Dissociating verum from focus

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Glow 35, Potsdam
Workshop on Association with Focus
March 31, 2012

1 Introduction

Verum focus (common usage) (Höhle 1992)
A special kind of H*L accent that, instead of focusing the accent bearing expression, is used to focus a covert operator called VERUM that provides the truth value/polarity of the propositional content of a sentence.

• This focus accent thesis (FAT) may be plausible for languages like German or English.
• However, we argue that this does not hold for typological more diverse languages.
• Hence we suggest an alternative thesis, which we call the lexical operator thesis (LOT).
• To avoid biased terminology, we will use verum emphasis instead of verum focus in the following.

2 Two approaches to verum emphasis

2.1 FAT

• The view on verum emphasis most dominant in the literature goes back to Höhle’s (1992) original characterization.

• According to this view, verum emphasis is an ordinary focus accent on a covert VERUM operator (cf. Büring 2006; Zimmermann & Hole 2008).

• We call this the focus accent thesis or FAT.

(FAT) verum emphasis := covert operator VERUM + focus marking

• In order for the FAT to work properly, VERUM must be present in every sentence – whether there is verum emphasis or not.
• However, in the absence of verum emphasis, VERUM must not make an efficient contribution to the meaning of a sentence. (Otherwise, the meaning of every sentence would be changed by the stipulation of VERUM).

• It has to be rendered as an identity function on truth values/ propositions. ⇒ VERUM is the reverse of negation (cf. Zimmermann & Hole 2008: 5).

\[(\overline{\text{VERUM}}) = \lambda p \lambda w. p(w) : \langle (s, t), (s, t) \rangle\]

2.2 LOT

• In contrast to the FAT, the lexical operator thesis (LOT) does not assume that a verum operator is present in every sentence.

• Instead, it is assumed that VERUM is a contentful conversational operator (cf. e.g. Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011 or Romero & Han 2004, for different realizations of this idea).

• Crucially, this operator is only present, when there is verum accent.

• That is, the verum accent has lexicalized intonational meaning (Potts 2004) in form of the verum operator.

Lexical operator thesis

\((\text{LOT}) \quad \text{verum focus} := \text{conversational operator realized by accent}\)

• In English or German, VERUM happens to be realized by the same pitch accent that marks focus.

• The LOT views this as a case of homonymy.

• According to the LOT, verum focus is no focus at all (despite the traditional term).

2.3 Predictions

• For English or German, both approaches seem suitable.

• Both theories make different predictions regarding the relation between focus and verum.

Different predictions regarding …

1. Means of focus/verum marking
2. Co-occurrences of focus and verum
3. Association with focus
• These different predictions can be used to decide between the two approaches.

Means of focus/verum marking

FAT: Since verum emphasis is focus, verum focus is marked by the same means as focus.

LOT: Since verum emphasis is not focus, there is no necessary overlap between verum and focus marking strategies.

Co-occurrences of focus and verum

FAT: a. If a language exhibits multiple foci, verum and focus can also co-occur.
   b. If a language prohibits multiple foci, verum and focus must not co-occur.

LOT: There is no correlation between multiple foci and the co-occurrence of focus and verum. ⇒ All four combinations should be possible.

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Table 1: FAT

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Table 2: LOT

Association with focus

FAT: Since verum emphasis is focus, it is possible that focus sensitive operators associate with verum focus.

LOT: Since verum emphasis is not focus, there is association with verum emphasis.

• While it is hard to differentiate between the two theses on the basis of German or English alone, taking into account languages that differ from the well-studied languages can help to evaluate them properly.

• We will present arguments for Chadic languages that seem to favor the LOT.
3 Testing the predictions

3.1 Formal realization of constituent focus and verum emphasis

• In German or English, there seems to be no formal difference in the realization of constituent focus and verum emphasis.

• Both are realized by an H*L pitch accent (as indicated by caps).

Focus marking

(2) a. Wen haben die Bürger gewählt?
   Sie haben [einen SOZIALISTEN]F gewählt.                      [obj focus: H*L]
   b. Who did the citizens vote for?
   They voted for [a SOCIALIST]F.                                  [obj focus: H*L]

Verum emphasis

(3) a. Sie HABEN einen Sozialisten gewählt.                  [verum: H*L]
    b. They DID vote for a socialist.                  [verum: H*L +do-insertion]

Chadic languages (Afro-Asiatic)

• The formal realization of constituent focus and verum emphasis differs in many Chadic languages.

Focus marking in Bura (Central Chadic, North-Eastern Nigeria)

• Subject focus is marked by the subsequent focus marker an.

• Non-subject focus is marked by a cleft (FOC + an + relative clause).

Subject focus: an

(4) [Píndár]F an sá mbal.
   P. FOC drink beer
   “PINDAR drank beer.”

Object focus: an + RC

(5) [Kilfá]F an [tí Kubíli másta akwa kwasúku].
    fish FOC REL K. buy at market
    “It’s FISH that Kubili bought at the market.”

Verum emphasis in Bura

• Verum is expressed by the particle kú (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2008).
Verum: kú

(6) Pindár kú sá mbal.

P. VERUM drink beer

“Pindar did drink beer.”

Focus in South Marghi (Central Chadic, North Eastern Nigeria)

- Constituent focus is fronted and obligatorily followed by the focus marker η (ηa preceding pronouns, cf. Hartmann to appear).

Focus: η + fronting

(7) [Ur]η a y-o cföl-au.

groundnut FOC 1SG-AUX buy-AU

“I am buying GROUNDNUTS.”

- A phrase structure variation in South Marghi (SVO, (8a)): verb raising to a high functional head resulting in an inverted structure (8b).

(8) a. Yi usa-r-nyi.

1SG.S greet-PERF-3SG.O

“I greeted him.”

(SVO)

b. A usa-r-nyi-r-y-au.

AUX greet-PERF-3SG.O-PERF-1SG.S-AU

“I greeted him.”

(VOS)

- This verb raising serves to express verum:

Verum: verb raising

(9) Q: O sin-gọ tọl mọlmọ gọ hyi ya?

AUX know-2SG.S chief town LINK 2PL Q

“Do you know the chief of your town?”

A: Ii, o sin-nyi-y-au.

yes AUX know-3SG.O-1SG.S-AU

“Yes, I (do) know him.”

Interim summary

- The formal expression of constituent focus and verum considerably differs in Bura and South Marghi.

- This follows immediately given the LOT which does not assume verum to be an instance of focus.
3.2 Co-occurrence of verum and focus

- If a language exhibits multiple foci, the Fat predicts that verum and focus can also co-occur.
- German and English can be argued to be compatible with this prediction.

Multiple focus/wh

(10) A: Wer hat wen eingeladen?

(11) A: Who invited whom?

Verum + constituent focus

(12) A: Peter hat den Hund nicht getreten und Paul auch nicht. Aber wer war’s denn?
   Wer HAT den armen Hund getreten?
   B: Also, ich weiß nicht, was mit Stefan ist, aber [KARL]F HAT den Hund getreten.

(13) A: Peter hasn’t kicked the dog and Paul hasn’t kicked it either. But who’s done it?
   Who DID kick the poor dog?
   B: Well, I don’t know what’s with Steven, but [CARL]F DID kick the dog.

- Bura allows for multiple foci as well.
- The second focus is realized in situ, just as in German and English.

Multiple focus in Bura

(14) Q: Wa *(an) másta mi ri? who FOC buy what Q
   “WHO bought WHAT?”
   tsúwa *(an) másta [mphyi]F.
   also FOC buy guinea corn
   “KUBILI bought GUINEA CORN, MTAKU bought A DONKEY and MAGIRA also bought GUINEA CORN.”

NB: an in questions/answers

Note that the focus marker, which is obligatory in the wh-question, may not appear in the answer. The obligatory absence of an in (14A) indicates that the subjects in the pair list answer are interpreted not as foci but as (contrastive) topic constituents, see (Krifka 1999).
• A crucial difference between Bura and German/English: wh/constituent focus marking is incompatible with the expression of verum.

• This is not predicted by the FAT.

No verum+focus in Bura

(15) a. Wán (*ku) sá mbal?
    who.FOC  VER  drink beer
    intended: “Who DID drink beer?”

    P.  FOC  VER  drink beer
    intended: “PINDAR DID drink the beer.”

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• A language which does not license multiple focus AND blocks verum in focus constructions is South Marghi.

No multiple focus in South Marghi

(16) ??Wa ʃ shili-na  mī a?
    who FOC buy-COMPL what Q
    intended: “Who brought what?”

NB: Possible reasons for the blocking of multiple focus in South Marghi

1. In situ focus appears to be marked in South Marghi.

2. Multiple fronting is not possible.

No verum (= verb raising) and wh/constituent focus in South Marghi

(17) a. Wa ʃa ji usa-r a?
    who FOC 3SG.S greet-PERF Q
    “Who did he greet?” [obj wh]

b. *Wa ʃa usa-r-j(a) a?
    who FOC greet-PERF-3SG.S Q

(18) Q: Who did Kwalago greet?
    N.  FOC K.  greet-PERF
    “Kwalago greeted NDIHYEL.” [obj foc]

    N.  FOC K.  greet-PERF-3SG.S
    [*obj foc + verb raising]
• Summary of the results:

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• Given the LOT, we expect to find languages which do not exhibit multiple focus but allow for the combination of constituent focus and verum (as long as there are not independent reason for this to be unexpected).

• A confirmation of this prediction has to await further research.

3.3 Association with focus

• According to the FAT, focus particles should be able to associate with verum emphasis.

• The LOT excludes this possibility.

• For German/English the data is not clear-cut.

Association with verum focus?

(19)   a. Wen HAT Peter nur eingeladen?
      b. Who DID Peter invite only?
         ⇒ nur/only does not associate with verum

(20)   a. Es ist nur erlaubt, DASS Peter ins Kino geht (nicht, dass er nicht ins Kino geht).
      b. It is only allowed, that Peter DOES go to the cinema (not that he does not go to the cinema).
         ⇒ An association with verum seems more likely.

• Focus sensitive particles are generally impossible in the presence of the verum operator ku in Bura (Hartmann & Jacob & Zimmermann 2008: 79, Hartmann & Zimmermann 2008).

No association with verum in Bura

(21)   Mwala ní adí tsá ní wá ama tsá (*ku) buhá ní daci.
       "The woman didn't hit him, but she only pushed him."

• The focus sensitive particle daci associates across the pronoun ní with the contrastively focused verb (which is formally unmarked).

• Crucially, it does not associate with the verum operator.

• This is unexpected under the FAT.
4 Conclusion

- We conclude that both analyses of verum emphasis are in principle able to account for the observed facts in the intonational languages in which verum and focus are marked the same.

- The Chadic languages, however, do not show evidence in favour of a focus accent analysis of verum.

- Instead they support a lexical analysis of verum as a contentful operator.

- That approach disassociates verum from the notion of focus.

- If we generalize these finding to languages like English or German – which gave rise to the focus analysis in first place – the accent pattern traditionally associated with verum focus is not licensed by the focus status of the covert verum operator.

- Instead, the accent itself is the realization of the lexical operator.

- That is, verum focus is no focus at all.

References


Hartmann, Katharina (to appear): "Verum Intervention Effects in Chadic Languages". Lingua.


Hartmann, Katharina & Malte Zimmermann (2008): "Not only 'only' but 'too' too. Alternative sensitive particles in Bura". Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 12, 196–211.


