

Focus particles and negative scope in subordinate clauses

In this paper we report some of the work we have been doing on the characteristics and syntactic analysis of subordinate clauses. In particular we are interested in the extent to which focus particles can act as a diagnostic tool for the distinction between fully integrated and less integrated or non-integrated clauses.

There are a number of tests which have been advanced as reliable indicators for the syntactic integration of a subordinate clause in its matrix clause: negative scope, intonational contouring, focus/background structure, transparency for binding, location in the prefield, and extraction (e.g. Haegeman 2012, Reis 1997). Some authors have questioned whether all of these are fully effective; for example Pauly (2013) suggests that negative scope is perhaps the only fully reliable syntactic criterion.

It has occasionally been noted that focus particles can interact with integration. For example Haegeman (2012; 168) notes that the relatively unintegrated adverbial clauses that she terms Peripheral Adverbial Clauses (PACs) cannot be preceded by *only*. Eberhardt (2014) has suggested that focus particles can provide a test for syntactic integration. In example (1) which is a Central Adverbial Clause (CAC), it seems acceptable to precede the clause with a focus particle; while this seems unacceptable in (2), a PAC .

- (1) Peter always makes strange noises (especially) when he is laughing.
- (2) There is a pub around the corner (*especially) if you are hungry.

However, some examples seem to show that the situation is more complex. In example (3) we see a case with negation scope into the clause, the same example with a focus particle - (4) appears surprisingly unacceptable.

- (3) Er kommt heute nicht, weil du ihn darum gebeten hast, sondern weil ...
- (4) Er kommt heute nicht, besonders weil du ihn darum gebeten hast, (*sondern...)

We therefore carried out two parallel experiments on German and English to seek empirical confirmation of the claims in the literature and further investigate the interaction of negative scope and focus particles. We tested clauses introduced *because* in English, *weil* in German, which would normally be expected to be integrated into their matrix clauses and thus allow both negative scope to access them and a preposed focus particle. There were four sentence conditions as follows:

- Negative scope: scope into sub-clause, no scope into sub-clause
- Focus particle on sub-clause: yes, no

The hypothesis was that all of the sentences we tested should be judged acceptable because the two tests of integration (negative scope, focus particle) are compatible with the CAC clauses in the study. Two conditions with negative scope within the matrix clause were included as controls. Four different focus particles were tested in each language in order to permit a degree of generalization; for German: *nur*, *auch*, *hauptsächlich*, *vor allem*; for English: *just*, *mainly*, *purely*, *specially*. The materials in German were as follows, the English was parallel:

Ia No scope into sub-clause, no focus particle

Peter bleibt in seiner Wohnung. Er hat sie **nicht gekündigt**, weil die Miete günstig ist, sondern er hat es nur angedroht.

Ib No scope into sub-clause, focus particle

Peter bleibt in seiner Wohnung. Er hat sie **nicht gekündigt**, **vor allem** weil die Miete günstig ist, sondern er hat es nur angedroht.

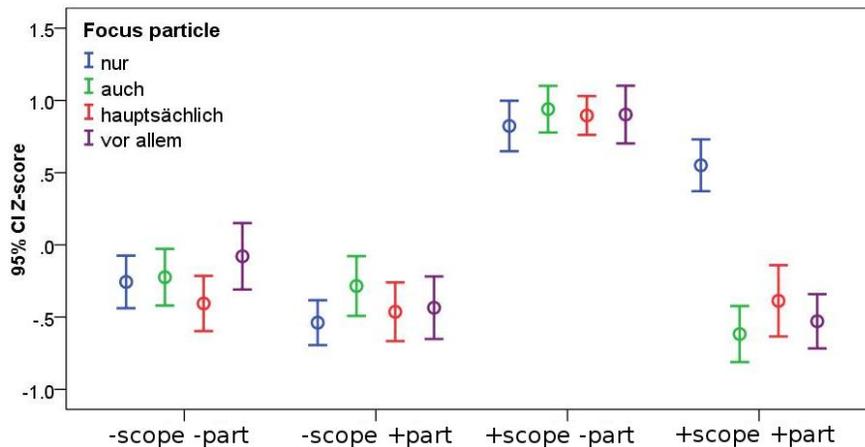
2a Scope into sub-clause, no focus particle

Peter zieht aus seiner Wohnung aus. Er hat sie **nicht** gekündigt, **weil die Miete gestiegen ist**, sondern weil seine Mitbewohner rauchen.

2b Scope into sub-clause, focus particle

Peter zieht aus seiner Wohnung aus. Er hat sie **nicht** gekündigt, **vor allem weil die Miete gestiegen ist**, sondern weil seine Mitbewohner rauchen.

The results in German are illustrated here (the English results were parallel):



First of all descriptively: while the presence of a focus particle (+part) makes no difference in those cases where the negative scope remains in the matrix clause (-scope). But the presence of a particle (+part) radically reduces perceived acceptability when the negative scopes into the embedded clause (+scope). While both of the two factors taken separately are quite acceptable, the interaction of the two together produces an unacceptable result.

The expectation that both negative scope and focus particles are consistent test of the integration status of a subordinate clause must therefore be relativized, since the addition of a focus particle to an example with cross-clausal negative scope is (generally) much worse. This factor should be taken into consideration when assessing evidence from negative scope on integration status. While both these tests seem robust in most cases, care must be taken to avoid interactions with other factors.

There is a sub-exception to this finding however, namely that this effect does not apply to the exclusive focus particle *nur* in German, nor to *just* or *purely* in English. We relate this finding to the broader observations about focus particle types.

We conclude the talk with a discussion of the relevance of focus particles for clausal integration.

References:

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