Non-restrictive Modification and Backgrounding

Non-restrictive modification is commonly said to provide information which is irrelevant to the denotation or reference of the modified phrase. A non-restrictive modifier draws attention to a property of the referent or denotation that is commonly known or supposed to be evident in the context in which the sentence is uttered, and thus expresses information which is contextually given or background in a broader sense. Non-restrictive modification may come in various forms, e.g. as a relative clause, or an apposition, or an adjectival modifier. This paper focuses on adjectival modifiers. The example in (1) is from a newspaper article referring to an anti-aircraft defence bill dismissed by the German constitutional court. The prominent interpretation of the NP *unschuldige Passagiere* ('innocent passengers') is such that the modification by *unschuldige* ('innocent') is non-restrictive, the NP denoting all passengers. According to this interpretation passengers in the context of an aircraft hijacking are viewed as generally innocent and are contrasted with kidnappers. There is also a restrictive interpretation of the NP *unschuldige Passagiere* such that kidnappers are regarded as guilty passengers in contrast with innocent passengers, which is, however, marginal.

(1) Ein Abschuss eines gekaperten Flugzeuges, in dem sich neben den Entführern unschuldige Passagiere befinden, ist und bleibt verboten.

   'Shooting down a kidnapped aircraft that has innocent passengers on board in addition to the kidnappers is illegal.'

In distinguishing between the restrictive and the non-restrictive interpretation of (German) adjective-noun phrases intonation plays a crucial role. Consider the NP *bunte Blumen* ('colourful flowers') in (2). An accent on the modifier, as in (2b), makes the sentence unacceptable for most speaker since it induces a restrictive interpretation contradicting the common view that flowers are generally colourful. Obviously, in order to licence the intended non-restrictive interpretation the modifier has to be deaccented. This suggests a narrow focus on the noun, as in (2c). However, following Rooth (1992) a narrow focus on the noun would trigger a set of alternatives comprised of colourful things, which induces an unwanted continuation and is clearly not the intended reading. The other option for the modifier not to receive an accent would be a focus including the NP, as in (2d), the accent thus falling on the head. This type of focus does not restrict the set of alternatives to colourful things, which is intuitively correct. It is, however, is in conflict with the intuition that a non-restrictive modifier expresses information which is evident in the context and thus a kind of background information.

(2) (a) In Annas Garten sind bunte Blumen (aber kein Gemüse und keine Bäume).
         'In Anna's garden there are colourful flowers (but no vegetables and no trees).'

     (b) ? In Annas Garten sind [BUNTE]]$_F$ Blumen (aber keine farblosen Blumen).
          'In Anna's garden there are colourful flowers (but no colourless flowers')

     (c) ? In Annas Garten sind bunte [BLUMEN]$_F$ (aber kein buntes Gemüse und keine bunten Bäume)
          'In Anna's garden there are colourful flowers (but no colourful vegetables and no colourful trees')

     (d) In Annas Garten sind [bunte BLUMEN]$_F$ (aber kein Gemüse und keine Bäume)
          'In Anna's garden there are colourful flowers (but no vegetables and no trees').'

Although the non-restrictive interpretation requires deaccenting of the modifier, the converse is not true – deaccenting does not entail a non-restrictive interpretation. This is shown in (3).

In Edna's reply the modifier *rot* ('red') is deaccented due to the previous mentioning of *rot* in Tom's statement. Nevertheless it has to be interpreted restrictively, which is evident from the mentioning of a green sofa in the subsequent sentence.

(3) Tom: Ich habe für unsere neue Wohnung einen roten Teppich gekauft.
'I bought a red carpet for our new appartment.'

    Edna: Das ist ja großartig. Chuck hat gesagt, dass er mir sein rotes SOFA gibt. Jetzt können wir das GRÜNE Sofa endlich wegschmeißen.
'This is great. Chuck said that I could have his red sofa. Now we can get rid of the green sofa'

The examples in (2) and (3) demonstrate that a non-restrictive modifier does not constitute background information in the sense of focus/background structure. Moreover, a back-grounded modifier need not be interpreted as a non-restrictive one. This suggests that the concept of focus vs. background and the concept of restrictive vs. non-restrictive modification are independent of each other. On the other hand there is the requirement for non-restrictively interpreted modifiers to be deaccented, and there is the status of non-restrictive information as being commonly known or evident in the context of the utterance, giving rise to the question of how background and non-restrictive modification interact.

It is generally agreed that a non-restrictive modification triggers an entailment such that the modified denotation or referent has the modifying property. Since this entailment it is not blocked by, e.g., negation and modals, it has been regarded as a presupposition giving rise to a truth value gap in case of inconsistency with the common ground (cf. Umbach 1996). The presupposition interpretation has been challenged by data suggesting that it is possible for the hearer to ignore the entailment triggered by a non-restrictive modification if it is in conflict with the common ground, especially in the case of adjectives and appositions. Another argument against the presupposition interpretation of such entailments is provided by the fact that, unlike regular presupposition, they project out of, e.g., indirect quotation contexts. For this reason Geurts (1999) proposed a *buoyancy principle* which allows for global accommodation of backgrounded material (where the notion of background in Geurts' paper includes the entailments of non-restrictive modifications as well as background material).

In Potts (2005) a range of phenomena is investigated which roughly corresponds to what is commonly subsumed under the notion of non-restrictive modification, e.g., non-restrictive relatives clauses, appositions, and so-called expressives. The basic idea is that in using such expressions the speaker makes a comment upon (part of) the asserted content of the utterance, and that these comments are conventional implicatures (cf. Grice 1975). Interpreting non-restrictive modifications as conventional implicatures accounts for the fact that they do not contribute to the denotation or reference of the NP, do not necessarily give rise to truth value gaps in case of inconsistency with the common ground, and are attributed to the speaker of the utterance even if embedded in indirect quotation. To represent conventional implicatures Potts suggests a multidimensional semantics such that the meaning of a sentence is represented by a tuple consisting of the asserted proposition and a (possibly empty) list of propositions representing conventional implicatures. The interaction between these two dimensions is restricted such that conventional implicatures can never be argument to an asserted expression and must take asserted content as their arguments – you cannot assert something that includes a comment and you cannot comment upon a comment.

In Potts' analysis focus is not considered. Although he admits that intonation has some kind of effect – non-restrictive relative clauses, for example, are distinguished by their so-called comma-intonation – he refers to focus semantics merely as a "campaign point" supporting his multidimensional view of meaning. It is unclear, however, how the focus dimension of meaning (in the sense of, e.g., Rooth 1992 or Krifka 1992) interacts with the conventional implicature dimension. Evidently, the former must not be conflated with the

latter. The examples in (2) and (3), on the other hand, indicate that the two dimensions are not independent of each other, thus raising the question of how to combine them in the representation of meaning. There are various possibilities depending on whether we choose Rooth' dimensions of focus meaning and ordinary meaning, or Krifka's dimensions of focus and background and on whether we regard focus meaning as a third dimension or opt for a focus/background distinction within the assertion/conventional implicature distinction, thus suggesting, first of all, to examine their interaction.

Concerning adjectival modifiers, Potts' investigation is restricted to cases like *damn* and *fucking*, which are unambiguously expressives. This paper will take a broader perspective including non-restrictive adjectival modifiers in general. Note that in a non-restrictive interpretation even unmarked adjectives like *klein* ('little') achieve an evaluative flavour due to expressing the speaker's assessment and may thus be regarded as expressives in a broader sense. Comparing regular and expressive adjectival modifiers from the point of view of focus semantics there are at least three major differences. The first and the second one relate to the behavior of expressives with respect to alternative sets which has already been pointed out in the example in (2). The third one relates to anaphoricity and change of speaker. In the examples below it will be assumed that, while in the case of indefinites the noun is subject to a non-restrictive modifier, in the case of definites it may either be the noun or the referent. In (4b), for example, the speaker either regards officers in general to be stupid, or he relates to the officer determined by the NP.

In (4) the focus is on the adjective. (4a) would be licensed by a preceding discourse such as *In dem Zimmer waren zwei Beamte, ein blonder und ein rothaariger.* ('There were two officers in the room, one was blond and the other one red-haired'). In the case of (4b), it is hardly possible to come up with a licensing context.[1] This indicates that, while regular adjectives are qualified to trigger alternatives (the red-haired officer, the blond officer, etc.), expressives are not.[2] Note that this is not a matter of the lexical item but of its use in the sentence. The NP *der dreckige Gauner,* for example, is preferably interpreted as referring to a crook, where *dreckig* is used as an expressive, i.e. non-restrictively. But as soon as it carries an accent it must be interpreted in the regular way – *der DRECKIGE Gauner* is clearly one who is covered with dirt.

(4) (a) Der [ROTHAARIGE]$_F$ Beamte fragte nach meinem Ausweis.
     (b) ?? Der [DÄMLICHE]$_F$ Beamte fragte nach meinem Ausweis.
          'The red-haired / stupid officer asked for my passport.'

In (5) the focus is on noun. (5a) would, e.g., be licensed by a previous discourse mentioning an officer and an applicant, both red-haired. If the regular adjective is substituted by an expressive, as in (5b), it is again hard to perceive of a licensing context. Obviously, an interpretation of the expressive such that it restricts the alternatives triggered by a focus (e.g. the stupid officer, the stupid applicant etc.) is not available. Or else, if the modifier does restrict the alternatives, it has a regular interpretation. In *Der dreckige GAUNER traf den dreckigen POPEN* ('the dirty crook met the dirty priest'), for example, the modifier must be interpreted in the regular way.

(5) (a) Der rothaarige [BEAMTE]$_F$ hatte ein rosanes Hemd an.
     (b) ?? Der dämliche [BEAMTE]$_F$ ....
          'The red-haired / stupid officer was wearing a pink shirt.'

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[1] There are quotation like contexts such that one officer has been called *dämlich* ('stupid') and another one, e.g., *faul* ('lazy') which would license (4b).
[2] Following Krifka (to appear) focus is evaluated on the level of the focus phrase. Note also that in the examples foci in the reminder of the sentence are ignored.

So while focusing an expressive adjective is infelicitous because it cannot trigger alternatives, backgrounding an expressive adjective is infelicitous because it cannot restrict the alternatives triggered by the focus. The former effect is predicted by non-restrictiveness: If officers are generally regarded as being stupid, there are no non-stupid officers available. The latter effect is naturally explained by interpreting the modifier as a comment: Regardless of whether the modifier comments upon the noun denotation or the referent, such a comment is not expected to be passed on to other entities in the discourse.

This leaves the option of a focus including both the adjective and the noun (*Der [dämliche BEAMTE]$_F$*). Assuming, however, that the focused part of a definite description has to be used to determine the referent of a definite NP whereas the background part applies to any of the alternatives (cf. Umbach 2002), the expressive would be decisive for the determination of the referent. Thus *der [dämliche BEAMTE]$_F$* would be interpreted as the unique individual in this situation who is an officer and is stupid'. On this interpretation the hearer would be obliged to accept the speaker's assessment, which is against the facts. The problems discussed above strongly suggest to follow Potts (2005) in representing the asserted content and conventional implicature of the NP separately and disregard conventional implicature expressions in the interpretation of focus.

Finally, although background information as well as expressive modifiers have widest scope not being blocked by, e.g., indirect quotation context, their scope in dialogue is different. Backgrounding is licensed by previous mentioning even if it's not the same speaker, cf. the example in (3). Expressives, however, cannot be picked up by the next speaker, which is predicted by the fact that they are speaker-related. Consider the example in (6). Edna's statement implicates that she likes Chuck's paintings (whereas Chuck might like them or not). But if Tom repeats her expression *wunderbar* ('wonderful') it seems like a quote indicating irony, and if he wants to say that he also likes Chuck's paintings, he has to use some other expression. It seems that expressives cannot pick up an antecedent expression and in addition do not qualify as antecedents.

(6) Edna: Chuck hat gesagt, dass er mir eins seiner wunderbaren Bilder geben will.
      'Chuck said that he will give me one of his wonderful paintings.'
    Tom: Aber häng das wunderbare Bild bitte nicht in den Flur.
      'But please do not hang the wonderful picture in the hall.'

To conclude, the analysis of expressive/non-restrictive adjectives in focused NPs confirms Potts (2005) view of these items as triggering conventional implicatures, which have to represented distinct from the assertional content. In the talk an implementation will be suggested combining the assertion/conventional implicature distinction and the focus/ background distinction in the framework of Gunlogson (2003).

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