

Indirect verbal marking in 10 Bantu languages

Elisabeth J. Kerr & Jenneke van der Wal

Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

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What is verum?

- *i^h©^h - term coined by Höhle (1988; 1992) for emphasis on the truth of a proposition, marked in German and English by accent

(1) Karl HAT den Hund gefüttert.

Carl has the dog fed

'Carl DID feed the dog.' (Höhle, cited in Lohnstein 2016:290)

- cf Watters (1979) on \neg «^h©^h (and counter-assertive polar focus) in Aghem (Grassfields Bantu)

Verum: Is it part of information structure?

- Verum has traditionally been seen as a subtype of focus (predicate-centred focus (PCF); Güldemann 2003, 2009)

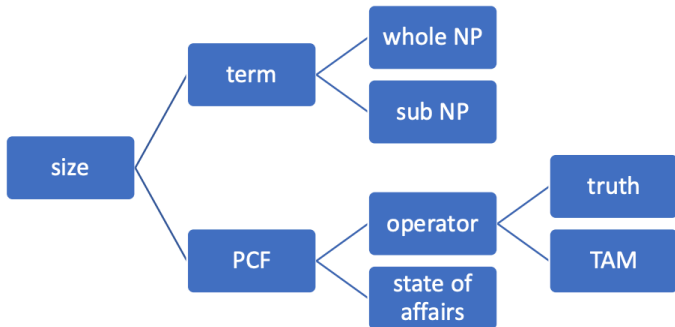


Figure 4 – Variation in the scope of the focus (building on Dik 1997:331 and Güldemann 2009)

Verum: Is it a type of focus?

- Gutzmann et al. (2020):
 ʔ, ʔ, ©, ¥, a, «, °, «, OE; it is a separate notion
- Pitch accent in German and English is not an instance of focus marking, but functions to link the current proposition to a QUD (= verum)
- In some languages, these two functions have distinct markings

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RESEARCH

Verum focus is verum, not focus: Cross-linguistic evidence

Daniel Gutzmann¹, Katharina Hartmann² and Lisa Matthewson³¹ University of Cologne, Albertus-Magnus-Platz, Cologne, DE² University of Frankfurt, Norbert-Wollheim-Platz, Frankfurt, DE³ University of British Columbia, Totem Field Studios, Vancouver, BC, CA

Corresponding author: Daniel Gutzmann (mail@danielgutzmann.com)

The accent pattern known as verum focus is commonly understood as an ordinary alternative focus on the truth of a proposition. This standard view, which we call the focus accent thesis (FAT), can be contrasted with the lexical operator thesis (LOT), according to which the accent pattern that looks like focus in languages like German or English is actually not an instance of focus marking, but realizes a lexical verum predicate, whose function is to relate the current proposition to a question under discussion. Although it is hard to distinguish between the FAT and the LOT on the basis of German or English, a broader cross-linguistic perspective seems to favor the LOT. Drawing from fieldwork on Tsimshianic (Gitksan) and Chadic (Bura, South Marghi), we first show that in none of these languages is verum realized in the same way that ordinary alternative focus is marked. This sheds initial doubt on the unity of verum and focus. Secondly, the FAT predicts that a language cannot have co-occurring verum and focus, if it does not allow multiple foci, and that a language should allow them to co-occur if it allows for multiple foci. Again, while it is hard to find counterexamples in German or English, some of the data from our cross-linguistic investigation favor the LOT.

Keywords: verum; focus; emphasis; accent; question under discussion

Verum: Is it part of information structure?

- Two conflicting views in the theoretical literature:
 - ① Verum as subtype of focus = part of information structure (IS)
 - ② Verum as separate notion
- Today: Consider this debate from the perspective of Bantu languages, which are known to mark IS morphosyntactically

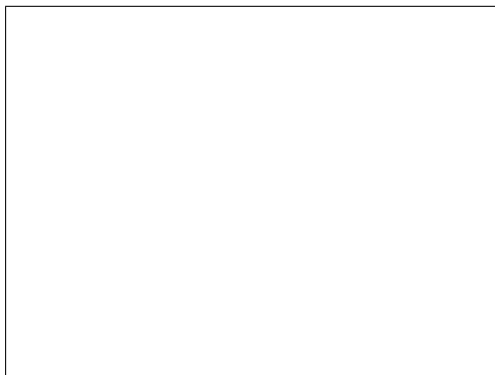


- RQ1: How is verum expressed in Bantu? Is there a dedicated strategy for marking it?
- RQ2: Is verum part of IS or is it a separate notion?

) Need to have data on verum marking in context of the broader system of IS-marking in Bantu...

BaSIS project

- Bantu Syntax and Information Structure (BaSIS) project, 2017-2023, Leiden University
- Investigating syntax and IS for 10 Bantu languages

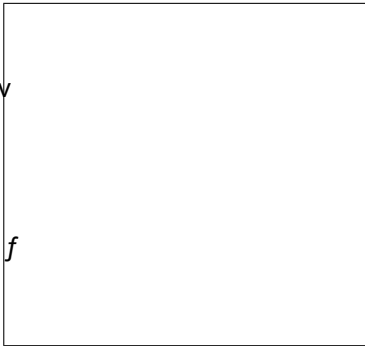


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Thank you for listening!

Elisabeth J. Kerr
Leiden University
e.j.kerr@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Jenneke van der Wal
Leiden University
g.j.van.der.wal@hum.leidenuniv.nl

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