

## A Contrastivist approach to the progressive

*Contrastivism*, recently argued for by Jonathan Schaffer (Schaffer 2004; 2005a; 2008, Schaffer and Gendler Szabó 2013), is the view that the truth conditions of ‘*S* knows that *p*’ do not only depend on *S* and *p*, but on a syntactically covert *contrast proposition q* as well. The theory has also been applied to issues of causation (Schaffer 2005b; 2012).

In my talk I will argue that the truth conditions of progressive sentences are *contrast dependent* in a similar way, and the semantics of the progressive lends strong support to the Contrastivist approach. Drawing on recent literature on the progressive (Gendler Szabó 2004, Wulf 2009, Varasdi 2013), I argue that (i) the outcome *O* referred to in the sentence radical of a progressive sentence always belongs to a contextually determined set of outcomes  $\mathcal{C}$ , and that (ii) the progressive is infelicitous if there is no evidence on which *O* can be singled out unequivocally from the elements of  $\mathcal{C}$ ; and (iii) I describe a method based on Cohen (1999) to compute  $\mathcal{C}$  on the basis of the context and the sentence radical.

As for an illustration of Claim (i), assume that Mary was hit by a truck while crossing the street. Then (1) and (2) are both true, even though the outcomes exclude each other (see Abusch 1985). We can explain this by assuming that (1) is evaluated under a *different* contrast set than (2): in (1) we contrast the possible spatial outcomes of Mary’s activities, while in (2) we contrast the potentially lethal and non-lethal outcomes thereof.

(1) Mary was crossing the street.

(2) Mary was walking into her death.

Notice that the appearance of these contrast sets is due to the use of the progressive, as the non-progressive (3) and (4) are clearly contradictory and cannot be true at the same time:

(3) Mary crossed/will cross the street.

(4) Mary walked/will walk into her death.

As for Claim (ii), consider sentence (5) from Mittwoch (1987):

(5) # The level of the lake was rising 10 feet when I arrived.

The relevant contrast set contains all the possible heights the level of the lake may rise. But, unlike in the case of Mary where there are clearly observable signs of Mary’s intentions or the trajectory of the truck, there is normally nothing about a lake that could help the observer single out a ten-foot rise *as opposed to* any other possible amount of rise in height, which explains the oddness of (5).

Notice that this is also a peculiarity of the progressive aspect, because the same situation can be described felicitously in non-progressive terms (see Higginbotham 2004):

- (6) When I arrived, the lake was in the course of (what would prove to be) a ten-foot rise.

Finally, drawing upon the theory of focus alternatives in Cohen (1999), I describe a method to compute the relevant contrast sets based on the minimal presuppositions of the sentence radical of the progressive sentence in a given context.

## References

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