Introduction The existing literature on verum focus (VF; Höhle 1992) treats it as a special type of focus handled by mechanisms distinct from those that evaluate other types of focus. In this paper, I show that VF can be analyzed in an alternative semantic framework (Rooth, 1985, 1992) because VF also presupposed the existence of a contrasting antecedent. I also show that, in certain cases, this antecedent can be accommodated from the discourse context.

Previous analyses of VF There is no clear consensus in the literature as to the proper semantic characterization of VF. The most influential analyses of VF are generally not considered tenable, and many deal only with VF in polar questions. (Lohnstein (2012) argues against Höhle’s VERUM predicate and AnderBois (2011); Gutzmann and Castroviejo Miró (2011) against Romero and Han’s (2004) certainty-expressing conversational epistemic operator.) AnderBois (2011) gives a characterization of VF in inquisitive semantic terms, but it is not clear that the closing-off of subordinate issues he proposes for high negation polar questions can be extended to declaratives.

VF and alternatives I argue that VF in declarative sentences (1) can be characterized within Rooth’s standard alternative semantics. Focus falls on the polarity of the sentence in \( \Sigma \) (Laka, 1990), and the presuppositional \( \bowtie \) operator forces its interpretation higher in the logical form. The \( \bowtie \) operator presupposes that an element of the focus semantic value of \( \Sigma \) distinct from its ordinary semantic value exists. Interpreting focus high in the clause results in a variable with a propositional type; the value of \( \Sigma \) is its presupposed alternative. The discourse must support a propositional antecedent that differs only in the expression of \( \Sigma \).

(1) The editor in Baltimore told Lacy to go for it. And he \text{DID} go for it.

Rooth proposes that the members of the focus semantic value of an expression are elements of the same semantic type. If this is the only restriction, all elements of type \( \langle t, t \rangle \) should be included in the focus semantic value of \( \Sigma \). Wagner (2012) has shown that a type-based restriction is too permissive—the focus alternatives should be further restricted to those that are contextually relevant. The relevant alternatives in VF are those that express positive and negative polarity.

Antecedents for VF The focused positive polarity is always pronounced and stressed. But positive polarity is normally unpronounced in broad-focus sentences. According to Rooth, the alternatives must contain an element distinct from the ordinary semantic value of the focused \( \Sigma \). VF may follow a broad-focus affirmative sentence (1), showing that unpronounced positive polarity and focused \textit{do} are semantically distinct. (I leave the nature of this distinction to future research, though it is clear that they are distinct lexical items.) Negative VF sentences following negative assertions (2) are infelicitous because the antecedent must be distinct from the focused \( \Sigma \):

(2) \# The editor in Baltimore told Lacy not to go for it. And he \text{DIDN’T} go for it.

The presuppositional account of focus alternatives is appropriate for VF, which cannot be used out-of-the-blue and requires a syntactically overt antecedent (Richter, 1993).

Accommodating the antecedent The antecedent for a VF sentence may contain a modal (3). I argue that this is not a problem for the presuppositional approach because the modal sentence does not actual serve as the antecedent for the VF sentence. An appropriate antecedent is accommodated in the discourse context. In the canonical word order, this accommodation process appears is limited to modality and tense; in VP-preposing, the antecedent may be accommodated wholesale, given sufficient pragmatic support:

(3) The partners felt they could monitor the market. And they \text{DID} monitor it.

(4) Merely posing the question offends most people. But answer it they \textit{DO}.

Conclusion At least in its basic instantiation, VF does not require specialized mechanisms. Instead, it can be analyzed within the standard alternative semantic framework.