

Verum focus in Frisian

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In this study, I discuss data from *verum focus* constructions in (West-)Frisian, a minority language spoken in the north of the Netherlands. The analysis of the data provides more evidence for a POL-head between C and T. I argue that the stress from the POL-head targets a sufficiently large phonological element that linearly precedes the POL-head, not a syntactic element. Furthermore, I claim that the merge of elements in *specCP* and *specTP* is not syntactic head movement, but postsyntactic amalgamation.

Verum focus is a special kind of accent used to emphasize the truth of the propositional content of a sentence (Höhle 1992). In German it is mostly expressed on C, but in relative clauses, it can also appear on the element in *specCP*. Different from German, Frisian has an overt COMP in relative clauses. (1) shows that *verum focus* in Frisian can be expressed on the C-head or on the element in *specCP*, depending on the context. If the reduced form of the COMP *'t* is used, the relative pronoun *wa* ‘who’ is stressed. If the full form of the COMP *dat* is used, the COMP is stressed, and it is ungrammatical to stress the relative pronoun.

- (1) Hanna dûnset net faak, mar dy pear minsken, WA'T/ *WA dat /wa DAT se
Hanna dances not often but those few people who-C/ who that/ who that she
mei dûnse hat, binne hielendal fan'e mik.
with danced has are completely from the goal
‘Hanna doesn’t dance often, but the few people with whom she HAS danced, are completely blown away.’

In (2), the *specCP* contains a PP of a single wh-word. Also in this context, the stressed element is the wh-word if the COMP appears in its reduced form (*'t*), and the COMP is stressed if it appears in its full form (*dat*). It is ungrammatical to stress the preposition (*mei*), or to stress the wh-element if the COMP appears in its full form.

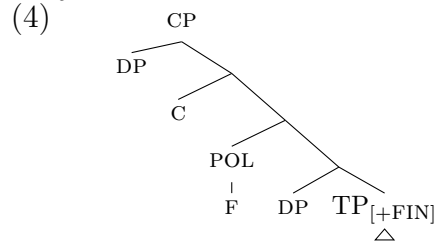
- (2) Hanna dûnset net faak, mar dy pear minsken, *MEI/ mei WA'T/ *WA dat/
Hanna dances not often but those few people with/ with who-C/ who that/
wa DAT se dûnse hat, binne hielendal fan'e mik.
who that she with danced has are completely from the goal
‘Hanna doesn’t dance often, but the few people with whom she HAS danced, are completely blown away.’

In second person singular, Frisian has COMP AGR. The corresponding pronoun *do* is obligatorily reduced to *-o*, and it cliticizes to the COMP AGR when the latter precedes the former. (3) shows that the stress pattern in *verum focus* contexts remains the same: *wa't* ‘who-C’ is stressed if the COMP is reduced, and *dat* ‘that’ is stressed if it is not. It is ungrammatical to stress *-sto*, the morpheme that contains COMP AGR and the reduced subject.

- (3) Do dûnsest net faak, mar dy pear minsken, WA'T-st-o/ *wa't-ST-O/
You dance not often but those few people who-C-2SG-you/ who-C-2SG-you/
*WA dat-st-o/ wa DAT-st-o/ *wa dat-ST-O mei dûnse hast, binne
who that-2SG-you/ wo that-2SG-you/ who that-2SG-you with danced have are
hielendal fan'e mik.
completely from the goal

‘You don’t dance often, but the few people with whom you HAVE danced, are completely blown away.’

In my analysis, I assume the structure in (4). The *wh*-element is located in *specCP*. The COMP (and COMP AGR) is in the C-head. I assume (following cf. McCloskey 2012) that in finite clauses there is a POL head, that hosts amongst others NEG or *verum focus*. The subject of the embedded clause is in *specTP*.



I propose the following ordering of operations. First, syntax builds the structure. The *specCP* bears features for the *wh*-element, the C-head bears features for the COMP (and COMP AGR), the POL-head bears *verum focus* features, and the *specTP* contains features for the subject.

Next, syntactic structure is translated into phonology: prosodic structure that contains phonological exponents. Nodes that contain phonological exponents are *specCP*, the C-head and *specTP*. Nodes without phonological exponent, and nodes with phonological exponents that are not large enough to receive their own phonological phrase are ‘flattened’ (Bennett et al. 2016). *Verum focus* from the POL-head cannot be realized on the POL-head because this element does not have a phonological realization, and it targets the element that linearly precedes it. The POL-head is preceded by the C-head. The C-head is stressed if the full form of the COMP (*dat*) is used (see (1) and (2)), but it cannot be realized on the C-head when it only contains the reduced COMP (*’t*). *SpecCP* precedes the C-head, and the relative pronoun *wa* in *specCP* is stressed in the context of a reduced COMP.

I argue that *verum focus* operates on linearly ordered phonological forms, and not on syntactic structure without phonological realizations. This is supported by two observations. First, *verum focus* only targets phonologically large enough elements, and phonological weight is a deciding factor. Second, (2) indicates that it is not the structurally closest element that is targeted: not the structurally closer P is stressed, but the linearly closer DP.

After the focus feature from the POL-head moves to the element that linearly precedes it, the reduced pronoun *-o* ‘you’ is cliticized to the COMP AGR in (3), and forms a phonological unit. This cannot be regular syntactic head movement, but it is rather an instance of post-syntactic amalgamation (Harizanov & Gribanova 2018). The proposed ordering is crucial, since *-sto* is phonologically large enough to receive stress (see (5) in which *-sto* is stressed in contrastive focus), but it is never stressed in *verum focus* contexts (see (3)).

- (5) Ik wol net dat hy my ophellest, mar dat-ST-O dat dochst.
 I want not that he me picks up but that-2SG-you that do
 ‘I don’t want that he picks me up, but that you do it.’

References Bennett, Ryan, Emily Elfner & James McCloskey. 2016. Lightest to the right: An apparently anomalous displacement in Irish. *Linguistic Inquiry* 47(2). 169–234. Harizanov, Boris & Vera Gribanova. 2018. Whither head movement? *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*. Höhle, Tilman N. (1992). Über Verum-Fokus im Deutschen. In: *Informationsstruktur und Grammatik*. Ed. Joachim Jacobs. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 112–141. McCloskey, James. 2012. *Polarity, ellipsis and the limits of identity in Irish*. Workshop on Ellipsis, Nanzan University, Japan.