
On L*+H, verum focus, and rejections

Heiko Seeliger¹

¹Universität zu Köln

heiko.seeliger@uni-koeln.de

In the contexts relevant in this talk, verum focus expresses polarity contrast and is prosodically encoded with an accent on the finite verb, see (1). I compare the results of three recent studies that investigated the prosody of verum focus in German rejections (Repp & Seeliger, 2023; Röhr, Grice & Baumann, 2023; Seeliger & Repp, 2023), in order to investigate the factors that influence associations between verum focus and accent *types*.

- (1) A: Du wohnst doch gar nicht in Köln! (Röhr et al., 2023)
you live MP at.all not in Cologne
B: Doch, ich WOHNE in Köln!
yes I live in Cologne
'A: You don't live in Cologne at all! B: Yes, I DO live in Cologne!'

Röhr, Grice & Baumann (2023) conducted a perception study that manipulated the accent type (H*, L+H*, L*+H) on verbs that were either in verum focus like in (1) or in lexical contrast (ex.: 'A: You're on vacation in Cologne. B: No, I LIVE in Cologne!'). The perceptually prominent L*+H, in which the pitch peak is aligned with the post-tonal syllable, was judged to fit well in verum contexts but not well in contexts with lexical contrast. The authors suggest an association between contrast and more prominent accent types, and some attitudinal meaning of L*+H that clashes with lexical contrast. The prosody of verum focus has also been investigated in production studies. Seeliger & Repp (2023) found L*+H to be extremely common in German rejections that contained negation ('Wait, he DIDN'T bring any flowers!'). Conversely, Repp & Seeliger (2023) found L*+H to be very rare in German rejections without negation but containing *doch*, a modal particle appealing to addressee knowledge (\approx 'as you should already have known').

I will present an account for the rarity of L*+H in rejections with *doch*. Verum, *doch*, and L*+H show overlap in their functions, and their combination is not outright impossible (e.g. the combination is possible in (1A)). I will argue that their combination is rare in contexts in which the combined contribution of the three, particularly the attitudinal meaning of L*+H, is too face-threatening.

References: Repp, S. & Seeliger, H. (2023). The prosody of contrastive focus and verum focus in rejections. Poster presented at *Tone and Intonation*, Singapore. • Röhr, C.T., M. Grice & S. Baumann (2023). Intonational preferences for lexical contrast and verum focus. In R. Skarnitzl & J. Volin (eds.), *Proceedings of the 20th ICPHS*. Prague: Guarant International • Seeliger, H. & S. Repp (2023). Information-structural surprises? Contrast, givenness and the (lack of) accent shift and deaccentuation in non-assertive speech acts. *Laboratory Phonology* 14, 1–46.