

‘Actually given’ versus ‘presented as given’ and ‘actually new’ versus ‘presented as new’: What happens when the ‘presented as’ gets out of step with the ‘actually’?

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The paper will review different approaches to the study of ‘given’ and ‘new’, building on work by Gerard O’Grady at the previous Round Table. Particular attention will be paid to the following distinctions:

- between approaches which assume ‘given’ means ‘presented as given’ and approaches which assume ‘given’ means ‘actually given’, in the sense of having been referred to earlier in the text;
- between approaches which assume ‘given’ and ‘new’ are realised intonationally and approaches which assume ‘given’ and ‘new’ are realised syntactically;
- between approaches which assume a simple cut between ‘given’ and ‘new’ and approaches which assume that both ‘given’ and ‘new’ are graded phenomena;
- between approaches which assume ‘givenness’ and ‘newness’ are in the text and approaches which assume ‘givenness’ and ‘newness’ are in the mind.

It will be argued that these different approaches should not in fact be seen as rival approaches, but rather as complementary approaches. Often more than one of them is needed to explain what is happening when problems occur in real life. For instance, in the UK, listeners to radio and television frequently complain that newsreaders “don’t seem to understand what they are reading”. Mention is made of “accent” and “inflection”, by which the complainers seem to mean that the wrong intonation is used. What seems to be happening on these occasions is that things are being intonationally presented as given, which are not given in the sense of having been referred to earlier in the text. And things are being presented as new, which are not new from the earlier text perspective. This also means that conversely there is a failure to present as given things which really are given and a failure to present as new things which really are new.

This problem and others will be exemplified and discussed.