into the squiggle condition), by *weakening* the condition on focus antecedents. Strengthening it to imply contrast would seem to rule (14) right back out; only that this time, no additional weak ‘givenness deaccenting’ could be added, on pain of being back to square one.

Wagner (2006b) does not discuss (14), but he does examples similar to it, such as (15), also from Ladd (Ladd, 1980, p.81), proposing —*pace* Ladd— that the focus here is not *read* but *John doesn’t read* (which, according to him, can become a constituent by moving the object outside of it).

- (15) {Has John read Slaughterhouse-Five? —} He doesn’t READ books.

Wagner writes: ‘There are no salient alternatives for “read” . . . , so [F-marking the V alone; DB] is not possible. . . . However, there was talk about “books” . . . so once the direct object moves, givenness marking is possible.’

Unfortunately, Wagner (2006b) does not elaborate on this much further, in particular what *contrasting* meaning to ‘John doesn’t read’ there is to be found in this context. I will argue below that in fact the target here is ‘John reads books’, but more needs to be said about this particular case.

Wagner (2012), discussing parallel examples like (16), again suggests that the focus here is not narrow, but broad, on *a police officer arrested*.

(16) {Smith walked in. A minute later,} a police officer arRESTed Smith.

Wagner argues that *a police officer arrested* (or: the property of being arrested by a police officer) contrasts with ‘walk in’ in (16). Intuitively, however, these two feel hardly more contrastive than ‘red’ and ‘high-end’. And in fact, neither by Wagner’s (2012) own condition on the *red convertible*-type deaccenting, nor by Katzir’s (2013) more elaborate condition, does ‘being arrested by a police officer’ qualify as contrasting with ‘walking into the store’.

Wagner (2012:125ff) answers with a surprising twist: the definitions of what counts as a contrastive antecedent in the case of direct objects and other immediate clausal constituents is divorced from the one applying *within* constituents, such as between adjective and noun. Effectively it is stipulated that deaccenting *within* immediate clausal constituents is subject to a strong contrast condition, along the lines discussed above, whereas deaccenting *of* immediate clausal constituents only requires a much weaker notion, empirically indistinguishable, as best as I can tell, from GIVENness as assumed in COPA.

But besides the usual uneasiness about such disjunctive conditions, this also means that cases like (6) through (10) above, in which a direct object fails to deaccent, can no longer fall in the same rubric as the convertible cases, even if they intuitively seem to suffer from the same lack of contrast. So something new would need to be invoked for cases like that.

I want to propose instead that *all* cases of failure to deaccent are due to a lack of contrast. The part where the theory needs to be adjusted in order to account for apparent anaphoric deaccenting as in (15) is rather the assumption that focal targets need to be anaphoric.

4 A hybrid convertible?! Contrast, no anaphoricity, but a dash of givenness

Consider a typical case of anaphoric deaccenting, again from Ladd (1980:52).

(17) {A bill was sent to Congress today by President Carter which would require peanut butter sandwiches to be served at all government functions.} At a press conference today, a group of Senators. . . deNOUNCED the measure.

What would stop us from considering the focus to be *a group of senators denounced*—in keeping with Wagner’s ideas— but insist that there *is* a strong contrast with ‘congress debated’; or even that *the senators denounced the measure* contrasts with ‘the senators supported it’?

Similarly, *a police officer arrested Smith*, (16), could contrast with ‘Smith went about his business as usual’, and *I’ve forgotten how to make French toast* with ‘I can make French toast’? Or take (18) from Büring (forthcoming):

- (18) {[one thief to another]} I'm afraid I'm developing a moral conscience lately.
Last week, I went to a book store and BOUGHT a book.

Couldn't the contrast here just be 'I stole a book'?

It couldn't, the standard approach goes, because 'I stole a book' is not salient in the context, so it couldn't antecede a focus; neither could 'congress debated', 'the Senators approved', 'went about his business as usual' or 'know how to make', since neither of these have been mentioned or made otherwise salient.

What I want to urge here is to drop that condition: focusing may well contrast with something that is *not* salient, so long as it is clear from the context what that is. Focus is not anaphoric: one does not need to be able to find a previous utterance that corresponds to the focus domain except for the focused parts in it.

If this is the case, then we shouldn't be using the term (FOCUS) ANTECEDENT; instead I will speak of the FOCAL TARGET. Among the focal alternatives to a given focus domain, there must a contextually identifiable target. The contrast condition pertains to focal targets, which may, but need not be, contextually salient. Apparent cases of anaphoric deaccenting are really cases of focusing targeting non-given targets. If the focus is rather big, as it is in the case of deaccented objects and the like, the set of potential targets is in principle quite large, and therefore one usually finds one that is plausible enough, giving the impression that deaccenting here is not really predicated on contrast (in that regard, Wagner's analysis, though incomplete, was absolutely on the right track). If the focus is rather small, as in the *convertible* examples, the set of potential targets is considerably smaller and may fail more readily.

Now, something along these lines has certainly been proposed before. In fact, I have a strong feeling I've heard a lot of people talk like that and tried to convince them otherwise, with the following argument: if you could just *make up* a focal target (rather than having to find it in the context), what is to stop you from saying things like (19) more or less out of the blue?

- (19) a. That's a NICE shirt you're wearing.
b. JOHN should be fired.
c. One day I hope to WIN the Pulitzer prize.

It is clear what you would be contrasting with in all these cases; surely, the foci here are the 'operative words', as it were. But you can't; not unless shirts, firing people, and competing for the Pulitzer prize were already salient. An anaphoric theory of focus has no problem capturing this: if the focal target must be contextually salient, and the focal target must differ from the focus domain only in the F-marked parts, the non-F-marked parts must correspond to things that are also 'in' the target, i.e. contextually salient. A non-anaphoric theory of focus seems to rule in all manner of infelicitous narrow focusings.

Instead of abandoning the project, I want to propose a considerably weaker anaphoric condition:

- (20) Givenness condition: if a constituents is PROSODICALLY DEMOTED, its meaning must, modulo existential closure, be contextually salient.

The prototypical and most easily detected case of prosodic demotion is clause-final deaccenting, as in all the examples discussed in the present paper.⁶

The examples in (19) involve significant deaccenting, and we already observed that they would only be acceptable in a context in which the deaccented elements denote concepts already salient. Examples like (17) or (18) on the other hand merely deaccent a noun phrase that *is* in fact contextually given.

4.1 New prediction: non-given backgrounds of associated foci

I proposed above that not all background elements need to be given, only those that were prosodically demoted do. This predicts that there should be cases of non-given backgrounds. This of course is not easy to show: if the material in question is not prosodically demoted, how are we to know that they are in the background of a focus?

In Büring (forthcoming) I discussed Kadmon and Sevi's (2011) (22), in which we may diagnose the focus semantically, via its contribution to the meaning of *only*.

- (22) {What's peculiar about Granny's dog?} She only likes JOHN.

Given the question, as well as the fact that there is nothing to make the concept 'liking' salient, we can conclude that *likes* is not given. Yet, the associate of *only* here is *John*, not *likes John*: the sentence entails that the dog doesn't like anyone else.

A parallel point can be made with respect to the examples in (23);⁷ here again, the intuitive meanings of the sentences indicate the bracketed foci to be the associates of *only*, which means that (at least) the material between *only* and those foci is in the background, yet not given. Furthermore, as discussed in Horn (1996), von Stechow (1999), Beaver and Clark (2002) and Wagner (2006a), negative polarity items such as *ever*, *care to* or *at all* only occur in the non-focal part of *only*'s domain, indicating further that these parts are indeed in the background of *only*'s focus here.

⁶ Other cases involve shifting the nuclear pitch accent to the right, onto a functional element or a predicate:

- (21) a. Sue saw IT (*vs. default* SAW it). b. Sue had her hair CUT (*vs. default* her HAIR cut)

Here *saw* and *her hair* have been prosodically demoted, even though they still may bear a (pre-nuclear) pitch accent. As far as I can see, these cases, too, require *saw* and *her hair* to be given.

⁷ (23a) from John Harris, *Early Language Development*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1990, and (23b) from Stephen Lincoln, Mark Daly, and Eric Lander, *Constructing Genetic Linkage Maps with MAPMAKER/EXP Version 3.0: A Tutorial and Reference Manual*, Whitehead Institute for

- (23) a. The central problem is that it is only ever possible to sample a child's language [over a fixed period of time and within a finite number of situations]_F.
 b. Because we found one order of this group to be much more likely than any other, we probably only care to see the map distances for [this single order]_F.
 c. My nose and my lungs are only alive at all [because they are part of my body and share its common life]_F.

To be sure, the primary point here is not that the material between *only* and the focus is not given (as far as we can tell from the contexts), yet not focused either. It is at least conceivable that there are 'stacked foci' here, as sketched in (24) for (23b), where the inner focus would be the associate to *only*, and the outer focus some kind of new information focus.

- (24) We [only care to see the map distances [for this single order]_F]_F

Rather the point is that, even if so, the domain of the inner focus — 'care to see the map distances for *x*' — does not have an antecedent. It has a target, to be sure: '(care to) see the map distances for all orders', but that target need not be salient, and presumably isn't, since it is actually likely pronounced with a contrastive accents of its own.

4.2 *New prediction: non-given backgrounds for free, contrastive foci*

Arguably, Wagner's convertible example (5) above, repeated here, too, involves a non-given focal target.

- (25) {Mary's uncle, who produces high-end convertibles, is coming to her wedding. I wonder what he brought as a present.} **He brought a CHEAP convertible.**

As Katzir (2013) shows, whether or not two expression like *red* and *expensive* are contrastive or not depends on their syntactic context. Thus in (26) ((20) in Katzir, 2013), deaccenting *convertibles* is perfectly fine, since 'he collects red convertibles, not expensive ones' is contrastive.

- (26) {The people in this club are very particular about the cars they collect. Mary, for example, collects expensive convertibles.} **And John collects RED convertibles.**

Conversely, *cheap* and *expensive* are not *per se* contrasting, as the infelicity of deaccenting in (27) shows.

Biomedical Research Technical Report, January 1993, both via Beaver and Clark (2002:330). (23c) from C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, via Horn (1996:8), attributed to Jacobsson (1951).

- (27) {Yesterday, I left my expensive convertible at home and took the bus. As luck would have it, ... }
- a. #the bus was hit by a CHEAP convertible
 - b. the bus was hit by a cheap CONVERTIBLE
- {...and never got me where I needed to go}.

This is because in (27), there is no contrast between being hit by a cheap convertible, and being hit by an expensive one. But this in turn means that in (25), the contrast cannot be between *cheap convertible* and ‘high-end convertible’, but must be ‘he brought a cheap, rather than an expensive, convertible’. This seems unobjectionable, but crucially, that the uncle *brought* an expensive convertible (rather than manufacturing them) is not salient/given.

4.3 *New prediction: non-given alternatives in the target*

In the preceding discussion of (25) I argued that the focal target had to be ‘he brought an expensive convertible’ (and not just ‘expensive convertible’) and that this target was not contextually salient, even if the actual contrasting element, ‘expensive’ was. (28) shows that even the contrasting element in the focal target need not be given.

- (28) {Ever since the unfortunate poppy field incident eight years ago, Nate hates everything red. So when his aunt, who owns a convertible factory, send him a wedding present, we were shocked to find that} she gave him a RED convertible.

The focal target of (28) is ‘she gave him a convertible of any other color than red’, or for short ‘she gave him a non-red convertible’. Again, that proposition is not salient in the context; not even ‘non-red convertible’, or, in fact, ‘non-red’ is salient. This is noteworthy, because on Wagner’s analysis, *RED convertible* needs to contrast with a *salient* antecedent, which rules out (28), independent of how big we think the focus domain is; (28) shows that focal targets can be non-given, not just because they need to contain a larger background than one might at first assume, but sometimes because even the contrasting element itself is not part of a salient antecedent.

4.4 *Cruising full circle: narrow or not?*

Recall from section 2 that, initially, COPA used convertible example to argue that sometimes a narrow adjective focus can be used to answer a question asking for the entire object DP (example (1)). Subsequently, COPA concluded, however, that in fact a pitch accent on the adjective may grammatically project focus to the containing DP, and needs to in cases like (3), repeated in (29), which, without such marking, would fail to be GIVEN.

- (29) {John drove Mary's red convertible. What did she drive?}
 She drove [her BLUE_F convertible]_F.

But if, as argued in section 4, focal targets do not need to be salient (and hence GIVENness is out of business), we could likewise analyze (29) as narrow adjective focus, targeting 'rather than her red convertible'. Generally, many cases of apparent deaccenting *within* a broader focus are now open to a reanalysis as narrow foci, just as COPA had originally envisioned for (1). In fact, if the focus domain for deaccenting in these examples needs to be bigger than DP, as concluded in section 4.2, the only alternative to analyzing (29) and its kind as narrow foci is to analyze them as independent, nested foci, so that the sentence targets 'rather than driving a non-convertible' and 'rather than driving her red convertible' at the same time.

In some cases we might find evidence for just such an analysis. To set up the case, note first that (30) implies that Max is not a friend of John's.

- (30) {Did John's mother appoint Max?} No, she appointed a FRIEND of John's.

This makes sense under a contrastive view of deaccenting (but not under a purely anaphoric one!), since *friend* narrowly contrasts with 'non-friend' or 'foe'. If one wanted to avoid this implication, one has to accent *John*, signalling object focus.

Yet, second, (31) merely contrasts a friend of John's with John himself, or rather: *friend of* with the identity function.

- (31) {Did John's mother appoint John?} No, she appointed a FRIEND of John's.

Now, crucially, in (32), there does not seem to be an implication that John is not a friend of Max.

- (32) {Did John's mother appoint John or Max?} Neither, she appointed a FRIEND of Max's.

This would make sense if we assumed that (32) in fact involves two focusings, with two targets: *a [friend]_F of Max* as opposed to Max himself, and *[a friend of Max]_F*, rather than John. If so, we have an indirect argument here that while narrow contrastive focus on the adjective is possible in an object answer, it is also possible for the same accent to license an *additional* focus on the DP, as argued in COPA.

5 Summary

In this paper I traced the steps from Schwarzschild's original convertible examples to their later variants, which eventually argued for a shift away from the weak GIVENness requirement to a stronger requirement of contrast. I then pointed out that in fact, such examples are problematic for *any* anaphoric theory of focusing, even one with a proper contrast requirement, and provided further cases to argue that the target of focusing cannot in general be required to be contextually salient;

in a slogan: focusing is not anaphoric. I also argued, however, that there still is an important role for non-contrastive givenness to play: whenever focusing requires that, in turn, another element be deaccented, or more generally, prosodically demoted, that element needs to be given, i.e. have a salient contextual antecedent. Contrast alone is not a sufficient condition for focusing, and deaccenting is never licensed by focusing alone.

Depending on the reader's background, they may find the first of these points — that focal targets need not be salient/anaphoric— not very surprising. In fact, one does not have to look too hard to find proposals which claim, or at least entail, that focusing is possible whenever speaker and hearer can clearly identify a (contrasting) focal target, given or not. For such readers, the main take-home message of the present paper is that that *alone* hopelessly overgenerates (recall the discussion of the examples in (19)); any such theory needs to be supplemented with conditions on when contrastive focusing is infelicitous, despite a clearly identifiable target. Clearly, *some* requirements referring to the previous actual discourse are needed; I argued that this should be a givenness requirement on deaccented element (but not on elements in the background of a focus domain in general).

Other readers may readily concede the need for a givenness component, but be skeptical of my claim that the targets for focusing cannot generally be claimed to be given/salient. I think this may largely be a matter of lack of terminological care. I do agree that all focal targets need to be identifiable for the hearer (and of course for the speaker), and obviously the context has a major role to play. But one has to distinguish carefully between, say, propositions that speakers can *deduce* or *identify* in a given context, and propositions that are *salient* in that context. To say that, say, Wagner's original convertible context —the uncle manufactures high-end convertibles and the uncle brought a wedding gift— makes *salient* the proposition that the uncle brought a high-end convertible as a wedding gift is not helpful in this connection, because then we need to explain why one cannot say (33) in this context, in which a clause denoting the allegedly salient proposition is treated as given (i.e. deaccented).⁸

(33) {Mary's uncle, who produces high-end convertibles, is coming to her wedding. So, as for presents,...} # we EXPECTED him to bring a high-end convertible.

The lesson here is that the set of propositions participants in a conversation can *deduce* or *reconstruct* as focal targets is a proper superset of those that are *salient*, in the sense that the term is used here. The former set is relevant for finding contrastive targets, the latter for deaccenting the backgrounds of the corresponding focus domains. Collapsing the two may give the *appearance* of a purely anaphoric theory of

⁸ There shouldn't be a problem with the contrast requirement here, because one can say *We EXPECTED him to bring a HIGH-end convertible, but he DIDN't*. One can also utter the sentence as written in (33), continuing for example with *... but no-one had imagined the custom made top edge model he actually ended up bringing*, but only if one treats it as contextually known —not just 'salient'— that the uncle brought a high-end convertible.

focus, but it simply fails to make the relevant distinctions for why (25) is possible, but (33) is not.

So by the end of the day, the main point of the present paper is a package deal: there is no anaphoric deaccenting, we need a strong, contrastive notion of focus interpretation, a loose, non-anaphoric account of finding focal targets, and a ‘traditional’, anaphoric givenness condition on realizing focusing by way of prosodic demotion.⁹

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⁹ Daniel Altshuler, p.c. suggested to me that prosodic demotion in this respect behaves like true anaphora (i.e. it is hard to ‘accommodate’ a missing antecedent for, say, a pronoun), while the requirement for a focal targets is more akin to presuppositions, which we know can be rather easily accommodated if it is clear what their content is. In the present paper, I thought of constructing a focal target as an entirely free process, unrestricted by context other than general considerations of plausibility, i.e. non-presuppositional. Perhaps, however, a status like ‘easily accommodable presupposition’ would fit even better here, though this would hinge on a) a formal theory of the the anaphora/presupposition distinction, and b) a precise understanding of what exactly would need to be accommodated, considering that the focal targets need not, and in most cases should not, be taken to be true.

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