snippets

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The rise and fall of non-conservatives

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Ahn and Sauerland (2017) observe that in several languages determiner phrases containing relative measures can express either a conservative construal as in (1a) or a non-conservative construal as in (1b).

(1) a. The company hired 75% of the women. (conservative)
b. The company hired 75% women. (non-conservative)

Whilst example (1a) considers the ratio of the company hires among all women, example (1b) concerns the ratio of women among the company hires.

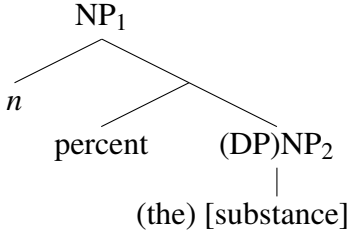
In German, for example, these interpretations can be distinguished by the case of the noun and the focus placement, as in example (2), which is adapted from Ahn and Sauerland 2017, ex. 5

(2) a. 30 Prozent der Studierenden arbeiten hier.
30 percent.NOM the.GEN students.GEN work here
'30 percent of the students work here.' (conservative)
b. 30 Prozent STUDIERENDE$_F$ arbeiten hier.
30 percent.NOM students.NOM work here
'30 percent of workers here are students.' (non-conservative)

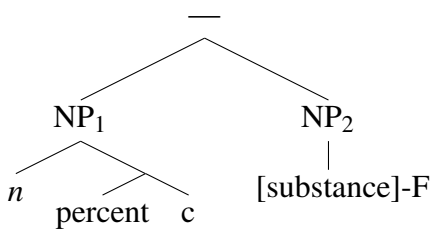
To account for the non-conservative construal Ahn and Sauerland combine quantifier raising and association with focus, and they propose a modification of the copy theory of movement.

They assume that in the conservative construal the measure noun and the substance noun, i.e. in (2) *the students*, form a constituent excluding the numeral argument of the measure noun. With the non-conservative construal, however, the measure noun and its numeral form a constituent excluding the substance noun, with the argument position of *percent* filled by a focus-sensitive restrictor *c*:

(3)



Conservative construal



Non-conservative construal

The details of their analysis are not important here, but their observation that focus is crucial for the non-conservative reading is. Interestingly, marking example (2b) with a fall-rise intonation contour, as shown in example (4), results in a conservative interpretation.

(4) 30 Prozent /STUDIERENDE$_{CT/F}$ arbeiten HIER$_F$\.
30 percent.NOM students.NOM work here
'30 percent of the students work here.' (conservative)

According to Büring (1997, 2003, 2016), a fall-rise contour indicates a contrastive topic. This analysis is usually challenged by theories that assume some kind of focus, e.g., multiple focus (Constant 2012), nested focus operators (Wagner 2012), topics that contain a focus (Krifka 1998) or contrastive focus within a topic (Umbach 2001). In their paper, Ahn and Sauerland do not discuss examples with fall-rise contours. They observe, though, that examples with no focus on the substance noun but on the VP instead have a conservative reading. That means, if one follows Büring, an analysis of example (4) would fall in line with Ahn and Sauerland.

If one follows the other approaches, however, it would be interesting to see how this can be integrated into the theory of Ahn and Sauerland. In either case, relative measures marked with fall-rise contours seem to contribute to the ongoing debate about how to analyze these contours. For that matter, as one reviewer pointed out, in Korean the topic marker *-nun* on the substance noun also seems to give rise to a conservative reading, and it had been argued before (Wee 1996) that the topic marker *-nun* corresponds to the fall-rise contour.

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