

Prominence in Pragmatics

A short introduction

Klaus von Heusinger, Petra B. Schumacher
(University of Cologne)
&
Ken Turner (University of Brighton)

Welcome and program overview

11.00-11.30	von Heusinger, Schumacher, Turner: <i>Prominence in Pragmatics - An Introduction</i>
11:30-12:00	Andrew Kehler <i>Prominence and Coherence in a Bayesian Theory of Pronoun Interpretation</i>
12:00 - 12:30	Aria Adli <i>Double topic chains and null subjects in Spanish</i>
12:30 - 13:00	Katharina Haude <i>"Inherent" vs. "induced" referential prominence in Movima (isolate, lowland Bolivia)</i>
13:00-14:30	Lunch



Welcome and program overview

14:30 - 15:00	Hans Kamp <i>The Dictatorial Prominence of Openers</i>
15:00 - 15:30	Stefan Hinterwimmer <i>Prominent Protagonists</i>
15:30 - 16:00	Bart Geurts <i>Saliency</i>
16:00 - 16:30	Coffee break
16:30 - 17:00	Mira Ariel <i>Truth-compatible inferences</i>
17:00 - 17:30	Peter Pagin <i>Enrichment, Coherence, and Discourse Structure</i>
17:30 - 18:00	Alice ter Meulen <i>Presupposed and Asserted Content in Aspectual DPs</i>
18:00 - 18:30	Final discussion
19:30	Welcome Reception Marekerk Church



1. Prominence

The linguistic concept of *prominence* is often informally described as "a prominent entity is standing out".

- entity prominence in comprehension vs. production (Kehler)
- prominence (saliency): individual vs. social concept (Geurts)
- topical prominence: local vs. non-local referents (Adli)
- referential prominence: inherent vs. induced (Haude)



2. Definition of Prominence

In our research project on *Prominence in Linguistics* in Cologne, we work with a preliminary definition of prominence [1], [2]

- (Def1) Prominence is a **relational property** that singles out one element from a set of elements of equal type and structure.
- (Def2) Prominent elements are **structural attractors**, i.e. they serve as anchors for the larger structures they are constituents of, and they may license more operations than their competitors.
- (Def3) Prominence status **shifts in time** (as discourse unfolds).



3. Def1 Prominence as singling out

We assume that the underlying structure of prominence in pragmatics is a relation between units of the same kind such that one unit is singled out

- (Def1) Prominence is a **relational property** that singles out one element from a set of elements of equal type and structure.



3a Entities that qualify as units for prominence

- discourse referents (individuals, time points, properties etc.)
- EDU (elementary discourse units) for discourse structure
- propositions (expressed, presupposed, inferred, implicated)

3b Structure of the prominence relation

(i) The element *a* has a special status with respect to $\langle b, c, d, \dots \rangle$. We say *a* is prominent (with respect to $\langle b, c, d, \dots \rangle$) or we say that *a* has a **prominent status**.

We can also define this relation as a function $Prom_{Dim}$ applied to a set of units of the same type that yield the prominent element.

$$Prom_{Dim}(\langle a, b, c, d, \dots \rangle) = a$$

4. Def2 Prominent units license more operations

What is the nature of prominent units - we assume that they allow for more structure and for more operations than less prominent units.

(Def2) Prominent elements are **structural attractors**, i.e. they serve as anchors for the larger structures they are constituents of, and they may license more operations than their competitors.

- a) Prominent discourse referents allow for more variation in their anaphoric linkages
- b) Prominent discourse referents are more often rementioned in a paragraph
- c) Prominent discourse referents are more likely to be perspectival centers

4a Prominent discourse referents allow for more variation in their anaphoric linkages

- (1) *The violinist* has introduced an oboist to a drummer and \emptyset / he / the man / the musician / the N ...

Assuming that the discourse referent associated with *the violinist* is the most prominent one, we argue that this referent allows for a higher variety of potential anaphoric expressions than a less prominent discourse referent, say the one introduced by *a drummer*.

- (2a) It was a violinist that Mary invited to the party. He / the man / the musician / the N ...
 (2b) Mary invited a violinist to the party. He / the man / the musician / the N ...

In (2a) a *violinist* introduced a discourse referent with a high prominence - therefore we can use a pronoun to refer back to it. However, we can also take any other more descriptive expression. In (2b), however, the discourse referent is less prominent and we therefore strongly prefer a more descriptive term such as *the musician*.

4a Prominent discourse referents allow for more variation in their anaphoric linkages [3]

	IN FOCUS	ACTIVATED	FAMILIAR	UNIQUE	REFERENTIAL	TYPE	TOTALS
<i>it</i>	214	1					215
<i>HE</i>		1					1
<i>this</i>		15					15
<i>that</i>	1	17					18
<i>this N</i>	1	11					12
<i>that N</i>		10	7				17
<i>the N</i>	30	95	47	108			280
indefinite							
<i>this N</i>					1		1
<i>a N</i>					41	55	96
TOTALS	246	150	54	108	42	55	655

TABLE 3. Distribution of English forms according to highest status

4b Prominent discourse referents are more often rementioned in a paragraph

We assume that discourse referents introduced by indefinite *this* are more prominent than ones introduced by the indefinite article [4]

- (3) Peter will nächste Woche **diese/eine Spanierin** besuchen. Er hat sie letztes Jahr in Barcelona kennen gelernt.
'Peter wants to visit this/a Spaniard next week. He met her last year in Barcelona.'

Experiment: indefinite *dies* vs. specific *ein*

Peter will nächste Woche **diese/eine** Spanierin besuchen. Er hat sie letztes Jahr in Barcelona kennen gelernt.
 'Peter wants to visit **this/a** Spaniard next week. He met her last year in Barcelona.'

dieser-version

- S1: Er traf **sie**, während er in einer Schlange stand.
 'He met **her** while he was queuing up.'
- S2: **Sie** war total genervt vom Warten und fing ein Gespräch an.
 'She was so upset and started a conversation.'
- S3: **Sie** hatte viele Gemeinsamkeiten mit ihm.
 'She had lots of things in common with him.'
- S4: Auch **ih**r kleiner Sohn war Peter auf Anhieb sympathisch.
 'Peter liked **her** little son as well.'

ein-version

- S1: Jetzt muss er nur noch einen Sprachkurs machen.
 'Now all he has to do is a language course.'
- S2: Sonst wird das wieder nur ein Treffen mit Zeichensprache.
 'Otherwise it will be a sign-language date.'
- S3: Sein gebrochenes Englisch ist auch nicht gerade hilfreich.
 'His bad English won't help either.'
- S4: Der Peter macht einen auf Globetrotter.
 'Peter pretends to be a globetrotter.'



Main Result

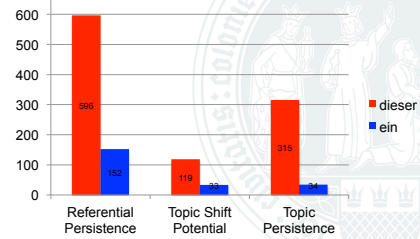


Fig. 1. Discourse saliency of critical referents, total values of 10TI with 6 continuation sentences delivered, 12 discourses produced / condition (dieser/ ein condition)

➤ Indefinite **dieser** exhibits a significantly higher discourse prominence – in contrast to the indefinite article **ein** – even on specific (wide-scope) interpretation.



4c Prominent discourse referents are more likely to be perspectival centers.

The perspectival center is generally the first person or the narrator, which is by the nature of a text the most prominent anchor. However, it can also be shifted to some prominent discourse referent that is the subject of a sentence that shows an inner "thinking". However, it is rarely the object of a transitive verb.

- (4) Mary approached a journalist, Alas, she would never become his girlfriend.



5. Prominence updates in discourse

(Def3) Prominence status **shifts in time** (as discourse unfolds).

The prominence relation between the relevant units do update and change in an unfolding discourse.



6. Summary

Prominence is a very useful, but differently used concept in pragmatics. We try to characterize prominence (and thus delimit it from other notions) by the following characterization:

- (Def1) Prominence is a **relational property** that singles out one element from a set of elements of equal type and structure.
- (Def2) Prominent elements are **structural attractors**, i.e. they serve as anchors for the larger structures they are constituents of, and they may license more operations than their competitors.
- (Def3) Prominence status **shifts in time** (as discourse unfolds).



References

- [1] Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. & Beatrice Primus. 2015. Prominence beyond prosody - a first approximation. In Amedeo De Dominicis (ed.), *Prominences in Linguistics. Proceedings of the pS-prominenceS International Conference*, 38–58. University of Tuscia, Viterbo: DISUCOM Press.
- [2] Jasinskaja, Katja, Sofiana Chiriacescu, Marta Donazzan, Klaus von Heusinger & Stefan Hinterwimmer. 2015. Prominence in discourse. In Amedeo De Dominicis (ed.), *Prominences in Linguistics. Proceedings of the pS-prominenceS International Conference*, 134–153. University of Tuscia, Viterbo: DISUCOM Press.
- [3] From Gundel, Jeanette K., Nancy Hedberg & Ron Zacharski. 1993. Cognitive status and the form of referring expressions in discourse. *Language*, 274–307.
- [4] Deichsel, Annika & Klaus von Heusinger. 2011. The cataphoric potential of indefinites in German. In I. Hendrickx, S. Lalitha Devi, A. Branco & R. Mitkov (eds.), *Anaphora and Reference Resolution. 8th Discourse Anaphora and Anaphor Resolution Colloquium, DAARC 2011 Faro, Portugal, October 6-7, 2011, Revised Selected Papers*, 144–156. Heidelberg: Springer.

