

## Polarity and particles – Marking double contrast across Germanic languages

Polarity contrast (sometimes also referred to as *verum* (focus)) is a phenomenon where an affirmative utterance contrasts with its negative alternative. The language-specific mechanisms to mark polarity contrast are well established: while Dutch prefers the use of the polarity particle *wel* (cf. e.g. Sudhoff 2012, Turco et al. 2014), such a particle does not exist in English, where polarity contrast is marked by emphasis on the finite verb instead, cf. (1a). German and Swedish allow for both mechanisms with either emphasized auxiliary or particles *schon/wohl* or *visst*, respectively, see (1b) and (1d) (cf. e.g. Höhle 2018, Myrberg 2010).

- (1) (Context: “Tom didn’t read the book.”)
- a. (Yes,) He DID read the book. (*English*)
  - b. (Doch,) Er HAT das Buch gelesen. / Er hat das Buch SCHON/WOHL gelesen. (*German*)
  - c. (Ja,) Hij heeft het boek WEL gelezen. (*Dutch*)
  - d. (Jo,) Han HAR läst boken. / Han läste VISST boken. (*Swedish*)

The discussion usually focusses on contexts as in (1) where the correction (or rather: rejection) of the polarity is the only contrast to the preceding context (hence the high degree of attention towards the discourse pragmatic effect referred to as *verum*; e.g. Lohnstein 2016, but see Sudhoff 2012 for an exception for Dutch). Yet, there seems to be an interesting language-specific variation regarding the mechanisms to mark polarity contrast in combination with another contrast. The double contrast in (2) provides two sets of alternatives: polarity (negative/positive) and subject (Tom/speaker). In such delimitation cases (cf. Krifka 2008), German uses a hat contour to separate the two domains of contrast. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the auxiliary in (2a) becomes heavily marked, whereas the use of the particles *schon* or *wohl* in (2b) is perfectly fine. In Swedish, it is the other way around: *verum* focus in (2c) is fine, but the particle *visst* in (2d) becomes unacceptable. The use of another particle *väl*, on the other hand, is acceptable in this context.

- (2) (Context: “Tom didn’t read the book.”)
- a. (Aber) ? / ICH \HABE es gelesen. (*German, verum focus*)
  - b. (Aber) / ICH (habe es) \SCHON/WOHL (gelesen). (*German, particle*)
  - c. (Men) Jag HAR läst boken. (*Swedish, verum focus*)
  - d. (Men) # Han läste VISST boken. (*Swedish, particle I*)
  - e. (Men) Han läste VÄL boken. (*Swedish, particle II*)

In our talk, we will discuss parallel corpus data from OpenSubtitles 2011 for German, English, Dutch, and Swedish (with German as the language of inquiry) in order to examine the preferred mechanisms to mark double contrast in these Germanic languages. As (3) demonstrates, the data show interesting and partly surprising patterns such as a striking high co-occurrence with ellipsis in all languages, or a syntactic inversion in Swedish.

- (3)
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| DE | A: Wenn Sie jetzt denken, ich habe meine Frage vergessen, irren Sie sich.<br>B: Ich aber schon . |
| EN | A: Now, if you think I've forgotten my question, I haven't.<br>B: I have.                        |
| NL | A: Denk niet dat ik mijn vraag ben vergeten.<br>B: Ik wel.                                       |

SE        A: Tro inte att jag har glömt min fråga, för det har jag inte.  
          B: Det har jag.

*OpenSubtitles 2011 – Anatomy of a Murder – #9868136 – doc#1224*

The observed mechanisms cover a broad inventory of linguistic means from prosodic over lexical to syntactic which supports the theoretical location of polarity contrast (and potentially verum) as an information structural property of language.

## References

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