# The concessive reading of scalar particles: a presupposition-weakening approach

**Chaoyi Chen**

*Rutgers University*

chaoyi.chen@rutgers.edu

Scalar particles (e.g., English *still*; Mandarin *hai*) are known as polysemous. Beck (2020) proposes a unified analysis for various readings of scalar particles, where all readings are boiled down to a core meaning. This paper argues that the concessive reading is not basic but derived, and is conditioned by the appearance of verum focus. The evidence includes (i) concessive scalar particles are not available cross-linguistically and (ii) concessive scalar particles need to co-occur with a verum focus marker *shi* in Mandarin as in (1).

(1)  Mali-de yisheng rang ta   xiuxi, dan ta   **hai**-*(shi) qu pao le    malasong
     *Mary's doctor   ask her rest,   but she still-SHI   go run ASP marathon*
     'Mary's doctor asked her to rest, but she still ran the marathon.'

I propose the concessive reading is presuppositionally weaker than the reaffirmative reading as in (2). The reaffirmative *still/hai*, defined in (3) (adapted from Beck (2020)), presupposes the prejacent $q$ is in the Common Ground (CG) at $c^*$. The concessive *still/hai*, defined in (4), is presuppositionally weaker than (3) as it presupposes the polar question concerning $q$ at $c^*$ ($q$ is not in CG yet; denotations from Farkas and Bruce (2010)).

(2)  **Reaffirmative reading:** Although you don't like me, I am <u>still</u> your mom.
(3)  $[\![still_R/hai_R]\!] = \lambda q_{\langle s,t \rangle} \lambda w : \exists c^*.c^* \propto c_t \wedge q \in CG_{c^*}.q(w)$
(4)  $[\![still_C/hai_C]\!] = \lambda q_{\langle s,t \rangle} \lambda w : \exists c^*.c^* \propto c_t \wedge \langle \overline{S[I]}; \{q, \neg q\} \rangle \in Table_{c^*}.q(w)$
(5)  $[\![\text{VERUM}]\!]^{u,c}(q) = \checkmark$, if the speaker $c_S$ wants to prevent that QUD(c) is downdated with $\neg q$.

The concessive reading is derived from the reaffirmative reading only when verum focus appears, which could be formally implemented by a **weakening operation** triggered only when presupposition failures happen. The felicity condition of the VERUM operator (5; Gutzmann et al. 2020) entails ?$q$ is the QUD. When an VERUM operator appears with the reaffirmative *still*, a semantic conflict arises because $q$ being in the CG at $c^*$ and ?$q$ being the QUD at $c^*$ cannot be true simultaneously. A creative weakening operation as a salvage operation applies to the presupposition of reaffirmative *still/hai*, deriving (4). This weakening story naturally explains why concessive scalar particles are derived and co-occur with verum-focus markers.

**References:** • Beck, S. (2020). Readings of scalar particles: noch/still. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 43(1), 1–67. • Gutzmann, D., Hartmann, K., & Matthewson, L. (2020). Verum focus is verum, not focus: Cross-linguistic evidence. *Glossa* 5(1), 51.