University Press Potsdam

Article published in:

J.M.M. Brown, Andreas Schmidt,
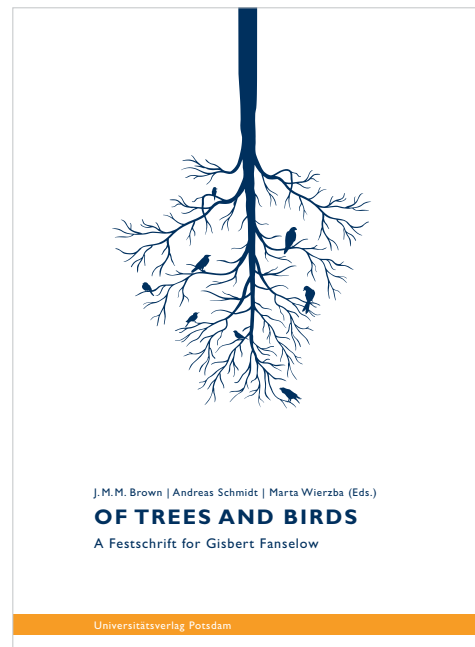Marta Wierzba (Eds.)

Of trees and birds
A Festschrift for Gisbert Fanselow

J. M. M. Brown | Andreas Schmidt | Marta Wierzba (Eds.)

OF TREES AND BIRDS

A Festschrift for Gisbert Fanselow

Universitätsverlag Potsdam

Verum focus and negation[1]

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1 Introduction

Fanselow (2013) discusses at length several morphological mismatches between parts of discontinuous nominal phrases. For instance, when the quantifier *kein* 'no' directly precedes the noun, as in (1a), it is weakly inflected, but in the discontinuous construction, the same quantifier has a strong form, as in (1b).

(1) a. Ich habe kein-Ø   Geld.
         I   have no.WEAK-ACC money
         'I have no money.'

     b. Geld   habe ich keines.
         money have I   no.STRONG.ACC

In this Festschrift contribution, we take this sentence as the basis of our investigation, but the phenomenon we discuss is a different one: we are interested in the nuclear accent location in (2b), thus the accent on the finite verb, when the sentence is set in the context of (2a).

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1. We have written this short contribution for Gisbert Fanselow, a true friend and the best colleague one can dream of. We have consulted some of his numerous friends who have helped us with data of their own languages. All of them are mentioned as informants in the paper.

(2) a. Ich soll   GELD   ausgeben?
         I   should money spend
         'I should spend money?'

     b. Geld   HABE ich keines.
         money have I   no.WEAK.ACC
         'I don't have money.'

     c. #Geld   habe ich KEINES   (aber Kinder   habe ich
         money have I   no.WEAK.ACC but   children have I
           viele).
           many
         'I don't have money, but I have many children.'

In (2a), the nuclear accent is placed on the argument of the verb, thus *Geld* 'money', as expected by focus projection and default accent placement rules. In (2b), the most natural continuation of (2a) is to put the nuclear accent on the finite verb. In this sentence, *Geld* may be prominent as well, but then it is an aboutness topic. A nuclear accent on *keines* as in (2c) is also possible, but then the reading calls for a contrastive topic on *Geld* and a focus on *keines*. The contrastive topic raises the expectation that *Geld* is contrasted with something else, with *children* 'Kinder' for instance, and then the focus on *keines* is also contrastive.

The puzzle we want to address here is how the accent in (2b) ends up on the finite verb, when the sentence is uttered in the context of (2a). It is a puzzle because *ich* and *Geld* are given in (2b) by virtue of being mentioned in (2a), and *habe* is presupposed, since in order to be able to spend money, it is necessary to have some. As a result, all three words should be unstressed. The only new part of the sentence is the negation *keines*. In this case, all focus projection rules we are aware of predict that the negation should be accented.[2]

A similar sentence in English comes from Ladd (1980) who analyzed the accent placement on *read* in (3) as a consequence of the fact that *book*

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2. Note that accentuation is not dependent on the use of a discontinuous nominal phrase, but remains on the verb also in a version with a continuous noun phrase in the same context, i.e. *Ich HABE kein Geld* vs. #*Ich habe KEIN Geld*.

is given because Slaughterhouse-Five is a book. The evident problem is that *read* is given as well, so that there is no compulsory reason to accent this word. Again, the negation is the only new part of the sentence, but in fact, an answer in which the negated part of the sentence is accented, as in (3C), is not well-formed. Here, it is the infinitive verb that is accented, rather than the finite.

(3) A:. Has John read Slaughterhouse-Five?

   B:. No, he doesn't READ books.

   C:. #No, he DOESN'T/does NOT read books.

An accent on the finite part of a verb, as in (2b), elicits a so-called *verum focus*, so named by Höhle (1988, 1992) who developed the first syntactic and semantic analysis of the phenomenon.[3] The next section reviews approaches to verum focus, especially Höhle's groundbreaking proposal. Section 3 discusses the related distinction between *counter-presuppositional* and *counter-assertive* verum focus. Section 4 pinpoints the role of the negation and proposes an account for its unaccented status. In Section 5, a short typological review is proposed where the languages that leave the negation unaccented are compared to those where the negation is accented. Section 6 contains a conclusion.

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3. We are not concerned with highlighting of the lexical content of accented verbs, nor any aspect of their conjugational form (such as tense), as exemplified in (i):

(i) A:. Rena hat ein Buch geschrieben. 'Rena wrote a book.'

   B:. Nein, Rena SCHREIBT ein Buch.
       no   Rena writes   a   book
       'No, Rena is writing a book.'

While accents on finite verbs can express both, the difference becomes clear in particle verbs, where contrastive focus on the verbal meaning is expressed by accenting the particle (ii), and when the verb is part of a non-compositional idiom (iii).

(ii) Morgen   höre   ich mit   dem Rauchen AUF.
     tomorrow stop.STEM I   with the   smoking stop.PARTICLE
     'Tomorrow, I'll stop smoking.'

(iii) Aber ja,   sie   macht   ihm   den GARAUS.
     but   yes she makes him   the   GARAUS
     'Indeed, she is killing him.' (Lit: She is making him the *garaus*).

2 Approaches to verum focus

The very name 'verum focus' points to Höhle's (1988, 1992) emphasis on the expression of truth of a proposition. Höhle relates this expression of truth to a linguistic object *verum* (or *VERUM focus* or *F-verum*) occurring in the syntactic structure of clauses, namely in the left periphery in main clauses, but also in embedded clauses. The function of the accent on the finite verb is to reflect this linguistic object.[4] Beside the syntactic location of verum focus, Höhle insists on its semantic interpretation: "Es handelt sich um einen semantischen Fokus" (Höhle 1992: 113). An example from Höhle appears in (4).

(4) A:. Ich habe Hanna gefragt, was Karl grade macht und sie hat die alberne Behauptung aufgestellt, dass er ein Drehbuch schreibt.

'I asked Hanna what Karl is doing these days and she made the silly claim that he is writing a screenplay.'

B:. Das stimmt. Karl SCHREIBT ein Drehbuch.

'It is true. Karl is writing a screenplay.'

Importantly, an expression with verum focus needs a context, and cannot be uttered out of the blue. It emphasizes the truth of a proposition or its negative counterpart. Crucially, verum focus only appears in contexts in which the proposition can be true or false. Höhle and several authors after him showed that verum focus appears in declarative sentences, but also in questions, in imperatives and in embedded clauses, so that an analysis in terms of illocutionary operators is not possible. For reasons of space we do not illustrate this here.

Verum focus has been given particular importance in the research on different polar question forms and their role in expressing bias for a positive vs. negative answer (e.g. compare *Is Moira here?*, *Is Moira not here?*,

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4. Höhle's definition (1992: 144): "In allen diesen Fällen kann man den Effekt, den die Betonung des Verbs hat, einigermaßen plausibel umschreiben, indem man ein Prädikat 'wahr' (oder ein Synonym) einführt und als inhaltlich hervorgehoben betrachtet. Ich nenne diesen hervorgehobenen Bedeutungsanteil VERUM und bezeichne solche Fälle als Verum-Fokus."

Isn't Moira here?, *Is Moira here?*). Based on Höhle's suggestion, Romero & Han (2002, 2004) formally define an epistemic operator verum, the use of which in a polar question can be paraphrased as asking the addressee 'Are you sure you want the proposition checked in this question (e.g. *Moira is (not) here*) to be added to the common ground?' (also see e.g. Gutzmann & Castroviejo-Miró 2011; Repp 2013). In this short paper, we ignore the issue of question bias that we consider orthogonal to the polarity issue.

In new dissertations, Samko (2016) and Goodhue (2018) assume that verum focus is simply focus in the Roothian tradition (Rooth 1992) and that auxiliary focus represents its clearest case. We follow this tradition here, which is also close to Höhle's original idea. A sentence with verum focus consists of a focused part and a given part like any other sentence. Specifically, verum focus is F-marking on the polarity head of the sentence and the polarity head is always present. Samko (2016) proposes that verum focus emphasizes the truth of the propositional content of a sentence: The alternative to a given affirmative declarative with verum focus is the corresponding negative declarative, and vice versa.

3 Counter-presuppositional and counter-assertive focus

As pointed out by Gussenhoven (2007: 92), the dialog in (3) minimally contrasts with (5). In (5), where the nuclear accent is on the negation, the speaker contradicts an immediately preceding assertion, i.e. tries to prevent the addressee from adding this assertion to the common ground. By contrast, the speaker in (3), where accentuation of the verb is preferred, tries to 'de-bug' the common ground by contradicting a presupposition on the part of the addressee (i.e. asking whether John read a certain book presupposes that John reads books in general). Gussenhoven (1983) referred to this difference as counter-assertive (5) vs. counter-presuppositional (3) focus on the polarity of the sentence.[5]

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5. Lyn Frazier (p.c.) confirms this difference between the two types of contexts, albeit with other examples. Also see Samko (2016) and Goodhue (2018).

(5) A:. I'm telling you: John reads books!

    B:. #No, he doesn't READ books.

    C:. No, he DOESN'T/does NOT read books.

Using this terminology, (2) includes counter-presuppositional focus, since, as pointed out above, spending money presupposes that one has it. Interestingly, German differs from English and (2) remains appropriate also in a counter-assertive context, cf. (6c); see Goodhue (2018) for infelicity of (6c) in English. However, we interpret this accent placement as counter-presuppositional.[6] A simple denial (counter-assertive) is achieved with an accent on *kein*, as in (6b). Moreover, a discontinuous nominal phrase (6d) seems less acceptable in this context regardless of accentuation, showing a further contrast with the counter-presuppositional context in (2).

(6) a. Aber du hast doch Geld!
      'But you have money!'

    b. Nein, ich habe KEIN Geld.
      'No, I don't have money.'

    c. Nein, ich HABE kein Geld.

    d. #Nein, Geld HABE ich keines / Geld habe ich KEINES.

A further very common example illustrating that counter-presuppositional focus is expressed with a verum focus, i.e. accent on the finite verb, is illustrated by the following sentence. If Gisbert is offering me his telescope in a situation where I can use my own one, I can answer (in a slightly rough way) with *Brauche ich nicht.* 'I don't need it.' With this answer and an accented verb, I cancel Gisbert's presupposition that I need a telescope.

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6. That is, this accentuation indicates that the speaker suspects that the addressee is not asking a neutral question, but already assumes the presupposition that the speaker has money to be true. To counter this inferred assumption, the speaker uses accentuation marking counter-presuppositional focus to achieve a 'de-bugging' of the common ground. Intuitions on the distinction between counter-presuppositional and counter-assertive focus can therefore be quite subtle, which may explain Bolinger's (1989: 365–379) assertion that they simply convey a different strength of denial.

Finally, while the distinction between counter-assertive and counter-presuppositional focus narrows down the meaning and function of these sentences, the original puzzle of the accent landing on the verb instead of on the negation remains. In the next section, we propose an element of answer, following Frank Richter's (1993) proposal.

4 Negation

The last components of (2b) in need of attention are the negation and its scope, and, most of all for the purpose of this short paper, absence of accenting of the negation even though it is the only new element of the sentence.

Höhle proposed that a verum focus is felicitous when the only focused part of the sentence is the verum focus itself. In other words, the remainder of the sentence has to be given. As soon as some part of the sentence is new, verum focus is not possible anymore (modulo bridging contexts or weak adverbs). Richter (1993) relates this fact to the scope of the verum focus: everything in its scope must be given. This is the reason why (7B) is a good answer to (7A), but (7C) is not. In (7C), the negation is in the scope of the verum focus, but it is not given (not in the context sentence). In (7B), by contrast, the negation is higher than the verum, as seen in the English paraphrase, and it does not matter whether it is given or not.[7]

(7) A:. Ich hoffe, Anna schreibt endlich ein Buch.
      I   hope Anna writes   finally a   book
      'I hope that Anna finally writes a book.'

   B:. Aber Karl sagte mir, sie SCHREIBT nicht an einem Buch.
      but   Karl told me   she writes   not   at a   book
      'But Karl told me that it is not the case that she writes a book.'

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7. According to Richter, the difference in interpretation between V2 stress or COMP stress and the negation facts speak for a difference in the syntactic structure of V2 and COMP, COMP needs to be higher in the tree.

C:.#Aber Karl sagte mir, DASS sie nicht an einem Buch
    but   Karl told   me that she not   at a   book
      schreibt.
      writes
   'But Karl told me that it the case that she doesn't write a book.'

In (8), the context contains the negation, rendering it given in the answers B and C. This is why both (8B) and (8C) are good.

(8) A:. Ich hoffe, Anna schreibt nicht etwa   ein Buch.
       I   hope   Anna writes   not   perhaps a   book
       'I hope Anna doesn't write a book.'

    B:. (Keine Sorge,) Karl sagte mir, sie SCHREIBT nicht an
       no   worries Karl told   me she writes   not   at
       einem Buch.
       a   book
       '(Don't worry,) Karl told me that it is the case that she doesn't write a book.'

    C:. (Keine Sorge,) Karl sagte mir, DASS sie nicht an einem
       no   worries Karl told   me that she not   at a
       Buch schreibt.
       book writes
       '(Don't worry,) Karl told me that it is the case that she doesn't write a book.'

Notice that (7C) and (8C) are identical in German. There is no need to stress the negation in order to realize a verum focus (here counter-assertive), independently of whether it confirms or denies a positive or a negative sentence: the polarity focus supersedes the simple negation. Not only is there no need to accent the negation in (2), (3) and (7), but accenting it is even wrong, because then the polarity focus may be cancelled, as illustrated in (2c).

    To sum up so far, we have made a distinction between two kinds of verum focus: a counter-assertive one, in the spirit of Höhle's original proposal, where it is the expression of the truth of a proposition that is

focused, and a counter-presuppositional one, where the accent on a verb cancels a presupposition. This distinction was already made by Gussenhoven (1983) to which we add a new component, namely the unaccented status of a new negation. In many cases, it is difficult to tear apart the counter-assertive and the counter-presuppositional functions of a nuclear accent, but in other cases, they can be distinguished. A good test for disentangling both readings is to use negated sentences. The counter-presuppositional focus overwrites the negation: the accent on the verb outranks the newness of the negation which ends up being deaccented. By contrast, the counter-assertive reading assigns an accent to the negation if it is new. However, the counter-assertive reading often contains a counter-presuppositional part, as discussed for (6).

5 Typological comparison

In this section, we explore verum focus including a 'new' negation in several languages. The facts summed up in this section are preliminary and need to be extensively researched.

In the counter-presuppositional reading, the Germanic languages Swedish (9), Norwegian (10), Dutch (11) and Danish (12) place the nuclear accent on the verb as seen above for English (3) and German (2); note that a discontinuous nominal phrase splitting up the NP 'no money' is not possible in Norwegian, Danish and Dutch in this context. The counter-assertive reading displaces the main accent, that is now preferably on the negation, at least in German, English, Swedish, Dutch and Danish. Norwegian does not change the position of the accent which remains on the verb. In Swedish and in German, a discontinuous NP is not possible anymore.

(9) a. Counter-presuppositional
Pengar   HAR jag inga. / Jag HAR inga pengar.
money.PL have I   no   I   have no   money.PL
'I have no money.'

    b.   Counter-assertive

Jag har   INTE mycket pengar. / Jag HAR inte mycket
I   have not   much   money   I   have not much

  pengar. / *Pengar har   jag inga.
  money   money have I   no

'I don't have much money.'   Swedish (Sara Myrberg)

(10) Jeg HAR ikke / HAKke   noen penger.
      I   have not   have.not any   money.PL

      'I don't have any money.'   Norwegian (Kjell Johan Sæbø)

(11) a.   Counter-presuppositional
         Geld   HEB ik niet.
         money have I   not
         'I have no money.'

     b.   Counter-assertive
         Ik heb (juist)   GEEN geld
         I   have (at.the.moment) no   money
         '(Right now,) I have no money.'
                        Dutch (Beata Moskal, Paul Dekker)

(12) a.   Counter-presuppositional
         Jeg HAR ingen penge.
         I   have no   money
         'I have no money.'

     b.   Counter-assertive
         Jeg har INGEN penge.
                     Danish (Cathrine Fabricius-Hansen)

As for Slavic languages, our informants for Polish (13) and Czech (14), but not for Russian (15), agree that the accent is on the verb.[8] However, since the negation is cliticized to the verb and the stress is penultimate in Polish and initial in Czech, the negation seems to be accented by ac-

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8. None of them finds a different accent placement in the counter-assertive context.

cident. In Polish, it is the case when the verb is monosyllabic. As soon as the verb is disyllabic, stress is on the verb.

(13) Ale ja przecież NIE MAM (żadnych) pieniędzy.
but I after.all not have.1SG no.PL.GEN money.PL.GEN
'But really I do not have any money.'

Polish (Joanna Błaszczak)

(14) Já žádné peníze NEMÁM. / Já NEMÁM žádné
I no.NCI money NEG.have.1SG I NEG.have.1SG no.NCI
peníze.
money
'I don't have any money.' Czech (Radek Šimik)

(15) У меня НЕТ денег.
at I.GEN no money.GEN
'I don't have any money.' Russian (Dina Voloshina)

According to the judgments we have obtained so far, the Uralic languages Estonian (16) and Finnish (17) do make a distinction between counter-assertive and counter-presuppositional, though the main prominence does not land on the negation in either case. Interestingly, while a discontinuous nominal phrase is possible in Estonian in the counter-presuppositional context (16b), it is not appropriate in Finnish (17b), but would require a context where other forms of compensation are possible, i.e. *rahaa* 'money' is a contrastive topic in (17b), similar to (2c) above. Also note that the Estonian non-inflecting particle *üldse* 'at all' attracts stress when it is present, also in the continuous NP (16b). In a counter-assertive context, the discontinuous NP is less appropriate in Estonian as well (16c), like for German and Swedish.

(16) a. Counter-presuppositional
RAHA mu-l ei OLE.
money.PART 1SG-ADE neg be.CONNEG
'I don't have money. / I have no money.'

    b.   Counter-presuppositional

Mu-l	ei	ole	ÜLDSE	raha.	/ Raha
1SG-ADE	NEG	be.CONNEG	at.all	money.PART	money.PART

	mu-l	ÜLDSE	ei	ole.
	1SG-ADE	at.all	NEG	be.CONNEG

'I don't have any money at all.'

    c.   Counter-assertive

Mu-l	ei	OLE	raha.	/ Ei	OLE
1SG-ADE	NEG	be.CONNEG	money.PART	NEG	be.CONNEG

	raha	mul.	/ ?Raha	mu-l	ÜLDSE	ei
	money.PART	1SG-ADE	money.PART	1SG-ADE	at.all	NEG

	ole.
	be.CONNEG

'I don't have any money.'   Estonian (Nele Ots)

(17) a.

Mutta	mu-lla	ei	oo	raha-a.
but	1SG-ADE	NEG.3SG	be.CONNEG	money-PART

'But I don't have money. / But I have no money.'

    b.

#Raha-a	mu-lla	ei	oo	yhtään.
money-PART	1SG-ADE	NEG.3SG	be.CONNEG	at.all

'I don't have any money.'   Finnish (Juhani Järvikivi)

Hindi also makes a distinction between counter-presuppositional (18) and counter-assertive (19) readings. In (18), the default order *nahiiN hai* is also possible. There is definitely some prominence on *hai* in both orders. But in (19), the auxiliary is either unaccented or absent.

(18)

lekin	mere	paas	paisaa	HAI	hii	nahiiN.
SBJV.1SG	me.GEN	near	money	is	only	not

'But I have no money.'

(19)

mere	paas	bilkul	paisaa	nahiiN	hai/∅.
me.GEN	near	absolutely	money	not	is

'I have absolutely no money!'   Hindi (Rajesh Bhatt)

Turning now to the Romance languages, let us illustrate Italian and French. In both languages, right-dislocation is preferred in such negations implying a verum focus. This is visible because of the clitic doubling *ne* in Italian (20), *en* in French (21). In Italian, both the counter-presuppositional and the counter-assertive reading elicit an accent on the verb.[9] By contrast, lexical stresses are absent in French (21) and pitch accents on particular words do not have the same role as in languages with lexical stresses and pitch accents. The final word of the prosodic phrase is more prominent by virtue of being final in its phrase. It happens to be the negation in both contexts in (21).

(20) a.   Counter-presuppositional
           Io non ne   HO,   di soldi. / Io non HO   soldi.
           I   not of-it have, of money   I   not have money
           'I have no money.'

      b.   Counter-assertive
           Non HO   (molto) denaro. / Non HO   acqua.
           not have (much) money   not have water
           'I don't have (much) money / water.'

                              Italian (Vieri Samek-Lodovici)

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9. It seems to be quite difficult to find contexts in which the negation can be accented in Italian. Vieri Samek-Lodovici would marginally accept accent on *non* in the second variant of (20b), but find it 'punctillious'. He volunteers the following dialogue which is clearly counter-assertive:

(i)   A:. Like all crocodiles, Nile crocodiles keep their eggs in their mouths.

      B:. I coccodrilli del Nilo NON tengono / non TENGONO le loro uova nella
          bocca. Sono gli unici a non farlo.

          'Nile crocodiles do not keep their eggs in their mouth. They are the only ones to
          not do so.'

(21) a. Counter-presuppositional

Moi, dépenser de   l'argent? Mais je n'en   ai
me   spend   PART ART.money but   I   NEG.PART have

  pas, d'argent.
  no   PART.money

'I should spend money? But I have no money.'

b. Counter-assertive

J'en   ai   pas, de   l'argent.   / J'ai   pas d'argent.
I.PART have no,   PART ART.money / I.have no   PART.money

'I have no money.'

In Japanese (22), the verb and the negative particle form a single phonological word, which receives the main prominence of the sentence, making the classification ambiguous.

(22) Kane-na'nte   (zenzen) MOTTE-NA'I yo.
      money-such.a.thing.like (at.all)   have-NEG   PRT

'I don't have any money / I don't have anything like money (I'm telling you).'   Japanese (Shin Ishihara)

Finally, our two Greek informants disagreed on whether a nuclear accent on the verb is possible, (23a) vs. (24), and whether *lefta* 'money' can be fronted without a salient contrast between money and other things, see (23b) vs. (24). However, both accept a nuclear accent on *katholu* 'not at all' in the counter-assertive reading and agree that stress on the negation is not possible.

(23) a. Dhen EHO   lefta.
          NEG   have.1SG money

'I have no money.'

b. Dhen eho   KATHOLU   lefta.
    NEG   have.1SG not.at.all money

'I don't have any money at all.'   Greek (Artemis Alexiadou)

(24) Lefta   den exo KATHOLU. / #Lefta den EXO katholu.
    money NEG have not.at.all   money NEG have not.at.all
    'Money, I have not at all.'   Greek (Stavros Skopeteas)

The strangest expression of a counter-presuppositional verum focus that we found documented in the literature comes from Irish, (25) (Bennett et al. forthcoming).

(25) A:. Cuir síos   é.
       send down it
       'Drive it down.'

    B:. Ní   rachaidh sé síos.
       NEG-FIN go.FUT   it down
       'It won't go down.'

It is a given pronoun that carries the pitch accent of the verum focus. This simple pronoun has been incorporated into the verbal complex, so that they form a prosodic word together, and the default place of the main accent in the prosodic word is the last syllable, and thus on the pronoun. The authors explain the unexpected position of the verum focus accent with "the satisfaction of purely phonological desiderata related to the expression of focus prosody."

6 Conclusion

We started this short study with a puzzle that we found in a sentence analyzed extensively by Fanselow (2013), see (2b). Besides a discontinuous nominal phrase, this sentence contains a counter-presuppositional focus on the negative polarity of the sentence. The puzzle concerns the nuclear accent that appears on the verb, even though the verb is given and presupposed, and not on the negation which is the only new element of the sentence: The negation remains unaccented. Following the tradition introduced by Höhle (1988, 1992) and others, an accent on the verb denotes a verum focus that can be counter-presuppositional or counter-assertive (Gussenhoven 1983). The sentence (2b) has an unambiguously counter-

presuppositional reading. We propose that the grammatical means to cancel an erroneous presupposition from the common ground are to accent the verb (either an auxiliary or the lexical content of the verb). In such a case, everything that is in the scope of the verum focus must be given, but the negation can survive outside of the scope of the verum focus, without being prominent (Richter 1993). The counter-assertive reading of the same sentence allows the negation to be accented, but this is not possible in the counter-presuppositional reading.

An informal typological survey showed that the same pattern is not only prevalent in Germanic languages, but also appears to some degree in Hindi and outside the Indo-European language family, as for example in Estonian and Finnish. It seems to be impossible in French, a language without lexical stress, and we expect that other languages without lexical stress also use other grammatical means to express counter-presuppositional readings, see Gutzmann et al. (2017) for some examples. We also showed that, in some languages, the phonology can be decisive for the position of the accent and even supersede the semantic needs. Further research is needed to confirm these findings.

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