UDK: 81'367.3+ 81'367.625]:811
Izvorni znanstveni članak
Primljeno 18. 6. 2025.
Prihvaćeno za tisak 27. 4. 2026.
https://doi.org/10.22210/suvlin.2026.101.06

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Towards a Typology of Positive Polarity Focus Constructions[1, 2]

This paper explores the cross-linguistic diversity of grammatical ways of encoding positive polarity focus in declaratives, termed *polarity focus constructions*. In addition, the paper attempts to address the question if such constructions cross-linguistically commonly target finite verb forms. A 20-language convenience sample was used for the study, spanning 10 language families from six geographic areas of the world: the Ethiopian Highlands, Europe, Mesoamerica, the Northwestern Coast of North America, Siberia and West Africa. The data were primarily collected from secondary sources. The investigation has confirmed all the structural types of polarity focus marking noted in previous work touching on the cross-linguistic structural diversity in polarity focus marking: prosodic prominence on the finite verb form, special syntactic positioning of the finite verb form, special morphemes and auxiliary verbs. What is more, it has attested to structural elements in polarity focus marking not mentioned in previous cross-linguistic work. One instance of these are special subject-agreement suffixes on the verb in Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands). Another instance is absence of structural elements that occur in canonical wide predicate-focus declaratives. This pattern was found in Bench and Somali (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic, Ethiopian Highlands). In addition, all three pairs of languages within the same genus that are included in the dataset feature completely different polarity focus constructions: Bura-Pabir and Marghi South (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, Bura-Marghi), English and Swedish (Indo-European, Germanic), and Croatian and Russian (Indo-European, Slavic). This suggests that polarity focus constructions might be a diachronically unstable feature. Finally, the polarity focus constructions in 16 of the 20 languages can be analysed as marking the finite verb form as the focus domain, with the data lacking for the remaining four languages. This suggests that the finite verb form as the syntactic domain of polarity focus may be a cross-linguistically common pattern.

Keywords: typology; syntax; information structure; polarity focus; verum focus

1 This paper is based on Chapter 7 of my doctoral dissertation, *An Areal Typology of Focus Constructions with Particular Reference to Europe* (Petrović, 2025a). However, four additional languages have been added to the dataset studied for the paper when compared to the thesis.
The presentation of this paper at the *16th International Conference of the Association for Linguistic Typology*, which took place 1–3 July 2026 in Lyon, was supported by funding from the development component of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences within the framework of the University of Zagreb Programme Agreement for the programme period 2025–2029.

2 I wish to thank Ranko Matasović and Sune Gregersen for reading an earlier draft of this paper and giving me useful feedback. I also thank Irena Zovko Dinković for useful comments on the concept of polarity focus as employed here.

1. Introduction

This paper explores how declarative clauses with focus scoping only over positive polarity can be grammatically distinct from canonical wide-focus declaratives in a 20-language sample. For example, (1ii) is an English clause with positive polarity focus, grammatically distinct from the wide-focus clause (1i):

(1) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
   i. Context: 'What did Mary do at the party?'
   She ate all the chocolate waffles.
   ii. Context: 'I can't imagine that Mary ate all the chocolate waffles at the party.'
   Mary DID *eat all the chocolate waffles.*[3]

Any grammatical way of encoding this kind of focus structure, such as the English *do*-support construction seen in (1ii), is termed a *polarity focus construction*. In addition to exploring the cross-linguistic diversity of polarity focus constructions, the paper tries to address the question how cross-linguistically commonly such constructions target the finite verb form.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 clarifies the concept of polarity focus and presents what little is known about the cross-linguistic structural diversity of polarity focus constructions. The research questions and hypotheses are explained in Section 3, followed by a description of the language sample used and of the parameters used for coding the data in Section 4. The analysed data are presented in Section 5. Finally, insights that can be drawn from the data are discussed in Section 6.

2. Theoretical background

This section first clarifies the concept of polarity focus as used in this study in §2.1, followed by an overview of what can be discerned on the cross-linguistic diversity of polarity focus constructions from the existing literature in §2.2.

2.1. The concept of polarity focus

The framework of focus used in this study builds on the logical concept of proposition. A proposition is defined here as "the representation of the semantic content of a clause" (Croft, 2022, p. 326), which may be true or false with respect to a given world. In other words, a proposition is a representation of the kinds of situations a clause may refer to, including the participants of the situation and their properties and quantities, the situation's time reference, aspectuality, mo-

3 SMALL CAPS are used in examples to indicate sentence-level prosodic prominence.

dality and other properties, and its positive or negative polarity (Croft, 2022, pp. 326–327; Dik, 1989, pp. 247–254; Lambrecht, 1994, p. 53; Löbner, 2013, p. 23; cf. Lyons, 1977, pp. 141–142; Pagin, 2016, p. 65).

The theoretical model of focus employed here draws mostly on Lambrecht's (1994) work. Lambrecht (1994, p. 52) uses the proposition-based concepts of *presupposition* and *assertion* to define focus as a concept within a model of linguistic communication. Presupposition is understood by Lambrecht as "the set of propositions [...] evoked in a sentence which the speaker assumes the hearer already knows or is ready to take for granted at the time the sentence is uttered", while assertion is "the proposition expressed by a sentence which the hearer is expected to know or take for granted as a result of hearing the sentence uttered". Focus is then defined by Lambrecht (1994, p. 213) as "the semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion [of the proposition] differs from the presupposition". In other words, focus represents the information update that a clause brings to the common ground of a particular discourse. For example, (2b), (3)b, (4b) and (5b) all express the same assertion:

(2) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)[4]
  a. *What happened?*
  b. *LEONORA ate all the salted CARAMEL cake at the party.*
(3) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
  a. *What can you tell me about Leonora?*
  b. *She ate all the salted CARAMEL cake at the party.*
(4) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
  a. *Who ate all the salted caramel cake at the party?*
  b. *It was LEONORA that ate all the salted caramel cake at the party.*
(5) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
  a. *What did Leonora do with all the salted caramel cake at the party?*
  b. *She ATE it/all the salted caramel cake.*

However, the focus is different in each example due to different presuppositions construed by the preceding question in each pair. In (2b), the focus is nearly equivalent with the assertion, as the context presupposes neither the kind of situation or its participants. The focus of the proposition expressed in (3b) spans all the semantic components other than the topical agent participant 'Leonora', as the question in (3a) presupposes that she is a participant involved in the situation denoted by the sought answer. On the other hand, the question in (4a) presupposes the kind of situation in the answer, its time reference, and the patient participant 'all the salted caramel cake'. The focus in (4b) is therefore only the agent participant 'Leonora'. This type of focus structure can cross-linguistically often be marked by a

4 Subexamples labelled by *a, b*... are to be construed as constituting a discourse together. On the other hand, subexamples that are grouped together but do not constitute a discourse are labelled by *i, ii*...

special construction, such as the cleft construction in English seen in (4b). Finally, the question in (5a) presupposes both the agent and the patient argument and the time reference, but leaves the kind of situation involving the two participants open. The focus of the assertion in (5b) therefore consists only in the situation type. In this paper, the following terms are used for the four types of focus structure exemplified by (2)–(5): *wide sentence focus* for the focus structure observed in (2b), *wide predicate focus* for the structure as in (3b), *narrow argument focus* for the one seen in (4b) and *narrow situation focus* for the focus structure as in (5b) (Bentley, 2023, pp. 466–472; Frascarelli, 2010, p. 2122; cf. Lambrecht, 1994, pp. 221–238; Van Valin, 2005, pp. 69–73). Lambrecht (1994, p. 235), Valin and La Polla (1997, p. 206) and Van Valin (2005, p. 70) assume that wide predicate focus is the unmarked focus structure type language-universally.

Furthermore, (6b) also expresses the same assertion as (2b), (3b), (4b) and (5b):

(6) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
a. *Did Leonora really eat all the salted caramel cake at the party?*
b. *She* DID *eat all the salted caramel cake.*

However, the kind of situation, its participants and time reference are already given by (6a), with only its truth value not presupposed between all the discourse participants. The speaker of (6b) thus expresses a proposition where the only non-presupposed component is its positive polarity, in order to assert the truth value of the proposition. The kind of focus structure observed in (6b) is termed *polarity focus* in this paper (cf. Büring, 2006, pp. 152–153; Dik, 1989, p. 282; Hartmann et al., 2008, pp. 74–75; Höhle, 2018, pp. 381–383; cf. Watters, 1979, p. 177).

A concept corresponding to polarity focus here has also been called *polar focus* (Watters, 1979, p. 177) and *verum focus*, the latter term especially dominant in the generative tradition since its coinage by Höhle (1988). Indeed, Höhle's (2018 [1992]) influential paper is even credited with creating the notion corresponding to polarity focus by for example Gutzmann, Hartmann and Matthewson (2020, p. 3), although the concept was already used at least by Halliday (1967, p. 39) in his analysis of a corpus of spoken English and was recognised as one of the focus structures reflected on a clause's grammatical structure in Aghem (Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, West Africa) in Watters' (1979, p. 177) pioneering work on focus constructions in that language.

The concept of polarity focus or *verum focus* has also been criticised (cf. Gutzmann et al., 2020; Matić & Nikolaeva, 2018). For example, Gutzmann, Hartmann and Matthewson (2020) argue that the phenomenon of polarity focus is better described as a lexical *verum* operator that only happens to be expressed by prosodic prominence in English and German, as focus is. They base their claim on formal asymmetries between argument or adjunct focus marking and *verum* marking in three Chadic languages: Bura, South Marghi and Gitksan, and in Kwak'wala

(Wakashan, Northwestern Coast of North America), as well as on the fact that *verum* marking is not obligatory in answers to polar questions in Bura or Gitksan. However, neither of these datapoints disprove the analysis that *verum* is a kind of focus structure. This is because different strategies for encoding different kinds of focus structure are perfectly conceivable, as are asymmetries in obligatoriness of marking between different focus structures. Indeed, asymmetries in obligatoriness of marking are attested even between narrowly focal arguments of different syntactic functions (cf. Petrović, 2025b, 2025a, pp. 136–138). In addition, Gutzmann et al. (2020) do not make their definition of focus entirely clear. Since polarity focus falls under the definition of a focus structure used in this paper, it is treated as a kind of focus structure here.

Since there are only two possible polarity values of a proposition, polarity focus is always asserted against a closed set of alternatives. Polarity focus is thus inherently contrastive in the sense that the concept of contrastivity is used in this paper (cf. Dik, 1989, p. 282; É. Kiss, 1998, pp. 267–271 for the concept of contrastivity). This has already been argued by Stommel (2012).

A term concerning the expression of focus within sentence structure that is also adopted from Lambrecht (1994, p. 214) is *syntactic domain of focus* or *focus domain* for short. This concept denotes the syntactic constituent that contains the focal constituent and may be marked as focal or independently used as a reply to a question only as a whole. The focus domain may be wider than the clause constituent expressing the focus. For example, only the adjective *red* in (7b) is focal:

(7) English (Indo-European, Europe) (Lambrecht, 1994, p. 214)
a. *Is the blue coat yours?*
b. *No, it's the red coat that's mine.*

However, the focus domain is the entire NP *the red coat*, as reflected in the fact that the entire NP is clefted in (7b).

2.2. Polarity focus constructions

Like clauses with narrow focus over an argument or an adjunct, polarity-focus clauses may receive special marking distinguishing them from corresponding wide-focus clauses. For instance, as evidenced by (1ii), English declaratives with polarity focus are marked by use of the auxiliary *do* and by sentence stress on the finite verb form. Any grammatical means of marking polarity focus clauses are termed *polarity focus constructions* in this paper. As far as I know, no substantial typological overview of polarity focus constructions has been made so far. The closest to such an overview to my knowledge is Lohnstein's (2015, pp. 14–15) brief discussion of various grammatical devices for encoding polarity focus encountered in seven languages, five of which are Indo-European languages of Europe. However, Lohnstein's (2015, pp. 14–15) text and examples used in works discussing theo-

retical modelling of polarity focus can hint at the cross-linguistic diversity of polarity focus constructions. These sources attest to four kinds of marking: sentence stress on a certain clause constituent, special morphemes, use of an auxiliary verb and placing the finite verb form in a designated syntactic position. Many examples supplied in the sources consulted (cf. Höhle 2018 [1992]: 382; Hetland 1992: 4–5; Hartmann 2013: 114–115; Gutzmann, Hartmann & Matthewson 2020: 21–24) are compatible with analysing the polarity focus construction as a construction indicating that the syntactic domain of focus scopes only over the finite verb form.

As with other types of non-canonical focus structures, polarity focus can be marked prosodically. However, unlike with narrow argument and adjunct focus, the clause constituent representing the polarity of the clause is often not obvious. According to the available descriptions, the clause constituent receiving sentence stress to indicate polarity focus is the finite verb form at least in English and in matrix clauses in German (Indo-European, Europe; Höhle 2018 [1992]: 382–383) and Norwegian (Indo-European, Europe; Hetland 1992: 4–8). Sentence stress on the auxiliary *do* in an English polarity-focus clause was already seen in (1ii). Sentence stress on the finite verb form in a polarity-focus declarative is shown for German in (8):

(8) German (Indo-European, Europe) (2018[1992], p. 382)
Context: 'I asked Hanna what Karl is doing now, and she made the silly claim that he was writing a screenplay.'

Karl	*SCHREIBT*	*ein*	*Drehbuch.*
Karl	write.PRS.3SG	NDF.N.SG	screenplay

'Karl is writing a screenplay.'

As demonstrated by (8), German differs from English in that a finite lexical verb form can also receive sentence stress to indicate polarity focus, and no special auxiliary is used for that function. Instead, a polarity-focus declarative is grammatically indistinct from a wide-focus declarative, with only prosody distinguishing them. Polarity-focus declaratives in German are thus both grammatically and prosodically identical to narrow situation-focus declaratives. As opposed to English, German (Höhle 2018 [1992]: 394–396) and Norwegian (Hetland, 1992, p. 5) are reported to prosodically mark polarity focus inside embedded clauses by stressing the complementiser instead of the finite verb form. This is shown for Norwegian in (9):

(9) Norwegian (Indo-European, Europe) (Hetland, 1992, p. 5)
Context: 'Do you know if she has been to Moscow?'

Jeg	*vet*	*AT*	*hun*	*har*	*vært*	*i*
1SG.NOM	know.PRS	that	3SG.F.NOM	AUX	be.PTCP	in

Moskva.
Moscow
'I know that she has been to Moscow.'

Furthermore, polarity focus can be marked by dedicated morphemes. For example, Bura-Pabir (Afroasiatic, Chadic, West Africa) may mark polarity focus in declaratives with the dedicated particle *kú* immediately preceding the predicate (Hartmann et al., 2008, pp. 74–79), as seen in (10):

(10) Bura-Pabir (Afroasiatic, Chadic, West Africa) (Gutzmann et al., 2020, p. 20)
Context: 'Yesterday, Pindar drank beer.'
A'á, Pindár kú sá mbal náha.
yes Pindar POL.FOC drink beer yesterday
'Yes, Pindar did drink beer yesterday.'

However, the Bura-Pabir particle *kú* can only be used in perfective clauses, demonstrating that polarity focus marking can also be split by the clause's grammatical features. In other words, non-perfective clauses with polarity focus structure are not grammatically distinguishable from wide-focus declaratives. Furthermore, the use of the particle *kú* in perfective clauses is optional. While polarity focus can be marked by the particle *kú* immediately preceding the verb form, with the verb form left in its canonical position, narrow focus over an argument or an adjunct can be grammatically marked by placing the corresponding constituent in a clause-initial slot and using another particle immediately following it. Clauses with narrow situation focus receive no grammatical marking. The Bura-Pabir pattern of polarity focus marking is therefore not outrightly reducible to using an independently existing focus construction to mark narrow focus over the finite verb form. On the other hand, it is not contradictory to conceptualising the finite verb form as the syntactic domain of polarity focus either. This is because the construction uses a special particle that still is adjacent to the verb form and that may simply be analysed as occurring on the other side of the constituent it focuses compared to the particle used for narrow argument or adjunct focus.

As already mentioned and shown in (1ii), English exhibits the use of the auxiliary verb *do* to mark polarity focus in a declarative featuring no other auxiliary.

Finally, polarity focus is cross-linguistically attested to be marked by placing the finite verb form in a designated syntactic position. For example, Hartmann (2013, pp. 114–115) and Gutzmann et al. (2020, pp. 21–24) describe Marghi South (Afroasiatic, Chadic, West Africa), a canonically SVO language, as positioning the finite verb form in the clause-initial position to mark polarity focus. However, this syntactic pattern is restricted to auxiliaries. The Marghi South auxiliaries primarily encode aspect. Their use is optional in wide predicate-focus contexts such as (11i), where Hartmann (2013, p. 105) reports no semantic contrast between the variant with the auxiliary and the one without it. On the other hand, an auxiliary must occur in a polarity focus construction. It is placed clause-initially in this context, as evidenced by (11):

(11) Marghi South (Afroasiatic, Chadic, West Africa) (Gutzmann et al., 2020, p. 23; Hartmann, 2013, p. 105)

i. Context: 'What did Ndíhyél do?'

Ndíhyél	*(a)*	*úsá-r*	*Ámóní*
Ndíhyél	AUX	greet-PFV	Ámóní

'Ndíhyél greeted Ámóní.'

ii. Context: 'Did you buy the rice?'

Aŋ,	*a*	*dəlbiya-ri-yi*	*morari*	*ni.*
Yes	AUX	buy-PFV-1SGrice		DEF

'Yes, I did buy the rice.'

Argument or adjunct constituents in narrow focus in Marghi South are also placed in the clause-initial position, in addition to being marked by a particle following them. Like prosodic marking of polarity focus in English, German and Norwegian, the polarity focus construction in Marghi South is thus also congruent with conceptualising the finite verb form as the representative of the clause's positive polarity that is marked as the exclusive focus domain. Under this analysis, the common template for narrow focus constructions in Marghi South is placing the narrowly focal constituent in the clause-initial slot, with narrow focus over an argument or adjunct constituent additionally marked by a particle.

3. Research questions

This paper aims to shed light on cross-linguistic diversity in the grammatical structure of polarity focus constructions as far as the data available for the languages included in the dataset allow. The study is limited to matrix clauses due to the scarcity of relevant data sources. Moreover, it is limited to affirmative clauses because negation marking is a complex topic in itself. The investigation is also limited to declarative clauses, leaving the question of the focus structure of interrogative clauses aside for future work. The main research questions addressed are:

1) What structural types of polarity focus declarative constructions are attested in the chosen language sample?
2) How common in the sample is it for the same construction type to be used both for encoding polarity focus and narrow focus over an argument or an adjunct?
3) How commonly in the sample do polarity focus constructions and narrow situation focus constructions coincide in structure?
4) How commonly in the sample can a finite verb form be analysed as the syntactic domain of focus in polarity focus constructions?

Prosodic marking is also considered when assessing whether the finite verb form can be analysed as representing the clause's positive polarity in a language.

If the finite verb form represents the polarity of a clause, this is expected to be reflected in that the polarity focus construction can be reduced to the same construction type used for encoding narrow argument or adjunct focus, but marking the finite verb form instead of an argument or an adjunct. Research question 2) was therefore addressed primarily as a help for assessing whether a polarity focus construction was adequately analysed as a narrow focus construction marking a finite verb form. In a similar manner, research question 3) was formulated with the assumption that narrow situation focus constructions are most likely to mark focus domain scoping only over a verb form, and primarily used as a help when considering whether a polarity focus construction is congruent with being a construction marking focus scoping over a verb form.

4. Material and methods

This section presents the language sample in §4.1 and delineates the way the relevant data were coded in §4.2.

4.1. Language sample

Data sources on encoding polarity focus in the languages of the world are scarce. This paper therefore uses a convenience sample (cf. Velupillai, 2012, p. 50) spanning only 20 languages for which the relevant data were found. This entails either that a description of a polarity focus construction featured in the language was found or a description confirming no grammatical encoding of polarity focus in the language. Reference grammars of another 66 languages were consulted, but they provided no information on the expression of polarity focus. To make the sample somewhat areally and phylogenetically diverse, the languages were selected from six geographical areas of the world: the Ethiopian Highlands, Europe, Mesoamerica, the Northwestern Coast of North America, Siberia and West Africa. The 20 languages come from 10 families. However, the Afro-Asiatic family is represented by languages from three of its primary branches: Chadic, Cushitic and Semitic, known for their large time depth and kinship distance between each other (cf. Diakonoff, 1988, pp. 15–16; Hayward, 2000, pp. 74, 80–81). An overview of the language sample is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Overview of the language sample

Ethiopian Highlands	**Afro-Asiatic, Semitic**: Tigrinya **Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic**: Somali **South Omotic**: Hamer-Banna **Ta-Ne-Omotic**: Bench
Europe	**Basque**: Basque **Indo-European** (7) Balto-Slavic: Croatian, Russian Celtic: Irish Germanic: English, Swedish Romance: Romanian, Spanish **Uralic** (2): Finnish, Hungarian
Mesoamerica	**Mayan**: Central Nahualá K'iche'
NW Coast of N America	**Wakashan**: Kwak'wala
Siberia	**Yukaghir**: North Yukaghir
West Africa	**Afro-Asiatic, Chadic** (2): Bura-Pabir, Marghi South **Niger-Congo**: Efik

All the glottonyms and phylogenetic classifications are adopted from Glottolog (Hammarström et al., 2025).

The maximum of two languages per genus in Dryer's (1989, p. 267, 2000, p. 335) sense was set, defined by him (1989, p. 267) as "genetic groups roughly comparable to the subfamilies of Indo-European". However, the sample is nevertheless both phylogenetically and areally biased, since seven of the 20 languages are Indo-European and ten of the 20 languages are spoken in Europe; see Section 6 for further discussion.

The data were primarily collected from secondary sources. In addition, the Croatian Web Corpus (hrWaC; Ljubešić & Klubička, 2014) was used for Croatian.

4.2. Data coding

The data were organised per construction. Each construction distinguishing a polarity focus declarative from a wide predicate-focus declarative was coded for the following parameters:

1) what structural elements it consists of
   a. designated syntactic position: yes, no
      i. which clause constituent is placed in the position
      ii. whether the position must be clause-initial: yes, no
   b. morpheme with non-verbal function: yes, no
      i. position of the morpheme: pre-verbal, post-verbal

ii. morpheme's function beside focus marking: none, copula, subject-agreement marker
iii. whether subject-agreement markers are attached to the morpheme: yes, no
c. auxiliary verb: yes, no
d. absence of structural elements: yes, no
e. sentence stress: yes, no
i. what clause constituent receives it

2) whether there is different marking depending on the grammatical features of the clause: yes, no
3) whether the same structural elements are used for marking narrow focus over an argument or an adjunct: yes, no
4) whether the same structural elements are used for marking narrow situation focus.

The "same structural elements" in 3) and 4) refer to the identical syntactic position, morpheme or auxiliary being used for marking polarity focus and the respective focus structure rather than the same type of structural element. In other words: if, for example, different morphemes placed in the same position are used for both constructions, the parameter is coded as negative.

A somewhat simplified overview of the dataset is given in the Appendix.

5. Results

The results are delineated in the following order: first, §5.1 presents the structural types of polarity focus constructions attested in the dataset and their frequency. A discussion of the evidence for analysing the polarity focus constructions as constructions marking the focus domain scoping over a verb form, considering both grammatical and prosodic marking and narrow situation focus marking, follows in §5.2.

5.1. Prevalence of structural types of polarity focus constructions

Table 2 shows the frequency of the structural types of polarity focus declarative constructions in the 20-language dataset. The designation "V-morpheme" in the table refers to morphemes that are always verb-bound, while "FOC-PRT" simply refers to morphemes that may occur separately from the verb, either in the polarity focus construction or in other contexts. Furthermore, "POL-FOC-PRT" and "POL-FOC-V-morpheme" indicate morphemes that are dedicated to polarity focus marking, whereas "FOC-PRT" and "FOC-V-morpheme" indicate morphemes that are also used for marking other focus structures:

Table 2. Overview of the polarity focus constructions in the dataset analysed into the structural elements they consist of

construction type	**number of languages**	**languages**
absence of structural elements	1	Somali
absence of structural elements, special SUBJ-agreement morpheme on V	1	Bench
auxiliary	1	English
FOC-PRT	1	Tigrinya
FOC-V-morpheme	3	Hamer-Banna, Central Nahualá K'iche', Northern Yukaghir
none	5	Efik, Hungarian, Irish, Russian, Swedish
POL-FOC-PRT	2	Kwak'wala, Spanish
POL-FOC-V-morpheme	1	Bura-Pabir
V in a designated syntactic position	4	Croatian, Finnish, Romanian, Marghi South
V in a designated syntactic position, POL-FOC-V-morpheme	1	Basque
total	**20**	

As seen in Table 2, the 20-language dataset attests to all the structural elements marking polarity focus declaratives reported in §2.2: special positioning of the verb form, particles, an auxiliary verb and no grammatical marking, with polarity focus declaratives distinguished from their wide-focus counterparts only by prosodic prominence of the finite verb form. In addition to particles, clear examples of verbal morphology as part of polarity focus constructions have also been found (see §5.1.2), comprising both an affix only indicating a certain focus structure when attached to the verb (see (17), (19) and (21)), and special sets of subject-agreement affixes for clauses with polarity focus (see (14)). Moreover, absence of structural elements has also been found to distinguish polarity focus declaratives from wide focus declaratives, these elements being subject pronouns in both occurrences (see (14) and (22)).

Five of the 20 languages exhibit no special grammatical marking of polarity focus declaratives. These comprise Efik (Niger-Congo, West Africa) and four European languages: Hungarian (Uralic), Irish (Indo-European), Russian (Indo-European) and Swedish (Indo-European). This, however, is not to be interpreted as an indication that European languages are less likely to feature grammatical encoding

of polarity focus compared to the other investigated areas. Instead, this may also be explained by the fact that the European languages are much better-described and thus more likely to have descriptions confirming no grammatical marking of polarity focus.

5.1.1. Designated syntactic positions

Special positioning of the finite verb form is found in five languages – Marghi South (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, West Africa), already exemplified by (11) in §2.2, and four European languages: Basque (isolate), Croatian (Indo-European), Finnish (Uralic) and Romanian (Indo-European). In all five languages, this special positioning entails clause-initial placement of the finite verb form whereas their canonical constituent order is not V-initial. Unlike what was reported for Marghi South in §2.2, the four European languages can place both auxiliary and lexical verbs in this special syntactic slot. For instance, the Romanian example (12) shows a transitive clause differing from the canonical SVO order in that the the verb form *înțelege* 'understands' precedes the subject pronoun *el* 'he', landing in a clause-initial position:

(12) Romanian (Indo-European, Europe) (Giurgea & Remberger, 2012, p. 29)
Context: the speaker presupposes that the hearer has doubts whether the person talked about understands the problem

Stai	*liniștit,*	*înțelege*	*el*
stay.IMP.2SG	calm.M.SG	understand.PRS.3SG	3SG.NOM

problema.
problem.DEF.ACC
'Don't worry, he DOES understand the problem.'

All five languages feature a clause-initial slot for narrow argument or adjunct focus. The V-initial polarity focus pattern therefore appears to exhibit a verb form placed in the same focus slot.

At least two of the four languages mentioned in the paragraph above appear to allow a clause-internal topic constituent preceding a verb form placed in a special syntactic position in a polarity focus context: Basque and Croatian. For example, (13) is an authentic attestation in Croatian, another canonically SVO language. The example features *jesu*, a stressed temporal auxiliary form. The occurrence of a stressed auxiliary form indicates a polarity focus interpretation itself, as a wide focus declarative would normally feature a clitic form of the auxiliary; with a 3PL subject as in (13), this would be *su*. In addition, the auxiliary form precedes the subject constituent *židovi* (*Židovi*) 'Jews', evidencing that it is placed outside of its canonical position. The auxiliary is in turn preceded by the object constituent *Isusa* 'Jesus.ACC'. *Isusa* is inflected in the case form required by the predicate *ubili* and is not resumed by a pronoun, suggesting that it is placed in a clause-initial topic slot rather than in a position detached from the clause:

(13) Croatian (Indo-European, Europe) forum.hr, hrWaC
Context: another forum member pointed out that Jesus was killed by Jews.
Isusa *jesu* *ubili* *židovi*
Jesus.M.ACC AUX.3PL kill.PTCP.M.PL Jew.M.NOM.PL
ali ti 'Židovi' smo svi mi.
'Jesus WAS killed by Jews, but all of us are those "Jews".'

A Basque example is shown in §5.1.2 as (21), since the construction involves a dedicated morpheme beside special positioning of the verb form.

5.1.2. Predicate-bound morphemes

Six out of the 20 languages make use of verb-bound morphemes for encoding polarity focus: Basque (isolate, Europe), Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands), Bura-Pabir (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, West Africa), Hamer-Banna (South Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands), Central Nahualá K'iche' (Mayan, Mesoamerica) and Northern Yukaghir (Yukaghir, Siberia). Unlike in the other five languages, the relevant verbal morphology in Bench consists in special sets of subject agreement markers. First, one of the sets of agreement markers called "subject pronominal suffixes" by Rapold (2006, p. 363) are described as used in a limited set of scenarios: in narrow situation focus or polarity focus contexts, on verbs in the injunctive mood and on embedded verbs with a different subject than the matrix clause verb. The 1SG marker from this set, *-tə̀n,* is seen in (14):

(14) Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Rapold, 2006, p. 365)
Context: 'Did you eat this food?'
Yíò, *m̆ʔ-tə̀n-ù-ē.*
yes eat-1SG-M-MED$_{DECL}$
'Yes, I HAVE eaten it.'

On the other hand, indicative matrix clauses with a wide predicate-focus construal require 1st and 2nd person subjects to be expressed by independent pronoun forms rather than by verbal suffixes. As demonstrated by the wide predicate-focus clause in (15), a 1SG subject is expressed by the free-standing pronoun *tā* 'I', while the suffix *-tə̀n* is absent from the verb:

(15) Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Rapold, 2006, p. 330)
Context: the speaker is talking about what he did.
Tā *m̆ʔ-ù-ē.*
1SG.NOM eat-M-MED$_{DECL}$
'I ate it.'

Secondly, both (14) and (15) feature the verbal suffix *-ù*, which is also a subject agreement marker. Following Rapold (2006), it is glossed only as "M" here because many of the person and number forms are syncretised, but some person and number combinations do exhibit distinct forms. As evidenced by (14) and (15), the same suffix for 1SG.M is used in polarity or situation focus contexts as in regular indicative forms. However, special forms are found in the paradigm used for polarity or situation focus for 2PL and optionally for 3SG.F. This second set of subject agreement markers is shared with the counter-expectational mood forms, used when the assertion of the clause counters a proposition in the presupposition. For example, (16a) demonstrates that the counter-expectational uses the agreement marker *-ù* from the second set for 2PL, compared to *-èn̪d* for 2PL in indicative matrix clause-final verb forms as in (16)b):

(16) Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Rapold, 2006, pp. 369; 337; 369)

a. Context: the speaker did not expect the addressees to come.
   yíntə̀yk'n̄-ī *àt-ù-ɪ̀̃s-è.*
   2PL-NOM.M arrive-M-2PL-MED$_{COUNTEX}$
   'You$_{PL}$ made it!'

b. Context: the speaker is talking about where the addressees live.
   yíntə̀yk'n̄-ī *yìnt* *két-n̋-ān* *āk'-ɪ̋*
   2PL-NOM.M 2.HON house-LOC-FOC spend.night-M
   pə̏ʃ-k-ɪ̋ *yísk-ènd-é.*
   spend.day-FS-M be.located.PRS-PL-MED$_{DECL}$
   'You are living in your own house.'

c. Context: 'Have you not come yet?'
   tə̀ *àt-ù-ɪ̀̃s-è.*
   1SG.NOM arrive-M-RSA-MED$_{COUNTEX}$
   'I made it!'

Counter-expectational forms are, however, distinguished from polarity-or-situation focus indicative forms in that they use yet a third set of subject-agreement markers in the morphological slot where polarity or situation focus forms use agreement suffixes from the first set mentioned: the marker *-ɪ̀̃s* is seen within a counter-expectational form for 1SG in (16c), used for all combinations of person, number and gender other than 3SG.F, whereas the marker *-tə̀n* in polarity-or-situation focus forms as in (14) is unique for 1SG. In addition, counter-expectational forms always occur with the mediative marker *-è*, as seen in (16a) and (16c), whereas polarity-or-situation focus forms such as (14) use a mediative marker with a different tone, the same one used in indicative wide predicate-focus contexts such as (15).

In contrast, Basque, Bura-Pabir, Hamer-Banna, Central Nahualá K'iche' and Northern Yukaghir all use a morpheme that has no meaning other than focus

marking when used in a polarity focus construction. The morpheme is used in both polarity and narrow constituent focus contexts in Hamer-Banna and Central Nahualá K'iche': Central Nahualá K'iche' restricts it to narrow focus scoping over an adjunct in addition to polarity focus, while Hamer-Banna uses the affix for narrow focus over either an adjunct or an argument. For example, (17) shows the relevant particle *wih* attached to the predicative 1SG pronoun *in* in a clause with polarity focus:

(17) Central Nahualá K'iche' (Mayan, Mesoamerica) (Velleman, 2014, p. 35)

No',	*la'*	*le*	*k'ache'laaj*	*xaq*	*si*	*in=wih.*
no	DEM	DET	forest	just	really	1SG=POL.FOC

'No, the forest in fact IS me.'

On the other hand, the same particle is found attached to the predicate in a clause with narrow focus on the adjunct constituent *p=u-wi' le jah* 'on top of the house' in (18):

(18) Central Nahualá K'iche' (Mayan, Mesoamerica) (Velleman, 2014, p. 101)

Aree	*p=u-wi'*	*le*	*jah*	*x-u-riq=wih.*
FOC	at=3SG-top	DET	house	CMPL-3SG-find=ADJN.FOC

'He found it ON TOP OF THE HOUSE.'

Note that the adjunct focus construction additionally includes placing the adjunct in a left-peripheral position and marking it with the particle *aree* to its left, as seen in (18), these two structural elements shared with the argument focus construction.

The Hamer-Banna suffix *-ne* is homonymous with the copula and is used as a focus suffix only on verbs in the perfect form, with polarity focus not grammatically marked in clauses where the verb is not in the perfect form. The suffix is shown in a polarity focus context in (19):

(19) Hamer-Banna (South Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Petrollino, 2016, p. 244)
Context: 'Have you finished?'

Ínta	*macc-idí-ne.*
1SG	finish-PRF-FOC

'I HAVE finished.'

The same suffix is seen on the predicate of a clause with narrow focus on the argument *anqasɛ* 'the bee' in (20):

(20) Hamer-Banna (South Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Petrollino, 2016, p. 163)
Context: 'What bit you on your cheek?'

anqasɛ	*í=sa*	*kárc'a-n ga?-idí-ne*
bee.M	1SG=GEN	cheek-F.OBL bite-PRF-FOC

'THE BEE bit me on my cheek.'

Finally, the verbal prefix *ba-* in Basque and the morpheme *kú* in Bura-Pabir, exemplified by (10) in §2.2, appear to be dedicated for polarity focus encoding. Hualde and Ortiz de Urbina (2003, p. 471) describe Basque verb forms prefixed with *ba-* as always occurring in a special syntactic position, although they do not provide an example non-ambiguously demonstrating this. The prefix is shown on a verb form preceding the object constituent *hori* 'that' in (21). This example violates the canonical OV order in Basque, but does not exclude the possibility that *hori* is post-detached from the clause (i.e. not part of the clause itself, literally corresponding to 'Jon is bringing it, that'). In addition, (21) shows the subject constituent *Jonek* preceding the verb form *badakar*:

(21) Basque (isolate, Europe) (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003, p. 471)
Jonek *ba-dakar* *hori.*
Jon.ERG POL.FOC-bring.PRS.3SG>3SG that
'Jon IS bringing that.'

Since *Jonek* is inflected in the case form required by the predicate *badakar*, this suggests that a verb form placed in the focus position may be preceded by clause-internal topic constituents, just like arguments and adjuncts in the focus slot in Basque and as seen for polarity focus constructions in Croatian in (13).

Three of the six languages featuring a predicate-bound morpheme for marking polarity focus restrict it to predicates with certain temporal, aspectual or modal features. These are verbs in the perfect form in Hamer-Banna, as already mentioned, perfective predicates in Bura-Pabir and realis predicates in Northern Yukaghir.

5.1.3. Non-predicate-bound particles

The Somali polarity focus construction makes use of a particle that, according to my analysis, indicates focus scoping either solely over the predicate or the predicate and a non-subject argument. The particle itself therefore does not distinguish polarity focus from canonical wide focus constructions. However, according to Green (2021, pp. 317–318), the two constructions are distinguished by the presence of subject pronominal clitics in wide predicate-focus clauses and their absence from polarity focus clauses. For example, (22) is a polarity focus clause, exhibiting the particle *waa* and no subject pronominal clitic:

(22) Somali (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Green, 2021, p. 318)
nim-an=k=u *waa* *y-imaad-d-ee-n.*
man-PL=DEF=SUBJ FOC 3-come-3-PST-PL
'The men DID come.'

On the other hand, a clause featuring the same particle and an identical predicate and subject but also the corresponding subject pronominal clitic *ay* attached to

the particle as in (23) receives a wide predicate focus interpretation; note that the clitic *ay* triggers a phonological coalescence process, resulting in a form of the particle different from the one in (22):

(23) Somali (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Green, 2021, p. 317)
Context: 'What did the men do?'
Nimánku *w=ay* *y-imaad-d-ee-n.*
man-PL=DEF=SUBJ FOC=3PL 3-come-3-PST-PL
'The men came.'

Three languages in the sample can mark polarity focus by a morpheme that is not verb-bound: Kwak'wala (Wakashan, Northwestern Coast of North America), Spanish (Indo-European, Europe) and Tigrinya (Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Ethiopian Highlands). For example, the particle *sí* (meaning 'yes' in other contexts) can be used withing a declarative clause to mark it for positive polarity focus, as seen in (24):

(24) Spanish (Indo-European, Europe) (Batllori & Hernanz, 2013, pp. 10–11)
Context: 'It hasn't rained today.'
Hoy *sí* *ha* *llovido.*
today POL.FOC AUX.3SG rain.PTCP
'It HAS rained today.'

Tigrinya marks polarity focus clauses with a grammatical element that appears to be on a grammaticalisation path from verb to particle. This marker is shown in a polarity focus context in (25), occurring clause-finally, following the canonically clause-final verb form:

(25) Tigrinya (Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Cacchioli, 2024, p. 6)
Context: 'Did you really see a cat?'
Dmu *riɛj-ɛ* *ʔiɟj-ɛ.*
cat see.GER-1SG POL.FOC-1SG
'I DID see a cat.'

The marker is completely homonymous with the present-time reference copula and the future-tense auxiliary *ʔiɟj-* and, like the copula and the auxiliary, must agree with the subject in person, number and gender. This is why the focus marker has distinct forms with a 1SG subject in (25) and with a 3SG.M subject in (26), in both examples bearing the same suffix as their respective predicates:

(26) Tigrinya (Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Cacchioli, 2024, p. 2)
Context: 'Did he really see a cat?'
Dmu *riɛj-u* *ʔiɟj-u.*
cat see.GER-3SG.M POL.FOC-3SG.M
'He DID see a cat.'

Furthermore, *ʔɨjj-* may not be used as a focus marker in the same clause where *ʔɨjj-* is used as a copula or an auxiliary or the copula *ʔallo-* is used, similar to the English polarity-focus auxiliary *do* and clauses with another auxiliary (e. g. **She does have seen a cat*). On the other hand, unlike with the copula or with the English auxiliary used in polarity focus constructions, the focus marker *ʔɨjj-* cannot be inflected to encode the time reference or aspectuality of the predicate. While nonverbal predication with past-time reference would normally be expressed with the copula stem *neyr-*, only the stem *ʔɨjj-* is used for focus marking. Time reference and aspectuality of a polarity focus clause is instead expressed by the inflection of the lexical verb, as evidenced by (25) and (26) being interpreted with past-time reference owing to the respective forms of the verb *rɨɛj-* 'see'. In addition, *ʔɨjj-* may be used as a polarity focus marker with forms of the lexical verb that may not be a complement to the copula. In addition to marking polarity focus, *ʔɨjj-* may also be used to indicate contrastive narrow focus over an argument or adjunct. In that function, the marker is placed immediately following the narrowly focal constituent and still agrees with the clause subject in person, number and gender, as seen in (27):

(27) Tigrinya (Afro-Asiatic, Semitic, Ethiopian Highlands) (Cacchioli, 2024, p. 13)
Context: 'Did you see a dog or a cat?'
Dmu *ʔɨjj-ɛ* *rɨɛj-ɛ*
cat FOC-1SG see.GER-1SG
'I saw A CAT.'

Since polarity focus is inherently contrastive – in the sense this term is used here – this distribution of *ʔɨjj-* as a focus marker indicates that the polarity focus construction may be analysed as featuring *ʔɨjj-* marking the focus domain scoping over the predicate. In this respect, this pattern is congruent with the pattern found in the languages where polarity focus can be marked by placing the finite verb form in a designated position while argument or adjunct focus can be marked by placing the narrowly focal argument or adjunct in the same position.

5.1.4. Auxiliary verbs

Finally, English is the only language in the sample where polarity focus is encoded only by using an auxiliary that behaves like an auxiliary verb in every way. This English auxiliary is *do*, used in contexts such as (28):

(28) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
Context: 'No way you could've seen a cat wandering alone in the tundra!'
I DID see a cat!

English *do* differs from Tigrinya *ʔɨjj-* as a polarity focus marker in that it is inflected for tense to reflect the time reference of the clause, as evidenced by (28)

compared to (29), and in that the lexical verb in a polarity focus construction with *do* is used in a non-inflected form, which normally cannot form a clause nucleus by itself:

(29) English (Indo-European, Europe) (own knowledge)
Context: 'No way you see a cat when you look at yourself in the mirror!'
I DO *see a cat!*

As already mentioned in §2.2, the Marghi South polarity focus construction also involves an auxiliary. However, the same auxiliaries in Marghi South can also be used in wide predicate-focus contexts. The Marghi South pattern is therefore analysed as marking polarity focus by placing the auxiliary in a designated position rather than by the use of the auxiliary itself.

5.2. Polarity focus constructions as constructions marking narrow focus over the finite verb form

Table 3 shows the number of languages in the dataset where the polarity focus construction shares a structural element with a narrow argument or adjunct focus construction, organised by the structural type of the polarity focus construction:

Table 3. Number of languages that feature a polarity focus construction in the dataset sharing a structural element with a narrow argument or adjunct focus construction per construction type

POL-FOC construction type	**number of languages where POL-FOC-c shares a structural element with an ARG/ ADJN-FOC-c**		
	no	**yes**	**total**
absence of structural elements	1		1
absence of structural elements, special SUBJ-agreement morpheme on V	1		1
auxiliary	1		1
FOC-PRT		1	1
FOC-V-morpheme	1	2	3
POL-FOC-PRT	2		2
POL-FOC-V-morpheme	1		1
V in special syntactic position		4	4
V in special syntactic position, POL-FOC-V-morpheme		1	1
total	**7**	**8**	**15**

As seen in Table 3, the polarity focus construction shares a structural element with a narrow argument or adjunct focus construction in eight out of the fifteen examined languages with identifiable grammatical marking of polarity focus. In all the five languages where polarity focus can be encoded by placing the finite verb form in a designated syntactic position – Basque, Croatian, Finnish, Marghi South and Romanian – the same syntactic position can also host a non-verbal constituent to mark narrow focus over it. Tigrinya attaches the same grammatical element to the finite verb form to express polarity focus that it attaches to non-verbal constituents to indicate narrow focus over them. Hamer-Banna uses the same suffix on the verb in clauses with polarity focus and clauses with narrow constituent focus, while Central Nahualá K'iche' attaches the same morpheme to the predicate for both polarity focus and narrow focus over an adjunct. On the other hand, Bench and Northern Yukaghir use the same kinds of encoding strategies for both polarity focus and narrow argument or adjunct focus. However, they were analysed in this study as not featuring a polarity focus and narrow argument or adjunct focus construction sharing a structural element because the strategies for encoding these two construction types involve different markers. In Bench, these are distinct sets of special subject agreement markers on the verb, whereas Northern Yukaghir attaches distinct morphemes to the verb. Finally, the English, Kwak'wala and Spanish polarity focus construction and argument or adjunct focus constructions exhibit no apparent similarities.

When the data are considered reversely, they indicate that five out of the twelve languages featuring a syntactic slot designated for narrowly focal non-verbal constituents in the 20-language sample can use the same syntactic position for the finite verb form to encode polarity focus. The canonical verb-initiality of Central Nahualá K'iche' makes clauses with the verb form in the clause-initial position formally indistinguishable from wide-focus declaratives, leaving five languages that feature a focus slot for arguments or adjuncts and that confirmedly may not place finite verb forms in a special position to express polarity focus: Efik, English, Hungarian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. While four of the 20 languages feature an idiosyncratic cleft construction for encoding narrow focus on non-verbal constituents, none of the 20 languages are attested to use a cleft construction to express polarity focus. Assuming that polarity focus marking commonly targets a finite verb form, this is not an unexpected pattern, as cleft constructions can rarely be used to mark finite verb forms cross-linguistically (cf. Dik, 1997, pp. 313–318; Givón, 2001, pp. 245–247; Kalinowski, 2015, pp. 141–142; Petrović, 2025a, pp. 57–58; 100–102). Six of the seven languages in the 20-language sample with morphemes for marking narrow focus on non-verbal constituents also feature morphemes for expressing polarity focus. However, whereas Hamer-Banna, Tigrinya and Central Nahualá K'iche' use the same morphemes both for narrow focus on a non-verbal constituent and for polarity focus, Bench and Northern Yukaghir use distinct morphemes in these two contexts.

Data on prosodic marking is available only for the ten European languages in the 20-language dataset. All ten have the finite verb form receive the focal stress in polarity focus matrix declaratives: Basque, Croatian, English, Finnish, Hungarian, Irish, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish.

To make use of as much data as possible, the polarity focus constructions in the dataset were also compared to narrow situation focus constructions in their respective languages. This was done assuming that narrow situation focus constructions, since they normally encode narrow focus over the denotation of a verb, are likely to grammatically mark a verb form as the focus domain. Of the fifteen investigated languages with identifiable grammatical marking of polarity focus, the datapoint concerning narrow situation focus marking is available for eleven. Data on the frequency of grammatical syncretism between polarity focus and narrow situation focus constructions by structural type of the construction is shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Frequency of grammatical syncretism between the polarity focus and the narrow situation focus constructions in the dataset by construction type

POL-FOC construction type	**number of languages where POL-FOC-c is grammatically identical to situation FOC-c**		
	no	**yes**	**total**
absence of structural elements		1	1
absence of structural elements, special SUBJ-agreement morpheme on V		1	1
auxiliary	1		1
FOC-PRT	1		1
FOC-V-morpheme		1	1
POL-FOC-PRT	2		2
POL-FOC-V-morpheme	1		1
V in special syntactic position	2		2
V in special syntactic position, POL-FOC-V-morpheme	1		1
total	**8**	**3**	**11**

The situation focus construction and the polarity focus construction are formally identical at least in Bench, Northern Yukaghir and Somali. The remaining eight languages feature distinct narrow situation focus and polarity focus constructions: Basque, Bura-Pabir, Croatian, English, Kwak'wala, Marghi South, Spanish and Tigrinya. Basque places a verb form in a special syntactic position for both contexts, but allows special placement of finite verb forms for expressing polarity focus

whereas it places a non-finite verb form in the pre-core slot for narrow situation focus. The analysis of Tigrinya as not featuring overlapping situation and polarity focus constructions is based solely on Cacchioli's (2024, p. 6) claim that placing *ʔijj-* after the predicate is not used for encoding narrow situation focus, with no data whatsoever available on whether there is another way of grammatically marking situation focus in any of the sources I have been able to consult. Considering that *ʔijj-* is also used after non-verbal constituents to indicate contrastive narrow focus on them, its inability to encode contrastive situation focus is rather unexpected. A possibility to be kept in mind is that Cacchioli's (2024, p. 6) remark actually asserts that the examples she discusses express polarity focus rather than narrow situation focus, given that no context is provided for the examples.

When the data on both grammatical and prosodic marking of polarity focus and the data on narrow situation focus marking are considered, the polarity focus constructions in 16 of the 20 investigated languages are congruent with an analysis that polarity focus marking involves marking narrow contrastive focus scoping over the finite verb form. None of the languages disprove this kind of analysis. Instead, four languages were left uncoded for this feature because they lack the relevant datapoints in the database: Bura-Pabir, Central Nahualá K'iche', Hamer-Banna and Kwak'wala. This is because no information about their prosodic focus marking or narrow situation focus encoding is available. In seven languages, the polarity focus grammatical construction itself resembles marking of narrow focus over the finite verb form: Basque, Croatian, Finnish, Marghi South and Romanian may use the same syntactic position for finite verb forms to express polarity focus as for non-verbal constituents to mark narrow focus over them, whereas Tigrinya marks polarity focus by placing the same marker after the verb form that it places after the narrowly focal non-verbal constituent in contrastive narrow focus contexts. Bench, Northern Yukaghir and Somali use the same construction for polarity and narrow situation focus, suggesting that both are marked as the focus domain scoping only over the verb form. On the other hand, English and Spanish show no grammatical homology between the polarity focus construction and constructions encoding narrow focus over a non-verbal constituent. Instead, the claim that the English and Spanish polarity focus constructions are analysable as marking narrow focus over the finite verb form can be maintained by the fact that the finite verb form in the polarity focus construction receives focal stress. Similarly, the five languages with no identifiable grammatical marking of polarity focus declaratives – Efik, Hungarian, Irish, Russian and Swedish – all do feature grammatical marking of narrow focus over non-verbal constituents, and their polarity focus expression was coded as analysable as a construction marking narrow focus over the finite verb form only because it involves focal stress on the finite verb form. Applying the analysis that polarity focus constructions are constructions marking narrow focus over a finite verb to English, Spanish and the five languages with no relevant grammatical marking therefore requires supposing that their constructions for narrow

argument or adjunct focus have morphosyntactic restrictions against being used on verbal constituents.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This section first discusses the insights on the cross-linguistic grammatical diversity of polarity focus constructions in §6.1. Evidence provided by the cross-linguistic data for analysing polarity focus constructions as constructions marking the focus domain scoping only over a verb form is subsequently discussed in §6.2.

6.1. Cross-linguistic diversity of polarity focus constructions

Although limited in scope, this study of the cross-linguistic diversity of polarity focus constructions has no precedents that I am aware of. The investigation has confirmed all structural types of polarity focus marking mentioned in Lohnstein's (2015, pp. 14–15) brief discussion of the cross-linguistic structural diversity in polarity focus marking: prosodic prominence on the finite verb form, special syntactic positioning of the finite verb form, special morphemes and auxiliary verbs. What is more, it has attested to structural elements in polarity focus marking not recognised by Lohnstein (2015, pp. 14–15).

Firstly, it has been shown that morphemes related to polarity focus marking can be not only free-standing particles, as shown by Lohnstein (2015, pp. 14–15), but also clear instances of verbal affixes. These unambiguous verbal affixes are two sets of special subject-agreement suffixes in Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic, Ethiopian Highlands), both occurring on the same verb form. A number of polarity-focus marking morphemes in other languages are also described as verbal affixes by authors of their descriptions, but the data provided is not sufficient to unambiguously qualify them as affixes rather than clitic particles. These are also always positioned relative to the verb stem when used for focus marking; however, unlike the Bench suffixes, their position makes it ambiguous whether they occur on an edge of the verb form itself or immediately following or preceding it.

Secondly, the study has shown that absence of a structural element may also distinguish a polarity focus clause from a wide focus clause. This pattern is encountered in two languages from the Ethiopian Highlands: Bench, where wide focus clauses must contain an independent subject pronoun if no other subject NP is present, whereas polarity focus clauses do not, and Somali (Afroasiatic, Cushitic), where wide focus clauses contain a subject pronominal clitic while polarity focus clauses do not.

Thirdly, the investigation has attested to a marker that appears to be on a diachronic path from a verb to a dedicated focus particle when used for focus marking, also functioning as a copula otherwise. This marker was found in Tigrinya (Afroasiatic, Semitic, Ethiopian Highlands).

The relatively most common structural element for marking polarity focus in declaratives in the 20-language sample are predicate-bound morphemes, found in six languages: two from the Ethiopian Highlands and one each from Europe, Mesoamerica, Siberia and West Africa. This is followed by special positioning of the finite verb form, encountered in four of the examined European languages and one West African language. No grammatical marking of polarity focus declaratives was also found in five languages, four European and one West African.

Particles that are not always predicate-bound are found in one language from Europe, the Ethiopian Highlands and the Northwestern Coast of North America each. Finally, a clear instance of an auxiliary verb used for marking a polarity focus declarative is encountered in one European language. As already noted in §4.1, this 20-language sample is not at all representative of the entire cross-linguistic diversity. This is especially true when considering languages with no grammatical marking of polarity focus declaratives – the data are not to be interpreted as an indication that languages with no grammatical marking of polarity focus declaratives are more common in Europe than in the other areas. This is due to the fact that the data can also be explained by the European languages being more likely to have sources confirming that they feature no grammatical marking of polarity focus declaratives.

Finally, the data has shown that all three included pairs of languages within the same genus feature completely different polarity focus constructions: Bura-Pabir and Marghi South (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, Bura-Marghi), English and Swedish (Indo-European, Germanic), and Croatian and Russian (Indo-European, Slavic). This suggests that polarity focus constructions might be a diachronically unstable feature.

6.2. Polarity focus constructions as constructions marking narrow focus over a verb form

Considering all the analysed aspects amounts to 16 of the 20 languages exhibiting a verb form as the clause constituent that is either grammatically or prosodically marked as the syntactic domain of polarity focus. These 16 languages comprise six instances where the polarity focus grammatical construction is readily analysable as a narrow focus construction marking the finite verb form, seven where evidence comes from the finite verb form receiving focal stress, and three where the evidence is indirect and consists in grammatical identity with the narrow situation focus construction. None of the 20 languages provides negative evidence for analysing the finite verb form as the clause constituent marked to target the positive polarity of the clause, the way a construction marking another clause constituent would. Instead, four languages are ambiguous regarding grammatical marking in that they attach a morpheme to the finite verb form to indicate argument or adjunct focus as well, whereas data on their prosodic marking is not available. In addition to confirming that European languages tend to mark the finite verb form as the syntactic domain of polarity focus, a fact well-known from before, this investigation has es-

sentially attested that the same pattern applies to at least three languages from the Ethiopian Highlands: Bench (Ta-Ne-Omotic), Somali (Afroasiatic, Cushitic) and Tigrinya (Afroasiatic, Semitic), one Siberian: Northern Yukaghir (Yukaghir) and two West African ones: Efik (Niger-Congo) and Marghi South (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic). While the data are far too limited to motivate the claim that marking the finite verb to indicate positive polarity focus is a cross-linguistically widespread phenomenon, they at least demonstrate that this pattern is not restricted to European languages.

In conclusion, I hope that this paper has made a first step towards systematic typological investigation of polarity focus constructions and will serve as a starting point for future, more extensive research. A logical next step is to study the cross-linguistic and areal prevalence of individual construction types on a larger language sample. However, for any robust typological studies, more descriptions of information-structure marking grammar in understudied languages are needed.

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Prema tipologiji konstrukcija za fokus na pozitivnoj polarnosti

Ovaj rad preliminarno istražuje međujezičnu raznolikost u gramatičkim načinima kodiranja fokusa na pozitivnoj polarnosti u izjavnim rečenicama, koji se nazivaju terminom *konstrukcije za polarnosni fokus*. Osim toga, u radu se pokušava odgovoriti na pitanje je li međujezično uobičajen obrazac da takve konstrukcije obilježavaju finitne glagolske oblike. Za istraživanje je upotrijebljen uzorak od 20 jezika koji obuhvaća deset porodica iz šest geografskih područja svijeta: Etiopskog visočja, Europe, Srednje Amerike, Sjeverozapadne obale Sjeverne Amerike, Sibira i Zapadne Afrike. Podaci su u prvome redu prikupljeni iz sekundarnih izvora. Istraživanje je potvrdilo sve strukturne tipove obilježavanja polarnosnoga fokusa zabilježene u prijašnjim radovima koji se dotiču međujezične raznolikosti u obilježavanju polarnosnoga fokusa: rečenični naglasak na finitnome glagolskom obliku, smještanje finitnoga glagola u posebni sintaktički položaj, posebne morfeme i pomoćne glagole. Povrh toga, zabilježilo je strukturne elemente u obilježavanju polarnosnoga fokusa koji nisu spomenuti u prijašnjoj literaturi. Jedan su primjer posebni glagolski sufiksi za sročnost sa subjektom u benču (ta-ne-omotski, Etiopsko visočje). Drugi je primjer odsustvo strukturnih elemenata koji se javljaju u kanonskim izjavnim rečenicama sa širokim predikatnim fokusom. Taj je obrazac pronađen u benčnonu i somalskome (afroazijski, kušitski, Etiopsko visočje). K tomu, sva tri para jezikā iz istoga genusa uključena u uzorak imaju posve različite konstrukcije za polarnosni fokus: bura-pabir i južni marghi (afroazijski, čadski, bura-marghi), engleski i švedski (indoeuropski, germanski) te hrvatski i ruski (indoeuropski, baltoslavenski). To ukazuje na mogućnost da su konstrukcije za polarnosni fokus dijakronijski nestabilno obilježje. Na koncu, konstrukcije za polarnosni fokus u 16 od 20 jezika mogu se analizirati kao da obilježavaju finitni glagolski oblik kao domenu fokusa; za preostala četiri jezika podaci nedostaju; što ukazuje na to da bi finitni glagol kao sintaktička domena polarnosnoga fokusa mogao biti međujezično uobičajen obrazac.

Ključne riječi: tipologija; sintaksa; informacijska struktura; polarnosni fokus; verum fokus

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative case	M	masculine gender
ADJN	adjunct	MED	mediative marker
ARG	argument	N	neuter gender
AUX	auxiliary verb	NDF	indefinite
CMPL	complementiser	NOM	nominative case
COUNTEX	counter-expectational mood	OBL	oblique case
DECL	declarative marker	PFV	perfective aspect
DEF	definite	PL	plural
DEM	demonstrative	POL	polar
DET	determiner	PRF	perfect tense
ERG	ergative case	PRS	present tense
F	feminine gender	PRT	particle
FOC	focus marker	PST	past tense
FS	factual stem	PTCP	participle
GEN	genitive case	RSA	reduced subject agreement
GER	gerund	SG	singular
HON	honorific	SUBJ	subject
IMP	imperative mood		

Appendix: a simplified overview of the dataset

language	area	family	basic constituent order	POL-FOC syntactic domain = finite verb form	POL-FOC-construction	POL-FOC marking restricted to a certain grammatical context	POL-FOC-c = situation-FOC-c?	POL-FOC-c = ARG/ADJN-FOC-c?	sources
Bench	Ethiopia	Ta-Ne-Omotic	SOV	yes	absence of structural elements, V-morpheme	yes			(Rapold, 2006)
Somali	Ethiopia	AA, Cushitic	SVO	yes	absence of structural elements		yes	no	(Green, 2021; Saeed, 1999)
Hamer-Banna	Ethiopia	South Omotic	SOV		FOC-V-morpheme	yes; perfect-tense verbs			(Petrollino, 2016)
Tigrinya	Ethiopia	AA, Semitic	SOV	yes	FOC-PRT		no	yes	(Cacchioli, 2024)
Basque	Europe	Basque	SOV	yes	V in syntactic position, POL-FOC-V-morpheme	no	yes		(Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003)
Croatian	Europe	Indo-European	SVO	yes	V in syntactic position		no	yes	own knowledge
Russian	Europe	Indo-European	SVO	yes	none		yes		(Zybatow, 1999)
Finnish	Europe	Uralic	SVO	yes	V in syntactic position			yes	(Holmberg, 2014)
Hungarian	Europe	Uralic	SVO	yes	none		yes		(Gyuris, 2012)
Swedish	Europe	Indo-European	SVO, V2	yes	none		yes		(Teleman et al., 1999)
English	Europe	Indo-European	SVO	yes	auxiliary		no		own knowledge
Romanian	Europe	Indo-European	SVO	yes	V in syntactic position			yes	(Giurgea & Remberger, 2014)
Spanish	Europe	Indo-European	SVO	yes	POL-FOC-PRT		no	no	(Batllori & Hernanz, 2013)

language	area	family	basic constituent order	POL-FOC syntactic domain = finite verb form	POL-FOC-construction	POL-FOC marking restricted to a certain grammatical context	POL-FOC-c = situation-FOC-c?	POL-FOC-c = ARG/ADJN-FOC-c?	sources
Irish	Europe	Indo-European	VSO	yes	none		yes		(Bennett et al., 2019)
Central Nahualá K'iche'	Mesoamerica	Mayan	VOS		FOC-V-morpheme			yes	(Velleman, 2014)
Kwak'wala	NW coast of North America	Wakashan	VSO		POL-FOC-PRT		no	no	(Littell, 2016)
Northern Yukaghir	Siberia	Yukaghir	SOV	yes	FOC-V-morpheme	yes; realis	yes	no	(Matić & Nikolaeva, 2014)
Bura-Pabir	West Africa	Afro-Asiatic, Chadic	SVO		POL-FOC-V-morpheme	yes; perfective clauses	no	no	(Gutzmann et al., 2020; Hartmann, 2013; Hartmann et al., 2008)
Efik	West Africa	Niger-Congo	SVO	yes	none	yes			(Cook, 2002)
Marghi South	West Africa	Afro-Asiatic, Chadic	SVO	yes	V in syntactic position		no	yes	(Gutzmann et al., 2020; Hartmann, 2013)