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To Project or Not to Project – Is that a Question?

Recent work revisiting focus projection, relevant
experimental evidence, and open questions

Kordula De Kuthy and Detmar Meurers

The Ohio State University

COGETI Workshop, Heidelberg
November 24, 2006

- ▶ The nature of the integration of a sentence into a discourse can provide an explanation for constraints previously stipulated in syntax (cf., e.g., De Kuthy 2002).

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- ▶ The nature of the integration of a sentence into a discourse can provide an explanation for constraints previously stipulated in syntax (cf., e.g., De Kuthy 2002).
- ▶ To explore this line of research, we need an explicit representation and understanding of the interaction of syntax and information structure.

- ▶ The nature of the integration of a sentence into a discourse can provide an explanation for constraints previously stipulated in syntax (cf., e.g., De Kuthy 2002).
- ▶ To explore this line of research, we need an explicit representation and understanding of the interaction of syntax and information structure.
- ▶ German and English, as the languages we are mostly working on, are intonation languages where the prosody plays an important role in constraining the possible integration of a sentence into the discourse.

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To discuss the interaction of prosody, syntactic structure and pragmatic function of a sentence in a discourse, we rely on the following three notions commonly found in the literature (cf. our tutorial at the COGETI Göttingen workshop):

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To discuss the interaction of prosody, syntactic structure and pragmatic function of a sentence in a discourse, we rely on the following three notions commonly found in the literature (cf. our tutorial at the COGETI Göttingen workshop):

- ▶ Focus: Which part of the meaning of a sentence answers the question under discussion in a discourse?

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- ▶ Focus: Which part of the meaning of a sentence answers the question under discussion in a discourse?
- ▶ Givenness: Which part of the meaning of a sentence contributes given and which new information?

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- ▶ Pitch Accent: An intonational phrase includes a nuclear accent (different types of accents exist); additional ones are referred to as prenuclear.

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- ▶ Givenness: Which part of the meaning of a sentence contributes given and which new information?
- ▶ Pitch Accent: An intonational phrase includes a nuclear accent (different types of accents exist); additional ones are referred to as prenuclear.

There are a lot of different uses of the first two terms, so we first make them explicit here and how one can test them.

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Characterizing Focus

- ▶ Which part of a sentence answers the question under discussion in the discourse can be made explicit by testing which expression is in the scope of *only*.

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Characterizing Focus

- ▶ Which part of a sentence answers the question under discussion in the discourse can be made explicit by testing which expression is in the scope of *only*.
 - (1) *The conference participants are renting all kind of vehicles. Yesterday Bill came to the conference driving a red convertible and today he's arrived with a blue one. Do you know what John rented?*

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 - ▶ focus = new = \llbracket a motorcycle \rrbracket
“only” makes explicit what is focused: Out of all the vehicles he could have rented, he got a motorcycle.

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 - ▶ focus = new = \llbracket a motorcycle \rrbracket
“only” makes explicit what is focused: Out of all the vehicles he could have rented, he got a motorcycle.
 - b. *He only rented a **GREEN** convertible.*

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“only” makes explicit what is focused: Out of all the vehicles he could have rented, he got a motorcycle.
 - b. *He only rented a **GREEN** convertible.*
 - ▶ focus = \llbracket a green convertible \rrbracket
Out of all vehicles he could have rented, he got a green convertible.
 - ▶ new = \llbracket green \rrbracket , given = \llbracket convertible \rrbracket

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On the Relation of Focus and Givenness

- ▶ The entire focus can be new:

(2a) *He only rented* **[[a MOTORCYCLE.]_F**

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On the Relation of Focus and Givenness

- ▶ The entire focus can be new:

(2a) *He only rented* **[[a MOTORCYCLE.]]_F**

- ▶ Part of the focus can be new, another part given:

(2b) *He only rented* **[[a GREEN convertible.]]_F**

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On the Relation of Focus and Givenness

- ▶ The entire focus can be new:

(2a) *He only rented* **[[a MOTORCYCLE.]_F**

- ▶ Part of the focus can be new, another part given:

(2b) *He only rented* **[[a GREEN convertible.]_F**

- ▶ The entire focus can be given:

(3) *A: John's mother saw Bill in the shopping center.*

B: And whom did she see then?

(4) *She saw* **[[JOHN.]_F**

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The issue: Revisiting focus projection

Traditionally it has been assumed that elements that are not intonationally marked can nevertheless be a part of the focus.

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Traditionally it has been assumed that elements that are not intonationally marked can nevertheless be a part of the focus.

- (5) a. Q: *What did Mary buy a book about?*
A: *Mary bought a book about* **[[BATS.]]_F**

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- (5) a. Q: *What did Mary buy a book about?*
A: *Mary bought a book about* **[[BATS.]]_F**
- b. Q: *What did Mary buy?*
A: *Mary bought* **[[a book about BATS.]]_F**

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A: *Mary bought a book about* **[[BATS.]]_F**
- b. Q: *What did Mary buy?*
A: *Mary bought* **[[a book about BATS.]]_F**
- c. Q: *What did Mary do?*
A: *Mary* **[[bought a book about BATS.]]_F**

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A: *Mary bought a book about* **[[BATS.]]_F**
- b. Q: *What did Mary buy?*
A: *Mary bought* **[[a book about BATS.]]_F**
- c. Q: *What did Mary do?*
A: *Mary* **[[bought a book about BATS.]]_F**
- d. Q: *What happened?*
A: **[[Mary bought a book about BATS.]]_F**

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A: *Mary* **[[bought a book about BATS.]]_F**
- d. Q: *What happened?*
A: **[[Mary bought a book about BATS.]]_F**

Büring (2006), Roberts (2006), Kadmon (2006) argue that no such focus projection is needed, which raises the questions:

- ▶ What is the relation between accent placement and focus?
- ▶ What evidence is needed to firmly answer this question?

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Questioning focus projection rules

Several recent proposals in formal pragmatics are questioning whether focus projection rules are needed to relate accent placement and focus:

- ▶ Büring (2006): Focus Projection and Default Prominence [recent article]
- ▶ Roberts (2006): Resolving Focus [Sinn & Bedeutung abstract]
- ▶ Kadmon (2006): Some Theories of the Interpretation of Accent Placement [OSU talk handout]

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Büring: Focus projection and default prominence

- ▶ Starting point: Selkirk (1995)

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Büring: Focus projection and default prominence

- ▶ Starting point: Selkirk (1995)
 - ▶ F-marking:
 - ▶ An accented word is F-marked.
 - ▶ Vertical Focus Projection:
F-marking of head of phrase licenses F-marking of phrase.

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 - ▶ Focus of the sentence (FOC):
 - ▶ F-marked node not dominated by another F-marked node.

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 - ▶ Focus of the sentence (FOC):
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 - ▶ F Interpretation:
 - ▶ constituent F-marked (but not FOC): New
 - ▶ constituent not F-marked: Given

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 - ▶ constituent F-marked (but not FOC): New
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- ▶ Büring (2006): eliminates focus projection rules
 - ▶ No restrictions on *vertical focus projection*, i.e., any accent within a phrase can project focus to the phrase.

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- ▶ Büring (2006): eliminates focus projection rules
 - ▶ No restrictions on *vertical focus projection*, i.e., any accent within a phrase can project focus to the phrase.
 - ▶ *Horizontal focus projection* is the consequence of default prominence assignment, not focus projection.

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 - ▶ Büring (2006): eliminates focus projection rules
 - ▶ No restrictions on *vertical focus projection*, i.e., any accent within a phrase can project focus to the phrase.
 - ▶ *Horizontal focus projection* is the consequence of default prominence assignment, not focus projection.
- ⇒ No syntactic constraints on focus projection are needed.

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Büring: Vertical focus projection

- ▶ Büring (2006, based on Schwarzschild 1999) uses de-accenting examples to argue: focus can always project.

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(6) *I know that John drove Mary's red **CONVERTIBLE**.
But what did Bill drive?*

- (7) a. *He drove **[[his MOTORCYCLE]]_F**.*
b. *He drove **[[her BLUE convertible]]_F**.*

⇒ *focus can project from adjectives/adjuncts*

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⇒ *focus can project from adjectives/adjuncts*

- ▶ Similar de-accenting examples support focus projection from transitive subjects, indirect objects, adverbs, minor categories and headless structures—all of which had been claimed to not support focus projection.

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⇒ *focus can project from adjectives/adjuncts*

- ▶ Similar de-accenting examples support focus projection from transitive subjects, indirect objects, adverbs, minor categories and headless structures—all of which had been claimed to not support focus projection.
- ▶ Vertical focus projection (Büring 2006):
 - ▶ F-marking of any daughter licenses F-marking of mother.

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- ▶ Horizontal Focus Projection (Büiring 2006)
 - ▶ In configuration [A B], one of A, B can be unaccented, even though it is interpreted as F-marked.

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- ▶ Horizontal Focus Projection (Büiring 2006)
 - ▶ In configuration $[A B]$, one of A, B can be unaccented, even though it is interpreted as F-marked.
- ▶ Büiring (2006) wants to derive this effect based on a theory of *default prominence*.

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- ▶ Horizontal Focus Projection (Büring 2006)
 - ▶ In configuration [A B], one of A, B can be unaccented, even though it is interpreted as F-marked.
- ▶ Büring (2006) wants to derive this effect based on a theory of *default prominence*.
- ▶ idea of default prominence: default accent placement, independent of whether focus or background

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- ▶ Horizontal Focus Projection (Büiring 2006)
 - ▶ In configuration [A B], one of A, B can be unaccented, even though it is interpreted as F-marked.
- ▶ Büiring (2006) wants to derive this effect based on a theory of *default prominence*.
- ▶ idea of default prominence: default accent placement, independent of whether focus or background
- ▶ The idea is only sketched, not worked out. A default pattern suggested for English states that predicates don't receive a pitch accent if an argument does.

Roberts (2006): Resolving Focus

- ▶ Roberts (2006) eliminates focus projection entirely and instead proposes to relate accent placement to interpretation using the notion of *retrievability*.

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Roberts (2006): Resolving Focus

- ▶ Roberts (2006) eliminates focus projection entirely and instead proposes to relate accent placement to interpretation using the notion of *retrievability*.
- ▶ Core components:
 - ▶ Accentuation: Freely align pitch accents (in an independently generated prosodic structure) with words (in an independently generated syntactic structure).

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- ▶ Roberts (2006) eliminates focus projection entirely and instead proposes to relate accent placement to interpretation using the notion of *retrievability*.
- ▶ Core components:
 - ▶ Accentuation: Freely align pitch accents (in an independently generated prosodic structure) with words (in an independently generated syntactic structure).
 - ▶ Retrievability presupposition: If a contentful constituent bears no accent, then its denotation is conventionally implicated to be **RETRIEVABLE**.

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- ▶ Roberts (2006) eliminates focus projection entirely and instead proposes to relate accent placement to interpretation using the notion of *retrievability*.
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 - ▶ Accentuation: Freely align pitch accents (in an independently generated prosodic structure) with words (in an independently generated syntactic structure).
 - ▶ Retrievability presupposition: If a contentful constituent bears no accent, then its denotation is conventionally implicated to be **RETRIEVABLE**.
 - ▶ Novelty Implicature of Focus: If a constituent bears an accent, then its denotation is **IRRETRIEVABLE**.

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- ▶ Roberts (2006) eliminates focus projection entirely and instead proposes to relate accent placement to interpretation using the notion of *retrievability*.
- ▶ Core components:
 - ▶ Accentuation: Freely align pitch accents (in an independently generated prosodic structure) with words (in an independently generated syntactic structure).
 - ▶ Retrievability presupposition: If a contentful constituent bears no accent, then its denotation is conventionally implicated to be **RETRIEVABLE**.
 - ▶ Novelty Implicature of Focus: If a constituent bears an accent, then its denotation is **IRRETRIEVABLE**.
- ▶ Elements without nuclear pitch accent which traditionally were analyzed as part of a projected focus must be
 - ▶ retrievable, or
 - ▶ accented after all

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Kadmon (2006): Some theories of the interpretation of accent placement

- ▶ Parallel to Roberts (2006), Kadmon eliminates focus projection entirely and instead relies on the notion of EXPECTABLE to relate accent placement and interpretation.

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Kadmon (2006): Some theories of the interpretation of accent placement

- ▶ Parallel to Roberts (2006), Kadmon eliminates focus projection entirely and instead relies on the notion of **EXPECTABLE** to relate accent placement and interpretation.
- ▶ Core components:
 - ▶ Interpretation of pitch accent placement: A word is interpreted as **EXPECTABLE** iff it is unaccented.

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- ▶ Parallel to Roberts (2006), Kadmon eliminates focus projection entirely and instead relies on the notion of **EXPECTABLE** to relate accent placement and interpretation.
- ▶ Core components:
 - ▶ Interpretation of pitch accent placement: A word is interpreted as **EXPECTABLE** iff it is unaccented.
 - ▶ An expression B is **EXPECTABLE** in an utterance U iff the following holds:
 - ▶ Presented with the result of replacing B in U with a variable, it would be possible for the hearer to infer on the basis of prior context that in the actual utterance, the position of that variable should be occupied by B .

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- ▶ Parallel to Roberts (2006), Kadmon eliminates focus projection entirely and instead relies on the notion of **EXPECTABLE** to relate accent placement and interpretation.
- ▶ Core components:
 - ▶ Interpretation of pitch accent placement: A word is interpreted as **EXPECTABLE** iff it is unaccented.
 - ▶ An expression *B* is **EXPECTABLE** in an utterance *U* iff the following holds:
 - ▶ Presented with the result of replacing *B* in *U* with a variable, it would be possible for the hearer to infer on the basis of prior context that in the actual utterance, the position of that variable should be occupied by *B*.
- ▶ Elements without nuclear pitch accent which traditionally were analyzed as part of a projected focus must be
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(8) *What did you do?*

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- (8) *What did you do?* (traditionally: wide, VP focus)
- (9) a. **I INVITED BILL.** (R/K claim: good out of the blue)

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- (8) *What did you do?* (traditionally: wide, VP focus)
- (9) a. *I INVITED BILL.* (R/K claim: good out of the blue)
b. *I invited BILL.* (R/K claim: bad out of the blue,
good if party context)

Empirical Evidence: Gussenhoven (1983) [I]

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- ▶ Context-retrievability experiment: judge whether a question and an answer are from the same or a different dialogue.

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Empirical Evidence: Gussenhoven (1983) [I]

- ▶ Context-retrievability experiment: judge whether a question and an answer are from the same or a different dialogue.
- ▶ Experiment includes two types of questions:
 - (10) *What do you do?* (wide, VP focus)
 - (11) *What do you teach?* (narrow, NP focus)

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- ▶ Context-retrievability experiment: judge whether a question and an answer are from the same or a different dialogue.
- ▶ Experiment includes two types of questions:
 - (10) *What do you do?* (wide, VP focus)
 - (11) *What do you teach?* (narrow, NP focus)
- ▶ Two types of answers:
 - (12) *I TEACH LINGUISTICS.* (accents on verb and NP)
 - (13) *I teach LINGUISTICS.* (accent on NP only)

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- ▶ Context-retrievability experiment: judge whether a question and an answer are from the same or a different dialogue.
- ▶ Experiment includes two types of questions:
 - (10) *What do you do?* (wide, VP focus)
 - (11) *What do you teach?* (narrow, NP focus)
- ▶ Two types of answers:
 - (12) *I TEACH LINGUISTICS.* (accents on verb and NP)
 - (13) *I teach LINGUISTICS.* (accent on NP only)
- ▶ Results
 - ▶ Listeners performed no better than chance in judging whether questions and answers were matched.
 - ▶ This finding supports focus projection: To focus the VP, it is sufficient to accent the object NP.

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Empirical Evidence: Gussenhoven (1983) [II]

- ▶ Second experiment tested dialogues with questions:
 - (14) *Please tell me what happened that night?*
(wide, VP focus)
 - (15) *What do you remember from the last lesson?*
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 - (14) *Please tell me what happened that night?*
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 - (15) *What do you remember from the last lesson?*
(narrow, NP focus)
- ▶ The answers contain “non-merging predicates”:
 - (16) *I REMEMBER NOTHING.* (accent on V and NP)
 - (17) *I remember NOTHING.* (accent on NP only)

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 - (16) *I REMEMBER NOTHING.* (accent on V and NP)
 - (17) *I remember NOTHING.* (accent on NP only)
- ▶ Results: Listeners matched
 - ▶ narrow focus questions (15) with answers accenting only the NP (17)

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 - (14) *Please tell me what happened that night?*
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 - (15) *What do you remember from the last lesson?*
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- ▶ The answers contain “non-merging predicates”:
 - (16) *I **REMEMBER** NOTHING.* (accent on V and NP)
 - (17) *I remember **NOTHING.*** (accent on NP only)
- ▶ Results: Listeners matched
 - ▶ narrow focus questions (15) with answers accenting only the NP (17)
 - ▶ wide focus questions (14) with answers accenting both the verb and the NP (16)

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- ▶ Second experiment tested dialogues with questions:

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(wide, VP focus)

(15) *What do you remember from the last lesson?*
(narrow, NP focus)

- ▶ The answers contain “non-merging predicates”:

(16) *I **REMEMBER** NOTHING.* (accent on V and NP)

(17) *I remember **NOTHING.*** (accent on NP only)

- ▶ Results: Listeners matched

- ▶ narrow focus questions (15) with answers accenting only the NP (17)
- ▶ wide focus questions (14) with answers accenting both the verb and the NP (16)

⇒ Non-merging predicates do not allow focus projection.

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Empirical Evidence: Birch and Clifton (1995) [I]

- ▶ Two sets of experiments, each consisting of:
 - ▶ make-sense judgment task (appropriateness of dialogue): response times to make yes/no-judgments measured.
 - ▶ linguistic judgment task: rate prosodic appropriateness on Likert scale (1–5)

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 - ▶ linguistic judgment task: rate prosodic appropriateness on Likert scale (1–5)
- ▶ Experiment 1: Questions and answers used in dialogues:
(18) a. *Isn't Kerry pretty smart?* (wide, VP focus)
b. *Isn't Kerry good at math?* (V focus)

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 - (18) a. *Isn't Kerry pretty smart?* (wide, VP focus)
b. *Isn't Kerry good at math?* (V focus)
 - (19) a. *Yes, she **TEACHES MATH.***
b. *Yes, she teaches **MATH.***
c. *Yes, she **TEACHES math.***

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 - b. *Isn't Kerry good at math?* (V focus)
 - (19) a. *Yes, she **TEACHES MATH.***
 - b. *Yes, she teaches **MATH.***
 - c. *Yes, she **TEACHES math.***
- ▶ Results for wide, VP focus question (18a):
 - ▶ make-sense judgment: same reaction times for answers with accent on both V and NP (19a) or only on NP (19b)

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 - ▶ linguistic judgment task: rate prosodic appropriateness on Likert scale (1–5)
- ▶ Experiment 1: Questions and answers used in dialogues:
 - (18) a. *Isn't Kerry pretty smart?* (wide, VP focus)
 - b. *Isn't Kerry good at math?* (V focus)
 - (19) a. *Yes, she **TEACHES MATH.***
 - b. *Yes, she teaches **MATH.***
 - c. *Yes, she **TEACHES math.***
- ▶ Results for wide, VP focus question (18a):
 - ▶ make-sense judgment: same reaction times for answers with accent on both V and NP (19a) or only on NP (19b)
 - ▶ linguistic judgment: subjects preferred answers with accent on both V and NP (19a) over only on NP (19b)

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 - ▶ Results for wide, VP focus question (18a):
 - ▶ make-sense judgment: same reaction times for answers with accent on both V and NP (19a) or only on NP (19b)
 - ▶ linguistic judgment: subjects preferred answers with accent on both V and NP (19a) over only on NP (19b)
- ⇒ Birch and Clifton (1995) interpret this as saying that accenting the verb of a focused VP is optional.

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Empirical Evidence: Birch and Clifton (1995) [II]

- ▶ Experiment 2 used questions supporting VP focus and answers with “non-lexical” argument NPs (quantifiers):

(20) *What can you tell me about the math program at Cornell this year?*

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- ▶ Experiment 2 used questions supporting VP focus and answers with “non-lexical” argument NPs (quantifiers):

(20) *What can you tell me about the math program at Cornell this year?*

(21) a. *They* **ACCEPTED NO ONE.**

b. *They* *accepted* **NO ONE.**

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 - (20) *What can you tell me about the math program at Cornell this year?*
 - (21) a. *They* **ACCEPTED NO ONE.**
 - b. *They accepted* **NO ONE.**
- ▶ Results:
 - ▶ make-sense judgment: faster response times for answers with accent on both V and NP (21a) than for NP only (21b).

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 - (20) *What can you tell me about the math program at Cornell this year?*
 - (21) a. *They* **ACCEPTED NO ONE.**
 - b. *They accepted* **NO ONE.**
- ▶ Results:
 - ▶ make-sense judgment: faster response times for answers with accent on both V and NP (21a) than for NP only (21b).
 - ▶ linguistic judgment: no preference for answers with accents on V and NP (21a) over only on NP (21b)

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Empirical Evidence: Birch and Clifton (1995) [II]

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- ▶ Experiment 2 used questions supporting VP focus and answers with “non-lexical” argument NPs (quantifiers):

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- ⇒ Conclusion: Accented lexically filled argument NPs project focus, while non-lexically filled ones do not.

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 - ▶ Parallel to Gussenhoven’s “non-merging predicates” results

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- ⇒ Conclusion: Accented lexically filled argument NPs project focus, while non-lexically filled ones do not.
 - ▶ Parallel to Gussenhoven’s “non-merging predicates” results
 - ▶ Reverse linguistic judgment results remain as a puzzle.

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Empirical Evidence: Welby (2003)

- ▶ Welby (2003) investigates the influence of prosodic phrasing in the Birch and Clifton (1995) setup.

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Empirical Evidence: Welby (2003)

- ▶ Welby (2003) investigates the influence of prosodic phrasing in the Birch and Clifton (1995) setup.
- ▶ Questions: VP focus (22a) or object-NP focus (22b):
(22) a. *What's that terrible smell coming from the neighbors' yard?*
b. *There's a terrible smell coming from the neighbors' yard. What are they burning?*

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Empirical Evidence: Welby (2003) Results

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- ▶ The experiment used the linguistic judgment task of Birch and Clifton (1995), rating using Likert scale.

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- ▶ The experiment used the linguistic judgment task of Birch and Clifton (1995), rating using Likert scale.
- ▶ Results for questions supporting VP-focus and for those supporting object-NP-focus were identical.

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- ▶ The experiment used the linguistic judgment task of Birch and Clifton (1995), rating using Likert scale.
- ▶ Results for questions supporting VP-focus and for those supporting object-NP-focus were identical.
 - ▶ “hat” pattern and the object-NP-only accent pattern were rated as equally appropriate.
 - ▶ Appropriateness of hat pattern → prenuclear pitch accent does not affect focus structure interpretation.

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 - ▶ “hat” pattern and the object-NP-only accent pattern were rated as equally appropriate.
 - ▶ Appropriateness of hat pattern → prenuclear pitch accent does not affect focus structure interpretation.
 - ▶ Two-peak pattern was less acceptable
 - Two-peak pattern is disfavored for single focus interpretation (favors double focus interpretation).

Empirical Evidence: Féry (1993)

[I]

- ▶ Context-retrievability experiment: judge whether a question and an answer are from the same or a different dialogue.

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Empirical Evidence: Féry (1993)

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- ▶ Context-retrievability experiment: judge whether a question and an answer are from the same or a different dialogue.
- ▶ Experiment includes two types of questions:

(24) *Wer ist verhaftet worden?* (narrow, NP focus)
who has arrested been

(25) *Hast Du heute die Nachrichten gehört?* (wide focus)
have you today the news heard

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- ▶ Answer recorded twice, once answering (24), once (25):

(26) **GORBATSCHOV** *ist verhaftet worden.*
Gorbachev has arrested been

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(26) **GORBATSCHOV** *ist verhaftet worden.*
Gorbachev has arrested been

▶ Results

- ▶ Listeners decided at random whether the realizations of (26) were an answer to the question inducing narrow focus or to the one inducing broad focus.
- ▶ No difference in tonal realization between narrow and wide focus answer.

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- ▶ Recent work in formal pragmatics proposes to eliminate focus projection rules:
 - ▶ Kadmon/Roberts: focus never projects (new elements must be accented; unaccented focused elements are given/retrievable/expectable)
 - ▶ Büring: focus can always project

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- ▶ A review of experiments reported in the literature shows substantial evidence for the existence of some focus projection, i.e., for certain pairs of verbs with object-NP arguments in English.
- ▶ More evidence is needed to establish when focus can project, more specifically: In which constructions can what kind of elements be accented (with which type of accents) and project focus how far?

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- ▶ More evidence is needed to establish when focus can project, more specifically: In which constructions can what kind of elements be accented (with which type of accents) and project focus how far?
- ▶ We intend to explore this question based on corpora which have been syntactically and intonationally annotated.

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