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Focus in Spontaneous Spoken Discourse: a Corpus-
Based Study of Conversation in *Friends*.

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Abstract.

The present study investigates the realization of focus in spontaneous spoken discourse. Focus is related to new information in an utterance and can be narrow or broad, depending on whether the new information is connected with one word or to a phrase or even the whole sentence. In spontaneous discourse, it is important to know the context of an utterance in order to place the focus. For that reason, to see the realization of focus in spontaneous spoken discourse, it is essential to examine the whole discourse. To achieve this consideration, different conversations from the television series *Friends* have been analyzed. In the different episodes, the two types of focus, narrow and broad, appear. The aim is to study narrow and broad focus in a conversation and find which type of focus predominates.

The corpus is the American series *Friends*. It is a situation comedy or sitcom that could be defined as a genre of comedy nowadays found on television that tells the daily life of the characters of the series. In this case, it tells the story of six friends, Monica, Chandler, Joey, Phoebe, Rachel and Rose, on their daily lives. As it is an American series, the characters speak in General American.

In general, in discourse broad focus appears to be more predominant than narrow focus. This is because the speaker wants to talk about something general and, as a consequence, a great part of the sentence is new information. However, in the corpus analyzed, there are some cases of narrow focus because sometimes new information is just a small part of the utterance. The speaker also has an intention using it. Sometimes this intention is related to contrast. Nevertheless, as the corpus analyzed is a sitcom, there are some cases in which the intention is to produce humor.

Resumen.

El presente estudio analiza la realización del foco en el discurso espontáneo. El foco está relacionado con la información nueva que se encuentra en la frase y puede ser reducido o amplio. Esto depende de si la información nueva es una palabra o una frase. En el discurso espontáneo, es importante conocer el contexto para saber donde debe ir el foco. Por esta razón, es esencial tener en cuenta todo el discurso, no solo la frase a analizar. Para estudiar esta idea, se han examinado varias conversaciones de la serie *Friends*. En los diferentes episodios analizados aparecen los dos tipos de foco, reducido y amplio. El objetivo de este trabajo es estudiar el foco reducido y el foco amplio en una conversación y descubrir qué tipo de foco es el que predomina.

El corpus utilizado es una serie de televisión americana, *Friends*. Esta serie entraría dentro del género de las sitcoms y este género se define como una comedia emitida en televisión que cuenta historia sobre la vida cotidiana de unos personajes. En el caso de *Friends* nos cuentan la historia de seis amigos: Monica, Chandler, Joey, Rachel, Phoebe y Rose. Como es una serie americana, los personajes hablan con acento americano.

De manera general, en el discurso se observa que el foco amplio predomina ante el foco reducido. La razón de que el foco amplio predomine es que los hablantes normalmente cuando conversan hablan de forma general y la gran parte de lo que dicen es información nueva. Sin embargo, en esta serie también se encuentran ejemplos de foco reducido cuando la información nueva es solo una pequeña parte de la frase. El hablante también tiene una intención cuando decide utilizar el foco reducido. Esta a veces está relacionada con el contraste. Además, como el corpus analizado es una sitcom, aparecen varios casos en los que la intención tiene que ver con el humor.

Introduction.

The term focus is related to accent and it has been studied in two ways: the first one by Chomsky, in opposition to presupposition, and the other one by Bolinger, related to information structure (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986, p. 41). Chomsky explained focus in a sentence through the Nuclear Stress Rule. This explanation is related to grammar and syntax and it is difficult to apply it in spoken interaction. However, other linguists like Bolinger have countered the connection of focus and syntax arguing that focus is related to information. Following this connection, Xu (2005) defines focus as “a discourse function serving to highlight a particular piece of information against information already shared by the conversation participants” (p. 161-162). According to Halliday (1967), “information focus reflects the speaker’s decision as to where the main burden of the message lies” (p. 204). Bolinger (1972) clarifies this idea in his essay *Accent is Predictable (If You’re a Mind-Reader)*:

“Accent should be viewed as independent, directly reflecting the speaker’s intent and only indirectly the syntax. Accented words are points of information focus” (p. 633).

The focus domain can be divided into broad and narrow focus. The difference between both is associated to new information in an utterance. This new information that has been mentioned is part of the structure of the utterance, in which, according to information structure, the utterance is divided into given and new information. This organization does not deal with syntax, but with the context. For this reason, it is not possible to contemplate the focus in a sentence without the context. As a consequence, the discourse is crucial to do this kind of studies.

Because of this, in order to analyze the focus domain, it is essential to see spoken interaction. To find examples it is necessary to seek a conversation. In this essay the conversations analyzed come from the television series *Friends*. This series is a sitcom. Sitcom is the abbreviation of “situation comedy”, which refers “to a radio or

television comedy series that involves a continuing cast of characters in a succession of episodes” (Situation Comedy, n.d.). *Friends* is about the daily lives of five friends: Rose, Phoebe, Chandler, Monica and Joey. They share experiences of their lives together and these experiences are shown in a humorous way.

The aim of this essay is to analyze narrow and broad focus and to examine them in some conversations from the television series *Friends*. The first part of the essay expounds a theoretical framework of the different concepts that have been mentioned previously. The second part of the essay explains through examples some of the analyses of narrow and broad focus in spontaneous spoken discourse.

Theoretical Framework.

First of all, it is important to explain some of the key words that are going to be essential to clarify the different examples that are going to appear in this essay.

As it is previously mentioned, there are two notions of focus: narrow and broad. On the one hand, broad focus, according to Paul Tench (1990), “refers to those cases where the whole of a sentence/utterance contains new information, as in replies to such questions as ‘what happened?’ or as in the majority of the examples used in the explication of the rules governing ‘normal stress’” (p. 189). Cruttenden (1986) states that “in broad focus the whole of the intonation-group is in focus” (p. 83). Robert Ladd (1996) also gives a definition of broad focus, but he also connects it to accent:

“‘Normal stress’ rules can be seen as a description of where accent is placed when focus is broad” (p. 161).

On the other hand, narrow focus deals with “individual words” (Ladd, 1996, p. 161). Paul Tench (1990) claims that “narrow focus refers to the other cases where the focus constituent is less than the whole of the sentences; it is not necessarily a single lexical item [...] but it very often is” (p. 189).

In the sentence, narrow focus is a lexical item, and the other elements of the sentence are considered to be out of focus (Cruttenden, 1986, p. 87). Both notions narrow and broad are connected to new information. In that sense, the speaker places the focus in the part of the sentence that is considered to be new information (Tench, 1990, p. 189), and what is out of focus is given information. Besides, the speaker places the nuclear accent in the focus part of the sentence and, according to Couper-Kuhlen (1986), “the nucleus will be associated with the last fully stressed syllable of the intonation group” (p. 81). This idea that the nuclear accent should be at the end of the sentence and, therefore, the focus is placed at the end, follows ‘the end-focus principle’.

‘The End-focus principle’ is connected to information structure. The principle claims that the new information is placed at the end of the sentence and the focus is placed where the new information is placed to emphasize it. This idea is explained through the Processibility principle, which states that the important elements of the utterance should be at the end in order that they would be easier to process. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985) explain ‘the End-focus principle’ and state that “it is common to process the information in a message so as to achieve a linear presentation from low to high information value” (p. 1357). Also Stebbins (2011) gives a definition of end focus principle connected to given and new information structure:

“Since we are all used to the strategy of identifying given information with the start of the sentence, we are all good at keeping an eye out for new information later in the sentence. In fact, as English speakers, we all typically work on the assumption that the new information, that is, the part of the sentence that deserves to be the focus of our attention will be the end of the sentence. [...] If you want the reader or hearer to take in new information, a good place for it to be is at the end of your sentence” (para. 11).

As it is mentioned previously, given and new information are key words to explain all the concepts that have been defined. They are part of information structure. According to Halliday (1967), “information structure is one aspect of the thematic organization of discourse” (p.205). Brinton (2000) explains the notion of information structure:

“We organize our discourse in a particular way in order to create cohesive and coherent texts, for example, to emphasize (foreground) or deemphasize (background) aspects of our discourse or to fit our contribution into an ongoing discourse. This is called information structuring; the language provides a variety of means for achieving our ends of arranging material for specific effects in discourse” (p. 290).

Focusing on given and new information, these terms are used to divide the utterance. However, there are other terms that refer to the division of the utterance, which are connected to given and new information. For example, Quirk et al. (1985) explain theme and focus, which are related to given and new information. Theme is given information and focus new information (p. 1361). Furthermore, Brinton (2000) uses the terms topic and comment that are connected to given and new information too, in which topic is given information and comment new information (p. 291). On account of this, it is important to define what given and new information are. Brinton (2000) defines given information as “information assumed to be culturally known, or information implied by something already introduced into the discourse” (p. 290). Furthermore, she defines new information as “either brand new or unused” (p. 290). That means that new information is the information that has not been mentioned previously on discourse or that is something completely new. Halliday (1967) clarifies the definition of new information:

“What is focal is ‘new’ information; not in the sense that it cannot have been previously mentioned, although it is often the case that it has not been, but in the sense that the speaker presents it as not being recoverable from the preceding discourse” (p. 204).

It is the speaker who decides what part is new and what part is given in the sentence. Halliday (1967) claims that “the focus of the message [...] is that which is represented by the speaker as being new” (p. 205). Following this idea in which focus is what is new, “what is outside the domain of focus is labelled ‘given’” (Tench, 1990, p. 187). As it depends on the context and on the purpose of the speaker, it is related to pragmatics. However, it is linked to syntax in a way. Given information is usually connected to the subject and new information to the predicate. For that reason, “the usual sequence in English is for given information to precede new information” (Tench, 1990, p. 187). Nevertheless, sometimes this is not the case as it is exposed later on in this essay in some of the discourse analyses.

Discourse analysis and discussion.

Secondly, in this part of the essay there is an analysis of some examples of focus in discourse from the television series *Friends* and it deals with broad and narrow focus. The first part presents examples of broad focus and the second part of narrow focus.

Broad focus.

In all the episodes that are analyzed in this essay, broad focus is the type of focus that predominates in the dialogues of the characters. Most of them are examples of the normal use of this type of focus, but there are others that have some different characteristics from the normal ones. In this part of the essay some examples of broad focus from different episodes of *Friends*' seventh season are going to be analyzed.

To begin with, broad focus is usually used after a general question such as ‘What happened?’. The answer to that kind of question is general too and, as the hearer does not know what the speaker is going to talk about, the speaker tends to choose all the

information as new. For that reason, the focus covers a great part of the sentence. An example of this appears at the beginning of the episode 5 in a dialogue between Monica and Chandler:

“Monica: What’s the matter?”

Chandler: Somebody on the subway licked my ‘NECK!! Licked my ‘NECK!!” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, min. 00:05).

Monica asks Chandler a general question when she sees that Chandler is angry because of something that she does not know. For that reason, the new information in the sentences is going to be more than one word. He follows ‘the End-focus Principle’ placing the nuclear accent at the end of the sentence, in the word “neck”. The focus is at the end of the sentence and it comprises the predicate. The subject seems to be given information. It is interesting that Chandler places “on the subway” in the subject instead of placing it at the end of the sentence. That is because he knows that this is given information for the hearer. Looking to the context, he comes back home from work and Monica, who is his fiancée, probably knows that he goes to his work by the subway. For that reason, he places “on the subway” at the beginning and decides that it is given information.

There are more examples of broad focus in the series. Another case is the following dialogue between Rachel and Tag, her new assistant.

“ Rachel: Oh, hi! How are you doing?”

Tag: I’m ‘okay. I gotta go down to the ‘POlice station and look at ‘MUG shots” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 8, min. 19:40).

As the answer is a coordinated sentence, it has two focuses. For that reason, it also has two nuclear accents. The focus is broad and it covers the predicate in both sentences. Knowing the context makes it easier to understand why he uses broad focus instead of narrow focus. It is clear that the question is general and, because of that, the

decision of using broad focus is quite clear but the context also helps to choose this type of focus. Before that scene, Rachel was in the balcony with Tag and she said him that she has a crush on him. At that moment, he saw some thieves robbing his car. Therefore he had to go and she did not see him until this scene. That is why she asks that general question and he decides to use broad focus because everything is new information for Rachel.

Both examples have broad focus at the end of the sentence, following ‘the End-focus Principle’. However, there are other examples in which broad focus is not at the end and, consequently, the nuclear accent is not placed at the end of the utterance. Cruttenden (1986) talks about three apparent exceptions in which the focus is not placed at the end and they are connected to syntax and semantics. For him they are exceptions because the idea that the nucleus accent is placed at the end is a rule. These are, according to him, event sentences, final adverbs and adjectival *wh*- objects (p. 83). Starting with the first one, he claims that they “involve an intransitive verb which denotes (dis)appearance or misfortune. In these sentences it is commonly the subject which receives the accent though the whole sentence is in broad focus” (Cruttenden, 1986, p. 83). As Paul Tench (1990) explains, the event sentences “typically involve words like come, go, happen” (p. 192).

In the television series *Friends*, there is an episode in which Rose and Chandler have a conversation. Rose found a note in his apartment and went to Monica and Chandler’s apartment to discover what had happened:

“*Rose*: What’s up?”

Chandler: ‘MOnica and I are engaged’ (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 1, min. 00:15).

There is broad focus because the whole sentence of the answer of Chandler is new information but the nuclear accent falls in the subject. Following the idea that Cruttenden (1986) explains, the nuclear accent is at the beginning because it is an event

sentence. Nevertheless, Paul Tench (1990) disagrees with him and states that this type of example has an intransitive verb in final position and it can be explained with “Bolinger’s notion of lack of semantic richness” (p. 192). This means that, as at the final position it is placed the verb, it has not the same semantic weight as the subject. The verb itself is not as weighty semantically speaking as the subject. If it would have been an adjunct or complement in the predicate, the nuclear accent would probably have been placed in the predicate and, as a consequence, the focus would have been at the end. However, this is not the case, and the subject in this example is stronger semantically speaking than the predicate.

The second exception deals with final adverbs. They “do not have to be without a nucleus but if they have a nucleus then it has to be in addition to the one on what precedes it” (Cruttenden, 1986, p. 84). In other words, if the adverb in final position has an accent, the previous strong word should also be accented. Although this is not a clear exception in which the nuclear accent is not placed at the end, it has two nuclei and the first one is not in final position. As an example of this, in a conversation between Chandler and Monica, Monica says the following sentence:

“He’ll be telling the ‘STORY for ‘YEars” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 3, min 10:35).

In her speech she gives the nuclear accent to both words, “story” and “years”, and follows this exception that Cruttenden (1986) explains. As there is an adverbial clause at the end of the utterance, she also has to put the nuclear accent on “story”. Broad focus covers the entire predicate, from “telling” to “years”. She decides to put the nuclear accent in the adjunct. Therefore, there has to be another one in the previous complement.

Finally, the third exception has to do with adjectival wh- objects. It refers to “wh questions where an adjectival wh- word functions as the object of the verb” (Cruttenden, 1986, p. 85). In these cases, the nuclear accent falls in the noun that follows the wh-

word. This does not occur when the *wh-* word functions as a pronoun or when the adverb has more than one complement. An example of this appears in a conversation between Chandler, Monica and Phoebe where they are trying to find Phoebe's grandmother cookie's recipe. They are cooking different recipes to find the one of Phoebe's grandmother and Ross tastes them.

“Which ‘ONE was that?’” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 3, min. 13:54).

Rose emphasizes the noun following the exception that Cruttenden (1986) explains. As Paul Tench (1990) explains, these kinds of questions move the object to a front position (p. 194). As a consequence, the object has the nuclear accent and when it is fronted, the nuclear accent is also fronted. He also says that this is not a good explanation and he recurs to Bolinger and his notion of semantic richness that it has been explained previously. In this example, this theory would also explain why the nuclear accent is placed at the beginning but just because there is not a rich predicate semantically speaking. The interesting thing of Paul Tench (1990) analyzing this exception is that he clarifies these examples in the following way:

“A more satisfying explanation is to note first of all that questions must have some context. [...]

The preceding discourse or the actual situation provide given information and thus these cases are not cases of broad focus at all, but narrow” (p. 194).

It is true that looking at the preceding discourse of this example “one” is given information. Therefore, following the theory, it should be narrow focus as Tench says. Nevertheless, Ross uses broad focus. This is probably because there is not new information in this example. He cannot just emphasize one part of the sentence as everything is given information. Phoebe is talking about different batch of cookies that Monica has cooked and she says that batch 17 was very good and Ross asks to know which one that was. It is clear that there is not new information in the question and the better explanation to this example is through syntax. As it is a question, he has fronted

the object to the beginning of the sentence and, consequently, the nuclear accent is also fronted.

These exceptions are connected to syntax and semantics, but there are other examples of broad focus that are explained through pragmatics. The following example is an example of broad focus in which the nuclear accent is placed at the beginning of the sentence. To introduce it, Monica and Chandler are preparing their wedding but Monica's parents have spent all the money. Rachel asks her how the conversation with her parents was.

“Rachel: What happened at dinner?”

Monica: My ‘PArents spent the money of our wedding” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 2, min. 12:51).

Monica uses broad focus in this sentence. Rachel asks a general question to Monica and the answer is all new information. The curious thing of this example is that, knowing the context, Rachel knew that they had dinner with Monica's parents and Chandler and Monica wanted to ask them about the money that Monica's parents have been saving for her wedding. Looking at the context, in theory, according to information structure, “parents”, “money” and “wedding” are given information. However, she places the nuclear accent in “parents”. Trying to give an explanation to this example, it is not possible that this is an example of event sentences because “spend” is a transitive verb. Thence this example can be explained through pragmatics. Monica is upset with her parents because they have spent the money of her wedding on an apartment. Because of that, she places the nuclear accent in “parents” in order to show that she is very annoyed with them. In spite of the fact that the information is given, she uses broad focus because she wants to focus on the entire sentence. What her parents have done to her has annoyed her and, consequently, this issue is very important to her. The intention of Monica is to show that she is annoyed. As a result, even though

the information is given, it is important to her and she wants to emphasize it, but the whole sentence, not just one part. For this reason, she uses broad focus.

Narrow focus.

Finally, the last part of this essay deals with narrow focus. The analysis of different examples of broad focus, which has been made previously, is connected with syntax and semantics. However, narrow focus has to do with pragmatics in most cases. It is difficult to find examples of narrow focus in the series because speakers usually say general things and a largest part of the utterance deals with new information. Nevertheless, there are some cases in which a small part is new information and, in those cases, narrow focus is used. The majority of the examples are connected to given and new information. In terms of intonation, speakers tend not to accent the given information and to accent the new information (Hirschberg, 2004, p 529). This opposition between new and given information also makes that sometimes the nuclear accent falls in a weak form.

As narrow focus is just connected to one word, it can be placed in any part of the utterance. That means that it can follow ‘the End-focus principle’ or not. It is not common to see narrow focus at the end because the placement of the focus is connected with pragmatics. Furthermore, the speaker could place the narrow focus on a weak form, as it has been mentioned. It is unquestionable that pronouns are unaccented and are part of these weak forms in the speech. Nevertheless, “they can be accented to convey various ‘marked’ effects — that is, an interpretation identified in some sense as less likely” (Hirschberg, 2004, p. 528). In other words, it is the speaker’s decision to accentuate it and this decision is connected with pragmatics. The following examples are related to given and new information and narrow focus is placed in a pronoun.

“Ross: who cares?”

Rachel: ‘I care’ (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 1, min. 14:38).

Rachel answers to the question and the “I” is the new information. It is not placed at the end of the sentence following the given and new information structure because it is following the usual word order of English. Knowing the context makes it easier to understand it. Ross and Rachel have kissed the day Monica and Chandler get engaged. Monica was upset because she thinks that Rachel wants to attract all the attention of the night when it is Monica’s night. She makes an emphasis because she intentionally wants Ross to see the way she feels. She wants to transmit her feelings to Ross and this is something that Ricardo Escavy Zamora (2011) talks in the book *Pragmática y subjetividad lingüística*. He explains the intentional “I” and states that the hearer must find the intentions of the speaker in the formulation of the speech (p. 177). In this example, Rachel uses the intentional “I” to show to Ross that she cares about the feelings of her friend Monica.

The following example follows ‘the End-focus principle’ because word order forces the speaker to put the pronoun at the end.

“Chandler: You didn’t bring me here to do ‘THAT, did you?’” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 7, min. 3:06).

The focus is placed in “that”. This is because of the context. Chandler goes with Ross to the library because Ross asks him. When they get into the library, Chandler asks why they are there. Ross answers that his doctoral dissertation is in that library and when they go to the corridor, they find a couple having sex. Seeing this situation, Chandler wants to be funny and says the sentence of the example. It is clear that he focuses on “that” because it is new information. The rest of the sentence is given information. Besides, he wants to make the audience laugh and that is why he is very emphatic.

Another reason to choose narrow focus is contrast. In the following examples, the speakers decide to use narrow focus in order to contrast two elements.

“Ross: Okay, all right, I’ll take ‘YOU’ (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 11, min. 7:48).

Looking at the context it is clear that there is a contrast. Ross has been invited to the wedding of his cousin, but Monica was not invited, even though she is her cousin too. Monica is very upset and she tells Ross to bring her to the wedding as Ross can bring a guest. He had invited a woman that he likes but Monica finally convinces him and Ross says “I’ll take you”. He puts the focus on “you” because he wants to enunciate that he is taking Monica to the wedding and not the other woman. It is a contrast because he is making a difference between Monica and the woman that he had invited. This contrastive stress, for some linguists like Chomsky, seems to be another type of accent assignment different from focus and default accent (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986, p. 47). It is believed that “any accent pattern in which a non-stressable word is accented or in which some stressed item other than the final one receives the accent is called *contrastive*” (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986, p. 47). In other words, the contrastive accent appears when there is not a normal pattern. Following this definition, most of the cases of narrow focus, which are connected to contrast, are contrastive accent. Nevertheless, other linguists like Bolinger think of contrastive as just the notion of contrast and he describes it as “A rather than B” (Bolinger, 1961, p. 87). Speakers use contrast to give more prominence to a word because they have an intention doing it, as it is shown in the example, but it does not determine another type of accent. As Couper-Kuhlen(1986) concludes, “the effect is to shift the burden of accent placement wholly to focus (and default) principles, although contrastivity is still implicit in the notion of narrow focus” (p. 48).

The focus in the next example is placed in some pronouns. In a scene in *Friends* the characters are celebrating that Monica and Chandler are engaged and Monica say the following words:

Monica: [...] thank you for being here on my special night.

Chandler: [cough]

Monica: ‘OUR special night. It just wouldn’t be ‘MY night... ‘OUR night... if you weren’t here to celebrate with me... ‘US’ (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 1, min. 2:10).

Monica is mistaken all the time because she wanted to be engaged a long time ago and she is very exhausted as she is going to get married, but she does not think of Chandler. She tries not to be so egocentric changing the pronoun “my, me” to “our, us” and she puts the nuclear accent on them to make a distinction between both pronouns. As she wants to include her fiancé on the speech, she accentuates the pronouns “our” and “us” to make a distinction to “my” and “me” that are supposed to be mistakes. The intention of this example is to make the spectators laugh. She stresses the pronouns excessively because she wants to make the spectators laugh.

To see more examples, the next one also has to do with contrast. To contextualize it, Ross is telling to Monica secrets about Chandler because they are going to get married and there cannot be secrets between them. Ross tells her this funny story:

Ross: And this girl is making eyes at Chandler, okay? So after awhile he-he goes over to her and uh, after a minute or two, I see them kissing. Now, I know what you’re thinking, Chandler’s not the type of guy who just goes to bars and makes out with girls, and you’re right, Chandler’s not the type of guy who just goes to bars and makes out with... ‘GIRLS’ (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 4, min. 13:14).

The interesting aspect of this example is that Ross is answering a question that Monica says that is “What happened in Atlantic City?”. Because of that, it should be broad focus as it is a general question. Almost the whole answer is broad focus, but the last sentence is narrow focus. It is a repetition of the previous sentence. It is interesting

to see how Ross changes the focus in the last sentence when the previous one has the same exactly words. He repeats it but with a different intonation. This is because he wants to create a contrast. He wants to say to Monica that Chandler is not the person that goes to bars and makes out with girls because he kissed a boy, not a girl. Using this change of focus, he creates a contrast and he makes the spectators laugh. He could just say that Chandler kissed a boy but using this strategy, repeating and changing the focus, he produces humor.

Finally, the following example is the last example of contrast. To put it into context, Phoebe was poor when she was a child and she had never owned a bicycle. When Ross realizes that, he decides to give her a bicycle.

Ross: You like it?

Phoebe: I 'LOVE it!!' (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 9, min. 5:43).

Phoebe uses narrow focus to emphasize that she loves the gift. She makes a contrast in the way that she does not like it, but she loves it. That is why she accentuates clearly the verb. She also wants to show Ross that she is excited because of the gift. The bicycle is decorated in the same way as she described some minutes before in the episode. For that reason, she loves the gift as it is her dreamed bicycle. Therefore, her intention using narrow focus is to give prominence to the contrast she makes between the two verbs, “like” and “love”.

To end with narrow focus, the next examples can be explained through pragmatics. They are not related to contrast or to given and new information. In these examples, the speaker chooses narrow focus because of the context and of an intention.

To begin with, the focus in the next example is placed at the end of the sentence because of word order.

Joey: Okay, all right, this is how it's going to work. We're gonna give you hypothetical maid of honor situations and you will be scored on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the highest.

Ross: No, 10 is the highest.

Joey: Why is 10 the highest?

Ross: Because it's the 'HIGhest' (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 6, min. 10:34).

To introduce the context, Rachel and Phoebe want to be Monica's maid of honor and Ross and Joey are evaluating them. At this moment, Joey is explaining how the competition is going to be. When he says that number one is the highest score they have, Ross corrects him saying that the highest is ten. At the end, he stresses it and uses narrow focus because it is a fact that ten is the highest mark. Besides, "highest" in the last sentence is the weightiest word semantically speaking. "Because" is just a conjunction used to answer a question, which begins with the interrogative pronoun "why". "It" is just a pronoun that substitutes "10" and "is" is the verb 'to be' that is supposed to be a weak form. Finally, "the" is an article that is used with the superlative forms. Maybe this example can also be explained through Bolinger's notion of lack of semantic richness that has been explained previously. However, the intention of the speaker may be to show Joey that it is a fact that ten is the highest number in the scale of one to ten.

To show more examples of narrow focus, the speakers can use narrow focus to give prominence to a word in order to produce humor. As the television series is a sitcom, humor is very important and sometimes the actors intentionally use a kind of focus to make the spectators laugh. Some of the previous examples also have this intention, but the following one is clearer. Joey is trying to get a nap while Rachel, Chandler and Monica are preparing the wedding. Rachel says to Joey why he does not sleep in his house and Joey says the following sentence:

"It is 'NOT' one of the places the duck got sick" (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 2, min. 4:30).

“It” refers to the couch that is in his house. He gives prominence to “not”. This is because he is lying and he wants the spectators to realize that he is lying and that something has happened with the couch and the duck. He makes such an emphasis on that word that even Rachel notices that he is lying. It is a clear example of humor. They want to make the spectators laugh. Furthermore, the whole utterance seems to be given information to Rachel. Apparently this situation is not the first time that happens and that is why he gives prominence to “not” and, consequently, shows that he is lying. This is because he knows that Rachel is going to be upset if she discovers that the duck got sick.

The next one is also related to humor. Rachel is dating her assistant and Monica and she are talking about what they are going to do in order not to get discovered by their boss.

“Monica: Oh yeah, what’s the plan?”

Rachel: We... We are not... ..going to let it... be a problem.

Monica: Wow! It took you all night to come up with “THAT plan?!” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 9, min. 3:01).

In the conversation Rachel says that they stayed all night trying to have a plan and when Monica asks, she just says that. For that reason, everything in Monica’s sentence is given information. She places narrow focus on “that” to show that she is underestimating their plan. She is sarcastic. It is not a big plan and she is surprised that it took them all night to produce it. They also want the spectators to laugh. Maybe in reality in a situation like this the speaker would also give prominence to “that” in order to be sarcastic, but it would not be as emphatic as Monica does. Therefore, the intention is to make laugh. Nonetheless, it is also good to remark the sarcasm.

Finally, the last example is about a conversation between Rose and Chandler. It is not connected with humor and it is explained through the context. Chandler hates dogs and Monica is upset with him because he has chased a dog out of the house. Monica is crying and Rose says to Chandler:

“No, she doesn’t want to see ‘YOU right now” (Crane & Kauffman, 2000, ep. 8, min. 15:27).

He places the nuclear accent in the pronoun in order to say to Chandler that, as she is upset with him, she does not want to be with him at this moment and it is better not to talk with her. He gives a lot of prominence to the pronoun and it sounds very intentional. This is in that way because of the context. Chandler does not want the dog in the house because he is afraid of dogs. He thinks that the dog is in Ross’ house but it is actually in his house. Monica is not crying, it is the dog that makes those noises. Ross does not want that Chandler goes in the room because he would see the dog and he would get angry. For that reason, Ross gives prominence to “you” because if Chandler thinks that it is Monica who is crying and it is because of him, he would not enter into the room and would not see the dog. The intention of this accent placement is to make Chandler feel guilty.

Conclusion.

To conclude, the term focus is connected with accent placement. This connection can be seen through syntax or through information structure. Information structure has to do with the structure of the sentence in terms of given and new information. Focus is usually placed where the new information is. Information structure follows the idea that given information is placed at the beginning of the sentence and new information is placed at the end. This is related to End-focus Principle, which says that focus should be at the end and, consequently, new information should also be at the end. This is because it is easier for the hearer to process the information if the new one is at the end. This

happens in spoken interaction; in written form, for instance, the structure of sentence can be different as the reader can reread it.

Furthermore, focus is divided into narrow and broad focus. Broad focus covers a great part of the sentence. This part is usually the predicate, if it follows the End-focus Principle. However, as it is shown in this essay, there are some cases in which it is not placed at the end of the sentence. This can be like that because of several reasons. For example, it can be explained through syntax if the sentence is a question with a wh-object. Other examples can be explained through pragmatics.

Broad focus is the type of focus that is mostly found in the series and in spoken interaction. This is for the reason that it is usually used when the speaker wants to tell something general and a great part of the sentence is new information. That means that he or she does not want to focus on something specific. Speakers often use broad focus in discourse because the majority of the things that they say usually have a great part of new information. If almost everything is given information, it is boring for the hearer as he or she knows everything. Therefore, when speakers have a conversation with somebody, what they regularly tell is occurrences that the hearer does not know about.

Narrow focus frequently covers only one word in the sentence. This focus is used to give prominence to a part of the sentence that the speaker wants to stress with an intention. As narrow focus has to do with one word or a short part of the sentence, it does not usually follow the End-focus Principle. The speaker wants a part of the sentence to be focused. Therefore, he or she is going to place the accent and, consequently, the focus in the part that he or she wants to stress that could be at the end of the sentence or could be in another place in the sentence.

The great majority of the examples of narrow focus that have been analyzed in this essay are explained through pragmatics. In the case of the series analyzed, it is a sitcom. This is comedy and, as a consequence, humor is one of the aspects that explains which intention the speakers have in using narrow focus. Besides, contrast is another important aspect to explain the reason why a character uses narrow focus instead of broad focus. Nevertheless, the majority of the examples are connected to given and new information.

There are not too many examples of narrow focus in spoken interaction. This is because of the same reason that is explained previously. Speakers generally use broad focus because what they usually say in a conversation is mostly new information because if not the hearer would be bored. Nevertheless, there are some cases of narrow focus because sometimes the speaker wants to highlight something and, as a result, he or she wants the hearer to pay attention to that particular word. In the case of this series, there were not too many examples of narrow focus but those examples were very interesting to be analyzed.

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