Focus Variables of Higher Type

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We will make use in this talk of a DRT-based representation of focus-background articulation. (Henceforth "focus frame-focus" or ff-f articulation.) In this representation format, focus constituents give rise to focus variables. Interpretation of a ff-f articulation representation requires that a set of entities be associated with each of the focus variables it contains. We call this set the variable's "alternative set". The set consists of entities of the type of the variable. It is determined on the basis of a number of factors, many of them provided by context.

Resolution of alternative sets has been considered mostly in relation to focus variables of the type of an individual variable (or variables of "type e"). However, in actual language use focus on higher type constituents is at least as common as focus on constituents of type e. And when the focus constituent (and with it the focus variable) is of higher type, the intrinsic structure of the domain may play a part in determining what the intended alternative set is. Moreover, when the focus variable is of higher type, we also find interactions between the structure of the higher order domain and the way in which the ff-f division is exploited (e.g. between its serving as input to the focus-sensitive particles 'even' and 'too'.

The talk will develop the general account of representation and justification of ff-f structures and then pursue the special problems arising for higher type variables.