

## Editorial

### Focus Particles in the Romance and Germanic Languages Corpus-based and Experimental Approaches

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This special issue of *Linguistik online* is devoted to a specific class of function words, to which the English literature refers as *focus particles/focus adverbs* (following e.g. König 1991). Focus particles have been defined as an autonomous category only in the last 40 years (cf. the pioneer works by Altmann 1976, 1978 and Jacobs 1983 on German *Gradpartikeln*, followed mainly by Nølke 1983 on French *adverbes paradigmatissants*, Moser 1992 on English and König 1991 on English and German *focus particles/adverbs*; for Italian, see the studies of Ricca 1999 as well as Andorno 2000 on *avverbi focalizzanti/focalizzatori*). Typically, three types of focus particles are distinguished: additive, restrictive and scalar. The prototypical members of the additive, restrictive and scalar focus particles class are E. *also/only/even*, G. *auch/nur/sogar*, I. *anche/solo/persino*, Fr. *aussi/seulement/même* etc.

The interest for focus particles lies in the fact that they are very basic from a variety of point of views, but rather complex in other respects. From a morphological point of view, they tend to be simple forms (the prototypical members of the class are mainly monomorphemic: see Ramat/Ricca 1994), but their syntactic behavior is quite complex, because of the interaction between rules concerning scope marking and the sentence information structure; from a semantic point of view, focus particles express basic semantic features (quantification and/or scales), but they also work on the discourse and pragmatic levels in raising a variety of implicatures and contributing to discourse cohesion; from a psycholinguistic point of view, they are at the core of the lexicon of a number of different languages: these forms are very frequent in all registers and genres (see again Ramat/Ricca 1994) and are acquired very early on in both L1s and L2s (see Niderstigt 2003 on German; Jordens 2012 on Dutch; Gayraud 2004 on French; Andorno 2000, 2005 and Giuliano 2012 on Italian; Benazzo et al. 2004 for a comparative perspective; also see the references in Benazzo/Dimroth, in this issue).

While other function words, such as discourse/logical connectives (expressing consequence, cause etc., such as *consequently*, *because...*), discourse particles (regulating verbal interactions such as *like*, *okay*, *so*, etc.) and modal particles (such as German *halt*, *doch*, *schon*) continue to attract a great deal of attention, the class of focus particles is comparatively under-researched and only a few aspects have been investigated. Most of the research currently available on the subject focuses on the syntactic and semantic properties of one or more prototypical members of the focus particles class. Moreover, most of the research available to date explores focus particles in single languages and on the basis of short, invented examples. Consequently, we need more studies that explore the actual use of focus particles in real discourse and specifically in different types of texts and language varieties.

We also need more analyses that take into account several languages at once, i.e. which adopt a cross-linguistic perspective. Finally, we need more research based on a solid empirical foundation.

Over the past decade, several research centers on focus particles developed across Europe. While the research object is the same, the methods, goals and tools used in these centers to explore the semantic and syntactic properties as well as the functions performed by focus particles in discourse vary significantly. Specifically, in contrast to most of the literature produced so far on focus particles, which tend to consider only single languages (see for instance Dimroth 2004; Sudhoff 2010 and Poźlewicz 2011 on German; La Forgia 2006 on Italian), in the past few years several important studies taking into account more than one language have been produced as well. These contrastive studies show that within one and the same language family focus particles can vary quite significantly from a semantic, syntactic and discourse point of view (Sudhoff 2012) and, conversely, that there are sometimes more similarities between languages belonging to different genetic families (see for instance Ureña Gómez-Moreno 2009 on English and Spanish, as well as De Cesare, in press on English, German, French and Italian).

This special issue of *Linguistik online* comprises seven papers, written by 15 authors from 10 Universities in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. Following on the widely held belief that comparative analyses (i.e. classically contrastive, typological and/or historical-comparative) of similar linguistic forms are a very fruitful method in achieving a better understanding of the organization of a basic notional domain and in describing how the linguistic resources at hand in different languages are used to structure text and discourses (cf., among others, Blumenthal 1985; Foolen 1989; Lauwers 2006; Gast 2006; Gast/van der Auwera 2011; Dimroth et al. 2010; Borreguero Zuloaga 2011; Sudhoff 2012), the papers included in this special issue discuss data from three Romance (Italian, French, Spanish) and three Germanic languages (German, Dutch and English).

Amongst the most innovative aspects of these papers, we can mention the following points: they offer (i) research exploring the actual use of focus particles in real discourse and, specifically, in different texts types and language varieties; in this issue, focus particles are investigated through data coming from written and spoken language sources, in adult and child production, in L1 and L2, in production and perception; (ii) research on focus particles based on different methodologies; (iii) contrastive analyses of focus particles within and among language families.

The data and methods used in the research presented in this volume differ in the following ways: some scholars employ corpus data (from original and/or translated texts: see De Cesare; Gast/Rzymiski; Nicklaus), others favor elicited ones, in the form of film-retelling (Dimroth/Benazzo; Andorno/Turco; Giuliano). The empirical data collected is then analyzed through quantitative and/or qualitative methods developed within Corpus Linguistics, Computational Linguistics and Psycholinguistic experimental research. Most studies are devoted to the investigation of linguistic production data, with analysis intertwining the textual and the syntactic level (De Cesare; Nicklaus; Giuliano; Benazzo/Dimroth), or the syntactic and the prosodic level (Andorno/Turco). Loureda et al., on the other hand, focus on the analysis of cognitive behavior in reading, through the use of eye-tracking techniques.

Part of the discussion is also devoted to assessing the methods to be used in corpora annotation (Gast/Rzyski in relation to E. *even*).

Most of the papers included in this issue offer a comparative analysis of focus particles belonging to two (cf. Andorno/Turco on Italian and German additive focus particles; Giuliano on Italian and English additive and restrictive focus particles) or more than two languages (see Dimroth/Benazzo on prototypical additive particles in French, Italian, German and Dutch; De Cesare on the same particles in Italian, French and English and Nicklaus on the translation of restrictive focus particles from German into Italian and French).

We would like to thank all our colleagues who contributed a paper to this issue. We believe that, collectively, the research presented here greatly improves our understanding of how basic cognitive categories such as addition, restriction and scalarity are linguistically codified, how the linguistic expressions available vary from a cross-linguistic point of view and how they are involved in discourse organization. Moreover, the research presented in this special issue further highlights the syntactic and semantic properties of focus particles by describing their use in real language data.

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