

The grammatical realization of polarity

Christine Dimroth & Stefan Sudhoff

Polarity focus and particles

- systematic correspondence between verum focus (focus on the truth of a proposition realized by a nuclear accent on the finite verb or complementizer) and certain (stressed) particles in German and Dutch, among other languages (Blühdorn 2012; Sudhoff 2012)

- (1) a. Die Studenten HAben das Buch gelesen. [German]
b. Die Studenten haben das Buch WOHL(/SCHON/DOCH) gelesen.
- (2) De studenten hebben het boek WEL(/TOCH) gelezen. [Dutch]

- systematic relation between polarity and stressed additive particles
- stressed additive particles realize an affirmative element and contrast with negation (Dimroth 1998; Krifka 1999)

- (3) a. Bayern hat nicht gut gespielt. [German]
b. Dortmund SCHON/WOHL.
c. Schalke NICHT/AUCH.

- (4) You didn't do your homework! – I did TOO!

questions:

- What is the exact meaning contribution of *verum* focus and the corresponding particles?
- How do affirmation and addition relate to each other?
- How can the interpretation of the sentences under discussion be compositionally derived?
- How is polarity focus represented in syntax?
- How does polarity focus interact with sentence mood and illocution type?
- Is the accent on the particles a proper focus accent (evoking alternatives) or is it a stopgap because the particle is the last new element, followed by given and de-accented material?

Polarity focus and assertion

- Dutch and German stressed particles are amongst the first 50 words in L1 acquisition. They are acquired during the root-infinitive phase and show complementary distribution with finiteness (Penner et al. 2000; Dimroth 2009)
- Given the relation between finiteness and assertion, particles were interpreted as carriers of assertion (and pre-cursors of finiteness) in early child grammar (Jordens & Dimroth 2006)

(5) kindern **hat** weihnachten [German]
Mirko **auch** weihnachten (Florian, 2;8)

(6) de **hat** ein biene reinstich
Julia Florian **auch** in nase stechen (Julia 2;4)

- in adult language, without finiteness no assertion is marked (Lasser 2002)
- making finite = linking a proposition to a topic relative to which it can be true or false (Klein 2006)
- the assertive "link" is affirmative in the default case and highlighted in case of verum focus

- (7) a. Leah drink a beer?
b. Leah DID drink a beer.

questions:

- Why can *verum focus* evoke a polarity contrast, even though the alternative of ASSERTION is NO ASSERTION (no truth value...) and not negation like in the case of stressed affirmative particles (Dutch *wel*, German *doch/wohl/schon...*)?
- How do finiteness/assertion (in the sense of Klein 2006) and polarity relate to each other?

Polarity focus and contrast

- ongoing debate about the need to distinguish between different kinds of focus
- in particular: presentational (new information) focus vs. contrastive focus (Sudhoff 2010)
- distinguishing property: nature of the alternative set
 - presentational focus: open alternative set
 - contrastive focus: closed alternative set
- alternative set involved in verum focus as a typical example of a closed alternative set: contains a proposition and its negation

(8) $\llbracket \text{Maria HAT Peter geküsst.} \rrbracket_f = \{m \text{ kissed } p, m \text{ didn't kiss } p\}$

- pragmatic similarity: sentences containing verum focus are typically used to correct other speakers (Stommel 2012)

questions:

- What is the exact relation between polarity focus and contrastive focus?
- Is polarity focus a special case of contrastive focus?
- Is what we call polarity focus a type of focus at all?

Polarity focus and prosody

- specific prosodic realization of contrastive focus compared to new information focus (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990, Sudhoff 2010)
- for instance, in German:
 - rising(-falling) accents instead of falling accents
 - absence of downstep

- (9) a. (Wen hat die Lehrerin beleidigt?) [German]
H*L
Die Lehrerin hat [den HAUSmeister]_{NIF} beleidigt.
- b. (Die Lehrerin hat den Direktor beleidigt.)
L*H
Nein, die Lehrerin hat [den HAUSmeister]_{CF} beleidigt.

- problem with polarity focus: position of the nuclear accent differs substantially between cases with verum focus and cases with accented particles

questions:

- How is polarity focus realized prosodically?
- Does the prosodic realization of polarity focus differ from that of (other) cases of contrastive focus?

Polarity focus cross-linguistically

- different strategies for expressing polarity contrasts in West-Germanic languages
 - Dutch: particles
 - German: verum focus, particles
 - English: emphatic *do*
 - Italian/French: particles (*si, bien*) exist, but are rare; verum focus not impossible, but also rare

questions:

- How is polarity contrast expressed in other languages?
- Is there cross-linguistic support for the hypotheses developed on the basis of Dutch/German/English data?
- Is there cross-linguistic support for polarity particles deriving from words meaning *yes* or *good*?
- How wide-spread is *verum focus*?

Polarity focus and discourse

- means for the expression of polarity focus can enhance discourse cohesion
- in languages lacking such means, speakers exploit contrasts between other information units (e.g. discourse entities)
- consequences for discourse organization: speakers of Romance languages tend to construe discourse in response to wh-questions (10a) and not polar questions (10b)

- (10) a. J'ai pensé que c'était Marie. C'était bien [elle]_f.
[A. Camus: *L'Etranger* 1942]
- b. Ich dachte, dass es Maria wäre. Sie [WAR]_f es auch.
[German translation 1996]

questions:

- What are the consequences of this difference for perspective taking?
- How do these question types (as *Questiones* or *Questions under discussion*) influence the flow of information and the attention of speakers/listeners?
- Does enhanced attention to the polarity component have cognitive consequences (that could, for example, be captured in reaction timed truth value judgment tasks)?

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