

Prosodic phrasing and accentuation in contrastive contexts

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One of the central issues in prosody research concerns the prosodic marking of focus (Kügler & Calhoun to appear). Typologically, languages employ different strategies such as stress-based cues or phrase-based cues to the effect that broadly focused elements are more prominent, given less prominent, and it is debated whether and how stress and phrase-based cues are related, e.g. whether both affect the pitch register for instance in terms of raising of the register on the focus domain and lowering of the pitch register before and/or after the focus domain. Whether and how ‘contrast’ adds to the prosodic marking of focus varies across languages. While for German, ‘contrast’ enhances prosodic cues used for focus marking in a non-categorical manner (Baumann et al. 2006; Féry & Kügler 2008), in Akan (Kwa language, Ghana) only contrastive focus is prosodically marked by pitch register lowering (Kügler & Genzel 2012). In this talk, I will concentrate on the prosodic marking of focus in the post-focal domain. Many languages are said to show post-focal pitch register compression (e.g. Xu 2011). Data on Hindi suggest that post-focal lowering appears to be the necessary cue for contrastive focus perception (Kügler in prep), while for German, an enhancement of prosodic cues on the focused constituent plays this functional role (Kügler & Gollrad 2015). From the perspective of prosodic phrasing, the classical view is that post-focal constituents are deaccented and hence dephrased (e.g. Cruttenden 2006). For German, however, we could show that post-focal constituents are not completely deaccented, but phrased separately (Kügler & Féry 2017). Concerning post-focal register lowering, I will conclude that languages differ in the degree of lowering: partial lowering in Hindi, almost complete lowering in German. This difference relates to the functional load of that domain, which is high in Hindi (post-focal area contributes to focus identification), and low in German (reduced pitch accents do not add any meaning distinction).

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