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Focussing modifiers

1. Focus particles

In German, various kinds of particles are used for various kinds of communicative purposes. The particles can either be independent interactive units (such as discourse organizing particles like *ja*, *ne*, *hm* or responsive particles like *ja*, *nein*, *doch*) or part of a sentence (such as modal particles like *denn*, *doch*, *ja*, intensifiers like *sehr*, *echt* or focus particles like *sogar*, *nur*, *noch*). Focus particles have been a topic of research in German linguistics since the 1970s (see Altmann 1976, 2009; Jacobs 1983; König 1991, 1993; Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997). Being part of a sentence, they also have to be part of its syntactic structure. In German, focus particles are mostly placed in front of a phrase:

(1a)   **Sogar** seit 19<u>36</u> betreibt Katharina Weber hier einen Schreibwarenladen.
(1b)   Seit 1936 betreibt **sogar** Katharina <u>We</u>ber hier einen Schreibwarenladen.
(1c)   Seit 1936 betreibt Katharina Weber **sogar** <u>hier </u>einen Schreibwarenladen.
(1d)   Seit 1936 betreibt Katharina Weber hier **sogar** einen <u>Schreib</u>warenladen.
       (Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997, p. 890)

Focus particles focus the following phrase (the focus accent is underlined in the examples above), which means that they emphasize its importance within the sentence concerned. The term 'focus particles' locates a certain group of particles (such as *allein*, *auch*, *ausgerechnet*, *bereits*, *besonders*, *bloß*, *einzig*, *erst*, *gar*, *gerade*, *gleichermaßen*, *gleichfalls*, *lediglich*, *mindestens*, *noch*, *nur*, *schon*, *selbst*, *sogar*, *wenigstens*, *zumindest*; Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997, p. 871) within the part-of-speech class of particles.

2. Focusing modifiers

In addition, we suggest using the term 'focusing modifier' to account for the syntactic function of the focus particles. When emphasizing the syntactic function instead of the part-of-speech classification, the function of tokens from other word classes may also be described as focusing modifiers:

(2)   Alß sie hatten gelegen an dem Ort uber 3 Wochen, da kamen von den Schweden eine stärke Partey, alzeit **uff** 4 dausen Man zu Roß und zu Fueß und vielen Wagen. (Bauernleben 1998, p. 43)

(3)   Wenn wir mit dieser Erklärung dem Dichter gerecht geworden sind, so kann doch **immer** noch gefragt werden, ob da mit der Inhalt des Mythus erschöpft ist. (Nietzsche 1872, p. 45)

The first example shows the preposition *uff* (*auf* (= *on*) in Modern German) being used as a focusing modifier that can be compared with *circa*.[1] In the second example, the adverb *immer* (= always) is used to focus the adverb *noch*.

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[1]   We illustrate the phenomenon using examples from New High German because the approach has been developed within the project "Basic Syntactic Structures of New High German" funded by the German Research Foundation and conducted by Vilmos Àgel (Kassel) and Mathilde Hennig (Gießen). Please consult the project homepage for the references: https://gieskane.com/.

2.1 Focusing modifiers as topological parts of constituents of sentences

The group of examples in (1) shows that focusing modifiers (in the case of the one realized by the prototypical focus particle *sogar*) belong to the following phrase in the sense that they can be placed together with this phrase in various positions within the topological structure of a sentence. Thus, they are topologically linked to the phrase although their position in front of the phrase, e. g. in front of grammatically constitutive parts of the phrase like prepositions in prepositional phrases or articles in noun phrases, indicates that they are not constitutive for the phrase themselves.

2.2 The semantic function of focusing modifiers

What is crucial about focusing modifiers is that they undoubtedly have a focusing function with regard to the following phrase but that they also relate this phrase to the sentence in a special way, namely they relate the proposition expressed by the sentence to certain expectations regarding the expressed issue (see Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997, p. 869). For example, the proposition in (1) is characterized as being located outside or at the boundary of a scale of expectations by *sogar*. In (1a), *sogar* focuses the temporal adverbial as not being expected, in (1b) the subject, in (1c) the locative adverbial and in (1d) the direct object. In this way, the main proposition is connected with a presupposition by the focusing modifier (see Pasch et al. 2003, p. 567).

2.3 The focusing modifying relation within the system of syntactic relations

Teuber (2005, p. 28) provides an elaborated classification of different types of syntactic relations by differentiating between constitutive and relating functions. According to Hennig (2010) the notion of relating relations can be used for relations between different domains in the sense of Sweetser (1990) (content domain, speech act domain and epistemic domain). Focusing modifiers can thus be described as relating relations between the content domain and the epistemic domain.

2.4 Focusing modifiers and part-of-speech classes

As mentioned above, samples of different part-of-speech classes can function as focusing modifiers. We found the following types in a sample of 13 texts from the 17th to the 19th century:

adjectives	allein, ausschließlich, besonders, bloß, einzig, einzig und allein, ganz, genau, genug, gleich, halb, hauptsächlich, lediglich, mehr, minder, nahe, pur, recht, rein, schier, sonderlich, ungefähr, unmittelbar, vornehmlich, weit, weiter
adverbs	bald, bereits, daselbst, eben, erst, gerade, geradezu, immer, immermehr, insgesamt, noch, nun, schon, selbst, so, überall, überhaupt, vor allem, wieder, wohl
connectors	aber, auch, beispielsweise, dagegen, ebenfalls, ebenso, etwa, freilich, hingegen, hinwieder, namentlich, nämlich, wenigstens, zumal, z. B., zum wenigsten
particles	an die, circa, gar, je, nicht einmal, mitten, nur, sogar
comment adverbs	beinahe, fast, kaum

nouns	Punkt
prepositions	auf, bei, über

2.5 Focusing modifiers in contrast to other types of relations

Focusing modifiers can also be classified semantically (for example: *nur* = restrictive, *immer* = iterative, *noch* = temporal), which makes them comparable with connectors. Both focusing modifiers and connectors are part of the topological structure of superordinated units without being constitutive in the narrower sense. Thus, it is not surprising that there are lexemes that can function as connectors and focusing modifiers alike (for example *auch*). The major difference is, nevertheless, that connectors relate two propositions whereas focusing modifiers relate a proposition with a presupposition (see section 2.2).

3. Usage of focusing modifiers in New High German

Focusing modifiers are currently being annotated in the corpus GiesKaNe (= Gießen Kassel Neuhochdeutsch). In the 13 texts from the 17th to the 19th century which have been annotated to date, 2,062 tokens of focusing modifiers have been found.
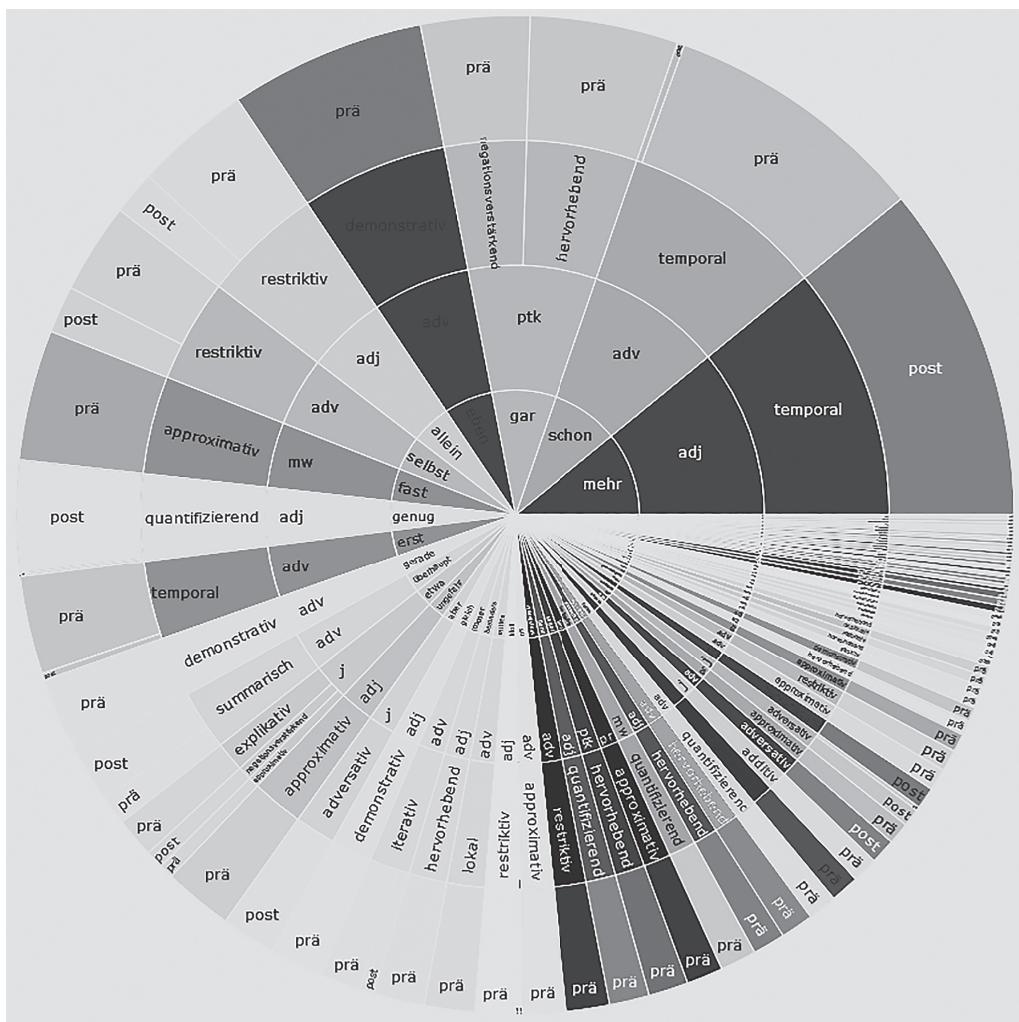

Fig. 1:   Focusing modifiers in New High German

Figure 1 shows the correlations between the tokens, part-of-speech classes, semantic classes and position (pre/post = before/after the focused phrase). It includes findings relating to 856 tokens, excluding the very frequent types *auch*, *noch* and *nur* (1,206 findings). According to Cramers V, the effect of the correlations is fairly strong: token – part of speech = 0.958; token – semantic class = 0.918; token – position = 0.83.

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