Resolving Backgrounds

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to treat background (non-focus) elements as anaphoric, i.e. as objects which are formally subject to the same conditions which hold for other anaphora. The idea that backgrounds are anaphoric is inherent in many approaches to information structure, but they are rarely treated as such formally. I will discuss two problems which seem to challenge a strict anaphoricity approach to backgrounds: the problem of non-identity between background and its antecedent, where one is more informative than the other, and the fact that a background may be seemingly anaphoric to an antecedent contained within a scope island. In order to resolve the scope problem I will assume that every existent NP presupposes the existence of a kind it realizes. On the other hand I will assume that different kinds of backgrounds, links and tails in Vallduví’s (1992) terminology, introduce different anaphoricity conditions. The anaphoric relation between a background and its antecedent does not necessarily have to be one of identity; links can be more descriptive than their antecedent while tails can be more general.

1. Introduction

In this paper I will discuss the anaphoric properties of backgrounds. Background, or non-focus, elements have repeatedly been argued to present given information within a discourse context. Nevertheless backgrounds are seldomly treated as genuinely anaphoric elements. Here I will treat them as anaphors in the strict sense. The goal is to integrate the discourse phenomena information structure (IS, hereafter) in an unified theory of discourse like DRT (Kamp and Reyle 1993). My discussion will mainly concentrate on tails (Vallduví, 1992), which I assume to be equivalent to unmarked themes (Steemdan, 2000), a special type of backgrounds, but I will also sketch a possible solution for the treatment of links (or marked themes in Steedman’s classification). The distinction between links and tails is that the former are marked by a L+H* accent (a raising accent) in English, while the latter are not accented or even de-accented. The semantic interpretation and also the anaphoric accessibility conditions vary between links and tails, but I will argue that they are both anaphoric. Although in English the difference between links and tails is usually only marked phonologically, romance languages may mark the two type of background elements syntactically. For example Catalan marks them via left- and right-dislocation respectively (e.g. Vallduví, 1992) and provides a more robust test case for the distinction of the two.

Apart from the theoretical appeal of treating IS within a framework like DRT (treating discourse phenomena in a formal theory of discourse), there is also a genuine need for the resolution of IS on the basis of a discourse context representation: the linguistic realisation of IS never fully disambiguates the focus-background partitioning itself. A good example for this is the so-called focus-projection phenomenon in English (Selkirk 1984, among many others), a phenomenon which shows that a single accent only marks the nucleus of a focus, but the extension of the focus remains ambiguous:

(1) [Peter [entered [the ROOM]].]

The focus nucleus of (1) is marked by an (H*+L) accent on ROOM but its extension is ambiguous between the object NP, the VP and the whole sentence, depending on the context question being Where did Peter enter?, What did Peter do?, etc. The extend of the background varies accordingly.

In Catalan this ambiguity is (at least partly) resolved by syntactic marking as can be seen in (2):

(2) a. Q: On va entrar en Pere?
   ‘Where did Peter enter?’
   A: A la HABITACIÓ, hi a entrar, (en Pere).
   In the room there-cl has entered art Peter
b. Q: Què va passar? | Què va fer en Pere?
   ‘What happened?’ | ‘What did Peter do?’
   A: En Pere hi va entrar a la HABITACIÓ.
   art Peter there has entered in the room.
c. Q: Què va fer en Pere?
   ‘What did Peter do?’
   A: Va entrar a la HABITACIÓ, en Pere.
   Has entered in the room, art Peter.

The Catalan data shows that there is a real ambiguity between different information-structural constellations, i.e. the exact boundary between focus and background. The answer of (2a) would for example not be felicitous as an answer to any of the other question in (2b,c). Different realisations are supported by different contexts. The English counterpart (1) does not mark this ambiguity overtly, but we have to assume that (1) is ambiguous as well. In a translation of (1) this ambiguity would have to be resolved. In order to resolve this problem I will adopt a version of the algorithm which is implicit in Schwartschild’s (1999) theory of givenness, an algorithm which tries to find a suitable antecedent for each potentially backgrounded constituent. In simple words: whenever we can find an antecedent for a constituent, this constituent will count as given and must be anaphoric.1

1 A word of caution is in order here: I claim that backgrounded material is anaphoric, but not that all anaphora are necessarily backgrounded. Anaphora can of cause be part of a focus, a fact that plays an important role in Schwartschild’s (1999) proposal.
2. Data and Motivation

Let us first review some of the relevant data. I will continue to use English and Catalan examples. The Catalan sentences often show an information-structural disambiguation where the English counterparts remain ambiguous. In English what is usually marked is the focus of a sentence, with a H* (simple high) or H*+L (falling) accent (e.g. Steedman, 2000), while the location of and extension of the background can only be inferred.

Now, there are some cases in English in which the exact boundary between focus and background can be determined from the phonological realisation of the sentence, but this is not always the case. If the focus of (1) is the whole VP and only the NP Peter is backgrounded then two intonation patterns are possible, one with a H*+L accent on room and one with the same H*+L accent on room and an additional L+H* accent on Peter. The two intonation patterns correspond to the same focus-background partitioning, but they are not licensed in exactly the same contexts.

(3) a. What did Peter do?
   [sai Peter] [H*+L entered the ROOM].
   b. What did Peter and Joe do?
   [H*+L L+H* entered the ROOM].

Following Vallduví (1992), I will assume that the difference between the two background realisations is that one is a link and the other is a tail. In (3b) Peter is marked as a link and is interpreted contrastively (a fact pointed out by Steedman). The Catalan counterparts of these sentences are given in (4).²

In Vallduví’s taxonomy background elements are either links or tails. The exact difference in interpretation between links and tails will not concern us here (although we will be concerned about the anaphoric conditions of the two in section 3.2). The important point is that the link-identifying accent makes the focus-background partitioning resolvable from the phonological surface form. On the other hand, (3a), the tail realisation, is more problematic in this respect since the boundary between focus and background is not marked neither phonologically nor syntactically. This is the interesting case for the present purpose. But despite of the lack of phonologic marking of a boundary, there is no reason to believe that (3b) is really ambiguous. The Catalan counterparts in (4) disambiguate this difference. This shows that we have a real problem at hand. There is no possible way to resolve backgrounds on the basis of surface information alone. I will propose in this paper that the only possible way to fully resolve backgrounds is to treat tails as anaphora and resolve them as being anaphoric, that means to check if they have a possibly matching antecedent.

Further on, the presence or absence of a link-marking (H*+L) accent influences the anaphoric interpretation of a background. Consider the following example, given by Hendriks and Dekker (1996):

(5) Ten guys were playing basketball in the rain. [The fathers] were having FUN.

If the NP the fathers in (5) is link-accented the fathers cannot be identical to the ten guys. If the accent is missing an identity reading between fathers and ten guys is possible and also the preferred reading (unless there are other fathers mentioned in wider context, e.g. the fathers of the ten guys playing basketball which are watching the game). In this example the background is ambiguous with respect to the type of anaphoric reading and the accentuation resolves the ambiguity. Accordingly the Catalan translation can be either of the sentences in (6).

(6) a. … [Els pares] s’ho van passar bé. (non-identity)
   the fathers refl. have-great-time.
b. S’ho van passar bé, [els pares]. (identity)
   (they) refl. have-great-time.

A related phenomenon is the recoverability of IS and accentuation from written texts: Written texts usually do not represent accents, but human readers are able to reconstruct them (and the IS of each sentence) without apparent difficulty. This again shows that linguistic IS-marking must be combined with context information in order to fully disambiguate the focus-background partitioning of each sentence in a discourse. In case the accents are not present, a good part of the focus-background partitioning is recoverable, although I will argue in section 3.3 that not all of the accents are recoverable.

Givenness approaches, especially Schwarzschild (1999), have already stressed the necessity of anaphoric background resolution. Nevertheless, any anaphor-approach to IS is confronted with a series of problems. I will address two of them, which I consider a serious challenge for a strict givenness approach to IS and which concern the peculiar anaphoric behaviour of backgrounds: 1) the problem of non-identity between a background constituent and its antecedent and 2) the fact that the antecedent of a background may occur inside a scope island, e.g. in a donkey sentence.


(8) a. PirateK are scum.
b. Nevertheless Mary MARRIED [a pirate/one]. (j realises k)

(9) a. Bach wrote many pieces for the violaK.
b. He must have LOVED [string instruments,K]. (t≥k)

(10) A: Any news about John?
   B: No, recently I haven’t SEEN my brothers.

(11) a. Every donkey ate a carrotK.
b. [Carrots,K] are healthy. (j realises k)
b’. *It is healthy.

(12) a. [They,K] are part of a healthy donkey diet.

The Catalan counterparts of these sentences are as follows:

(7) L’empresa el va fer fora, [Paul, him] has kicked-out, the Paul.

(8) La Maria es va casar amb un, [de pirata], part pirate.

² I will follow the standard convention of using small capital letters for the focus identifying accent.
³ Vallduví (1992) analyses preverbal subjects as links, an analysis I will adopt here without further discussion. He assumes that Catalan has an underlying basic VSO word order.
Backgrounds to be anaphoric. Now the question is how with the backgrounded NP in (11b) if we take antecedent for z.

Turning to (8), there problem we can observe here is that the background apirate is anaphoric to the kind-refering NP pirates. What makes this problematic is the fact that there is a mismatch between the type of the referents, an individual and a kind (Carlson, 1977), although the individual realises the kind pirates. Backgrounds seem not to require a identity interpretation and be able to shift types. Still there are pronouns like one which show the same behaviour. In (9) (taken from van Deemter and Odijk, 1997) both the background (a tail which is de-accented) and its antecedent are kind-refering. But the referent expressed by the tail (string instruments) is anaphoric to a antecedent-kind (the viola) which is more specific (in the sense of being more descriptive: [string instruments] ≥ [[viola]]). This again shows that the anaphoric relation between a background and its antecedent is not necessarily one of identity. This part of relation is not restricted to kinds and sub-kinds, as (10) shows, where the relevant reading is that John is one of B’s brothers.

Finally, (11b) shows that the background may be anaphoric to an antecedent contained within a scope island. The first sentence here is a donkey-type sentence. The quantifier every takes scope over the indefinite a carrot, making the existence of every carrot dependent on the donkey which eats it. This scope island rules out (11b), since the pronoun it requires an individual antecedent. Such an individual is not available from the context, since each individual carrot is dependent on the donkey which eats it. The pronoun it is outside the scope of every. In DRT-terms the carrots are introduced in a DRS representing the consequent of a conditional-like construction. The pronoun is introduced in the main DRS which is superordinate to the conditional. Since the consequent DRS is subordinate to the main DRS where z is introduced (the referent for it), y is not accessible as an antecedent for z.

But exactly this anaphoric binding is what happens with the backgrounded NP in (11b) if we take backgrounds to be anaphoric. Now the question is how that can be. To some extent this case is parallel to cases of pronominal binding, shortly discussed in Kamp and Reyle (1993, ch. 4, 391ff.). Some (kind-referring) pronouns seem to be able to access their antecedent within such islands, namely when they refer to a kind realised by the antecedent (as in (11b')). I will come back to this point in section 3.1.

By way of summary we can say we have three problems which we have to account for:

Problem 1: backgrounds which denote individual referents are able to be anaphoric to kinds.

Problem 2: backgrounds may be anaphoric to an antecedent which is only partially identical with it.

Problem 3: backgrounds do not respect the same scope island which block anaphoric linking for pronouns referring to individuals.

On the other hand we can make the following positive observations:

Observation 1: Backgrounds are kind-sensitive anaphora: if j is a background, k is a kind and j realises k, then j may be anaphoric to k.

Observation 2: Tails (as opposed to links, which behave differently) may be anaphoric to an antecedent which is more specific.

Observation 3: There is a principled relationship between a kind k and a referent j which realises k.

For the sake of completeness reconsider (3b) and (4b), an example of a link-construction. Here the antecedent is a plural referent and the referent expressed by the link Peter/Pere is a part of the antecedent referent: [[Peter]] ≥ [[Peter and Peter and Joe]]. Compare that to observation 2. What we find with links seems to be the mirror-image of tails. So we arrive at observation 4:

Observation 4: Links may be anaphoric to an antecedent which is less specific. If α is a tail which refers to a referent x and β is a target antecedent for α which refers to y, then α may be anaphoric to β iff y ≥x.

From Observation 4 we could suspect that the ≥-relation between link and antecedent also holds in the case of kinds, and this is what we find:

(12) a. Which relationship did Bach have to string instruments?
   b. He certainly LIKED [link the viola]
      H* L+H*
      b’. [link La viola], segurament, li va agradar.
      The viola, certainly, him-cl he-liked.
      ‘The viola, he surely liked.’

3. Discussion

3.1. Kind sensitivity and kind introduction

As we have seen in the last section kinds play an important role in the resolution of backgrounds. Kamp and Reyle (1993) note that the kind-referring pronoun they shows the same unusual behaviour with respect to donkey islands as exemplified in the sequence (11a,b'). They assume a rule that introduces a referent for the kind which is realized by an embedded individual. This referent for the kind will be introduced in the universe of the main

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4 Under an alternative, generalised view, it is located in the DRS which represents the nuclear scope of a duplex condition. The difference is not relevant for the present discussion.
DRS. Although they do not elaborate on that, they assume that this rule is triggered by presupposition.\(^5\)

Following Kamp and Reyle, I assume that kind-realising NPs presuppose the existence of the kind which they realise. A pirate\(_i\) in (8) presupposes the existence of the kind pirates. In (8) the presupposition is satisfied because of the existence of a kind-referent introduced in (8a). If the universe of discourse does not contain a referent for the kind, it must be created via accommodation. Kind-presuppositions pass the standard tests for presuppositions, such as surviving under negation (no pirate entered still presupposes that there is a kind or ‘concept’ pirates, even if this kind has no existing representives).

(13) **Kind presupposition**

If a new discourse referent \(x\) is introduced by an NP, a kind \(k\) is presupposed such that \(x\) realises \(k\). If the presupposition is not bound, \(k\) must be introduced via presupposition accommodation.

In addition I will assume that a background may be anaphoric to a context given kind.

(14) **Anaphoricity to kinds**\(^6\)

If a background constituent \(\beta\), which projects a referent \(x\), realises a kind \(k\), it will introduce a condition realise\((x,k)\) in the condition set of the DRS it is introduced in, and discourse referent \(x\) will count as anaphoric to \(k\), if \(x\) realises \(k\) and \(k\) is accessible for \(x\).

The effects of these two assumptions can be apply to examples like (9) and (8). (8″) is the DRS which realises NPs presuppose the existence of the kind which projects a referent for the kind, it must be created via accommodation. Kind-presuppositions pass the standard tests for presuppositions, such as surviving under negation (no pirate entered still presupposes that there is a kind or ‘concept’ pirates, even if this kind has no existing representives).

If we apply the anaphoricity principle (16) to (9)/(9′) we derive the following DRS (omitting the anaphoric resolution of ‘he’):

(9) a. Bach wrote many pieces for the viola\(_y\).

b. He must have LOVED [tail a viola\(_y\) / one].

(9′)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(x, y, z, u_k)</th>
<th>pirate(z)</th>
<th>realise((z,u_k))</th>
<th>mary((y,z))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pirates((x_k))</td>
<td>scum((x_k))</td>
<td>(u_k=z_k)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary((y))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presuppositional behaviour of kind introduction explains the ability for an antecedent to escape scope islands. In (11a) the NP a carrot presupposes the existence of a kind carrots, which has no previously existing referent in its DRS. The kind referent must therefore be introduced via accommodation.\(^7\) Since presuppositions can project upwards, this kind-referent may be created outside the scope of every (i.e. in a higher DRS) and is so accessible for the anaphoric background carrots in (11b). This analysis is parallel to cases discussed by van der Sandt (1992) and the analysis of presupposition as anaphora there. (11a+b) is thus parallel to (15). Here the possessive John’s talk introduces an existential presupposition which projects upwards and can be accessed anaphorically from outside the donkey sentence:

(15) a. Every linguist liked John’s talk.

b. It was very interesting.

3.2. Partial descriptions

Let us now turn to observation 2 from section 2. Examples (9) and (10) show that a background, more precisely a tail, is licensed if its referent is more descriptive than its antecedent or it describes a set which is a superset of the set that corresponds to its antecedent.

(16) **Anaphoricity principle for tails**

a. If \(\alpha\) is a background which projects a referent \(x\) and \(\beta\) is a plural target antecedent for \(\alpha\) which projects a referent \(y\), then \(\alpha\) may be anaphoric to \(\beta\) iff \(y\geq x\).

b. If \(\alpha\) is a background which denotes a kind \(k\) and \(\beta\) is a target antecedent for \(\alpha\) which denotes a kind \(k'\), then \(\alpha\) may be anaphoric to \(\beta\) iff \(k\geq k'\).

This anaphoricity principle will cause the introduction of a new discourse referent \(x\) for a tail, every time one is realised. In addition it will introduce a condition \(x\geq ?\) in the condition set, where the question mark must be resolved to the closest matching and accessible potential antecedent. With respect to standard DRT we allow here for more anaphoricity equators: \(\{=, \leq\}\). As a basis for the part-of relations I assume an algebraic model of plurality, as the one proposed in Kamp and Reyle (1993, 398). The advantage of an algebraic model (as opposed to a purely set-theoretic model) is that a part-of relation may hold between a kind and a sub-kind.

If we apply the anaphoricity principle (16) to (9)/(9′) we derive the following DRS (omitting the anaphoric resolution of ‘he’):

(9) a. Bach wrote many pieces for the viola\(_y\).

b. He must have LOVED [tail a string instruments\(_z\). (\(t\geq k\)]

(9″)

| \(x, y, z_k\) | \(x=bach’\) | viola\((y_l)\) | write_a_lot_of_pieces_for\((x,y_l)\) | string_instruments\((z_k)\) | \(z_k\geq ?\) |

The approach is extendable to links (which I assume to be contrastive topics). Links are also anaphoric but since they are interpreted contrastively, a referent expressed by

\(^{5}\) The introduction of the kind-referent in the main DRT may be a oversimplification since they assume that this rule is triggered by presupposition. Accommodated presuppositions tend to be introduced in the highest possible DRS, but accommodation in the local or an intermediate DRS is also possible (cf. van der Sandt, 1992). The following sentence pairs is not fully acceptable, most probably because the presupposition of the kinds dragons and chicken owned by Ottilie is bound within the conditional.

(i) If dragons exist, they are dangerous. ?They are no nice pets.

(ii) If Ottilie owns chicken and at least one chicken she owns lays an egg, she will have a nice breakfast. ?They are very good to eat.

\(^{6}\) The formulation of this rule is quite ad-hoc. A viable alternative would be to explain the type shifting behaviour of backgrounds in a type-theoretic framework where kinds have the status of a semantic type, as in ter Meulen (1995) where type-shifting rules for kinds are defined.

\(^{7}\) I use the subscript \(k\) in \(x_k\) only as a gloss to mark kind-referring referents, although for the time being this will make no theoretical difference.
a link can be part of the referent expressed by its antecedent. In some cases the link-referent is a singular entity which is part of a plural entity expressed by the antecedent, like in (3b). In other cases, the link-referent is more specific than the antecedent-referent. Both of those cases can be expressed by a ≤-relation, reverse of the ≥-relation used in (16) above. Compare (9) to (12). The situation in (12) is the reverse as in (9) since in (12) string instruments can serve as an antecedent for the link the viola. (12b) is the Catalan version of (12b) in the same context. Since Catalan marks links with left dislocation, the example nicely shows that the viola is indeed realised as a link.

### 3.3. Linguistic marking of backgrounds and recoverability

So far I have described the conditions under which a background element may be anaphoric to an antecedent. In fact, this is the starting point for many approaches to information structure which calculate IS on the basis of prosodic clues (in the case of English, e.g. Steedman, 2000) But in section 2 I have argued that many times an utterance is ambiguous between different focus-background divisions. Backgrounds present an additional problem in comparison to other anaphora: They are not lexically marked as such. In this respect they are different from pronouns, for example, which belong to a known class of anaphoric lexical items. This is further complicated by the fact that it is not always a single lexical item which is anaphoric, but often a whole constituent. The task of background resolution is thus twofold: In case of information-structural ambiguity, the background elements of a sentence must be identified as being anaphoric, including the delimitation of its extension. And their antecedent must be resolved. In many cases the two tasks go hand in hand.

Schwarzschild (1999) presents a elaborate theory of givenness which is wider in scope than the present proposal, which mainly concentrates on NPs, while Schwarzschild calculates givenness for any kind of constituent, applying an operation called Existential Type Shift. Schwarzschild starts from a basic F-marking rule which marks a (focus) accent word as nucleus of the sentence focus. Via a set of focus projection rules, the sentence focus may project upward from the accentted focus nucleus. Focus projection is then limited by two further principles: GIVENNess (capitalisation by Schwarzschild) and AvoidF. GIVENNess requires a constituent to be given if it is not F-marked, while AvoidF is an economy principle which allows the algorithm to only “F-mark as little as possible, without violating GIVENNess”. Now every every constituent must be checked for GIVENNess in order to calculate the IS of an utterance. It follows explicitly that given material may be included in the focus, but only if strictly necessary. This implies that even pronouns and other anaphoric material may be included in the focus.

The scope of the present proposal is more narrow than Schwarzschild’s theory. I will only adopt the algorithm for the purpose of checking whether if nominal referents are given, hence anaphoric. If they are anaphoric they will be marked as a background unless this conflicts with the F-marking procedure of the sentence focus. The concentration on nominal referents should by no means imply that non-nominal constituents should be neglected in the resolution algorithm. But since this would imply reference to other semantic types, like events and properties, I will ignore them for the time being. Let us see who the algorithm works in the case of (9)

(9a) a. Bach wrote many pieces for the viola.
   b. He must have LOVED [tail string instruments].

(12k)

(9b) has two nominal referents. The pronoun he will be resolved to co-refer with Bach by standard DRT principles. Now we only have to check if the NP string instruments is anaphoric by looking for a potential antecedent which matches the description. In the context we have two of those: Bach and viola. The first is evidently not a matching antecedent, but the second is, since [[string instruments]] ≥ [[viola]]. From that we can gain two important pieces of information: First, the NP string instruments must be backgrounded (unless it is not necessarily part of a larger focus), and, second, the background must be realised as a tail.

On the other hand, linguistic IS marking is by no means redundant. There are cases where linguistic marking forces the hearer to assume that a certain constituent is anaphoric and in which way. One such example is (1fa). If a link-identifying accent is placed on fathers, the hearer must assume that a ≤-condition holds for the referent projected by the NP. That means that she must assume that the fathers are part of a larger set and hence that there must be other persons (non-fathers) in the set described by ten guys. In (10) only the de-accenting of brothers triggers the interpretation that John is part of the set denoted by brothers.

Linguistic IS marking has thus two functions: It narrows down the search space for the background resolution algorithm and it can override and/or complete context given information, transmitting real additional meaning.

### 3.4. Presupposition

In section 3.1 I have made use of presupposition for the introduction of kinds. This should by no means imply that the whole approach to background resolution is presuppositional in nature. There are presuppositional approaches to Information Structure, most notably Geurts and van der Sandt (2004). The basic tenet of this approach is that the focus is the non-presupposed part of the sentence, while the background is presupposed. Such an approach is not unproblematic, although theoretically appealing.8 Here I will not discuss the theoretical problems which this brings along and only explain briefly why the present proposal is not based on presuppositions.

According to a certain tradition, most notably represented by van der Sandt (1992), presuppositions are anaphoric and must either be bound by the context or trigger presupposition accommodation. Here I have argued that backgrounds are anaphoric, but this only means that both backgrounds and presuppositions are anaphoric, not that backgrounds are presupposed. There may be presupposed material within the focus. Consider (17):

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8 The reader is referred to Schwarzschild (2004), Büring (2004) and more papers in the same volume for an extensive discussion.
Q: Who does every student of the course hate?
A: They hate the TEACHER.

The definite NP the teacher presupposes the existence of the referent and the definite description depends on the context. We are talking about the teacher of the course, not just any teacher in the world. Nevertheless the definite is in focus and not part of the background. This comes as no surprise under a givenness approach, since given material is not necessarily backgrounded if it is part of a larger focused constituent.

Krahmer and van Deemter (1998), discuss a series of anaphoric properties displayed by presuppositions which closely resemble the properties of backgrounds described here. In their proposal they use context variables (variables ranging over contexts). This context variable must be bound by the larger context. This kind of binding is much more general than the binding of other anaphora, including backgrounds. Take for example a novel in where a character appears which is a dragon and has the name Hildegunst. Chapter 1 talks about Hildegunst, but chapter 2 and 3 do not mention him at all. All of a sudden Hildegunst reappears in chapter 4, without any other dragon mentioned in the book. Chapter 4 mainly tells the story of the hero. All of a sudden the following phrase appears:

(18) Then the hero saw the DRAGON.

Here the dragon Hildegunst is surely given by the context (the novel), but it has no close enough antecedent in order to count as anaphoric in the strict sense. This is the reason why it appears as part of the focus and not as a part of the context. Backgrounds are more like pronouns in that they must be bound by the local background.

4. Conclusion

In this article I have argued that backgrounds are anaphoric in a similar way pronouns are. But they differ from pronouns in that they can be kind-sensitive and stand in a part-of relation to their antecedent. The discussion concentrated on nominal backgrounds but should eventually be extended to other referents.

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5. References


9 I’m grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.
10 See Umbach (2002) for a related but different view on accented and de-accented definite descriptions.