

Title: Can Manner-of-Speaking Islands be Rescued Through Discourse Foregrounding?

Introduction: Complement clauses to manner-of-speaking (MoS) verbs (e.g. "shout", "mumble") are typically treated as islands (MoS Islands [1,2]), see (1). The *syntactic account* holds that MoS Islands are underlyingly complex-NP islands as in (2) [2]. The *frequency account* holds that sentences like (1) are degraded because sentences with MoS verbs taking complement clauses are rare [3,4]. The *discourse account* connects the MoS Island to a discourse-level constraint: complements of MoS verbs are discourse backgrounded and thus resist movement which requires the fronted element to be foregrounded [5-7]. Previous studies have shown a positive correlation between the degree of backgroundedness of an MoS verb's complement and the degradedness in acceptability due to an MoS Island violation [6,7]. In this study, we ask whether the relation between complement backgroundedness and the MoS island effect is a causal one: i.e., whether a greater degree of discourse backgroundedness *causes* stronger islandhood (as opposed to being merely correlated with it), as predicted by the discourse account. We manipulate the backgroundedness of the MoS verb complement using context sentences with different prosodic focus patterns and test whether the MoS Island effect is ameliorated when the complements of MoS verbs are discourse foregrounded. Neither the syntactic nor the frequency account predicts an effect of backgroundedness on islandhood.

Methods: Participants (planned N=100, data collection to be completed on 11/14/22) were recruited through *prolific*. Each participant saw 36 2-sentence dialogs (12 critical, 24 fillers) presented in written form. In the first utterance, either the matrix verb (*Verb Focus* condition, 6 items) or the embedded object (*Embedded Focus* condition, 6 items) is capitalized and bolded, representing prosodic focus that backgrounds or foregrounds the embedded clause respectively (examples in (3)). The second utterance, identical in both focus conditions, is a *wh*-interrogative violating an MoS Island (example in (1)). On each trial, participants either rated the acceptability of the second utterance on a sliding scale or answered a 2AFC comprehension question probing the backgroundedness of the embedded clause (example in (4)).

Results: Results from an N=9 pilot study are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Data collection for this project is ongoing, so we report the planned analysis. **Manipulation check analysis.** We will use a mixed-effects logistic regression model to predict the backgroundedness comprehension question responses from a fixed effect of focus condition and the maximal random effects structure (by-item and by-participant random intercepts and slopes for the fixed effect). If the focus manipulation succeeds in changing the backgroundedness of the embedded clause, the log odds of complement-foregrounded responses should be greater in the *Embedded Focus* than in the *Verb Focus* condition. The pilot data suggests the manipulation will succeed. **Main analysis.** Contingent on the expected result of the manipulation check, we employ an LMER model to predict acceptability from a dummy-coded predictor of focus condition and the maximal random effects structure.

Discussion: If the *Embedded Focus* condition leads to higher acceptability of the target sentences than the *Verb Focus* condition, we can conclude that foregrounding attenuates the MoS island effect, supporting the discourse account. The pilot data suggests this pattern. Conversely, but more weakly, a null result might suggest no direct causal link between backgroundedness and islandhood despite the possible existence of a correlation. This result would suggest that factors other than backgroundedness (e.g. syntactic constraints, verb-frame frequency) could be the source of the MoS Island effect.

(1) *Example of MoS Island violation*

*Who did John whisper that Mary met with ___?

(2) *Underlying structure of MoS Island violation according to the syntactic account [2]:*

*Who did John whisper (a whisper) that Mary met with ___?

(3) *Example stimuli*

a. *Verb Focus condition*

Hanako said: John didn't WHISPER that Mary met with the lawyer.

Scott said: Then who did John whisper that Mary met with?

b. *Embedded Focus condition*

Hanako said: John didn't whisper that Mary met with the LAWYER.

Scott said: Then who did John whisper that Mary met with?

(4) *Example comprehension question probing backgroundedness of embedded clause (a: foregrounded; b: backgrounded), given example stimuli as in (3).*

Question: What was Hanako talking about?

Options:

a. Who Mary met with, according to John.

b. The way John said that Mary met with the lawyer.

Figure 1. Acceptability rating pilot results.
(N=9)

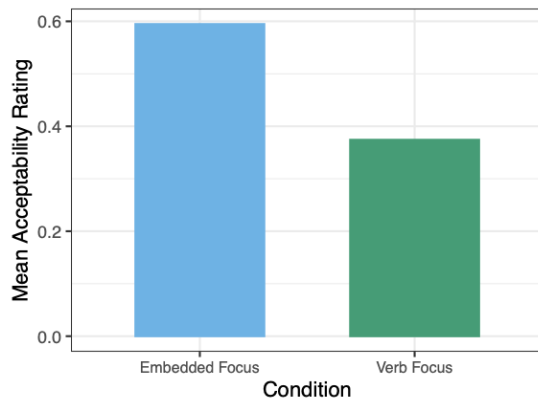
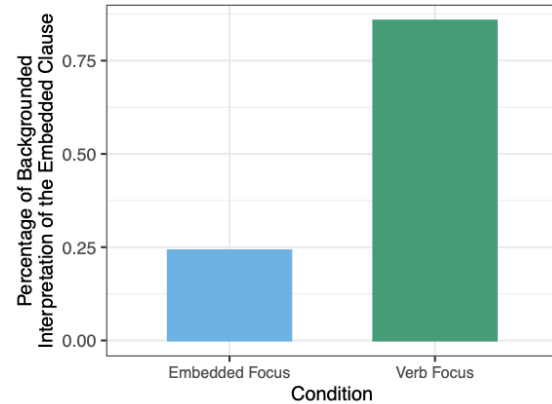


Figure 2. Backgroundedness task pilot results.
(N=9)



References: [1] Ross (1967) [2] Snyder (1992) [3] Kothari (2008) [4] Liu, Ryskin, Futrell & Gibson (2022) [5] Erteschik-Shir (1979) [6] Ambridge & Goldberg (2008) [7] Goldberg (2013)