Diversity in verum focus phenomena

Introduction. An ongoing debate in semantic theory asks whether the meaning of verum focus constructions is due to truth operators or general focus operations. This paper shows that the two mechanisms can be identified independently in verum phenomena, and suggest that verum focus is an umbrella term for a class of constructions that handle cases of contradictory statements in context.

Background. The term Verum Focus was introduced in Höhle (1992) to describe the prosodic pattern in (1), where focus on the auxiliary (or verb) is used to resolve an epistemic conflict in the discourse. In Hebrew, the same meaning is achieved through a stressed affirmation particle *ken* 'yes', seen in (2).

(1) German (Gutzmann et al. 2020): *Peter HAT den Hund getreten.* P. has the dog kicked 'Peter DID kick the dog.'
(2) Hebrew: *hu KEN ba'at ba-kelev. he yes kicked at.the-dog* 'He DID kick the dog.'

Höhle attributes the meaning contribution of the accent in question to an operator akin to 'it is true that'. This operator is a component in many analyses of verum focus (e.g., Romero & Han 2004, Lohnstein & Stommel 2005, Zimmermann & Hole 2008, Bill & Koev 2021), with some variation in technical details of how focus is involved. Other accounts reduce the verum component and derive the same meaning through focus alternatives (Richter 1993, Wilder 2013, Goodhue & Wagner 2018), while Gutzmann et al. (2020) call to separate verum focus from focus alternatives based on languages where the two are realized by different particles, including Tsimshianic and Chadic. Overt verum operators are attested in many other languages, and do not categorically draw focus (e.g., English *indeed*, French *voire*, Hebrew *betax* 'sure'). That verum focus constructions are comparable to overt verum operators can be observed in that both can be used in answers to positive polar questions, as in (3-4).

(3) A: Did you buy yogurt? (Goodhue 2022)
(4) A: Did you buy yogurt?
(5) B: I DID buy yogurt.
(4) A: Did you buy yogurt?
(5) B: I Indeed bought yogurt.

Data. Verum focus constructions that employ affirmative particles are a rather common phenomenon, also attested with Spanish *si* and Yiddish *yo*. 'yes' particles occupy the position of negation and therefore canonically modify elements from the verbal system, where they are indistinguishable in their semantic and pragmatic outcome from English and German stressed auxiliaries. In Hebrew, constituent negation is available and, consequently, stressed *ken* may modify tenseness constituents, including attributive adjectives (5a) and infinitive verbs (5b). In these positions, stressed *ken* reveals that it is not a verum operator, but rather a vehicle for focus.

(5) Hebrew (attested examples):

	ha-KEN metubal.	\neq ze KEN ha-of ha-metubal.	
	cken DET-yes seasoned SEASONED chicken.	'this IS the seasoned chicken	
(b) <i>ani roca Kl</i> I want ye 'I want to go	s go.INF	≠ and KEN roca lalexet.'I DO want to go.'	

Since verum operators target the truth value of a proposition, a verum analysis of *ken* in (5) would give it a sentence-level scope regardless of its surface position. It is therefore unexpected that these sentences are distinct from their sentence-*ken* counterparts, in which *ken* can be replaced with an opening 'it IS true that', without affecting the sentence's meaning or presupposition. It can be shown that the sentences in (5) introduce different presuppositions than their 'it is true that' paraphrases, as follows:

Statement:Presupposition:(5a) This is the KEN seasoned chicken.There is an unseasoned chicken.(5a') It IS true that this chicken is seasoned.The chicken's seasoning was doubted.(5c) I want to KEN go.Not going is an option.(5c') It IS true that I want to go.The speaker's desire was doubted.

The lack of verum component is further shown in the unacceptability of stressed *ken* as a response to positive polar questions in (6), which is also demonstrated for Spanish sí (7).

(6) A: kanit yogurt?	B: (#KEN) kaniti.
buy.2sG yogurt	yes buy.1SG
'Did you buy yogurt?'	'(#yes) I did.'
(7) A: les diste	de comer a los caballos?
DAT.3PL give.PAST.2SG 'Did you feed the horses	of eat.INF to DEF.PL.M horses s?'
$B: (\#SI) \ les \qquad di$	de comer.
yes DAT.3PL give.PAS	г.1sg of eat.inf
'(#yes) I did.'	

These examples suggest that both *ken* and *si* generate verum meaning as a result of focus alternatives and not of a verum component. The same mechanism seems to also be active in English verum focus constructions, since the use of a stressed auxiliary in a restrictive relative clause (i.e., a modifier and not a proposition) triggers a presupposition consistent with focus alternatives rather than verum, as seen in (8).

(8) The students that DID do their homework are exempt from the quiz.

<u>Presupposition</u>: * The fact that the students did their homework was doubted. \checkmark Other students did not do their homework.

Proposal. I propose the typology in Table 1 for verum focus constructions, where **overt verum operators** contribute an *it is true that* meaning; **stressed 'yes'** particles take a predicate P and a context c and returns P, while presupposing that \neg P is given in the context (c is restricted to the alternatives formed by substituting stressed 'yes' particle with a negation particle); **stressed auxiliaries** employ both mechanisms and may induce verum meanings thorough a silent verum component or focus alternatives on the sentence's polarity.

	Op.	Focus		
Overt verum	\checkmark	%		
Stressed 'yes'	×	\checkmark		
Stressed auxiliary	\checkmark	\checkmark		
Table 1: partial typology of				

(9) Verum operator:	(10)	Focused 'yes' particle:	auxiliary
[[indeed]](P) = <i>it is true that</i> P		$\llbracket ken \rrbracket(P)c = P$ $c = \llbracket [ken]^{f}(P) \rrbracket = \{P, \neg P\}$	Table 1: partial typology of verum focus constructions

The proposed typology is non-exhaustive and leaves room for other epistemic conflict resolution phenomena, such as fronting in Spanish (Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal 2009).

Goodhue & Wagner (2018) Intonation, Yes and No. *Glossa*. Gutzmann et al. (2020) VF Is Verum, Not Focus: Cross-Linguistic Evidence. *Glossa*. Höhle (1992) Uber VF Im Deutschen. Informationsstruktur Und Grammatik. Leonetti & Escandell-Vidal (2009) Fronting and VF in Spanish. Lohnstein & Stommel 2005. VF and Phases. Linguistic Analysis. Richter (1993) Settling the Truth: VF in German. Romero & Han (2004) On negative yes/no questions. *Linguistics and philosophy* Wilder (2013) English 'emphatic do'. Lingua Zimmermann & Hole (2008) Predicate Focus, VF, Verb Focus: Similarities and differences.