Information Structure

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Chapter 4. Information structure

The flow of information is an important part of the grammar of a language and in every utterance, the constituents are ordered in a particular way so that they convey new, shared or old information, or alternatively, indicate what the sentence is about. In this context, we examine various types of new information (Focus), [Pragmatics - 4.1] and constituents that convey what the sentence is about (Topic) [Pragmatics – 4.2].

4.1.   Focus

Focused constituents contribute new information to the informative content of a sentence.

4.1.1.   All-new focus

All-new focus provides information all of which is new, and refers to sentences which lack a particular salient part. This kind of focus is also known as presentational focus, information focus, neutral focus, or broad focus. The following declarative sentence is a response to what happens in a picture where a man is eating a chicken leg. In fact, all-new focus sentences are typically answers to wh-questions such as 'What's happening?'. The signer blinks after the subject and at the end of the sentence. Other than these blinks, there are no other prominent nonmanual markers in the sentence. This means that no particular part is salient, hence, the sentence provides a description of a state of affairs, which is all new information.

| blink			blink
MAN	CHICKEN		EAT.HCL

'A man is eating chicken.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

The introduction of new referents into the discourse is another case of sentences with all new information. The referents may serve as the grammatical indefinite subject of the predicate VAR, 'THERE-IS'.

H1: IX-3-a   CAT   TWO...……………………………………………………………
H2:   CAT   MALE   THERE.IS
'There are two male cats.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

In Figure-Ground sentences, the constituent which is larger and less mobile is called the Ground while the constituent which is smaller and more mobile is called the Figure. When all new focus includes Figure-Ground information, the flow of the information is Ground first and then Figure. Below the Ground is COUCH and the Figure is ROPE.
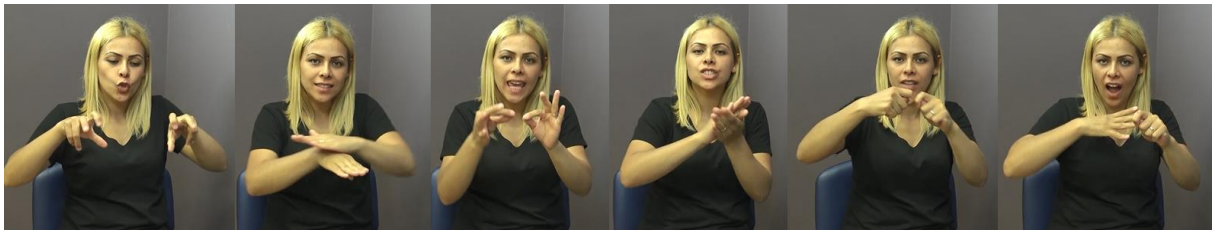
H1: COUCH   BELOW   ROPE   SOAP   TIED   THERE.IS
H2: COUCH   BELOW   ROPE   SOAP   TIED…………………………….
'There is a piece of rope tied around a bar of soap under the couch.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

When a new segment of discourse unrelated to the previous contexts begins with a sentence containing new information, the focused element is often but not always non-manually marked with a squint. The example below includes a squint while the next one does not.
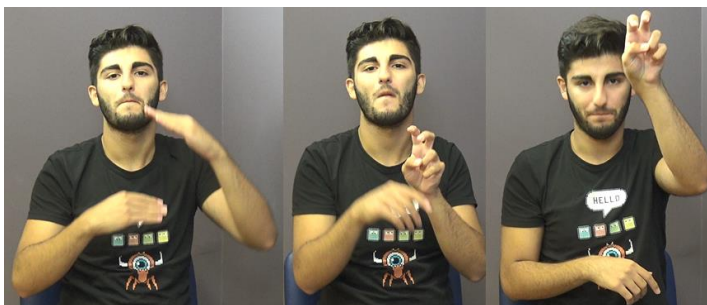
                          <u>   squint   </u>
H1: EXTEND.WECL   STAIRS
H2: EXTEND.WECL
'There are stairs.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

PIANO is under presentational focus below but it is not marked prosodically.

				eo
				br
			neutral face	
h1: FALL.WECL	IX-3-a	PIANO	MUSIC	PIANO	FALL.WECL
h2:	WECL	PIANO	MUSIC	PIANO	FALL.WECL

'A piano is falling down the stairs.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

4.1.2. New information focus

New information focus provides new information in the form of a single constituent. This kind of focus is also called identificational focus, or narrow focus. The focused element in TİD may occupy different positions in a sentence. It can occur in the sentence-initial position.

YESTERDAY[focus], CHILD GARDEN BALL PLAY
'The child played ball in the garden yesterday.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 67)

The focused element may also occur in the sentence-final position.

CHILD GARDEN BALL PLAY YESTERDAY[focus]
'The child played ball in the garden yesterday.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 67)

In both of these sentences, the salient part that the signer conveys is 'yesterday'.

The answer to a wh-question which asks for the identification of a particular entity or state of affairs, such as 'What did the man kick?', contains a constituent which carries new information focus. Clefted constituents in a wh-cleft also carry new information focus. BALL below is new information.
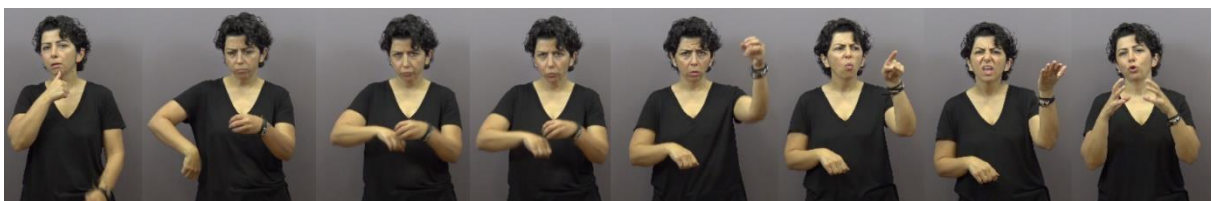
MAN   KICK.BPCL:FOOT   GO.WECL:ROUND.OBJECT POINT-3-a   WHAT   BALL
'What the man kicked (and as a consequence went) was a ball.'
(Kayabaşı in progress)

Self-corrective focus occurs in narrative discourse where the signer confuses the referents and self-corrects. These are typically marked prosodically with closed-eyes, raised eye-eyebrows, and optionally, a change in head position mostly actualized as a head-shake - the latter two of which correlate with the non-manual marking of negation in TİD (Gökgöz 2011). Corrective focus below is on CAT.

		closed-eyes	
		br	
MAN	USE.WECL:STETHOSCOPE	CAT	USE.WECL:STETHOSCOPE

'The man… no, the cat is using the statoscope.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

4.1.3. Contrastive focus

Contrastive focus is used for invalidating the old information mentioned in the previous discourse by providing a new one. This is also a case of new information focus since one constituent is made salient. However, in contrastive focus, the salient constituent is contrasted with a previously mentioned constituent.

ANKARA[focus] (YESTERDAY) (EVENING) (GO)
'TO ANKARA, I went yesterday evening.'
(Adapted from Makaroğlu 2012: 68)

Another example of contrastive focus is provided below. The information that 'The house belongs to all her family.' is invalidated by providing the information that it belongs to 'her' only.

| POINT-3-a | HOUSE | FAMILY | ALL | POSS(1) | NO-NO | POSS(2) |

'That house does not belong to all her family. (It is) HERS.'
http://tidsozluk.net/tr/Kendi?d=0058

4.1.4. Emphatic focus

Emphatic focus augments or emphasizes an element.
INDEX-1 GO YESTERDAY[E-Focus].
'I went YESTERDAY.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 73)

Emphatic focus can be doubled.

INDEX-1 YESTERDAY[E-Focus] GO YESTERDAY[E-Focus].
'I went YESTERDAY.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 74)

4.1.5. Focus doubling

The information-focused element may occur in the sentence-final position with a double in the sentence internal position of the focused constituent.

CHILD YESTERDAY[focus] GARDEN BALL PLAY YESTERDAY[focus]
'The child played ball in the garden yesterday
(Makaroğlu 2012: 67)

4.2. Topic

Topic provides information concerning what the sentence is about. A distinction is made regarding the discourse status of topics. Some topics are continued or shifted topics. While topic shift indicates a change from a previously built context by starting a new one, topics with continued discourse status maintain former referents in the discourse.

Similar to presentational utterances that bring new referents into a new context, topic shifts, containing mediated information, are mostly marked non-manually with a squint, and more optionally with a brow raise or a change in head position. CAT below is a shifted topic.


```
              br
            squint
CAT           SIT
```
'The cat (from the previous context) is sitting'
(Gökgöz in progress)

MOUSE below is a shifted topic.


```
          head-nod
          squint
POINT-3-a         MOUSE
```
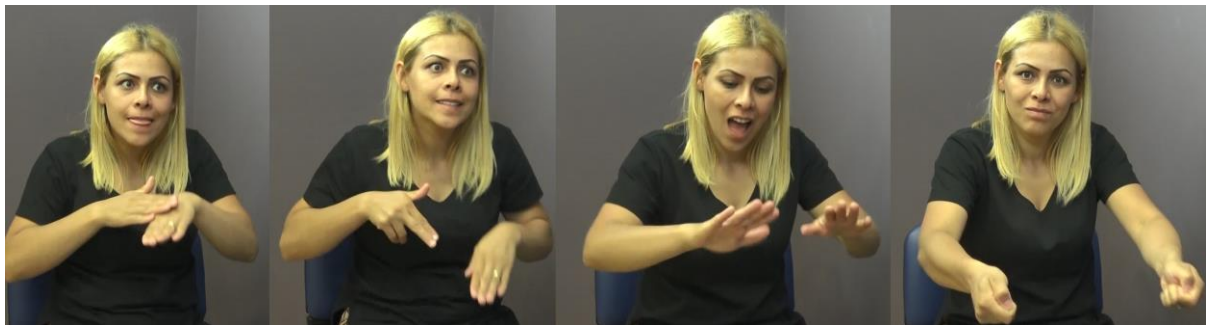'There is the mouse (from the previous context)'
(Gökgöz in progress)

Continued topics that maintain previously built referents do not seem to be marked prosodically although an eyeblink during or at the end of the sign may optionally occur. CAT below is a continued topic below.
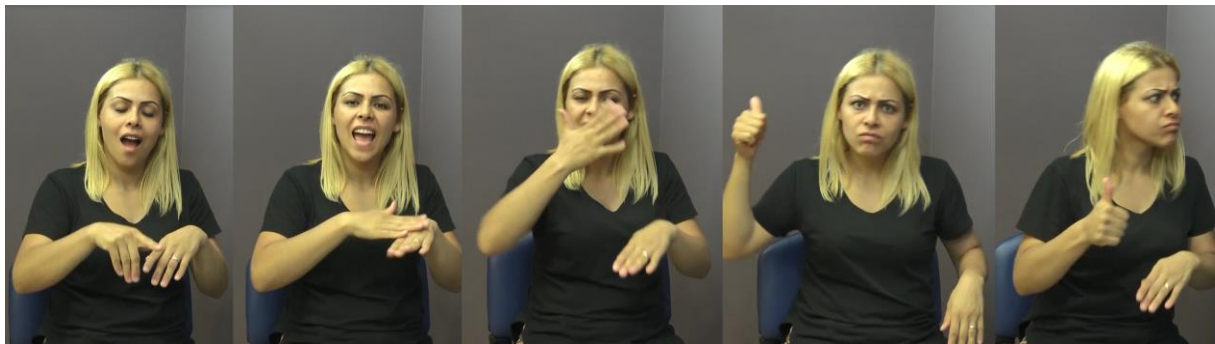

| CAT | WALK.BPCL:LEGS | CARPET | PULL.HCL:FLAT.OBJECT |

'The cat is pulling the carpet.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

POINT-3-a CAT is a continued topic below.

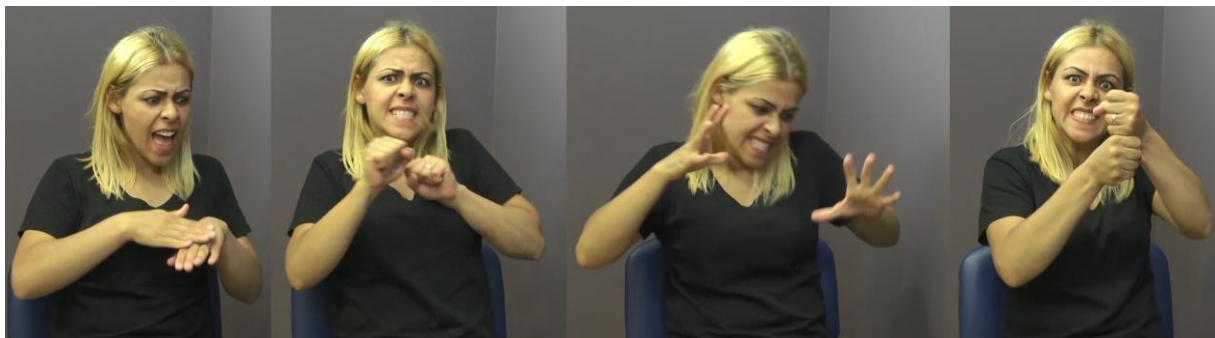   <u>blink</u>

| POINT-3-a | CAT | BLACK | RUN.WECL:ANIMAL |

'Then the black cat runs (storming) back.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

Constructed action or role shift in which the signer takes on the role of a character in the narrative spreads across most notably in continued topics which may block further prosodic marking. CAT is a continued topic below.

                                         <u>role-shift</u>

| CAT | GET.ANGRY | CATCH.HCL:SMALL.ANIMAL |

'The cat gets angry and catches the mouse'

(Gökgöz in progress)

Scene-setting topics, whether they are new to the discourse or present old information, are fronted adverbial or prepositional clauses that provide spatial or temporal information. They occur sentence-initially, preceding an optional aboutness topic. Scene-setting topics in TİD are often marked with a non-neutral head position and optionally with a brow raise.

Scene setting topic

       <u>   head down</u>
EXTEND.WECL.DOOR
'There is a door which extends like this.'

Following sentence

CAT   OPEN.BPCL:MOUTH
'The cat opens his mouth.'
(Gökgöz in progress)

Base-generated topics, which often represent a class or a set of items precede information-focused constructions.

What does Ali like the most among fruits?
FRUIT, APPLE (ALI) (VERY.MUCH) (LIKE)
'As for fruits, Ali likes apples the most.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 69)
In cases where topics which represent a class or set of entities co-occur with focus, the topic and focused constituents can be animate or inanimate entities.

Inanimate entities:
Which city do you like the most?
CITY[Topic] ISTANBUL[I-Focus] INDEX-1 MOST LIKE
'As for cities, I like İstanbul the most.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 78)

Animate entities:

Which singer do you like the most?
SINGER[Topic] ZÜLFÜ LIVANELI[I-Focus] INDEX-1 MOST LIKE
'As for singer, I like Zülfü Livaneli the most.'
(Makaroğlu 2012: 78)

Animacy has an effect on the interpretation of a constituent as the topic of a sentence. The following sentence includes an inanimate object, BOOK, which can be interpreted as a topic.

BOOK CHILD BUY
'The book, the child bought.'
(Açan 2007: 206)

However, CHILD cannot be interpreted as a topicalized direct object in the sentence below. Rather it is the subject.

CHILD MOTHER LOVE
'The child loves his/her mother.'
(Adapted from Açan 2007: 206)

4.3. Morphological and prosodic markers of topic and focus
4.3.1. Focus
4.3.2. Topic

Information on data and consultants
Please see the data and consultant information in the references. The examples with a link underneath are from tidsozluk.net (Makaroğlu and Dikyuva, 2017).

References

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