Three shades of *sim*: Affirmation, Verum and Counter-Assertion

This paper contributes an analysis of the syntactic distribution and the various interpretations of the particle *sim* in European and Brazilian Portuguese. By investigating the contexts in which the particle appears, the goal is to present a first unified account of the phenomena.

Claims   The paper motivates the following claims. **C1:** There is a one-to-one relation between the syntactic position *sim* appears in and the interpretation it gives rise to. **C2:** *Sim* is an underspecified item. Its interpretative effects result from focus on the functional category it is merged in. **C3:** The contrast – the lack of the verum strategy in European – is a result of independent syntactic properties.

The phenomenon   The empirical focus resides on data like the ones illustrated in (1-2).

(1)   A: Vens?   B: **Sim**.
    come.2s   SIM
    'A: Are you coming? B: Yes.'
    (BP ✓, EP ✓)

(2)   A: Não vens,   pois não? B: Venho   **sim**.
    not come.2s aren't you   come.1s SIM
    'A: You're not coming, aren't you? B: I AM coming.'
    (BP ✓, EP ✓)

(3)   A: Não estou certa: vens   ou não? B: **Sim** (que) venho.
    not am   sure   come.2s or not   SIM QUE come.1s

    'A: I'm not sure: are you coming or not? B: I AM coming.' (BP ✓, EP ✗)

As an affirmative particle (1), *sim* usually appears isolated and expresses a positive answer to a polar question (see for instance Holmberg 2016, Krifka 2013). When functioning as a counter-assertive particle (2), it appears postverbally (Martins 2007; Martins 2013). It is employed as a reaction to a previous utterance and reverses the polarity of this utterance (see Watters 1979).[1] As a verum particle (3), it appears in the left periphery of a sentence and may co-occur with *que* (see AUTHOR 2017, 2018, 2019 on the role of *que* in these contexts). The function of *sim* here is to emphasize the truth of the proposition (cf. Höhle 1992, Gutzmann 2012, Lohnstein 2016, Martins 2006, AUTHOR 2019).

C1: Mapping between structure and interpretation   The main point of my paper is that the three interpretations are linked to different syntactic positions. In the affirmative and counter-assertive pattern, the particle is analyzed in two distinct polarity projections. The reasoning is that both of these strategies have a counterpart where a negative particle surfaces in the same position.[2] *Sim* as an affirmative particle is analyzed in a high PolP between FinP and IP (see Laka 1990, Holmberg 2016).[3] The counter-assertive function is

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[1]Verum strategies can be used to express counter-assertive focus as well, hence the English translations of the examples (2, 3). Even though Portuguese has developed a dedicated strategy, still in the contexts where postverbal *sim* appears, a verum strategy is usually also acceptable.

[2]On the syntax of answer particles in general see Holmberg 2016, on postverbal negation in Brazilian Portuguese see Schwenter (2005; 2006); Some Romance varieties also have a negative counterpart to their equivalent of the *sim (que)* strategy (cf. Poletto and Zanuttini 2013). Portuguese, however, does not.

[3]In Holmberg (2016) the answer particle is merged in a left peripheral FocP and assigns a value to an unvalued polarity feature in PolP. Examples like pt. *Certamente que sim.* 'Yes, certainly.' however show that Portuguese answer particles can be preceded by certain modifies (and complementizers) that are analyzed below FocP. Hence the current proposal that the particle is merged directly in PolP.

linked to a lower PolP between IP and VP discussed in Winkler (2000). For the verum strategy, I adopt Lohnstein's (2016) *sentence mood theory of verum focus*, which treats the interpretation of verum as a by-product of focus on sentence mood. The particle is merged in a low left peripheral sentence mood position (see AUTHOR 2018, 2019 for a motivation and Haegeman 2006 for a similar idea). In the present account, *sim* is attracted by a focus feature in all three strategies. In the affirmation strategy, the feature is contingent on FocP (see Holmberg 2016 on the relation between FocP and PolP in affirmation/negation). In the verum and counter assertion strategies, the focus feature is hosted by MoodP and PolP respectively. The different interpretations result from the fact that in each strategy *sim* expresses focus on a different functional category.

C2: Underspecified element I propose that there is only one *sim* in the lexicon of Portuguese. The item encodes positive-polarity in its core meaning but is underspecified otherwise. Its precises functional interpretation results from stress on the functional projection it is hosted by. This explains why the syntactic position has an impact on the interpretative effect of the particle. For verum and affirmation, the relation to focus is in line with Holmberg (2016), who argues that polar questions set up a contexts in which the polarity of the answer constitutes a focus, and with Lohnstein (2016), who treats verum as a result of focus on sentence mood. Polarity is also focused in the counter assertive interpretation. It is used in contexts like (2) where the speaker wants to stress that the polarity of the current proposition contrasts with the polarity of a salient alternative proposition.

C3: Variation While Brazilian Portuguese permits all three strategies, European Portuguese only allows two: affirmation and counter-assertion. This contrast is explained as a result from a more general and well-observed difference between the two varieties. European Portuguese finite verbs move to a higher position in the left periphery while in Brazilian Portuguese the verb remains in IP (see Martins 1995, Galves, Moraes, and Ribeiro 2005, among others). I show that the left peripheral position the verb targets in European Portuguese is MoodP. It therefore coincides with the position *sim* is merged in the verum strategy (see AUTHOR 2019). This explains why in European Portuguese it is impossible to insert *sim* in this position because it is occupied by the finite verb. I will extend my account to the alternative verum strategy in European Portuguese studied in Martins (2006; 2007; 2013) that relies and verbal doubling. I show that it can be adequately captured in the same vein. By doing so I add on to the analysis proposed by Martins and bring in further evidence in favor of the *sentence mood theory of verum focus* proposed in Lohnstein (2016).

Selected References

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