

Diagnosing focus *

GWIS 2 Methodological Issues in the Study of Information Structure
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Goals

- Gather together the tests for focus and related phenomena like exhaustivity.
- See to what extent the tests show what they are meant to show.

Outline

- Disclaimers
- Definitions
- Tests:
 - o Questions
 - o Particles
 - o Quantifiers
 - o Co-text
 - o Stimuli
- Your own input!

0A. What is not addressed here

- The (possible analyses of) syntactic structure of focus strategies (biclausal or monoclausal cleft, altruistic movement of non-focal material, WCO, resumptive clitics etc.)
- Whether focus is a unified phenomenon or category (Matić and Wedgwood 2012 vs. Onea and Zimmermann 2011)
- Formal diagnostics, see under 1.
- Possible influence of non-linguistic / paralinguistic features (e.g., eyebrow raising, cf. work by Kraemer and Swerts)
- Second occurrence focus
- Pairwise focus ('who kissed whom?')
- The possible category 'emphasis' (cf. Downing and Pompino-Marschall 2013)

0B. Data and tests

As focus is necessarily dependent on the linguistic and extra-linguistic context, it is essential that contextualised data be used. The ideal would be to combine insights from corpus data and semi-spontaneous data with elicitation. On the one hand the corpus data prevent a tunnel view, and on the other hand the elicitation data provide more fine-grained and also negative evidence that is needed for testing specific hypotheses (cf. Skopeteas 2012).

So, while acknowledging that spontaneous data are indispensable, data mining, e.g., for the expression of focus, is a field on its own (see Dipper et al. 2007) and I will concentrate here on tools that have been used in elicitation. The assumption is that speakers' intuitions tells us something about felicity and about grammatical /IS rules.

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1. Definitions

The many confusing definitions of focus can be divided into three groups, according to the parameter of defining:

1. The means of focussing (fronting, stress, particle etc.)
2. The scope: which constituent is focused (term, sentence, verb phrase, adjunct etc.; also broad vs narrow)
3. The semantic/pragmatic interpretation (exhaustive, completive, assertive etc.)

The first group is the one we are testing here (phonology, morphology and word order), so diagnostics referring to formal encoding are not taken into account.

The third group can be subdivided into pragmatic and semantic effects of focus. The various pragmatic types of focus are defined by the context in which they occur, that is, they relate to managing the common communicative goals (Krifka 2007). These are the ‘corrective’, ‘replacive’, ‘selective’ etc. types of focus (see the typology in Dik 1997), which feature in section 4. Semantic focus, on the other hand, relates to the content of the common ground (Krifka 2007) and –unlike pragmatic focus– can have truth-conditional effects. A well-known semantic definition of focus is that it triggers alternatives (Rooth 1992, 1996), and possible operations on that set of alternatives result in an exhaustive or exclusive reading, having truth-conditional effects.

Exhaustivity differs from exclusivity in that the first excludes *all* alternatives, whereas the second excludes *at least some* alternatives. See Beck and Rullmann (1999), Molnár (2002) and Van der Wal (2011) for more on weak and strong exclusivity and exhaustivity.

2. Questions

Test 1: WH questions and answers

- Type of focus: new information, completive, assertive
- “If a question asks for some X (X being a syntactic category), in a direct answer to this question, the constituent which corresponds to X is focused”.
(Kasimir 2005:12, cf. Dik 1997, Rooth 1992, Krifka 2002, 2007, Lambrecht 1994, Roberts 1996, Beaver and Clark 2008, and many others)
- Used to establish scope of focus

(1) a. (what kind of juice did Little Tiger drink?)
He drank [**apple**]_F juice.

b. (what did Little Tiger drink?)
He drank [**apple juice**]_F.

c. (what did Little Tiger do?)
He [**drank apple juice**]_F.

- Trouble:
 - o fragment answers
 - o Q-A congruence
 - o ‘what happened?’ does not necessarily give ‘all focus’
 - always-available topics (the sun, the queen)
 - situationally available topics (speech act participants, the dog)
 - accommodation

Test 2: Alternative questions

- Type of focus: selective
- “A focus constituent X is used selectively if [it] introduces an element of [the set of alternatives] into the common ground, and [it] is chosen from a restricted subset of A the members of which have been explicitly mentioned in the preceding context” (Zimmermann and Onea 2011:1663)

- (2) A: Do you want coffee or tea?
B: I want tea.

Makhuwa (van der Wal 2011)

- (3) a. DJ n-náá-phéélá o-ń-thélá?
2PL.SM-PRES.DJ-want 15-1OM-marry
‘do you want to marry her?’
- b. CJ mwi-m-phéélá o-n-thelá mwi-m-phéél’ oshupishú?
2.PL.SM-PRES.CJ-want 15-1OM-marry 2PL.SM-PRES.CJ-want 15.bother
‘do you want to marry her, or do you want to bother?’

- Trouble:
What is the status of the selection? Are the mentioned alternatives excluded on a semantic or pragmatic basis?

Test 3: ‘Mention some’ questions

- Type of focus: exclusive/exhaustive
- An exhaustive focus strategy is infelicitous (in questions and answers) if an exhaustive answer to the question is impossible for pragmatic reasons.

Cable (2008)

- (4) a. ?? Where is it that I can buy a newspaper in this city?
b. ?? Where are the places that I can buy a newspaper in this city?
c. ?? Which numbers are the ones that are odd?

3. Particles

The term ‘focus particles’ has been used to refer to two categories of particles. On the one hand, there are languages which have a dedicated particle marking the focus of the sentence (e.g. the Gbe languages), which are themselves a strategy of encoding focus. On the other hand, there are focus particles (or focus-sensitive particles) that associate with the focus of the sentence (see the particularly clear overview in Beaver & Clark 2008). These are particles like ‘even’, ‘also’, and ‘only’ (see König 1991).

Test 4: Particle ‘even’

- Type of focus: additive, expansive, non-exclusive
- Scalar additive ‘even’ entails that more events have happened and that the object modified by ‘even’ is the least likely in the set of alternatives to make the predicate true. If a strategy is incompatible with ‘even’, it shows the exclusive nature of the strategy.

Makhuwa (van der Wal 2009)

- (5) a. CJ *ki-n-thotol-alé hatá Láúra/Laurá
 1SG-1-visit-PERF.CJ even 1.Laura
 int. 'I visited even Laura'
- b. DJ ko-ń-thótólá hatá Láúra
 1SG.PERF.DJ-1-visit even 1.Laura
 'I visited even Laura'

Italian (Brunetti 2004:68)

- (6) a. Anche UN CAPPELLO gli ha comprato Maria.
 also a hat to-him-CL has bought Maria
 'It is also a hat that Maria bought him'
- b. Persino UN CAPPELLO gli ha comprato Maria.
 even a hat to-him-CL has bought Maria
 'It was even a hat that Maria bought him'

Test 5: Particle 'only'

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- Exhaustive particle 'only' indicates that the predicate is exhaustively true for the referent of the focused element, excluding possible alternatives.

Zulu (Buell 2009)

- (7) a. CJ Ngi-bon-e uSipho kuphela.
 1SG.SM-see-PERF.CJ 1.Sipho only
 'I saw only Sipho.'
- b. DJ *Ngi-m-bon-ile uSipho kuphela.
 1SG.SM-1OM-see-PERF.DJ 1.Sipho only

- Trouble:
 - o Exhaustive reading due to presence particle or use of strategy?
 - o Critique test 5': If the it-cleft would specify exhaustivity, the felicity of (8b) would be expected, on a par with (8a).

(Wedgwood (2005, 2009), É.Kiss (2010) and Zimmermann and Onea (2011), attributed to Horn (1981))

- (8) a. I know that Marcel had a pizza, but I just discovered that it was only a pizza that he had.
- b. # I know that Marcel had a pizza, but I just discovered that it was a pizza that he had.

4. Quantifiers

Test 6: Numerals become exact

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- Numerals are normally interpreted as a lower boundary 'at least this amount', but in exhaustive focus refers to precisely that quantity. If a strategy shows only the exact reading and does not allow a 'minimum' reading, the strategy is used for exhaustive focus (É.Kiss 2010).

Hungarian (É.Kiss 2010)

- (9) a. János meg keres egy milliót havonta
John PRT earns one million-ACC monthly
'John earns a/one million a month.'
→ (one million or more)
- b. Egy milliót meg keres János havonta
'A/one million, John earns (it) a month.'
→ (one million or more)
- c. János EGY MILLIÓT keres meg havonta
'It is one million that John earns a month.'
→ (exactly one million)

Test 7: Weak quantifiers

- Type of focus: exclusive
- Weak quantifiers like 'some' and 'few' are upward entailing, but in exclusive/exhaustive focus the relevant alternatives (e.g. the necessary amount of Lari in the example) are excluded. This affects the possibilities of felicitous continuation (Skopeteas and Fanselow 2010). If a strategy shows the exact reading of the weak quantifier, it is used for exhaustive focus.

Georgian (Skopeteas and Fanselow 2010:1387)

- (10) čven ramdenime lar-i še-v-a-grov-e-t...
IPL.ERG some/a.few(NOM) lari.NOM PR-S.1-gain-AOR-PL
'we gained some/a few of Lari...'
(..., so we can buy the present.)
(..., so we cannot buy the present.)
- (11) čven RAMDENIME lar-i še-v-a-grov-e-t...
IPL.ERG some/a.few(NOM) lari.NOM PR-S.1-gain-AOR-PL
'we gained some/a few of Lari...'
(..., so we can buy the present.)
(..., so we cannot buy the present.)

- Trouble: is this exclusive interpretation semantic or an implicational pragmatic?

Test 8: Non-specific NPs

- Type of focus: exclusive
- Non-specific NPs include any and all referents and hence do not exclude any alternatives. If a strategy is incompatible with a non-specific NP, or triggers a specific reading, it is used for exclusive focus.

Makhuwa

- (12) a. DJ ko-m-wéha ñtthu
 1SG.SM.PERF.DJ-1OM-look 1.person
 ‘I saw someone’ (specific/unspecific)
- b. CJ * ki-m-weh-alé ntthú
 1SG.SM-1OM-look-PERF.CJ 1.person
 int: ‘I saw someone’
- c. CJ ki-m-weh-alé ntthú, nki-weh-álé enáma
 1SG.SM-1OM-look-PERF.CJ 1.person NEG. 1SG-look-PERF 9.animal
 ‘I saw a person/human being, not an animal’

Test 9: Not all

- Type of focus: exclusive
- Adding ‘primarily’, ‘least of all’, or ‘for the most part’ to a focused element entails that there are viable alternatives and hence that the strategy is not exclusive.

(13) Hungarian (Wedgwood, Pethö and Cann 2006)

A Zöld Párt 1980-as megalakulása a legkevésbé [ökológiai problémákhoz]
 the Green Party 1980-in formation-POSS3SG the least ecological problems-to
 volt köthető — annak ellenére, hogy az atomerőművek s a
 was connectable that.DAT notwithstanding that the atomic.power.plants and the
 nukleáris átmeneti tárolók [...] ellen alakult polgári kezdeményezésekből [...]
 nuclear transitory stores against formed civil initiatives-from
 szerveződött párttá.
 was.organised party-into
 ‘The formation of the Green Party in 1980 had least to do [with ecological problems],
 notwithstanding that it became a party out of civil initiatives against nuclear power
 plants and nuclear intermediate storage sites.’

Test 10: Unique referent

- Type of focus: exclusive
- The impossibility of having a unique referent in a focus strategy shows that it is exclusive, as no alternatives exist and can hence nothing is excluded.

Hungarian (Kenesei 1986, 2006, in López 2009:65)

- (14) a. A nap sütött ki a felhők mögöl
 the sun shone out the clouds from.behind
 ‘The sun shone from behind the clouds.’
- b. * A nap ki-sütött a felhők mogul
 ‘The sun shone through the clouds.’

- Trouble: this can be felicitous; native speakers get a contrast e.g. with the moon.

Test 11: Universal quantifiers

- Type of focus: exclusive
- Universal quantifiers like ‘every’ and ‘all’ include any and all referents and hence do not exclude any alternatives. If a strategy is incompatible with a universal quantifier, it is used for exclusive focus.

Hausa (Green and Jaggar 2003:200)

- (15) a. Kōwā yanà sâ hùlā
 everybody 3M.IMPF put hat
 ‘Everybody wears a hat.’
- b. *Kōwā (nè) yakè sâ hùlā
 everybody FM.M 3M.FOC.IMPF pu hat
 ‘It’s everybody who wears a hat.’

Japanese (Hara 2006b:32, via Vermeulen 2012:108)

- (16) a. Nanninka-wa kita
 some.people-wa came
 ‘Some people came.’ (i.e. ‘not everyone came’)
- b. *Minna-wa kita
 everyone-wa came

- Trouble:
 Can be ‘repaired’ by specifying the set of alternatives for the universally quantified DP, e.g. by adding a relative clause (specifying within the referents of the universally quantified DP), or mentioning an alternative set in the context (specifying the whole set as an alternative to other whole sets): ‘It’s every cake *(baked by Mary) that I like’.

Hungarian (Wedgwood 2012)

- (17) a. *minden regényt olvasott el
 every novel.ACC read VM
 ‘He read every novel.’
- b. minden regényt olvasott el (nem minden cikket)
 every novel.ACC read VM not every article.ACC
 ‘He read every novel (not every article).’

5. Co-text

The largest inventory of focus tests is found in placing a strategy before, after or between other text. This I refer to as ‘co-text’, since it involves the linguistic preceding and following text, and not the broader *context*.

Test 12: That is the problem

- Type of focus: (scope)
- Adding ‘that is the problem’, or ‘surprisingly’ demonstrates in its inferences which constituent is the focus of the preceding clause.

(Kasimir 2005:7)

- (18) a. SHE stole the bicycle. That is the problem.
 → if someone else had stolen the bicycle, that wouldn't necessarily a problem = focus on the subject 'she'
- b. She stole the BIcycle. That is the problem.
 → If she had stolen something else, that wouldn't necessarily be a problem = focus on the object 'bicycle'
 → If she had done something else, that wouldn't necessarily be a problem = focus on the verb phrase 'stole the bicycle'

Test 13: 'which context best?'

- Type of focus: depends
- Simply asking the informant's intuitions about when a given sentence could felicitously or most naturally be used often gives a good indication of the information structure of the sentence.

Test 14: '... (and) not Y'

- Type of focus: contrastive¹ & scope
- Negating one or more of the alternatives in a preceding or following clause (not Y, rather than Y, instead of Y, ...) indicates the exclusive use of the strategy in the clause (Chafe 1976).

Gâbunke Fula (Labatut 1986 via Robert 2010:237)

- (19) cukalel ngel ayn-u puccu ngu,
 child the tend-PERF1.VB.FOC horse the
- ngel lootaani ngu
 he wash.PERF.NEG the
 'The child TENDED the horse, he did not wash it.'

(Drubig 1994)

- (20) They only investigated [DP1 the question whether you know [DP2 the woman who chaired [DP3 the ZONINGc board.]]]
- a. *not the SCHOOL board.
 b. *not the woman who chaired the SCHOOL board.
 c. ✓not the question of whether you know the woman who chaired the SCHOOL board.

(É.Kiss 1998:262)

- (21) a. It's not sick that she was, but tired.
 b. * It's sick that she was.

"This technique allows the adjective *sick* to be accommodated into the referential focal position, creating a much more acceptable it-cleft than [the second sentence]" (Patten 2010:232)

Test 15: Juxtaposition

- Type of focus: contrastive

¹ Notice that this is a syntagmatic use of 'contrast', indicating a contrasting in the explicit environment of a sentence, and not a paradigmatic contrast with the triggered alternatives for the focused constituent.

- Contrasting different referents in juxtaposed clauses (Chafe 1976).

(22) Birgit wrote an article and Michelle wrote a novel.

(23) Other people may plant other things, but I plant potatoes.

- Trouble:
The contrast holds for both contrasted topics (Birgit vs Michelle) and contrastive foci (article vs novel).

Test 16: Answer to a loaded yes/no question

- Type of focus: corrective/replacive, truth
- Asking a yes/no question with a referent for which the predicate is false will trigger a correcting answer in which that referent is replaced by a focused phrase referring to the referent for which the predicate is true. If a strategy is used in the corrective answer, it is used to express exclusive focus, as the alternative given in the question is excluded.

(from QUIS)

(24) A: 'Does Elena have soup?'

B: '(No,) Elena has cheese.'

(25) A: Did Elena eat the soup?

B: '(No,) Elena didn't eat the soup.'

- Trouble:
The non-pragmatic nature of the exclusive reading is only clear with the negation.

Test 17: Reply to an incorrect statement

- Type of focus: corrective/replacive, contrastive, counter-assertive, polar/truth
- When the interlocutor disagrees with something the speaker says, he/she will correct it. If a strategy is used in the corrective answer, it is used to express exclusive focus, as the alternative given in the first speaker's statement is excluded.

(from QUIS)

(26) A: 'The woman ate the beans.'

B: '(No,) (she didn't eat the beans,) she ate the rice.'

(27) A: 'The woman didn't eat the beans.'

B: 'She did eat the beans.'

Korean (Kim 2012): *-ka* expresses identification, *-nun* does not.

(28) A: John went to the party.

B: No, Mary-ka/#-nun did.

- Trouble:
The non-pragmatic nature of the exclusive reading is only clear with the negation.

Test 18: Reply to an incomplete statement

- Type of focus: corrective/replacive, expanding

- Replying by ‘no, also Y’ corrects the reading of the previous sentence to a non-exhaustive one, thereby showing that that sentence did have an exhaustive reading, in turn showing that the strategy used in that sentence is used for exhaustive focus (É.Kiss 1998 referring to Donka Farkas).

Hungarian (É.Kiss 1998)

(29) A: Mari egy kalapot nezett ki maganak.
Mary a hat.ACC picked out herself.DAT
'It was a hat that Mary picked for herself.'

B: Nem, egy kabatot is ki nezett.
no a coat too out picked
'No, she picked a coat, too.'

- Trouble: is this exhaustive interpretation semantic or implicational pragmatic?

Test 19: Reply to an overcomplete statement

- Type of focus: corrective/replacive, restricting
- Negating a conjoined constituent and adding a corrective clause containing only one of the conjuncts corrects the first sentence only on the exhaustive aspect. The strategy used in the corrective clause can only be one that can be used for exhaustive focus.

Hausa (Green and Jaggard 2003:201, but see Hartmann and Zimmermann 2007)

(30) Bā Audù dà Mūsā ba nè Kànde takè sô...
NEG Audu and Musa NEG (FM.PL) Kande 3F.FOC.IMPF love
'it's not Audu and Musa that Kande loves...'

... Audù nē takè sô
Audu (FM.M) 3F.FOC.IMPF love
'...it's Audu she loves.'

(31) # Kànde bā tà sôn Audù dà Mūsā...
Kande NEG 3F.IMPF love Audu and Musa
'Kande doesn't love Audu and Musa...'

...tanà sôn Audù
3F.IMPF love Audu
'...she loves Audu.'

- Trouble:
 - o This effect can be due to constructing the sentence as a singular event (Onea 2007, see also Gryllia 2009 below).
 - o It can be metalinguistic negation.

Test 20: Entailments

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- “Szabolcsi’s test involves a pair of sentences in which the first sentence contains a focus consisting of two coordinate DPs and the second sentence differs from the first one only in that one of the two coordinate DPs has been dropped. If the second

sentence is not among the logical consequences of the first one, the focus expresses exhaustive identification.” (E. Kiss 1998:250)

Greek (Gryllia 2009:15,16)

(32) a. Sto Yani ke sti Maria agorasa padeloni
to.the.ACC John.ACC and to.the.ACC Maria.ACC buy.1SG trousers.ACC
‘I bought a pair of trousers [for John]_{foc} and [for Mary]_{foc}.’

-/→

b. Sto Yani agorasa padeloni
to.the.ACC John.ACC buy.1SG trousers.ACC
‘I bought a pair of trousers [for John]_{foc}.’

(33) a. Agorasa padeloni sto Yani ke sti Maria
buy.1SG trousers.ACC to.the.ACC John.ACC and to.the.ACC Maria.ACC
‘I bought a pair of trousers [for John]_{foc} and [for Mary]_{foc}.’

→

b. Agorasa padeloni sto Yani
buy.1SG trousers.ACC to.the.ACC John.ACC
‘I bought a pair of trousers [for John]_{foc}.’

- Trouble:

The entailment does not go through only if the preverbal element is interpreted collectively. On a distributive reading, which can be controlled for by using ‘each’, the entailment does go through: ‘I bought John and Mary a pair of trousers each’ entails ‘I bought John a pair of trousers’ (Gryllia 2009).

Test 21: Be explicit

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- The compatibility with explicitly exhaustive (‘and nothing else’) or explicitly non-exhaustive (‘among other things’) clauses makes the reading quite clear.

Italian (Torregrossa 2012:164, 165)

(34) a. Ha invitato Marco.
‘He invited Marco.’

b. MARCO ha invitato.
‘It was MARCO that he invited.’

c. . . . e forse ha invitato anche Davide. . . .
‘and, perhaps, he also invited Davide.’

Mandarin Chinese (Pan 2012)

(35) a. Shi nǎ-bu dianying, kan-guo de ren bu-shao?
be which-Cl movie see-exp de person not-few?
‘Which movie is it that the people who saw (it) are many?’

b. # Shi Hali Bote, kan-guo de ren bushao; shi Zhihuan Wang, kan-guo de ren ye bushao
‘It is Harry Potter that the people who (it) are many; it is also The Lord of the Rings that the people who saw (it) are many.’

Test 22: Conjunctions

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- The ‘and also’ test in fact depends on the conjunction used. The choice of the conjunction ‘and’ or ‘but’ in the second clause can tell you about its compatibility with the first sentence: ‘but’ will be used if ‘and’ creates a contradiction, for example in (non-)exclusive interpretation of the second clause.

See illustration in section 6.

Test 23: Non-focusable constituents

- Type of focus: new information or contrast
- Focus naturally only associates with contentful elements that can be conceived as the new or contrasted information. Cognate objects and parts of idioms should hence not be focussable. If you can use a strategy with these objects, it shows that the strategy is not a dedicated marker of new information or contrast on the affected phrase.

German (Fanselow and Lenertová 2011:176)

(36) [Den GARaus]_i hat er ihr _{t_i} gemacht.
 the.ACC garaus has he her.DAT made
 ‘He killed her.’

- (37) a. They painted the town red.
 ‘They went out and had a really exciting time.’
- b. It was red that they painted the town.
 (only literal meaning)

Test 24: Unexpectedness

- Type of focus: mirative
- “Attracting the hearer’s attention to that portion of the utterance that may not be in line with the hearer’s expectations” (Skopeteas and Fanselow 2011:1698)
- “Contrast is established with an element that is part of the shared knowledge of the participants and can be semantically characterized as a “proposal to negotiate a shared evaluation” (Bianchi 2012)” (Frascarelli & Jiménez-Fernandez 2013, cf. Brunetti 2009, Bearth 1992, Martins 2012, Zimmermann 2008).

Italian (Cruschina 2011:120)

- (25) a. Ma guarda te! **In bagno** has messo le chiavi!
 but look.IMP.2SG you in bathroom have put the keys
 ‘Look at that! He put the keys in the bathroom!’
- b. Non-ci posso credere!
 not-to.it can.PRES.1SG believe
- Due bottiglie** ci siamo bevuti!
 two bottles REFLCL be.PRES.1PL drink.PP
 ‘I can’t believe it! We drank two bottles!’

- Trouble: Is the mirative reading encoded in the strategy or due to context?

6. Stimuli

Test 25: Describe a picture

- Type of focus: scope, all-new
- All the information (event, referents) in the picture are new, therefore an all-focus sentence is expected in the description.

- (38) (picture of cat in water)
 ‘There is a cat in the water.’
 ‘The/this cat is swimming.’

- Trouble: (as mentioned above) accommodation.

Test 26: Lie test (entailments)

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- Participant is presented with a situation with more than one referent and a sentence that only mentions one referent. The participant is asked whether the sentence is true or false. If the sentence is false, it is interpreted as exhaustive and the strategy in the sentence is used for exhaustive focus.

- (39) (picture of man who caught three types of fish)
 # ‘It is cod that the man caught.’

- Trouble: is this exhaustive interpretation semantic or an implicational pragmatic?

Test 27: Matching

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- A descriptive sentence is presented and several alternative scenarios, from which the participant is asked to choose the matching scenario(s), and possibly to explain his/her choice.

- (40) ‘It is cod that the man caught.’
 → picture of man who caught three types of fish and picture of man with one type of fish

Test 28: ‘no’ / ‘yes and’ / ‘yes but’

- Type of focus: exhaustive
- (Onea and Beaver 2011) Participants are presented with a situation and a sentence, and are asked whether the sentence is true or false. The picture, for example, shows two kids who both caught a butterfly, and the sentence is a description ‘Marci caught a butterfly’ with either a “neutral” or focus strategy. The participants could answer the true/false question with ‘no, Peter also caught a butterfly’, ‘yes, and...’ and ‘yes, but...’. If the focus strategy encodes exhaustive focus, participants are expected to choose the negative answer, indicating inherent incompatibility between the stimulus and the sentence. If the ‘yes, and...’ answer is chosen, the strategy is not exhaustive, and the ‘yes, but...’ answer indicates that the sentence is not truth-conditionally incompatible with the stimulus, but that there are still (implicational) effects of exhaustivity.

The results of these tests for Hungarian as opposed to German show that the

Hungarian preverbal position is much more strongly associated with an exhaustive interpretation than German focus intonation, but that this effect is pragmatic, rather than semantic.

The stimuli can be used together with a question as input for the answer, as is the basis for the Questionnaire on Information Structure (Skopeteas et al. 2006). See Skopeteas and Verhoeven (2009) for a meticulous application of these tests to Yucatec Maya.

Test 1': WH questions

- Type of focus: new information, completive
- A wh-question can interrogate a constituent (who/what?) to obtain a completive or new information focus when the participant has been given a picture as input.

Test 2': Alternative questions

- Type of focus: selective
- An alternative question (X or Y?) can trigger a selective focus when the participant has been given a picture showing one of the alternatives as input.

Test 12': Answer to a yes/no question

- Type of focus: corrective/replacive
- A yes/no question with the 'wrong' constituent can trigger a replacive/corrective focus when the participant has been given a picture showing an alternative as input.

Important points

- Not all tests are equally applicable, depending on 1. the language, 2. the circumstances: informants (fieldwork situation), test materials, computer-run programmes
- One diagnostic test may not be enough.
- Showing that a certain strategy is used in a sentence with a certain interpretation (e.g., exhaustive), or is compatible with / felicitous in a certain interpretively limited context, does not necessarily mean that the strategy is a dedicated marker for this interpretation. It may be that the strategy indeed encodes focus, but is underspecified as to the precise interpretation ("type of focus") it encodes, or it may be that the interpretation is a side-effect of some other mechanism.

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