Wide Focus Object Fronting
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Outline

Optimality Theory (OT)

Wide Focus Object Fronting

Experiments
  Production Experiments
  Perception Experiments

Analysis
  Theticity
  Partial Focus Fronting
  Prosodic Analysis of WFOF

Conclusion
Féry (2007) examines the Wide Focus Reading of sentences like 
*Ein BIER haben wir getrunken*

- conducted perception and production experiments
- provides an Optimality Theory (OT) Approach to the Phenomenon
Background: Optimality Theory (OT)

- “Sentences with object fronting [...] are optimal in two contexts.”
- Big parts of the paper understandable without knowledge of OT
- OT needed for Féry’s Prosodic Analysis
OT: very rough informal overview

- some constraints
- a ranking of the constraints
- some possibilities to judge
OT: real-world example

You want to travel to Hamburg to watch a Musical at 8p.m. There are some things that matter to you:

- You don’t want to change trains.
- You want to arrive before 7p.m.
- You don’t want to pay more than 30€.
You find the following offers:

- The Deutsche Bahn 29€ (ICE) special, where you only have to change trains in Stuttgart and arrive 7.03 p.m.
- Some slow and cheap trains (15€), with changes in Stuttgart, Frankfurt(M) and Cologne arriving 2.37 a.m. the night before the Musical.
- A regular ICE train, with changes in Stuttgart and Frankfurt(M), 35€, arriving 6.30 p.m.

So, which one is the optimal offer?
Well,... There might be some information missing. What matters most to you? In short:

- Are you broke?
- Are you lazy?
- Do you want to watch the entire Musical?

→ It’s all about the order of your constraints! Let’s assume the following order:

1. Watching the entire Musical
2. Money
3. Laziness

→ Intuition about optimal offer?
OT: Some Terminology and Notations

- Comparison of candidates in tableau
- * marks constraint violation
- ! marks crucial constraint violation (violation of the highest ranking constraint distinguishing the candidate from its competitors)
- ⚫ marks the optimal candidate(s)
OT: real-world example contd.

- The Deutsche Bahn 29€ (ICE) special, where you only have to change trains in Stuttgart and arrive 7.03p.m.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Musical</th>
<th>Money</th>
<th>Laziness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICE special</td>
<td>*!</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<td>🐪 Slow trains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular ICE</td>
<td>*!</td>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1)  a. \{What did you do after I left?\}

\texttt{[i[Ein \ \textsc{Bier} \ haben wir getrunken]\textsubscript{F}]}

a-ACC beer have  we drunk

‘We drank a beer.’

b. \{How was your evening?\}

\texttt{[i[\textsc{Fernsehen} \ habe ich geguckt]\textsubscript{F}]}

television have I  looked

‘I watched television.’

c. \{Why was she away so long?\}

\texttt{[i[Das \ \textsc{Kind} \ hat sie ins \ \textsc{Bett} gebracht]\textsubscript{F}]}

the-ACC child has she in-the bed brought

‘She brought the child to bed.’
Remarks on the Examples

- optimal in two contexts:
  - narrow focus
  - Wide Focus Object Fronting (WFOF)
- consist of a single intonation phrase (i-phrase)
- have a unique, early falling pitch accent
- marked word order
- Notations:
  - subscript I → Intonation Phrase (i-phrase)
  - subscript P → Prosodic Phrase (p-phrase)
  - subscript F → Focus
  - subscript T → Topic
  - SMALL CAPS → Pitch Accent
Conditions for WFOF

- single accent
- unique accent must be located
  - very early in the sentence
  - on the fronted object
- rest of the sentence unaccented
Accents on WFOF

\[ (2) \quad H^*L \quad L_I \]

\[ [\text{Die Miete haben sie wieder mal erhöht}]_F \]

the-ACC rent have they again once raised

‘They have raised the rent again.’

- accent is a bitonal falling tone \( H^*L \)
- boundary tone \( L_I \) aligned with last syllable of the sentence
- melody between those two low throughout
  → alignment of the low boundary tone to both the end of the i-phrase and the position immediately following the pitch accent
Fig. 1 Pitch track of *Die MIETE haben sie wieder mal erhöht*
Full DP Subjects

- Examples so far: pronominal subjects

(3) \{Warum kommst Du so spät?\} ‘Why do you come so late?’

  a. \([i[\text{Eine Alkoholkontrolle hat die Polizei an-ACC alcohol control has the police gemacht}]_F\)]

  done

  b. \(#[i[P[\text{Eine Alkoholkontrolle}]_T [P hat die Polizei gemacht}]_F]]\)

  c. \([i[[P \text{Die Polizei}] [P hat eine Alkoholkontrolle gemacht}]_F]\]

  ‘The police were stopping drivers to test for alcohol consumption.’
Comments on Full DP Example

- b) example with accent on *die Polizei* can not have wide focus
- *Alkoholkontrolle* is topic
- *die Polizei* is focus
- normal word order as in c) is possible and unmarked
  - *die Polizei* can be aboutness topic
  - does not have to be aboutness topic
  - topic marked by separation from the remainder of the sentence by i-phrase boundary
Comments on Full DP Example contd.

- a) and c) differ in
  - accent pattern
  - word order
  - interpretation

- a) does not predicate anything about an alcohol testing
  \[ \text{\textit{Alkoholkontrolle} bears the accent 'by accident'} \]
Fronting of other elements...

- ... is also possible:

(4) a. Vor haben wir das nicht gehabt (Müller 2002)
   PTL have we that not had
   ‘We did not intend to.’

   b. Auf die Pelle ist sie mir gerückt
      on the skin is she me-DAT moved
      ‘She is crowding me.’

   c. Den Garaus denke ich nicht dass er ihr
      the-ACC out think I not that he her-DAT
      gemacht hat
      made has
      ‘I do not think he finished her off.’

- prosodic difference between a) and c): c) has accent on postverbal subject
Narrow Focus...

- ... has the same prosodic pattern as WFOF:

(5) a. {What did you drink?}
   \[i[Ein \text{ B\text{\v{e}r}]_F \ haben \ wir \ getrunken]\]

b. {How did you do?}
   \[i[\text{Fernsehen}]_F \ habe \ ich \ geguckt]\]

c. {Who did she bring to bed?}
   \[i[\text{Das Kind}]_F \ hat \ sie \ ins \ Bett \ gebracht]\]

- accent, prosodic phrasing and tonal structure identical in WFOF and Narrow Focus
- only one initial accent
- remainder of sentence unaccented
- only one i-phrase and one p-phrase
- initial accent rendered more prominent by deaccenting of postnuclear part of sentence
First Production Experiment - Questions

1. Do native speakers of German readily realize the prosody just described?

2. Is there a difference in the production of these sentences in a VP focus context (called wide focus in the following) and in narrow focus context? More specifically, is the accent higher in the narrow focus context than in the wide focus context?

- 30 students read sentences as answers to visually and acoustically presented contexts
- narrow focus and wide focus contexts
- generic and specific objects
- fronted object and canonical word order
First Production Experiment - Example

(6) a. Did you go out afterwards?
   b. What did you drink?

(7) a. Ein a-ACC Bier haben wir getrunken / Ein a-ACC Jever haben wir getrunken
   ‘We drank a beer / a Jever.’
   
   b. Wir haben ein Bier getrunken. / Wir haben ein Jever getrunken.
First Production Experiment - Results

1. Do native speakers of German readily realize the prosody just described?
   → YES! Always unique falling accent on object.

2. Is there a difference in the production of these sentences in a VP focus context (called wide focus in the following) and in narrow focus context? More specifically, is the accent higher in the narrow focus context than in the wide focus context?
   → NO! No difference in pitch between narrow and wide focus.

   ▶ small differences in fundamental frequency ($F_0$) of objects and verbs
   ▶ wide focus: specific objects slightly lower pitch than generic ones

→ Germans utter WFOF sentences without problems
→ No prosodic difference between accent in narrow and wide focus contexts
Second Perception Experiment - Question

Does an increase in the number of arguments in the (intended) deaccented part of the sentence impede the readiness of speakers to produce a prosodic pattern with only one early falling accent, and the remainder of the sentence deaccented?

- Answer gives information whether occurrence of WFOF decreases with increasing number of p-phrases.

Experiment similar to the First Production Experiment but with longer sentences.
Second Production Experiment - Example

(8) a. {Why were you away so long?}

Ich habe den Wagen / den Jaguar in die Garage gefahren.
‘I drove the car / the Jaguar into the garage.’


c. In die Garage habe ich den Jaguar gefahren.

(9) a. {What did you drive into the garage?} Ich habe den Wagen / den Jaguar in die Garage gefahren.

Second Production Experiment - Example Contd.

(10) a. \{Where did you drive the car to?\} Ich habe den Wagen / den Jaguar in die Garage gefahren.


▶ In 8a) in the majority of cases, both object and PP accented
▶ Unique accent on narrow focus object in 96%, 44% on wide focus object
▶ Unique accent on fronted narrow focus PP in 94%, 5% on fronted wide focus PP
Second Production Experiment - Results

Does an increase in the number of arguments in the (intended) deaccented part of the sentence impede the readiness of speakers to produce a prosodic pattern with only one early falling accent, and the remainder of the sentence deaccented?

→ YES! Addition of accentable constituents renders sentence less apt to be realized with unique accent on the fronted element → More natural to realize unique accent on fronted direct object than on fronted PP object.
Third Production Experiment - Questions

1. Does the presence of a full DP instead of a pronominal subject have an effect on the accent pattern?

2. Is there any difference between the height of the pitch accent on the object in a wide focus when the subject is a pronoun or a full DP?

3. Does the replacement of an all-new instead of a VP focus have an effect on the accent pattern?

- Indirectly answers: Do deaccented postnuclear arguments form extra p-phrases or are they included into the p-phrase of the accented subject?
- Tested on all-new vs. narrow focus and pronoun vs. full DP subject
Third Production Experiment - Example

(11)  
\{(\text{All-new: Why was the talk cancelled?})\}  
\{(\text{Narrow focus: What did he / they / the doorman lose?})\}  

a. \textit{Den Eingangsschlüssel haben sie / hat er verloren.}
   ‘They / he lost the front door key.’

b. \textit{Den Eingangsschlüssel hat der Pförtner verloren.}
   ‘The doorman lost the front door key.’
Third Production Experiment - Results

- Pronominal Subject: 94% unique object accent
- Full NP Subject: 43% unique object accent

1. Does the presence of a full DP instead of a pronominal subject have an effect on the accent pattern? → YES! The addition of a full DP subject decreases the occurrence of unique object accents

2. Is there any difference between the height of the pitch accent on the object in a wide focus when the subject is a pronoun or a full DP? → NO! No difference in accent height

3. Does the replacement of an all-new instead of a VP focus have an effect on the accent pattern? → NO! VP and all-new focus do not lead to different WFOF accent structures
Perception Experiments

(12) \{\textit{All-new: Why didn’t the talk take place?}\}
   a. \textit{Den Eingangsschlüssel hat er verloren.}
      ‘He lost the front door key.’
   b. \textit{Den Eingangsschlüssel hat der Pförtner verloren.}
      ‘The doorman lost the front door key.’

(13) \{\textit{Narrow focus: What did the doorman lose?}\}
   a. \textit{Den Eingangsschlüssel hat er verloren.}
   b. \textit{Den Eingangsschlüssel hat der Pförtner verloren.}

▶ presented as spoken and written material
First Perception Experiment - Questions

1. How acceptable is a sentence with a fronted argument/object and a unique accent in an all-new environment as compared to a narrow focus context?

2. Is the acceptability affected by the kind of subject (pronoun vs. full DP)?

3. Does an accent on a full DP subject affect the acceptability of WFOF sentences?

   - Dialogues prerecorded
   - Question and Answers read by two different phoneticians
   - all-new vs. narrow focus
   - pronominal vs. full DP subject
   - accented vs. unaccented subject (only applicable for full DP; pronouns always deaccented)
First Perception Experiment - Examples

(14) \{Why are your neighbors complaining?\}
   a. Die Miete haben sie wieder mal erhöht.
   b. Die Miete hat der Hauswirt wieder mal erhöht.
   c. Die Miete hat der Hauswirt wieder mal erhöht.
      the rent has the landlord again once raised
      ‘The landlord / he raised the rent again.’

(15) \{What did the landlord raise again?\}
   a. Die Miete hat er wieder mal erhöht.
   b. Die Miete hat der Hauswirt wieder mal erhöht.
   c. Die Miete hat der Hauswirt wieder mal erhöht.
      ‘The landlord / he raised the rent again.’
First Perception Experiment - Results

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Judgements</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. All-new focus: Pronoun: 5.45
b. All-new focus: Unaccented subject DP: 4.8
c. All-new focus: Accented subject DP: 2.2
d. Narrow focus on the object: Pronoun: 5.8
e. Narrow focus on the object: Unaccented subject DP: 5.8
f. Narrow focus on the object: Accented subject DP: 1.95

Fig.6 Judgments of the question/answer pairs in spoken form
First Perception Experiment - Results Contd.

1. How acceptable is a sentence with a fronted argument/object and a unique accent in an all-new environment as compared to a narrow focus context?

2. Is the acceptability affected by the kind of subject (pronoun vs. full DP)?

3. Does an accent on a full DP subject affect the acceptability of WFOF sentences?

- wide and narrow focus nearly equally good with pronominal subject
- unaccented full DP reduces acceptability of wide focus
- wide and narrow focus nearly equally bad with accented full DP subject
Second Perception Experiment - Question

Is there a difference in the presentation of the material in a written and in an oral form? In other words, does it matter for the acceptability judgements whether the accent pattern is presented together with the sentences?

▶ Same sentences as before
▶ Sentences in written
Second Perception Experiment - Examples

(16) \{Why are your neighborscomplaining?\}
   a. Die Miete haben sie wieder mal erhöht.
   b. Die Miete hat der Hauswirt wieder mal erhöht.

(17) \{What did the landlord raise again?\}
   a. Die Miete hat er wieder mal erhöht.
   b. Die Miete hat der Hauswirt wieder mal erhöht.
Second Perception Experiment - Results

![Bar graph showing judgments for different conditions]

- a. All-new focus Pronoun: 2.4
- b. All-new focus Full DP: 2.5
- c. Narrow focus Pronoun: 4
- d. Narrow focus Full DP: 4.1

Fig. 7 Judgments of the question/answer pairs in written form
Is there a difference in the presentation of the material in a written and in an oral form? In other words, does it matter for the acceptability judgements whether the accent pattern is presented together with the sentences?
→ YES! Prosodic pattern helps to judge sentences in their contexts.
  ▶ judgements lower than with spoken material
  ▶ no effect of pronoun vs. full DP subject (test persons assumed wrong non-optimal prosodic pattern)
  ▶ influence of focus: narrow got higher scores
Summary of the Experiments’ Results

- WFOF sentences are readily pronounced and accepted by German natives
- Unique accent on fronted object easier with pronominal subject than with full DP
- Intervening accented elements block WFOF → negative influence of additional p-phrases
- Knowledge of prosodic structure increases acceptability of WFOF
- WFOF accent pattern similar in VP-focus and all-new
- Height of accent indistinguishable between VP focus and narrow focus
- Height of accent indistinguishable in all-new sentences between pronoun and full DP subject
Analysis

- comparison to thetic sentences
- Partial Focus Fronting
- OT analysis
- comparison to similar sentences with more than one accent
Theticity

- Thetic sentences describe single event
- No topic and comment
- Just predicate + argument
- Unique accent on subject
- Motivation for a behaviour → lack aboutness topic

(18) a. *My house is on fire.*
    b. *Your eyes are red.*
    c. *My wallet has disappeared.*
    d. *Johnson died.*
Differences: Theticity vs. WFOF

- differ on accented constituent
- Theticity: subject; WFOF: object
- (Theticity and) WFOF: action is prototypical for the object

(19) a. {What did you do after I left?}
   \[P[Ein \text{ B\i er haben wir neu zusammengebraut}]_F\]
   ‘We brew a new beer.’

b. {Why was she away so long?}
   \[P[Das \text{ Kind hat sie zur Notaufnahme fahren m"ussen}]_F\]
   ‘She had to drive the child to the emergency room.’
Differences: Theticity vs. WFOF Contd.

(20) \{What did you do with the book?\}
Meiner Freundin hab ich’s geschenkt
my-DAT friend have I it given

‘I gave it to my friend as a present.’

▶ no thetic flavor
▶ categorial sentence: topic and comment
Partial Focus Fronting

- Fanselow & Lenertová (2006): syntactic account
- Partial Focus Fronting: A-bar movement attracting closest accent in clause
- triggered by accent
- sensitive to island and pied-piping restrictions
Idioms

(21) a. *Wir sind vom *Regen* in die Traufe gekommen.*
    we are from the rain to the eaves come
    ‘We’ve jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.’

b. *Vom Regen sind wir in die Traufe gekommen.*

c. *In die Traufe sind wir vom Regen gekommen.*

» WFOF is possible in a) and b)
» only literal meaning possible in c) because of change
  in accent pattern
Prosodic (OT) Analysis of WFOF

- In some context sentences with a unique accent are prosodically optimal
- Three constraints:
  - StressXP
  - Destress-Given
  - *P-Phrase
Constraints

1. **DEstress-Given (DG)**
   A given XP in the postnuclear position is prosodically non-prominent

2. **StressXP (StrXP)**
   Each lexically headed XP must contain a phrasal stress (where ’phrasal stress’ refers to the head of a p-phrase)

3. **P-Phrase**
   No p-phrases
(26) OT analysis of (1a) with object fronting and wide focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>[Ein Bier haben wir getrunken]_F</th>
<th>DG</th>
<th>STRXP</th>
<th>_P-PHRASE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>[ Ein BIER]_P [haben wir GETRUNKEN ]_P</td>
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<td></td>
<td>**!</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>[ Ein BIER haben wir getrunken ]_P</td>
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<td>*</td>
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</table>

- Canonical word order equally optimal
OT analysis Contd.

(22) a. \([\_P \text{Die Polizei}] [\_P \text{hat eine Alkoholkontrolle gemacht}]\]

b. \([\_P [\text{Die Polizei}]_F \text{ hat eine Alkoholkontrolle gemacht}]\]

c. \([[[\_P \text{Eine Alkoholkontrolle} \text{ hat die Polizei gemacht}]_F]]\]

d. \([\_P [\text{Eine Alkoholkontrolle}] [\_P \text{hat die Polizei gemacht}]\]

‘The police were stopping drivers to test for alcohol consumption.’

(28) OT analysis of (27a) with canonical word order and wide focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DG</th>
<th>STRXP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(_P \text{Die Polizei hat eine Alkoholkontrolle gemacht})_F</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. (_P \text{POLIZEI} [_P \text{hat eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE gemacht}])</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>b. (_P \text{Polizei hat eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE gemacht})</td>
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<td>*!</td>
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OT analysis Contd.

(29) OT analysis of (27a) with canonical word order and and givenness of the subject

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>DG</th>
<th>S(_R)XP</th>
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<tr>
<td>[Die Polizei](_G) [hat eine Alkoholkontrolle gemacht](_F)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. [Die POLIZEI](_P) [hat eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE gemacht](_P)</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. [Die Polizei hat eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE gemacht](_P)</td>
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</table>

(30) OT analysis of (27b) with canonical word order and object givenness

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<tr>
<td>a. [Die POLIZEI hat eine Alkoholkontrolle gemacht](_P)</td>
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<td>b. [Die POLIZEI](_P) [hat eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE gemacht](_P)</td>
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OT analysis Contd.

(31) OT analysis of (27c) with fronted object order and wide focus

<table>
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<th>[Eine Alkoholkontrolle hat die Polizei gemacht]_F</th>
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<td>a. [Eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE]_P [hat die POLIZEI gemacht]_P</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. [Eine Alkoholkontrolle hat die POLIZEI gemacht]_P</td>
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(32) OT analysis of (27c) with fronted object order and given subject

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Eine Alkoholkontrolle hat [die Polizei]_G gemacht]_F</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. [Eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE hat die Polizei gemacht]_P</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. [Eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE]_P [hat die POLIZEI gemacht]_P</td>
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(33) OT analysis of (27d) with fronted object order and wide focus

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<tr>
<td>a. [Eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE]$_P$ [hat die POLIZEI gemacht]$_P$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. [Eine Alkoholkontrolle hat die POLIZEI gemacht]$_F$</td>
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(34) OT analysis of (27d) with fronted and narrowly focused object

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<tr>
<td>[Eine Alkoholkontrolle]$_F$ [hat die Polizei gemacht]$_G$</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. [Eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE hat die Polizei gemacht]$_P$</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. [Eine ALKOHOLKONTROLLE]$_P$ [hat die POLIZEI gemacht]$_P$</td>
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<td>*!</td>
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Important Points from the OT Analysis

- always optimal candidate in both word orders
- OT computation chooses between candidates phrased and accented in a certain way
- interpretation constraints needed to resolve ties
- OT analysis confirms the indistinguishability of narrow focus and WFOF
- possible reason for WFOF utterance: enhanced perceptivity of initial unique accent
Ambiguous Focus Structures

(23) a. *Was hat Karl dem Kind geschenkt?* ’What did Karl give to the child?’

b. *Was hat Karl hinsichtlich des Kindes gemacht?* ’What did Karl do with regard to the child?’

c. *Was hat Karl getan?* ’What did Karl do?’


Karl has the-DAT child the-ACC book given


‘Karl gave the book to the child.’

▶ WFOF: only one accent: rightmost and leftmost
Conclusion

- WFOF sentences have unique falling pitch accent on the fronted object, followed by flat and low sentence melody
- Information structure identical to wide focus
- Falling accent is focus exponent
- Marked word order explained by syntactic movement
- Object fronting renders prosodic structure optimal