

## Focusing adverbs don't exist!

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**1. Introduction:** Different grammatical devices are reported in the literature to mark the *focus* in a sentence: cleft structures, pseudoclefts, displacements of different sorts, intonation, etc. Recent studies—especially those developed within the Cartographic approach—have argued in favour of the existence of distinct structural positions in the sentence for the valuation of different types of foci. Thus, constituents bearing contrastive and exhaustive features would raise to a dedicated position in the left periphery, namely [Spec,Foc], to have their features valued (Rizzi 1997), while other types of foci (e.g. informational focus) would move to the vP-periphery (Belletti 2004). Nonetheless, the very fact that high adverbs (e.g. the corresponding of *probably*, *evidently*, *perhaps* in Romance) can be used as “focusing” adverbs—having scope over their associated DP (see (1))—(Cinque 1999: 30) would question this acknowledgment: their position of merge is IP-internal and the associated focus generally appear to their right (see (1)). In addition to this, the so-called “focusing adverbs” (*only*, *even*, *etc.*) can be associated with a constituent which is not necessarily the focus in a given sentence (see (2) where the alleged focusing adverb *solo* ‘only’ takes under its scope the DP<sub>-complement</sub> which is clearly not the focus as the focus is the fronted PP, given Rizzi’s (1997) unicity of focus).

- (1) Gianni                      mangiava                      probabilmente                      la pasta, non la carne                      [Italian]  
       G.                          used-to-eat                      probably                      the pasta, not the meat  
       (‘G. probably used to eat pasta, not meat.’)
- (2) [Foc A SUSANA] (que)                      Juan                      le dio                      solo                      el libro                      (no a Adriana)                      [Spanish]  
       TO SUSAN                      that                      Juan                      to-him gave                      only                      the book (not to Adriana)  
       ‘To Susan John only gave a book (not to Adriana)’

**2. Goals:** Given the paradoxical scenario stated in the *Introduction* (on the basis of the data in (1) and (2)), the main goal of this paper is to argue that *focusing adverbs don't exist*—or, to put it in a different way, that the merger of adverbs often associated with focus do not constitute (*per se*) a syntactic strategy to mark the sentence focus. Therefore, the paper aims to argue that, as a syntactic phenomenon, *focalisation* can only be reached by means of internal(not external) merge, the XP bearing the focus feature having to raise—either pied-piping the (alleged focusing)adverb or not—to have its focal features valued either in the low (Belletti 2004) or in the left (Rizzi 1997, 2004) peripheries.

**3. Data and discussion:** In order to show that “focusing” adverbs cannot be considered a syntactic device to mark the focus—because *there are no focusing adverbs at all*—, the first task is to show that an alleged focusing adverb having under its scope a given constituent (which is not the focus) can co-occur with a focalised constituent—here, focalised by means of an uncontroversial strategy to mark the focus (e.g., cleft-structures, focus-fronting movement, etc.). Given the *unicity of focus* (Rizzi 1997)—which is a consequence of a more general principle voiding repetition of categories in a given sentence, say the *decompositionality principle* (Kayne 2005)—, sentences featuring constituents displaced to the low and left peripheries co-occurring with constituents modified by alleged focusing adverbs (e.g. *only*, *even*, *mainly* etc.) are good and valid arguments in favour of the contention that there are no focusing adverbs at all. Examples of these sorts include—but are not limited to—the following:

1. the possible co-occurrence of a clefted-XP (thus undoubtedly the focus) with a different phrase under the scope of a “focusing adverb”. This is shown by (3-4), where the focus is the clefted DP (*Paula*, in (3), and *A Sônia*, in (4)), regardless of the presence of the “focusing adverb” *solo/só* ‘only’ and the DP (*un premio/um prêmio* ‘a prize’) it modifies (3,4).

- (3) Fue [F PAULA]                      que ganó                      solo un premio                      [, no Juana!]                      [(South American) Spanish]  
       Was PAULA                      that won                      only a prize                      [not Juana]  
       ‘It was Paula who won only a prize [, not Juana]!’
- (4) Foi [F A SÔNIA]                      que                      ganhou                      só um prêmio                      [, não a Joana!] [Braz. Portug.]  
       Was [THE SÔNIA]                      that                      was-awarded                      only a prize                      [not the Joana!]  
       ‘It was Sônia that was awarded only a prize, not Joana’

2. the possible co-occurrence of a fronted focus with a different phrase under the scope of a “focusing adverb”. This is shown by (5-6), where the fronted focus (namely *To Susan* (5)/*Para a Susana* (6)) co-occurs with the DP *a book* (5) or *o livro* ‘the book’ (6) which is under the scope of the alleged focusing adverb.

- (5) [<sub>Foc</sub> TO SUSAN], John only gave *a book* (not to Adriana)  
 (6) [<sub>Foc</sub> PARA A SUSANA] (que) o João deu só *o livro* (não para a Adriana) [Brazilian Portuguese]  
       TO THE SUSANA that the João gave only the book (not to Adriana) (= (5))

3. the possible co-occurrence of a pseudoclefted constituent with an XP modified by an alleged focusing adverb. This is shown in (7) where the pseudoclefted constituent *banana*, the focus, co-occurs with the alleged focusing adverb *só* ‘only’ which modifies the DP-subject *o João*, which is not the focus.

- (7) O que só *o João* comeu foi banana [Braz. Portuguese]  
       The what only the John ate was banana (“What only John ate was banana”)

Given the unicity of focus (Rizzi 1997), according to which there is only one focus per sentence—probably a consequence of the *decompositionality principle*, whereby there is space for only one element from a given category in the structure—the very fact that the three sort of examples above involve an uncontroversial focalised constituent (underscored in the examples in (3-7)) jointly occurring with a DP modified by a(n alleged) focusing adverb (italicised in the corresponding examples) is more than a plausible argument against the contention that focusing adverbs don’t exist.

Now, given the conclusion that focusing adverbs are not focusing at all—as they can take under their scope a constituent which is not the sentence focus—, something else must be said on the integration of the so-called focusing adverbs into sentence structure when they are indeed associated with focus (e.g. in sentences like (8-9), below):

- (8) Juan come solo comida chatarra [South American Spanish]  
       Juan eats only food junk (“John only eats junk food”)  
 (9) O João come só porcaria (= (8)) [Brazilian Portuguese]  
       The João eats only junk-food (= (8))

In these two examples, the so-called focusing adverb is indeed associated with sentence focus, namely, the DP (corresponding to) ‘junk food’. In this case, given the discussion on the data in (3-7), the focus in (8-9) (only) coincides with the adverbs’ modifiee. The derivation of (8-9) would involve an analysis in the spirit of Kayne (1998) and Munaro (2013) by which the DP modified by the alleged focusing adverb would raise to the specifier of a probing head followed by the merger of the adverb and remnant movement. These steps would only guarantee the modification of the DP *comida chatarra/porcaria* by *only/solo/só*. To value the focusing feature, the chunk *solo comida chatarra/só porcaria* would have to raise to [Spec,FocP] in the left periphery. The raising of the remnant not only guarantees that the sentence be linearised this way at PF but also that the chunk be interpreted as the sentence focus. What makes (8-9) different from (3-7) is that this further movement of the DP *comida chatarra/porcaria* (pied-piping the alleged focusing adverb) do not take place in (3-7) as in those sentences the adverb does not modify the focus.

**4. Conclusion:** All in all, focusing adverbs don’t exist. Therefore, what is informally and mistakenly referred to as a focusing adverb may only occasionally be associated with the focus in a given sentence. One may thus disassociate modification by a given adverb class from focalisation (which involve raising to the left-periphery). Alleged focusing adverbs syntactically behave as ordinary adverbs: they modify a given XP. This XP may be the focus or not.

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