

Autofocus, Custom Focus

Kjell Johan Sæbø
Hohentübingen
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autofocus 1 *def.* when *-self* focuses on sb or sth; *ex. she herself is at risk of inheriting Alzheimer's disease; syn. intensification*



Fig. 2 Early autofocus camera

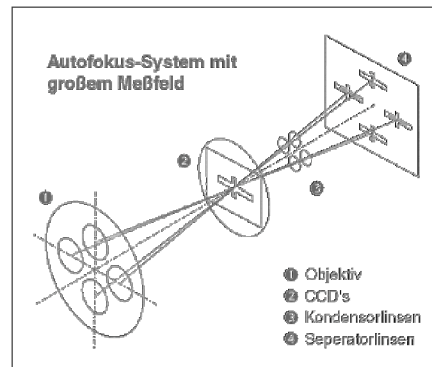


Fig. 1 Autofocus measurement

Eckardt subjected *selbst* to analysis

In an article published in *Natural Language Semantics* in December 2001, Regine Eckardt (36) presented her theory of the German intensifier *selbst*. According to this theory, *selbst* denotes the identity function on individuals (ID). From this simple assumption, several facts could be shown to follow: For *selbst* not to be redundant, it itself must be in **focus**, and, its **associate** argument must not be. Eckardt's is the sole formal theory of intensification to date. It has a range of successful applications.

Agnes Kant heeft bevordering en ondersteuning van borstvoeding in haar portefeuille.
 Agnes doet dit graag en met volle overtuiging, zelf heeft ze haar beide dochters bijna een jaar lang borstvoeding gegeven.

= SpecCP *zelf*



Ich möchte spätestens mit 17 ein Kind haben, weil ichs einfach am besten finde, früh Kinder zu bekommen, um mein Kind, wenn es selbst Teenager ist, zu verstehen.

= Adnominal *selbst*

The Foundation: Rooth (1992)

In a paper published in the same journal some ten years earlier, Mats Rooth had proposed a general theory of focus interpretation forming the basis for Eckardt's analysis. On this theory, focus gives rise to presuppositions about alternatives. Usually, the context must provide a proposition (or a set of p.) where the focus or foci have been replaced by alternatives.

Example 1 (adnominal case)

- (1) (As Elizabeth Brinker cares for her mother, she knows)
 she herself_F is [at risk of inheriting]_F Alzheimer's disease.

She and *herself* form a constituent, "she herself". Assume that the ordinary semantic value of *she* is x (bound in a presupposition). Then the ordinary semantic value of *she herself* is the same, x .

The focus semantic value of *she* is also the same, x . But the focus semantic value of *she herself* is the set of values of alternatives to ID at x –

$$\{ z \mid \text{there is an alternative } f \text{ to } \text{ID}_{\langle e, e \rangle} \text{ such that } z = f(x) \}$$

Alternatives to the identity function on individuals are functions that do not map individuals onto themselves but onto others.

At sentence level, the foci are interpreted in terms of a focus presupposition

$$\text{there are propositions } \phi \mid \text{there is a function } f \approx \text{ID}_{\langle e, e \rangle} \\ \text{and a relation } R \approx \text{at risk of inheriting} \mid \phi = R(\text{alzheimer's})(f(x))$$

which is verified through $f = \text{one's mother}$, $R = \text{actually afflicted with}$.

Example 2 (adverbial case)

For cases like (2), Eckardt assumes type-lifted versions of ID, like:

$$\underline{\text{selbst}}_2^* = \lambda Q \lambda x Q (\text{ID}(x))$$

After applying to a predicate, this can apply to the associate entity term.

- (2) (She had watched the local, State, and Federal funding dry up over time, and not having had an easy youth herself, she wanted to help.)
She built_F the boat herself_F,

$$\underline{\text{built the boat herself}}^* = \lambda x \text{built}(\text{the_boat})(\text{ID}(x))$$

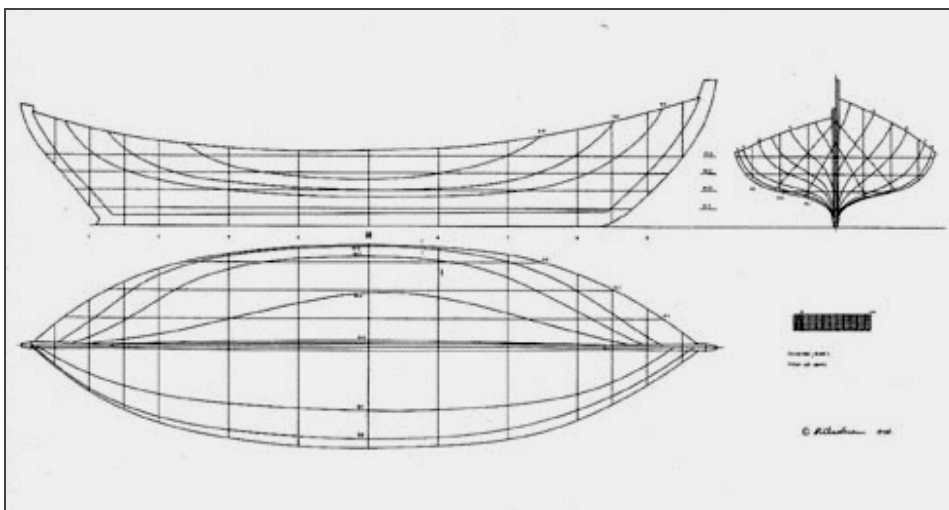
The focus semantic value of this predicate is

$$\{ P \mid \text{there is an alternative } f \text{ to } \text{ID}_{\langle e, e \rangle} \text{ and an alternative } R \text{ to } \textit{built} \\ \text{such that } P = \lambda x R(\text{the_boat})(f(x)) \}$$

so that the focus presupposition of (2) is:

$$\text{there are propositions } \phi \mid \text{there is a function } f \approx \text{ID}_{\langle e, e \rangle} \text{ and a relation} \\ R \approx \textit{built} \mid \phi = R(\text{the_boat})(f(\textit{she}))$$

which is verified through $f = \textit{the juveniles one helps}$, $R = \textit{sail}$.



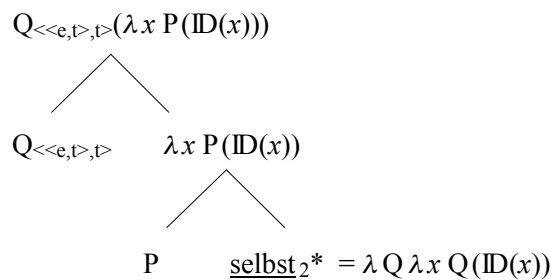
So far, the autofocus associate – ID’s argument – has been out of focus.

SHE HERSELF

A reason to background a term: It is a continuing topic (de Hoop 2003).

Eckardt’s story stops there. But she concedes that because adverbial *selbst* combines with a predicate before its argument is saturated, adverbial *selbst* does not impose any sortal restrictions on “the NP it is linked to” (p. 381). This NP can therefore be a genuine quantifier, and be accented.

In a sense, then, there is no associate; the argument is never saturated – in the following tree, there is no constituent providing it:



What is the use of autofocus if there is manual – no, oral! – focus already?

Answer 1 1 focus presupposition about **alternatives to alternatives**

Answer 2 a 2 focus presuppositions,
one from a focus interpreted at predicate level

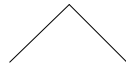
Answer 2 b 2 focus presuppositions,
one from a focus interpreted at subsentential type t level,
about **different alternatives**

Example 3 (alternatives to alternatives)

- (3) – Will your parents mind if you marry a piano player?
- Hardly. You see, my brother_F plays the piano himself_F.

The focus semantic value of the relevant sentence is

$$\{ \phi \mid \exists a \approx \text{my_brother} \exists f \approx \text{ID}_{\langle e, e \rangle} \mid \phi = \text{plays_the_piano}(f(a)) \}$$



$$\{ a \mid a \approx \text{my_brother} \} \quad \{ P \mid \exists f \approx \text{ID}_{\langle e, e \rangle} \mid P = \lambda x \text{ plays_the_piano}(f(x)) \}$$

The focus presupposition based on this is satisfied through the following instantiations: $a = I$, $f = \text{one's fiancé}$. – Note the absence of a “centrality effect” here – central is the alternative to the linked NP.

Example 4 (two practically identical focus presuppositions)

- (4) – Who should we select for the role of Ray Charles?
- Well, Jamie Fóxx_F plays the piano himself_F.

The tree results from overt or (QR, topicalization) covert subject raising. Autofocus is interpreted in line 3, its presupposition is projected to the top (notation: assertion < presupposition >):

$$\text{plays}(\text{JF}) \langle \phi \mid \exists a \approx \text{JF} \phi = \text{plays}(a) \rangle$$

$$\langle \phi \mid \exists f \approx \text{ID} \phi = \text{plays}(f(\text{JF})) \rangle$$

JF

$$\lambda x_i \text{ plays}(\text{ID}(x_i)) \langle \phi \mid \exists f \approx \text{ID} \phi = \text{plays}(f(x_i)) \rangle$$

λx_i

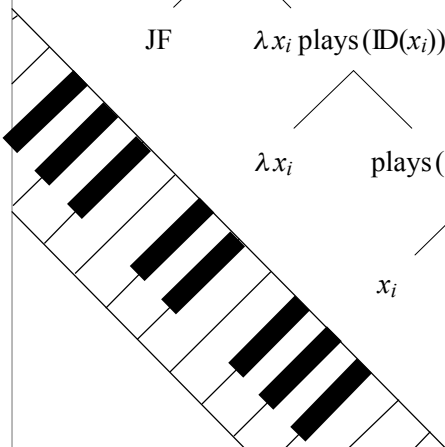
$$\text{plays}(\text{ID}(x_i)) \langle \phi \mid \exists f \approx \text{ID} \phi = \text{plays}(f(x_i)) \rangle$$

x_i

$$\lambda x \text{ plays}(\text{ID}(x))$$

plays

himself



Beside the contrast implicature that the other candidates, Sean Connery etc., do not play the piano, stemming from the custom focus on “JF”, the autofocus makes the sentence presuppose that there is a proposition that the value of an alternative to the identity function at Jamie Foxx plays the piano – Ray Charles, on an instantiation of *f* as one’s role model.



Custom focus / autofocus division of labor

- 2 foci on 1 entity (in one and the same argument role) – why?
- They play two roles: One is a theme, the other a rheme focus.
- 2 occurrences of 1 focus presupposition – why?
- They select two different alternative sets.

Try to do the same with *also* or *too* – and discover that autofocus is more flexible because its presupposition is **promiscuous** (Schwarzschild 2004):

- (5) A. wants to become a piano player. She comes from a family of music lovers. Her (brother is a saxophonist, and her) mother is a piano player herself / ??too.

Further reading

- Eckardt, Regine (2001) “Reanalysing Selbst”, in *Natural Language Semantics* **9**, 371–412.
- de Hoop, Helen (2003) “On the Interpretation of Stressed Pronouns”, in Reinhard Blutner and Henk Zeevat (eds.), *Optimality Theory and Pragmatics*, London, 25–41.
- Rooth, Mats (1992) “A Theory of Focus Interpretation”, in *Natural Language Semantics* **1**, 75–116.
- Schwarzschild, Roger (2004) “Focus Interpretations: Comments on Geurts and van der Sandt (2004)”, in *Theoretical Linguistics* **30**, 137–147.



Appendix (no-delegate, no-assist case)

(6) Franziska_F develops her films herself_F.

The custom focus concerns a sloppy reading, the autofocus a strict reading:

