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This book contains a collection of articles on current research on information structure. ‘Information Structure’ is understood here as those aspects of the linguistic system and language processing that pertain to the dichotomies ‘focus vs. background’, ‘topic vs. comment’ and ‘given vs. new’. The volume is a well-designed combination of theoretically oriented articles on the role of information structure in grammar, and reports on empirical research projects that draw on novel data sources from typology, diachrony and psycholinguistics. It thus supplies the reader with a representative overview both on the state of the art of our theoretical understanding of information structure phenomena, and on cutting edge empirical issues in this domain. A large part of the research reported here has been carried out in the context of the Collaborative Research Center ‘Information Structure’ at Potsdam and Berlin, but the volume also contains contribution by internationally leading scholars from other universities in Europe and North America.

The book is divided into three parts and consists of fifteen papers. It starts with an introductory chapter by the editors that briefly explains the subject domain of the book and then gives an overview over the individual chapters. Part I is devoted to theoretical issues, Part II contains articles on cross-linguistic (i.e. typological and diachronic) research, and Part III reports psycholinguistic studies.

Part I ‘Topic and Focus’ contains six papers that deal with theoretical issues relating to the interpretation of topic and focus at the interfaces of grammar. It opens with an article by MATS ROOTH, ‘Second occurrence focus and Relativized Stress F’. Rooth develops a system that derives the correspondence between the prosodic and semantic effect of focus marking in a strictly local fashion, including the marking of second occurrence foci. The following article, ‘How focus and givenness shape prosody’ by CAROLINE FÉRY and SHINICHIRO ISHIHARA investigates the interplay of syntax and information structure on prosody for two typologically distinct languages: German, that assigns pitch accents freely, and Japanese, where pitch accent assignment is lexically governed. It is argued that focusing regulates pitch accent only indirectly, via manipulating the F0 register of the relevant prosodic phrase. This theoretical claim is supported by experimental evidence. Chapter 4, ‘Structural focus and exhaustivity’ by KATALIN É. KISS explores the issue whether the exhaustivity that comes with focus interpretation is part of the truth conditions or comes about via some pragmatic re-interpration. The author provides evidence from Hungarian indicating that exhaustivity is in fact part of semantics proper. The subsequent chapter, ‘The interpretation of topical indefinites as direct and indirect aboutness topics’ by CORNELIA EBERT and STEFAN HINTERWIMMER argues that specific, generic and quantificationally variable readings of indefinites should receive a unified treatment as ‘aboutness topics’, and it presents a proposal how the different semantic interpretation of indefinite topics come about. One of the crucial assumptions of this approach is the idea that establishing an aboutness topic is in itself a speech act, and that speech acts can therefore occur semantically embedded. This idea is also utilized in the two following chapters. In ‘Contrastive topics operate on speech acts’, SATOSHI TOMIOKA investigates the semantics and pragmatics of contrastive topics in Japanese. These constructions are theoretically challenging because they involve a combination of formal topic marking and focus marking, while their pragmatics does not involve topicality in the usual sense. Tomioka proposes a unified analysis of contrastive and non-contrastive topics that hinges on the assumption that formal topic marking induces semantic scope over the local speech act. The last chapter of this part, ‘Biased questions, intonation, and discourse’ by BRIAN REESE and NICHOLAS ASHER elaborates the leitmotif of the integration of speech acts
into sentence grammar further. It is proposed that biased questions are complex speech acts with an assertive and an interrogative component.

Part II, ‘Cross-Linguistic Variation and Diachronic Change’ consists of five chapters that address the cross-linguistic aspects of information structure, especially of focus marking. DANIEL BÜRING’S ‘Towards a typology of focus realization’ is arguably the theoretically most ambitious piece of work in this volume. The author purports to develop a unified theory of focus realization that subsumes prosodic, morphological and syntactic marking strategies. According to this ‘Prominence Theory of Focus’ (PFC), there is one overarching constraint governing the surface expression of focus:

**FocusProminence**: Focus needs to be maximally prominent.

Even though the analysis is not fully spelled out technically, Büring has an implementation in the spirit of Optimality Theory in mind. Other, subordinate, constraints govern prosodic prominence. If the focused constituent would wind up non-prominent under the default strategy, **FocusProminence** enforces violation of other constraints to ensure prominence of focus. Depending on the language specific constraint ranking, this may lead to different repair strategies, i.e. prosodic re-organization, morphological marking or syntactic movement. The next chapter, ‘Focus in Aghem’ by LARRY M. HYMAN and MARIA POLINSKY gives an in-depth description and analysis of focus syntax in the Bantu language Aghem. In this language, narrowly focused constituents occur directly postverbally. The authors make a case that this positional marking of focus is not the reflex of a syntactic focus position. Rather, focus structure is derived from constituent structure within the verbal domain. While Büring’s article may be the theoretically most ambitious contribution, perhaps Chapter 10 ‘Subject focus in West African languages’ by INES FIEDLER, KATHARINA HARTMANN, BRIGITTE REINEKE, ANNA SCHWARZ, and MALTE ZIMMERMANN has the largest empirical scope. It investigates focus marking in a sizeable sample (twenty-three) of West-African languages (taken from three language groups: Gur, Kwa, and Chadic). Several quite remarkable generalizations emerge. For instance, it turns out that all these languages show a subject/non-subject asymmetry regarding focus marking (which is linked to the assumption that subjects are per default non-focal topics). Also, focus marking of non-subjects can neatly be classified into the three marking types that are also identified in Büring’s paper – morphological, syntactic and prosodic marking.

The following two chapters, ‘Information structure and OV order’ by ÞORBJÖRG HROARSDÓTTIR and ‘Information structure and unmarked word order in (Older) Germanic’ by ROLAND HINTERHÖLZL both deal with the role of information structure for object-verb serialization in Germanic languages, and both take a diachronic perspective. Hroarsdóttir’s article studies the change from OV to VO word order in Icelandic. The common explanation for this kind of change in languages like English is that a loss of case morphology is the relevant diachronic trigger. However, Icelandic still had rich morphology in the relevant period. Hróarsdóttir argues that word order variation that was induced by information structure, combined with socio-linguistic factors, led to the critical state that initiated the switch to VO word order. Hinterhölzl’s paper discusses the interaction of information structure and word order in Old High German (OHG). OHG is an OV language, but unlike modern German, it admits VO word order rather freely. Hinterhölzl rejects the hypothesis that this variability is due to multiple simultaneous grammars. Rather, OHG VO word order is triggered by information structural factors.

Part III, ‘Experimental and Psycholinguistic Approaches’, comprises three chapters. ‘Effects of givenness and constraints on free word order’ by STAVROS SKOPETEAS and GISBERT FANSELOW reports results of psycholinguistic production studies regarding the impact of givenness on word order. Sentences involving a transitive verb and two arguments are solicited from the participants, one of them being given in previous discourse. Experiments are conducted with speakers of ten typologically diverse languages. It is shown
that object-before-subject word order is only found if the patient is given and the agent is new. The article also gives a detailed analysis of the grammatical implementation of OS order in the individual languages. The authors argue that givenness-induced object fronting is always an instance of A-movement. ELSI KAISER’s ‘Investigating effects of structural and information-structural factors on pronoun resolution’ deals with a series of production experiments on pronoun resolution. The results indicate that pronoun resolution is guided by several factors – the preference for subject antecedents being the strongest one, but weaker effects of pronominalization and focusing also play a role. The last chapter of the book, ‘Given and new information in spatial statements’ by ROBIN HÖRNIG and THOMAS WESKOTT reviews several psycholinguistic experiments pertaining to the comprehension of spatial expressions of the form ‘The A is to the left/right of the B’. It was found that such statements are easiest to comprehend if the relatum (B in the example) has been previously placed in the model and if the complete locative expression is in preverbal position, thus establishing an impact on given-new structure on sentence comprehension. Finally, the book contains a reference section, an author index and a subject index.

The volume gives the reader a comprehensive overview on the issues which are ‘hot topics’ in current research on information structure, ranging from prosody over all modules of grammar to speech act theory. A special merit of the book is the consistent attention that is placed on cross-linguistic investigations and the study of information structure in languages other than English. Almost all articles in the collection are devoted to language specific and/or cross-linguistic issues. Three of the contributions consider a larger sample of languages to come up with typologically well-founded generalizations, each from a different angle. Büring’s paper starts from a universalist perspective, i.e. he proposes a single universal constraint governing focus realization. In the spirit of Optimality Theory’s factorial typology, he proceeds to develop a typology of focus realization and exemplifies this with data from twelve languages. Fiedler et al.’s contribution takes a bottom-up perspective. The authors study twenty-three West-African languages and derive descriptive generalizations. The – highly innovative – approach taken by Skopeteas and Fanselow could be dubbed ‘psycholinguistic typology’. They conduct sentence production experiments with speakers from ten different languages. They are able to derive noteworthy cross-linguistic generalization on linguistic performance while paying due attention to the grammatical peculiarities of each individual language.

It is perhaps unavoidable that a collection of papers on cutting-edge research cannot simultaneously strive for theoretical coherence. The volume documents a lively debate, which necessarily involves disagreement. At various places, controversial issues are openly addressed – to the benefit of the reader, for instance regarding the syntactic status of focused items in Hungarian that are discussed in Kiss’ and Büring’s contributions. At other places the thematic coherence of the individual contributions could have been spelled out more clearly. For instance, Büring on the one hand and Hyman and Polinsky on the other hand do not discuss each other’s work, even though their findings are mutually relevant and challenging.

It should also be remarked that the copy-editors did a remarkably good job when producing this volume. In the entire book, I found only two errors (a missing reference on page 241 and an occurrence of ‘object’ where it should be ‘subject’ on page 345). Also, the formatting etc. is impeccable.

To sum up, the present volume represents a fascinating snapshot of research in an exciting field of investigation. It will be an interesting read for researchers with an interest in theory of grammar, typology, historical linguistics and psycholinguistics.