
Exclamative Accent, Focus and Common Ground

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Abstract

One of the main features of nearly all exclamative sentences is the presence of the so-called exclamative accent. Experiments show that it is easy to tell apart from contrast accents or *bona fide* cases of focussing accents. Its particular properties are greater maxima with respect to the basic frequency, greater length and possibly a higher intensity, cf. Batliner (1988), Oppenrieder (1989).

In this talk, I will first discuss the question if the exclamative accent has focus properties, which is often denied in the literature. Altmann (1993) explores the interrelation between various sentence types and focus-background-structure. With respect to the question if the exclamative accent has focus-properties, if it has any focus effects in terms of reference to a set of alternatives, his answer is basically negative. Nevertheless, I want to have another look at *dass*-exclamatives in German. For *dass*-exclamatives, demonstrative pronouns are typical, which often bear the main accent, realised as an exclamative accent. If focus has to do with setting up a relation to alternatives or indicates the presence of alternatives, relevant for the interpretation of an utterance (cf. Rooth 1985, 1992; Jacobs 1988; Krifka 2007 and many others), than the following example shows that different positions of the exclamative accent result in different sets of alternatives, see (1).

(1) A: Der Karl hat dem Friedrich verraten, dass Heinz gelogen hat.

Karl revealed to Friedrich that Heinz lied'

B1:(i) Dass DER dem das verraten hat!

B2 (ii) Dass der DEM das verraten hat!

B3 (iii) Dass der dem DAS verraten hat!

'It is amazing that he revealed it to him!'

I will show that an expression with an exclamative accent can have focus properties in the sense of Krifka (2007:19), cf. (2).

(2) A property F of an expression α is a Focus property iff F signals

(a) that alternatives of (parts of) the expression α or

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(b) alternatives of the denotation of (parts of) α are relevant for the interpretation of α .

As a second point, I will discuss how the set of alternatives could be relevant for the interpretation of exclamatives and in what way the utterance of an exclamative can influence the context. Even if the proposition of a *dass*-exclamative can be considered as part of the common ground (via presupposition accommodation), there is another way in which utterances of exclamatives show context change potential. That the speaker expected something else to be true is also an information that is added to the Common Ground. Deploying the concept of normalcy expectations (d'Avis 2013, t.a.), I will argue that this information is added to the Common Ground neither by implicature, nor by presupposition nor by assertion but as part of the felicity condition of exclamations.

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