

# Sharpening the adequacy of a characterisation

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## Abstract

In this paper, we propose a characterisation for the German particle *gerade* ( $\approx$ just/precisely) that tries to capture the intuition of “emphatic assertion of identity” (König 1991a,b) in terms of an operation of comparison. Stated informally, *gerade* helps to “sharpen the perception of adequacy” of the description expressed by the associate. The focus-background partition is exploited to identify the elements in the identity relation, and the effect of sharpening comes about by asserting the superiority of the associate over the alternatives with respect to the issue under discussion.

## 1 Introduction

The German particle *gerade* means literally ‘straight’. Most often, it translates into English by *just* or *precisely*, or is expressed by an *it*-cleft sentence.

*Gerade* has been characterised as a particle sensitive to focus marking, cf. Altmann (1978), König (1991a,b). Traditionally, focus particles are classified into three classes: additive, scalar, and restrictive (or exclusive), (cf. König 1991b, Krifka 1998). Additive particles, like *also*, assert the host clause, and presuppose that there is at least one alternative to the associate for which the background holds (the existential presupposition, cf. Karttunen and Peters 1979). Scalar particles can be characterised in the same way, but additionally, the alternatives are ordered on a scale (the scalar presupposition, cf. Karttunen and Peters 1979). Restrictive particles differ from the previously mentioned classes in that the proposition expressed by the host clause is taken to be presupposed, at least in the trend of analysis that originates in Horn (1969).

König (1991a) proposes an additional class that could be named “identifiers”, following his analysis that they emphatically assert the identity of two values. *Just*, as illustrated in (1), belongs, according to König (1991a: 12) to this class, together with, e.g. *exactly* and German *ausgerechnet*. Note, however, that *just* has been classified elsewhere as an exclusive particle, together with *only* (cf. Pullum & Huddleston 2002, Beaver & Clark 2007).

(1) That’s just what I wanted.

*Gerade* has been proposed by König (1991a,b) to fall into the class of identifiers. If we consider the more recent classification of its English correspondent *just*, it would fall into the class of exclusives instead. In this paper we tackle the question of how to

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classify *gerade* from a different angle. We start in section 2 by scrutinizing the existing classification and point out problems that suggest that *gerade* does not fall easily into one of these classes. Next, in section 3, we propose an analysis that tries to capture the intuition of “emphatic assertion of identity” in terms of an operation of comparison, rather than an identity statement. Intuitively, *gerade* helps to “sharpen the perception of adequacy” of the characterisation expressed by the associate. Finally, in section 4, we will look at discourse properties of the particle. In this paper, we do not discuss the temporal uses of *gerade*, but as we have shown in (Schaden & Tovená 2008), the analysis presented here can cover them too.

## 2 Properties of *gerade*

### 2.1 Focus sensitivity

As the examples in (2) illustrate, *gerade* is sensitive to focus marking. A different focus placement evokes different sets of alternatives, hence it affects the range of contexts in which the sentence can be used. *Gerade* evaluates the appropriateness of the associate with respect to the background predicate, and requires it to be superior to the appropriateness of the alternatives. Thus, *gerade* exploits the alternatives induced by focus, in order to operate the comparison.<sup>1</sup>

- (2) a. Gerade ROTEF Autos werden oft gestohlen.  
‘Precisely RED cars are often stolen.’  
(Considering cars that are often stolen, red cars are prototypical instances of such a car type; alternatives considered: green cars, blue cars, etc.)
- b. Gerade rote AUTOSF werden oft gestohlen.  
‘Precisely red CARS are often stolen.’  
(Considering red things that are often stolen, red cars are prototypical instances of such red things; alternatives considered: red bikes, red ships, etc.)

By taking away *gerade* from the examples in (2), one loses the information that the actual focus value cannot be outranked in its appropriateness to characterise the set denoted by the background. With *gerade*, an element of the set of alternatives to the actual focus value cannot be subject to thefts more often than the asserted value. Notice, however, that the examples in (2) are consistent with other types of cars or red things being often stolen, as long as they are stolen less frequently than red cars.

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<sup>1</sup> Notice that *gerade* does not require the associate to be discourse-new, i.e. a rheme. Evidence for this is provided by the fact that *gerade*, just like other particles, can focus a pronoun, cf. (i).

(i) Ich führe keine Verhandlungen über die Medien, gerade das hat uns in den letzten Jahren in diese verfahrenere Situation gebracht.  
‘I do not negotiate through the media, precisely this has brought us into this complicated situation.’

In the remainder in this section, we will show that the behaviour of *gerade* cuts across the partition into exclusive and additive particles. Mixed evidence shows up also with respect to the scalar vs. non-scalar distinction.

## 2.2 Exploring the place of *gerade* in a classification of focus particles

### 2.2.1 Testing the exclusive characterisation

If we interpret the effect of *gerade* in (2) as involving scales, this example shows the elimination of higher parts of a scale: *red cars* would be the maximum element with respect to the scale of cars that are often stolen. This behaviour would be consistent with *gerade* being a (scalar) exclusive particle, like, e.g., *only*. And indeed, in some circumstances *gerade* can be translated by such a restrictive particle, see (3).

- (3) Otto hat gerade mal 1000 € beim Pokern gewonnen.  
≈ ‘Otto has only won 1000 € at the poker-game.’ (≈ 1000 € is not much money)

In order to obtain a scalar, downward oriented reading for (3), the speakers we consulted require the addition of *mal* to *gerade*. Examples where such readings obtain without *mal* are attested in corpora and in the literature though, see (4). Notice, however, that the lexical items *shower* and *bathroom* form an ad hoc scale, in the context of the description of an apartment, and the associate is the lower bound.

- (4) ... in der Wohnung meiner Eltern gab es gerade eine Dusche, aber kein Badezimmer.<sup>2</sup>  
‘In the apartment of my parents, there was just a shower, but no bathroom.’

Notice also that *gerade mal* is not quite synonymous to *gerade* in contexts where the latter allows for lower bound readings on its own, for instance in combination with *enough*. In the following example, both *gerade genug* and *gerade mal genug* translate roughly as *just enough*.

- (5) Ich habe gerade (mal) genug Geld, um mir den Kirschkuchen zu kaufen.  
‘I have just enough money to buy the cherry pie.’

Both versions of example (5), with or without *mal*, are only felicitous in a context where the speaker has either the exact amount necessary to buy the pie, or an only unsubstancially higher amount. However, *gerade mal* additionally requires that there be a more desirable item that one could buy with more money. Thus, in a situation where the speaker is completely satisfied with the perspective to obtain the cherry pie and nothing else, *gerade mal* is infelicitous, but *gerade* on its own is perfectly appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> Example taken from Métrich et al. (1995: 349).

Can we conclude from the examples seen so far that *gerade* is an exclusive particle? We don't think so. In languages like English and German, exclusive particles license negative polarity items (NPIs), like *je* (ever), in the sentence background, as illustrated in (6a). However, *gerade* is unable to license NPIs in such a position (cf. 6b):

- (6) a. Nur Reinhold Messner hat je einen Yeti gesehen.  
'Only Reinhold Messner has ever seen a yeti.'  
b. \* Gerade Reinhold Messner hat je einen Yeti gesehen.  
'Precisely Reinhold Messner has ever seen a yeti.'

The fact that (6b) is ungrammatical constitutes a strong argument against an analysis of *gerade* as exclusive.

### 2.2.2 Testing other characterisations

While *gerade* does not fully qualify as exclusive particle, examples from corpora show that it is compatible with exclusive particles and can be coordinated with them, cf. (7).

- (7) Wenn dieses Buch hier trotzdem vorgestellt wird, dann nur und gerade deshalb, weil [...] (*Die Zeit*, 1975, DWDS-Corpus)  
'If this book is presented here despite that, then [it is] only and precisely because...'

In (7), *nur* has an exclusive reading, not a scalar one: there is exactly one reason to present the book, but it is not said that this is an unimportant reason. As for *gerade*, it indicates that this single reason is a very notable one. Examples like (7) show that *gerade* does not require the status of alternatives not to be fixed yet, since they are all eliminated by *nur*. Thus, *gerade* cannot be an additive particle per se, which would presuppose that there exists at least one other alternative for which the background can be truthfully asserted. But it is compatible with additive particles and can be coordinated with them. The combination *auch und gerade* (also and precisely), illustrated in (8), is very frequent:

- (8) Das macht sich auch und gerade in Frankreich bemerkbar.  
This can be observed also and particularly in France.

For (8) to be felicitous, the phenomenon in question must be observable also in other countries. This is the additive component, provided by *auch*. *Gerade* adds the idea that, in the context, France is possibly the best representative of a country where the phenomenon can be observed.

Finally, *gerade* may also be coordinated with a scalar additive particle, for instance *sogar*, the German equivalent of *even*.

- (9) So wird jede der oben genannten Gefahrenstellen immer wieder zum Streßfaktor, sogar und gerade auf Radwegen in großen Straßen [...] (web example)

‘So, any of the above-mentioned sites of potential danger is a renewed source of stress, even and precisely on the bicycle track of major streets [...]’

Intuitively, in (9), *sogar* and *gerade* provide two independent, (scalar) evaluations of the stress impact of dangerous sites on bicycle tracks of major streets with respect to bicycle tracks on other types of streets. *Sogar* contributes the evaluation that it is somehow unexpected that bicycle tracks on major streets are stressful; *gerade* contributes the idea that they are more stressful than tracks on alternative streets, e.g., mid-sized or minor streets.

## 2.3 Scalar matters

In this section, we discuss the effect that scalar material in the associate or the background has on the acceptability of the sentences.

### 2.3.1 Direction and endpoints of the scale

*Gerade* cannot apply to a (lexically high ranked) adjective, unless negation reverses the direction of inferences on the scale, see (10) adapted from König (1991a).

- (10) a. # Er war gerade begeistert.<sup>3</sup>  
He was truly delighted.  
b. Er war nicht gerade begeistert.  
He wasn't really delighted.

Assuming that the focalized element in (10) is the adjective *delighted*, which denotes an element of a scale, an important property of *gerade* gets clearer: it does not contrast the position of the focalised item with other available positions on that scale, imposing a certain order, as would do standard scalar particles. Most of the time, it is even difficult to guess what sentences like (10a) are supposed to mean. This interpretive problem seems to be independent of the direction of a scale, as the phenomenon occurs as well with properties having a top threshold – like *clean*, cf. (11a) – their complement – *dirty*, cf. (11b) – and mid-level denoting elements – *average*, cf. (11c):

- (11) a. \* Gerade sauber ist seine Jacke.  
His vest is truly/just/exactly clean.  
b. \* Gerade dreckig ist seine Jacke.  
His vest is truly/just/exactly dirty.  
c. \* Gerade mittelmäßig hat er gesungen.  
He sang just/truly in an average way.

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<sup>3</sup> (10a) has a temporal, “progressive” reading (at that moment in the past, he happened to be delighted). If *gerade* and its associate appear in the foreground, a temporal reading is no longer available, and that is why we mostly use this word order in our examples.

As pointed out by Henk Zeevat (p.c.), in sentences like (12), it is at least clear what the intended meaning should be, namely a reinforcement of the scalar component, which can be rendered in English by ‘truly’:

- (12) a. Gerade engelhaft hat er gesungen.  
He sang truly like an angel.  
b. Gerade grottenschlecht hat er gesungen.  
He sang truly very badly.

However, this is probably due to a contamination with *geradezu*, which is what would make sentences like (12) perfectly acceptable for all speakers.<sup>4</sup> In cases where substitution with *geradezu* is impossible (like in (11)), such sentences are unacceptable. The difference between (11) and (12) is that (12) involves not only an extreme value on a scale, but also a strong subjective, evaluative component, which is lacking in (11). In this respect, *geradezu* is similar to *gerade mal*, although they differ in the ranking expected for their associate, cf. our discussion of example (5).

Let us consider now adverbs with which *gerade* can easily combine. We have already seen *genug* (enough). Interestingly, there are pairs of near-synonymous adverbs which do not behave in the same way with respect to their ability to combine with *gerade*:

- (13) a. gerade rechtzeitig  
gerade in good time  
b. # gerade pünktlich  
gerade punctually

The basic difference between these two adverbs, both roughly meaning “on time”, can be stated as follows: *pünktlich* involves the adequacy of the time of actualisation of an eventuality with respect to an expected interval or point in time. *Rechtzeitig* evaluates the adequacy of an eventuality with respect to some other eventuality and has an additional argument, which might be instantiated covertly. One is *rechtzeitig* for something, not only with respect to a moment in time (e.g., *9 o’clock*). Thus, whereas *pünktlich* can be seen as establishing a graded, centered scale (the closer to *t*, the higher the degree), *rechtzeitig* establishes a partition between intervals which are in good time for something, and others, which are not.

### 2.3.2 Where does the scale come from?

We have seen that an expression denoting an element on a scale is not always a suitable associate for *gerade*. Let us now have a look at the presence or absence of gradable material in the background. First, in the complete absence of gradable material, it is

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<sup>4</sup> *Geradezu* would translate as *downright*, sometimes also *sheer* (cf. *sheer madness*). *Zu* works as a preposition introducing a goal.

difficult to accommodate a scale, and the use of *gerade* seems infelicitous out of the blue, see (14).<sup>5</sup>

- (14) #Gerade der Satz des Pythagoras ist bewiesen.  
Precisely the Pythagorean theorem is proven.

*To be proven* is not a gradable property, neither does the associate contain a scalable element. The difficulty in accommodating contrasts with what it is usually the case with run-of-the-mill scalar particles like *even*. As shown in (15a), the use of *even* triggers the accommodation of an ordering based on expectedness, with Otto ranking low on it, even when used out of the blue. On the contrary, the corresponding sentence with *gerade* in German is awkward, see (15b).<sup>6</sup>

- (15) a. Even Otto got promoted.  
b. ??Gerade Otto hat eine Beförderung gekriegt.  
gerade Otto has a promotion got.  
'Precisely Otto got promoted.'

Second, a scalar element in the background considerably increases the adequacy of *gerade*, and diminishes the load on what counts as an adequate prior context, as illustrated by (16). Similar considerations apply to example (2).

- (16) Gerade theologische Aussagen lassen sich nur schwer widerlegen.  
Precisely theological statements are very difficult to refute.

In short, the status and activation conditions of alternatives are not very clear. On the one hand, examples (14-16) show that mere focalisation is not sufficient to provide an acceptable environment. On the other hand, we have seen in (7) that *gerade* is acceptable under an exclusive particle which has already eliminated all the alternatives. We leave the question open, and we shift the perspective from the relation of the associate with its alternatives to the relation of the associate with the background.

### 3 The analysis

In this section, we will first present our basic idea in a half-formal way, before implementing it in the framework of von Heusinger (1999), cast within Discourse Representation Theory (DRT).

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<sup>5</sup> (14) could be felicitous in a correction-context: somebody asserts that the Pythagorean theorem is unproven, and another person reacts to this by uttering (14).

<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by Hans-Christian Schmitz (p.c.), (15b) can be improved by substituting *gerade* with *ausgerechnet* (literally *calculated*, translates as *of all things/of all people*).

### 3.1 General idea

We analyse *gerade* as sharpening the perception of adequacy for characterising a particular set. Reconsider (2a), repeated below:

- (2a) Gerade ROT<sub>E</sub>F Autos werden oft gestohlen.  
'Precisely RED cars are often stolen.'

*Gerade* works on a focus-background partition. In (2a), the background B is “cars that are often stolen”, and the focus is “red”. As usual, focussing on a constituent entails the creation of a set of alternatives (cf. Krifka 2007). *Gerade* points at the subset of the background B which is viewed as the most prototypical one and tells us that this (nonempty) subset extensionally corresponds to the set characterised by the associate, i.e., red cars in (2a). This correspondence is computed via a measure function  $\mu$  that returns a higher value for the focussed property P than for any other property P' considered to be a relevant alternative to P in context C. The measure  $\mu$  establishes the match between the prototype of B and the associate as the best fit in C, although it is not necessarily the unique possible match. Therefore, the effect of sharpening the descriptive power of a property is the result of a comparative instruction. It is important to notice that we take *gerade* to express an evaluation of the associate, but not a (presupposed or other) ranking among the alternatives. The result is interpreted as a partition, though it is compatible with an order.

Our proposal captures König's (1991a,b) intuition that *gerade* is used to emphatically express identity between two values. However, it also differs in some crucial points. First, *gerade* does not just express plain identity between two equal values. In our analysis, the set characterised by the associate provides the best match for the most prototypical part of the set characterised by the background. Then, for König, informativity of the identity-relation comes from the dissonance between the two identified values. On our account, as the correspondence holds between extensions, it is contingent and informative. Moreover, in principle, one should be able to stack pure identity assertions. However, as we will see below in section 4.2, occurrences of *gerade* cannot be freely stacked. This is predicted by our approach that identifies the core contribution of *gerade* in a comparison operation aimed at establishing a best match, since there cannot be an indefinite quantity of contextual best matches with respect to a background property.

Finally, in our approach, emphasis is not (just) a Gricean effect, as for König, but results (also) from assigning the property expressed by the associate the highest measure, which is a semantic instruction. From this instruction, we can derive the exclusive-like behaviour as an implicature, because, like with scalar exclusives, no better-positioned alternatives are allowed.

### 3.2 The formalisation

According to von Heusinger (1999), focus induces the construction of two different representations of a sentence: a *foreground* and a *background*. The foreground corresponds to the host sentence (i.e. the sentence without the particle), whereas the

background is the foreground where the focus value has been abstracted away, and replaced by a variable. The following representations illustrate this (in a much simplified way) for sentence (2a):

(17) a. Background:

x
car(x) <b>X</b> (x) get_ofTEN_stolen(x)

b. Foreground:

x
car(x) <b>red</b> (x) get_ofTEN_stolen(x)

The background is taken as being given, that is, the discourse referents and the conditions on them must be recoverable from the context. The background and the foreground are related by a function, which corresponds to the assignment function  $h$  for the designated variable  $X$  (here:  $h(X) = \text{red}$ ). We take *gerade* to denote conditions on such assignment functions between background and foreground, as shown in (18):

$$(18) \llbracket \text{gerade} \rrbracket = \exists h \exists g [\llbracket \Phi[X] \rrbracket^{g,h} = 1 \ \& \ h(X) = \text{AFV} \ \& \ \exists \mu [C(\mu) \ \& \ \forall h' [h'(X) \neq h(X) \rightarrow \mu(h(X)) > \mu(h'(X))]]]$$

In (18),  $\Phi[X]$  stands for a formula  $\Phi$  containing a condition  $X$ , and AFV stands for the ‘actual focus value’.  $g$  corresponds to the assignment function fixing all values in the background;  $h$  extends  $g$  by assigning the actual focus value to  $X$ . All functions  $h'$  extending  $g$  that differ from  $h$  in the value they assign to  $X$ , are given a lower value than  $h(X)$  by a contextually fixed measure function  $\mu$ .

For example (2a), (18) amounts to the following: all alternative assignments  $h'$  with some property  $X$  (other than being red) are contextually lower valued for being often stolen cars, so cars that are most typically often stolen are the red ones.

Notice that our analysis explains why *gerade* might look like a scalar particle, but also why it does not accommodate a scale. (18) is compatible with cases where the associate does not belong to an order nor to a scale. The measure function  $\mu$  provides a way of projecting ordered and non-ordered predicates on an ordered domain (i.e., numbers), and of comparing these predicates with respect to a given context. The discussion in section 2.3.1 about the examples where *gerade* combines with scalar expressions like adverbs, has shown that the situation is less clear when the predicate is ordered. The question whether there are compatibility restrictions between the order in the domain and the range of the measure function  $\mu$  remains open at this stage of research.

## 4 Discourse constraints

König (1991a) mentions – additionally to the core meaning component of *gerade* – the constraint of ‘conflicting roles’ as a felicity-condition, i.e. the two properties should be at least potentially in conflict, and he takes it to be an implicature (gradually becoming conventionalized). This meaning component is very salient in examples like (19):

(19) Paul unterstützt gerade die Leute, die ihn hassen.

‘Paul helps precisely those people who hate him.’

In this last section, we want to address two questions: first, does this meaning component stem in some way from the particle *gerade*, or should it be analysed as a conversational implicature? Second, if it should turn out to be rooted in the meaning of *gerade*, are we able to derive it from the semantics in (18), or do we have to add it as a separate meaning component?

#### 4.1 Are conflicting roles contextually induced?

In examples like (19), the idea of potential conflict – or of an unexpected pattern of behaviour – would also arise if *gerade* were omitted. Indeed, the source of the tension is rather the strong lexical opposition between *help(x,y)* and *hate(y,x)*. *Gerade* merely contributes a (scalar) flavour that Paul helps prototypically those who hate him, and that it should not be thought that he *also* or *only* helps such people. Moreover, in some contexts, not only *gerade* does not add a shade of conflict, but it even contributes to downtone it, see (20).

- (20) Es war ja gerade der Triumph der Araber, der ihnen ihre heutige Lage so unerträglich macht.<sup>7</sup>  
≈‘Obviously, it was precisely the triumph of the Arabs that makes their present situation so unbearable to them.’

Intuitively, (20) states that the most relevant reason for the Arabs current unhappiness is their past glory, and presents this as an obvious fact. Furthermore, it strongly suggests that there may be other, perfectly valid reasons for them to be unhappy. In König’s analysis, based on simple identity, we would exhaustively identify *past glory* with *reason for current unhappiness*, and there clearly is at least potential conflict between these two predicates, as *past glory* might very well be considered as a reason for current pride.

Example (20) is interesting also because it contains two discourse particles, namely *gerade* and *ja*. *Ja* is generally analysed as marking information as pertaining to the common ground, or as being easily inferrable from elements of the common ground (cf., e.g., Weydt 1969:31, Rinas 2006: 154). Of the five combinations one can get in theory out of two particles, it is not the case that they yield equally acceptable outcomes. First, if we take out *gerade* from (20), other things remaining unchanged, the sentence becomes pragmatically odd, and requires strong contextual support.<sup>8</sup> If only *ja* is taken out, (20) remains perfectly fine. Then, taking away both particles makes the sentence slightly odd, but still better than the case where only *ja* occurs. Finally, the inverse relative position of *gerade* and *ja* – that is, the sequence *gerade ja* – would

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<sup>7</sup> Example from *Die Zeit* N°13/2006: Interview with Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

<sup>8</sup> Not all German native speakers share this judgement, though.

make the sentence completely unacceptable. Coordination of *ja* and *gerade* is not a grammatical option either.

Let us now check how our semantic analysis of *gerade* will fare with respect to (20). Although there is no formal mark of focus in this (newspaper-)example, it is quite safe to assume that “*Triumph*” bears focus, and that alternatives have to be calculated with respect to this constituent. Our definition (18) tells us thus that “*Triumph*” must be the contextually best match for the background-property. This is what we have called the effect of a sharpening of the adequacy of *P*. However, it does not exclude other reasons *P*’ for being unhappy, provided that each of them individually measures less than our *P*. But why cannot *gerade* be left out in (20)? Without the particle, a normal step of interpretation would be exhaustification. Remember that the focus is in an *it*-cleft, and it is often assumed that such constructions exhaustify the element in the cleft with respect to the rest of the sentence, cf. (Ward et al. 2002: 1416). Schulz and van Rooij (2006) even suppose that (contextually restricted) exhaustification of the focus with respect to the background is the default operation in the absence of instructions by particles.

Suppose now that we exhaustify the focus with the background in (20). This would lead to the conclusion that there are no other substantial reasons for the Arabs to be unhappy. This conclusion must be an obvious one, as indicates the presence of *ja*. However, the causal link between past glory and present unhappiness does not fulfil such a requirement; it is rather a surprising link established between the two predicates. Hence, the relevance and salience of the link must be enhanced by *gerade* in order to become as obvious as marked by *ja*. On the contrary, in (19), *gerade* can be omitted because of the strong lexical opposition between the elements.

So, at least for the examples (19-20), the conflicting role constraint does not need to be explicitly added as a conventional implicature or felicity-condition. It is a conversational implicature that exploits the basic semantics for the particle. This is a rather desirable conclusion, as in many circumstances, a conflicting-role implicature is not very salient, if present at all, cf. (21).

(21) [For Spanish Human Resources managers, the personal impression they get from the candidate is extremely important.]

Das gilt gerade für kleine oder mittelständische Unternehmen und noch einmal mehr, wenn sie familiengeführt sind. (web example)

‘This is true especially for small or medium-sized corporations, and even more so, if they are run by the family that owns the corporation.’

In cases like (21), *gerade* seems to merely introduce a sort of scalar appreciation. There is no implicature to the effect that this should be unexpected or conflicting in any way.

So far, we have argued that the conflicting roles implicatures are reducible to contextual factors. However, sometimes *gerade* does impose constraints on the discourse. This issue will be addressed next.

## 4.2 Where *gerade* induces discourse constraints

As noted in the literature, *gerade* has temporal uses. We will be interested here in the “progressive” use, since *gerade* has been identified in a major typological study (cf. Dahl 1985) as the German expression of progressive aspect. Consider (22):

- (22) ??Es war gerade bitter kalt. Es regnete gerade. Einige Betrunkene sangen gerade auf der Straße. Kunigunde verließ das Haus.  
‘It happened to be very cold. It happened to rain. A few drunken people happened to sing in the street. Kunigunde left the house.’

The discourse fragment in (22) exhibits repeated occurrences of *gerade* and is odd. Notice that this is not due to an incompatibility of *gerade* with any of the verbal predicates. Were (22) to contain only one *gerade*, at any one of the places where it currently occurs, it would be perfectly acceptable. This example shows that the particle doesn’t simply background eventualities, as would do for instance a Romance *imperfect*, or an English *progressive*. *Gerade* adds a meaning component that one could describe as a ‘contingency-effect’, and which we have tried to render in the translation by ‘*it happened to be that  $\Phi$* ’: things turned out to be that way, but it might very well have been otherwise.

Interestingly, it is not the mere repetition of the particle that is the cause of the awkwardness of (22). No such effect arises in fragments of discourse like (23).

- (23) Kunigunde betrachtete das Foto mit Staunen. Da sah man einen Ritter, der gerade vom Pferd fiel, ein Einhorn, das gerade Blätter fraß, und einen Basilisken, der sich gerade im Spiegel betrachtete.  
‘Kunigunde looked at the photo with awe. There one saw a knight falling from his horse, a unicorn eating leaves, and a basilisk contemplating himself in a mirror.’

The second sentence of (23) is perfectly normal, although it contains no less than three occurrences of *gerade*. What are the differences between sequences like (22) and (23)? Before answering this question, let us first introduce some background-assumptions.

We assume that in the temporal uses of *gerade*, what is at stake is an optimal match of an eventuality-description with respect to a moment or interval.<sup>9</sup> More precisely, this interval would be the Reichenbachian moment of reference *R*. In DRT, narrative progression is achieved by introducing a new moment of reference into the DRS; when eventualities are backgrounded, *R* rests stable. On this basis, we can now tackle the issue of the differences between (22) and (23).

In (22), the first three eventualities constitute the background for Kunigunde’s departure. As each of them contains an occurrence of *gerade*, we obtain the instruction

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<sup>9</sup> This is somewhat a simplification, but close enough to the truth for our needs at hand. For a more detailed discussion of the temporal uses of *gerade*, see Schaden & Tovena (2008).

that all three eventuality descriptions are optimal matches with respect to the same interval of reference – which is strange. The contingency-effect associated with such sentences can be derived as follows: *gerade* associates with the focus, and so, other potential candidates for a match at R must be considered. *P* is the best match, but only on the basis of contextual elements, and it is one possibility among others.

For (23), the situation is different: here, the eventuality-predicates are optimal descriptions of several disjoint entities – the knight, the unicorn and the basilisk – at some moment (which might not be the same for the entities). Each entity individually is optimally described by one predicate only; we get no stacking of optimal descriptions onto one single (temporal) entity.

Summing up, it has appeared that in some cases *gerade* does indeed introduce discursive constraints. However, these constraints can be derived straightforwardly from the semantics we presented in (18), and they do not have to be introduced separately or on top of the general semantics we assume for this particle.

## 5 Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have taken the intuition of “emphatic identity” by König (1991a,b) as our starting point, and we have reelaborated it in order to exploit more thoroughly the focus sensitivity of the particle. *Gerade* posits the associate as the best match for the background. The focussed element is not necessarily new per se, but its quality of best match is a new piece of information. Alternatives get into the picture through this comparison. The formalisation in terms of comparison allows us also to predict that *gerade* may display scalar effects in suitable contexts, but doesn’t force us to say that it is scalar on itself. Indeed, there is evidence against a full-fledged scalar characterisation, provided by the fact that this particle cannot force the accommodation of a scale.

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