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40. DGfS-Jahrestagung

Intonation and discourse status of Spanish subject pronoun *yo* ('I')

(AG2: The relation between prosodic and referential structure)

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Introduction

- The present talk discusses whether referential expressions with different information-structural (IS) functions have correlates in phonology, in syntax or in both (cf. Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007; Frascarelli 2007).
- We attempt to give an answer especially to the third workshop question: *"To what extent do we rely on prosodic information to understand discourse structure?"*
- by focusing on intonational patterns of the first person singular **pronominal subject (PS)** in spoken *Porteño* Spanish (Buenos Aires):

yo [jɔ], [ʒɔ] 'I'

Introduction

- The data were obtained in free interviews conducted in Buenos Aires (2008, 2009).

Advantages of this method:

- It yields casual, informal, and natural speech (Silva-Corvalán 2001)
 - It thus represents an interesting source for studying not only “natural” intonation, but also the use of PS in a null-subject language (NSL) like Spanish.
 - It is especially useful for the analysis of the expression of yo 'I' since this pronoun is strongly discourse/context related (it is quite difficult to get such data by means of other methods).
- There are two main views on the expression / omission of PS in Spanish:

Introduction

1. Grammarians' point of view:

- PS = only realized if interpreted as a focus or contrastive topic
- PS = emphatic and contrastive category
- PS = always strongly stressed/accented (Zagona 2002)

(see Alarcos Llorach 1994; Badia Margarit 1988; Biberauer et al. 2010; Bosque 1989; Chomsky 1981, 1995; Fernández Ramírez 1987; Fernández Soriano 1999; Gili Gaya 1969; Jaeggli & Safir 1989; Luján 1999; Montalbetti 1984; Pérez Rioja 1954; RAE 1870, 1931, 1973, 2009-2011; Rizzi 1982, 1986; Seco 1963; Wiggers 1860; Zagona 2002 etc.)

- Against these “categorical” assumptions:

Introduction

2. Empirical (corpus-based; variationists) research:
- Overt PS = not necessarily focal and/or contrastive category
 - PS = variable, i.e., it can be but need not be overt
 - There are different extra-linguistic (e.g., age, social class) as well as intra-linguistic factors (e.g., grammatical person, verb semantics, **information structure (IS)**) which may explain the variation between the overt/null subject.

(see Adli 2011; Aijón & Serrano 2010; Alonso-Ovalle et al. 2002; Amaral & Schwenter 2005; Barrenechea & Alonso 1977; Carvalho et al. 2015; Bayley & Pease-Álvarez 1997; Bentivoglio 1987; Enríquez 1984; Lipski 2002; Lu 1997; Morales 1997; Orozco & Guy 2008; Otheguy et al. 2007; Pešková 2013; Posio 2012; Ranson 1991; Silva-Corvalán 2001 etc.)

Introduction

- Pronominal subject *yo* 'I'
 - a deictic pronoun (1st person singular)
 - a strong pronoun (thus, stressed) (Cardinaletti & Starke 1999)
 - reported to be the most used person in spoken language (see, e.g. Carvalho et al. 2015), exhibiting frequently an overt form:

(1) *Por eso ∅ te digo. Sí. Pero yo lo aprendí estando afuera eso. Porque yo no me daba cuenta cuando yo vivía en Caballito. Para mí era de lo más normal. Y no. Yo no sé.*

‘That is why (I) am telling you. But I learnt this, living abroad. Because I didn’t realized it when I was living in *Caballito*. For me, (it) was the most natural thing. But not. I don’t know.’

Introduction

- Pronominal subject *yo*
 - The reiterative use of 1st pers. sg. sometimes attributed to the “egocentric nature of speech” (Claes 2011: 199); “what we most like to talk about is ourselves” (Davidson 1996: 553)
 - Or simply to the fact that “[speakers] construe their discourse, anchoring it to their subjective viewpoint (...).” (Posio 2012a: 16)
 - Frequently, it appears at a new episode boundary, a context where the referent is less accessible (see, e.g., Van der Wal 2010 for the Bantu language Makhuwa; Paredes Silva 1993 for Brazilian Portuguese).
 - Information structure plays also a role: (at least) five different roles in the discourse are assumed
(see Adli 2011; Frascarelli 2007; Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007; Krifka 2007; Pešková 2014, 2015)

IS-categories

- Focus
 - Contrastive topic
 - Disambiguating topic
-

Obligatorily overt PS

- Aboutness-shift topic
- Familiar topic

Optionally overt PS
(variation between
overt/null subject)

- IS – important for separating obligatorily overt PS (focus, contrastive topic) from variable (i.e. optionally expressed) PS (aboutness-shift/new topic, familiar/given topic) and for explanation of the use of PS in natural speech.

IS-categories

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- Posio (2012: 14)

“In order to fully account for the relation of contrastivity and emphasis to subject pronoun expression, it would be crucial to study prosodic features such as intonation.”

Obligatorily overt PS

- Focus

“indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions” (Krifka 2007: 18)

(2a) *Esto no lo digo *([_F yo]), lo dice Transparency.*

‘It is not me who says this, it’s Transparency.’

(2b) *Sí, bueno porque evidentemente es una provincia importante. Será, digo *([_F yo]).*

Yes, well, because it is obviously a very important province. It will be, that’s what I think.’

Obligatorily overt PS

- Contrastive topic

“creates oppositional pairs with respect to other elements belonging to a restrictive discourse-given or contrastive set.” (Chocano 2012: 143)
It is not omissible.

(3a) *Juan quiere ir al cine, pero *([_{Tc} Yo]) prefiero ir al teatro.*

‘John wants to go to the cinema, but I prefer to go to the theater.’

(3b) *¿Cómo podés comer pan? *([_{Tc} Yo]) quiero comer... algo de verdad.*

‘How can you eat just bread? I want to eat something proper.’

Contrastive sets: *ir al cine vs. ir al teatro (3a), comer pan vs. comer algo de verdad (3b)*

Obligatorily overt PS

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‘John wants to go to the cinema, but I prefer to go to the theater.’

(3b) *¿Cómo podés comer pan? *([_{TC} Yo]) quiero comer... algo de verdad.*

‘How can you eat just bread? I want to eat something proper.’

- In contrast to Juan, I prefer to go to the theatre.
- In contrast to you, I want to eat something proper.

Obligatorily overt PS

- Disambiguating topic

“An overtly realized topic in order to disambiguate referential and/or morphological (verbal) ambiguities in contexts that lack semantic predictability” (Pešková 2014: 62)

(4a) *Pero, bueno, mi marido quiso mudarse por ahí. *([_{Td} Yo]) no tenía problema...* (*tenía* = 1st or 3rd person sg.)

‘But, well, my husband wanted to move there. I had no objections...’

(4b) *Pensé que _ tenía una cara más linda...*
‘I thought she had a nicer face...’

Not *Td*, because the reference is interpretable-
semantically transparent
in a context!!!

Optionally overt PS

- Aboutness-shift topic

It introduces or reintroduces a reference that does not contrast with any preceding element in the context. It is omissible (Frascarelli 2007: 697)

(5) *Y el Marantz, el Marantz es muy bueno... ([_{Ta} Yo]) conozco una bandeja, porta...vinilos.*

'The Marantz is very good... I know one disc tray...'

Optionally overt PS

- Familiar / continuous topic

It refers to a given or previously mentioned information in a discourse; it maintains the same-reference in the conversation. It is omissible.

(6) *En Ámsterdam también \emptyset_i tuve muchos problemas cuando \emptyset_i llegué, para dormir, porque ([_{Tf} yo_i]) no reservaba nada... ([_{Tf} Yo_i]) llegaba y me iba al hotel...*

‘In Amsterdam (I) also had a lot of trouble finding a place to sleep when (I) arrived, because I didn’t make any reservations; I was coming and going to the hotel...’

One IS category – one pitch accent?

| PREVIOUS RESEARCH (EXAMPLE) | Frascarelli 2007 (Italian) | Gabriel et al. 2010 (<i>Porteño</i> Spanish) |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| • Focus | high tone | rising-falling tone |
| • Contrastive topic | high tone | - |
| • Disambiguating topic | - | - |
| • Aboutness-shift topic | rising tone | - |
| • Familiar topic | low tone | rising tone or low tone |
| DATA | full NP, PS | full NP |
| | spontaneous data (free interviews; only 100 minutes) | semi-spontaneous data (large production experiment); perception study |

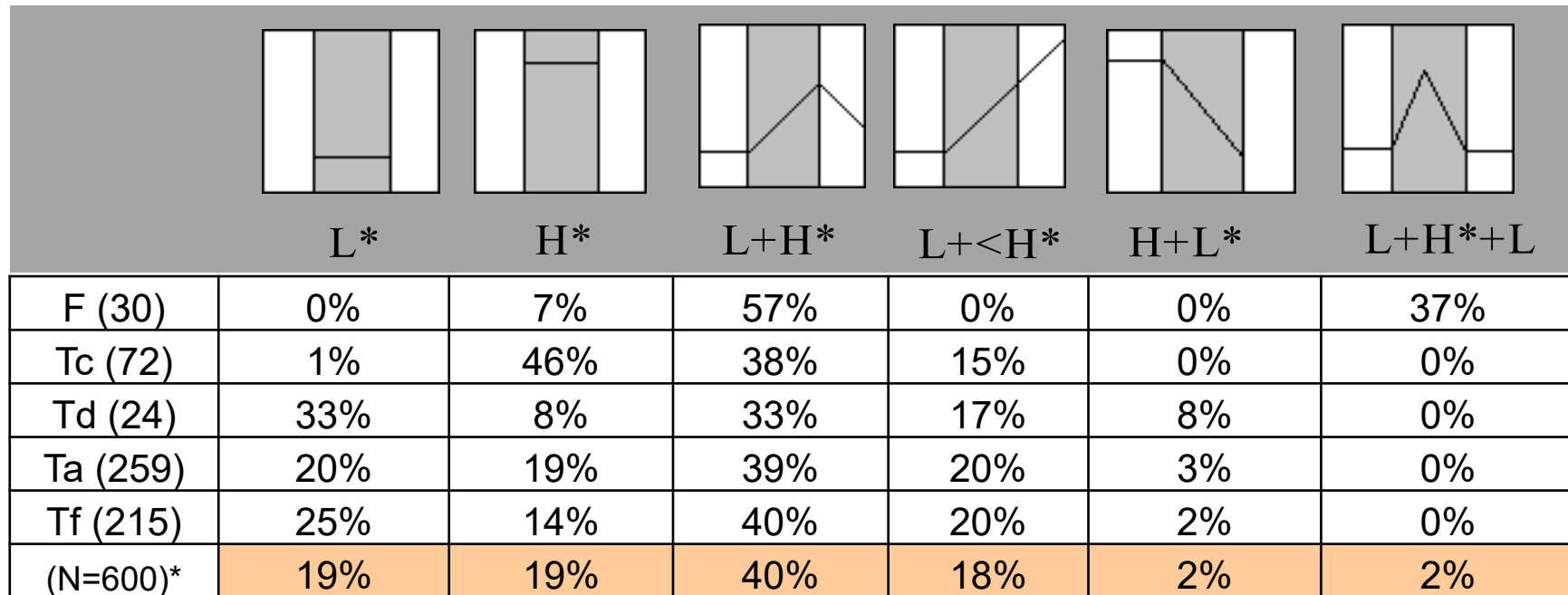
Data and methodology

- Corpus:
 - 10 hours of free interviews (10-60 min. long)
 - 118,514 words (36 speakers)
 - 10,748 finite sentences with overt/null PS (including all grammatical persons; impersonal as well as personal constructions)
 - 4796 personal structures; 2499 sentences with verbs in the first-person singular
 - 646 sentences (25%) with overt *yo*
 - The role of the *yo* in a discourse (present data):
 $Ta (N=281) > Tf (N=229) > Tc (N=78) > F (N=34) > Td (N=24)$

Data and methodology

- Intonational analysis:
 - pitch accents and boundary tones, applying Sp_ToBI (see Aguilar et al. 2009; Estebas Vilaplana & Prieto 2009; Prieto & Roseano 2010; for *Porteño* see Colantoni & Gurlekian 2004; Gabriel et al. 2010, 2013; Feldhausen et al. 2010, 2011)
 - the labels were applied “phonetically” (cf. IPrA proposal by Hualde & Prieto 2015; Eti_ToBI by Elvira-García et al. 2016)
 - acoustic analysis with Praat (Boersma & Weenink 1992-2016)
 - It should be underlined that the IS functions of overt PS were defined according to the pre-established categories, after the intonational properties of the overt PS were annotated.

Results



*(46 cases PS were excluded from prosodic analysis due to poor sound quality; noises, etc.)

prenuclear accent
in *Porteño* Spanish
(see Colantoni & Gurlekian 2004
Gabriel et al. 2010, 2013)

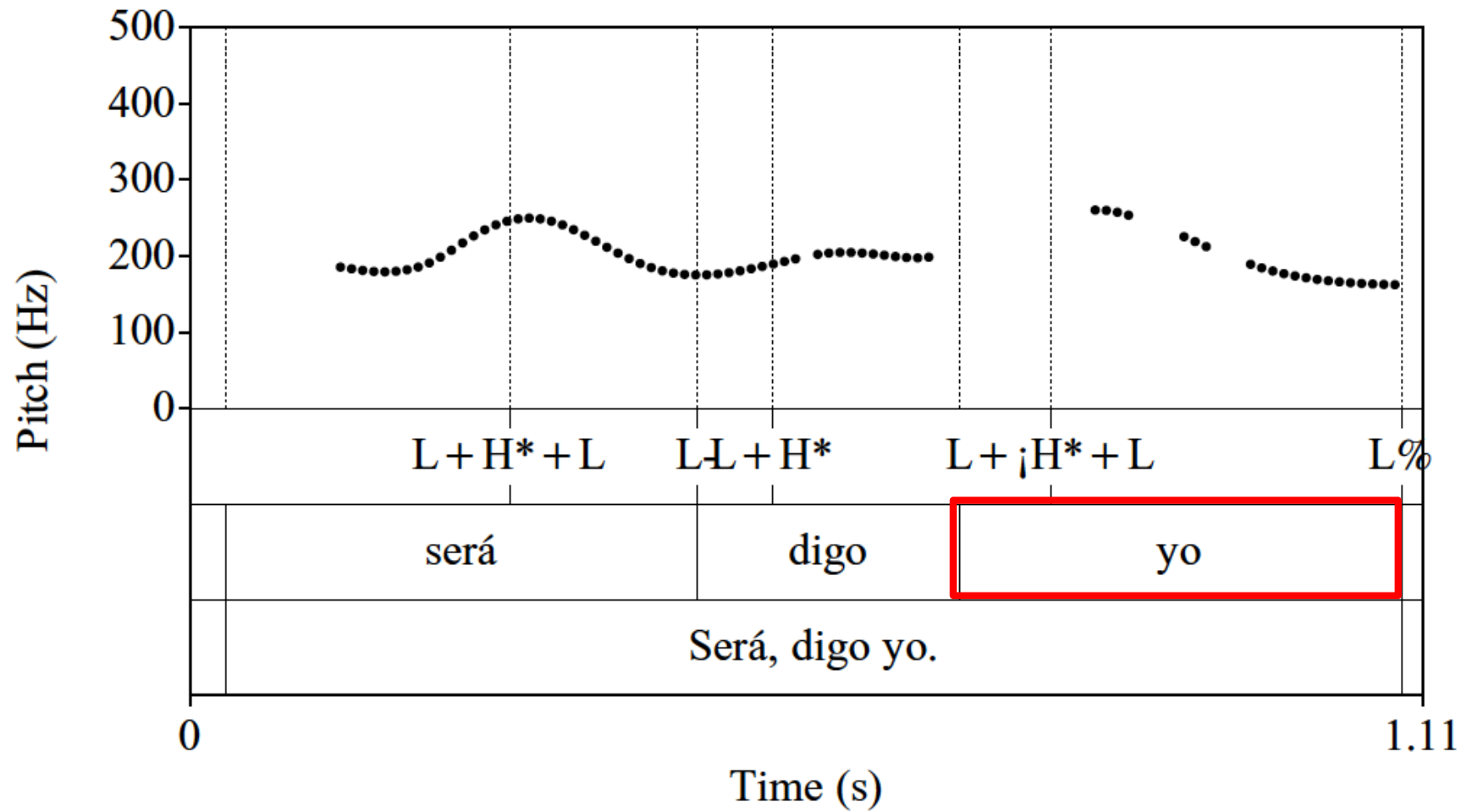


focus, emphasis
in *Porteño* Spanish
(see Gabriel et al. 2010, 2013
Feldhausen et al. 2011)



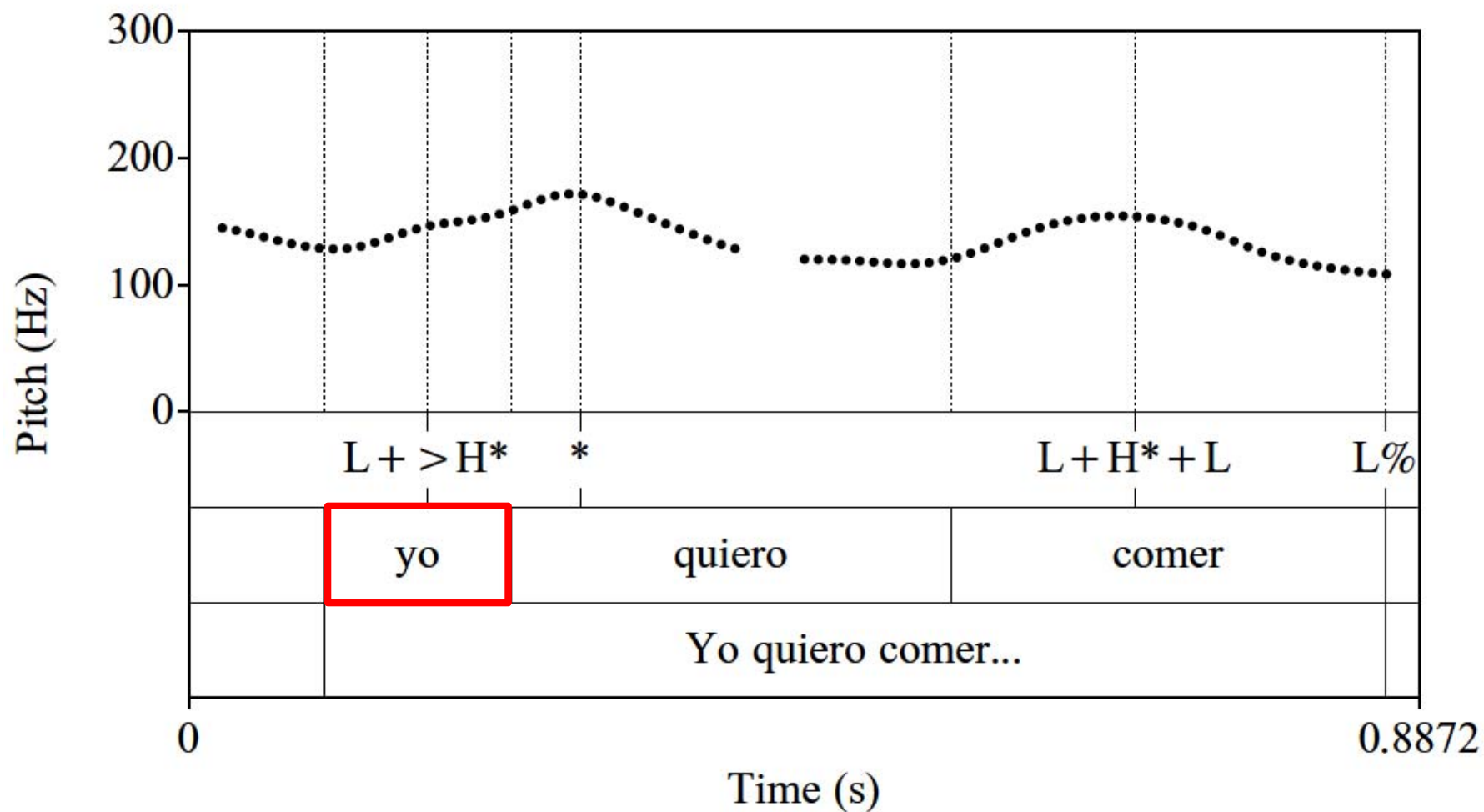


Focus (yo)



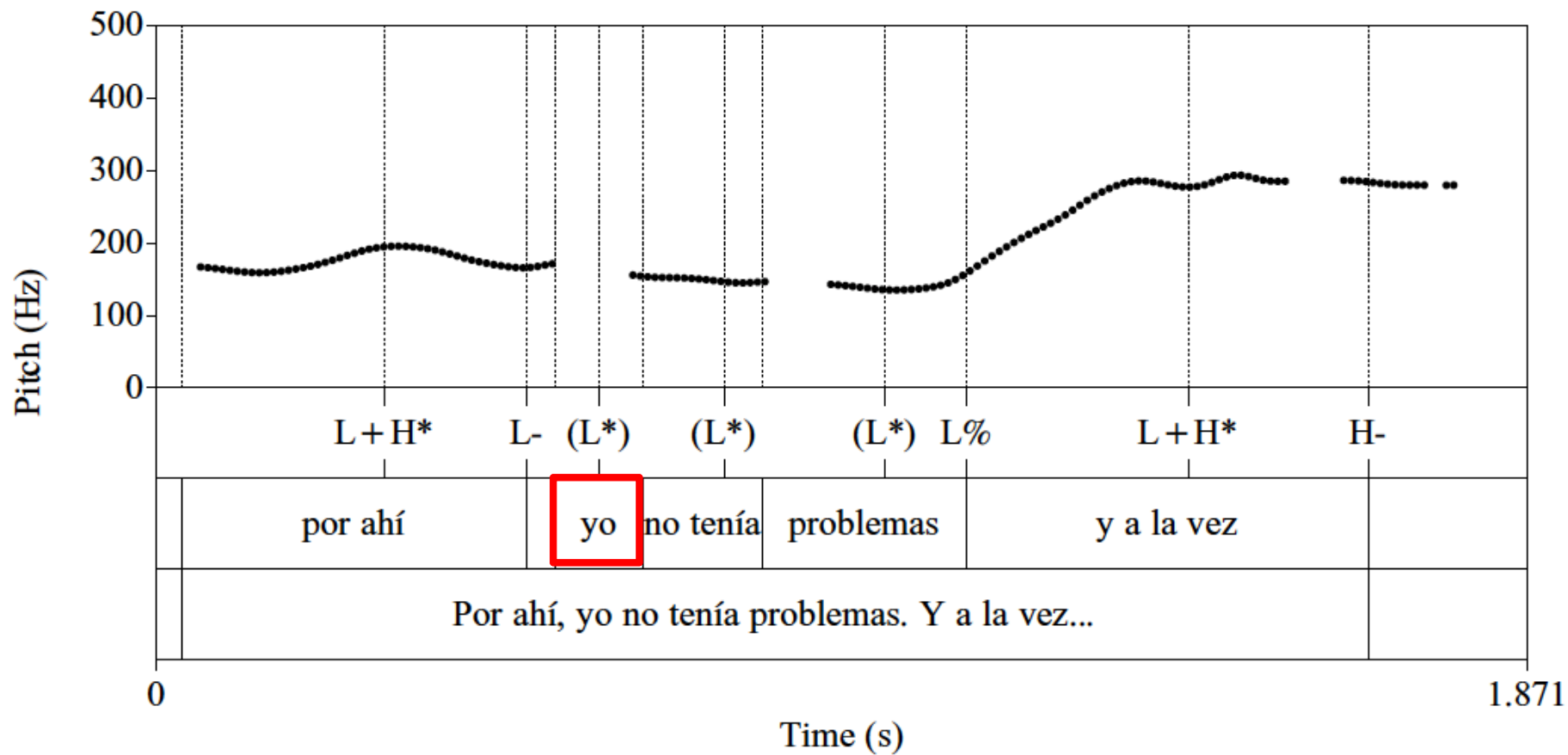


Contrastive topic (yo)



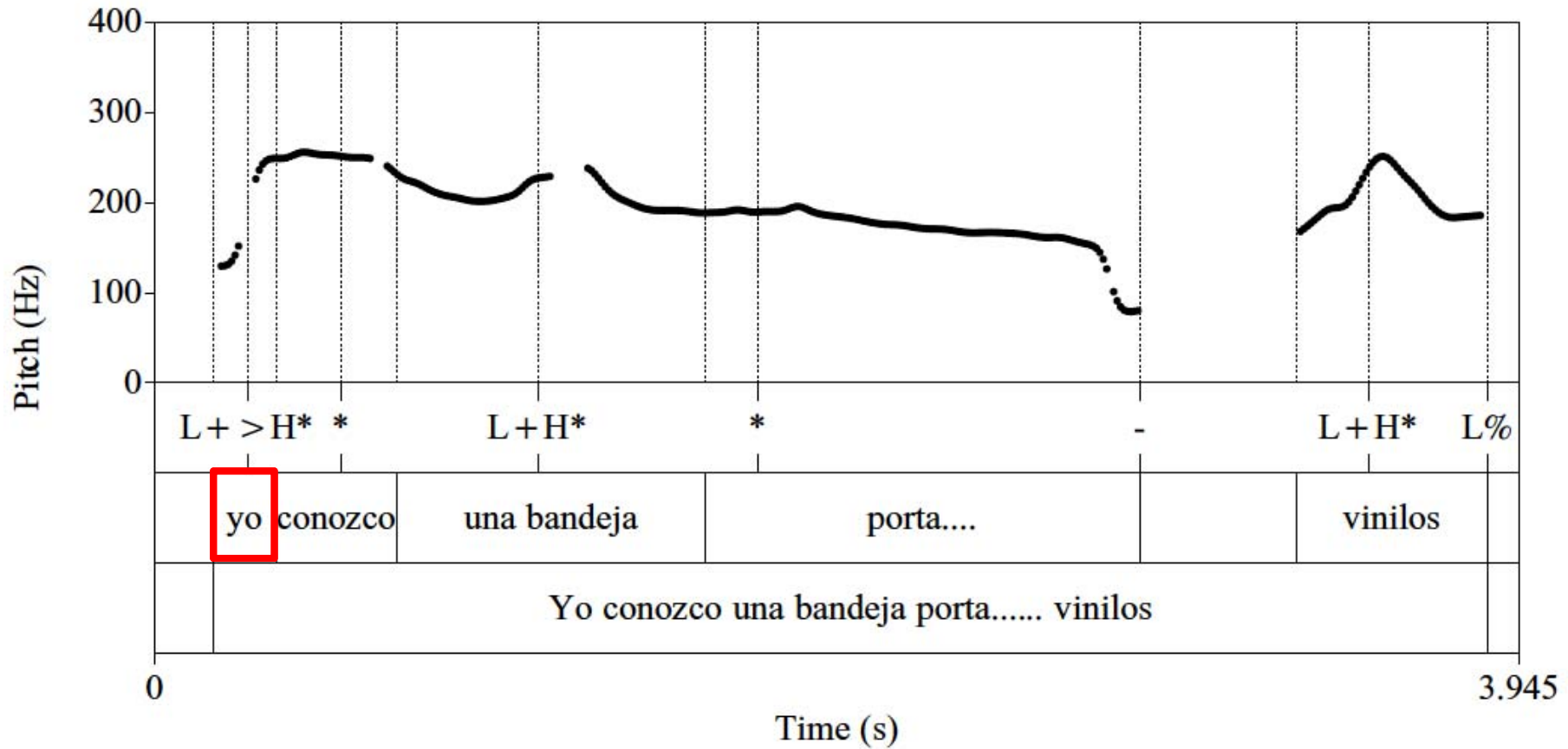


Dismambiguating topic (yo)



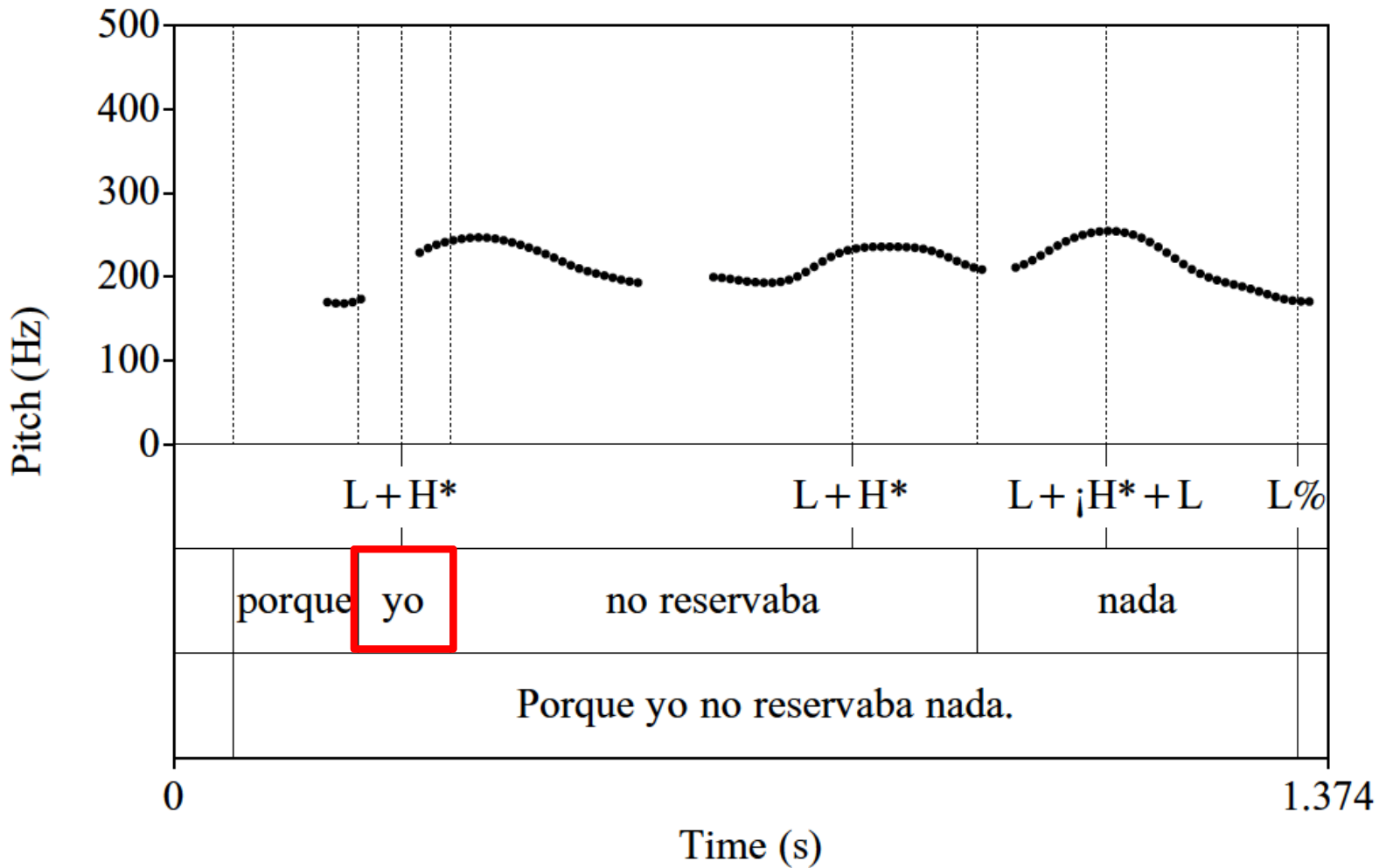


Aboutness-shift topic (yo)





Familiar topic (yo)



Results: summary

- The results show that intonation together with syntax (here: word order) is crucial for distinguishing *yo*-topics from *yo*-focus (L+H* vs. L+H*+L),
- while contextual conditions play an important role in determining different types of *yo*-topics.
- Besides the typical tritonal realization in unmarked SV(O) sentences or in the right-most position, focal *yo* can also have other tonal realizations in cases where it is expressed in cleft constructions or with adverbs (e.g. *también* 'also', *por lo menos* 'at least',...) expressing focus or when it appears at intermediate H boundary.

Results: summary

- As for the different kinds of topics, the findings indicate that we have no strictly consistent correlates for topics in (*Porteño*) Spanish, as, for example, Frascarelli (2007), Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007) assume for Italian.
- The prevailing pitch accent associated to the pronoun is a rising pitch accent L+H*, but also further monotonal or bitonal pitch accents were found.
- The variation observed in data can be represented by the following rules:

Results: summary

- PS as a **focus**

| | | | | |
|------------|------------------------|-----|----|------|
| | [L+H*+L] | / | __ | L- V |
| /L+H*+L/ → | [L+H*+L], [H+L*], [L*] | / V | __ | L% |
| | [L+H*], [L+iH*] | / V | __ | H- |

- PS as a **topic**

| | | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|------|----|----|
| | [L+H*], [L+<H*], [H*], [L*] | / | __ | V |
| /L+H*/ → | [H+L*], [H*] | / H- | __ | V |
| | [L*] | / L- | __ | L% |

(where V = verb)

Discussion

- We believe that the attested variability is more of a phonetic nature and it depends on different factors like
 - the position of the pronoun in the sentence,
 - speech rate and articulation,
 - preceding and following material (e.g., another tonic syllable or not)
- Some other factors should also be examined:
 - emotions and different degrees of expressive force,
 - types of sentences,
 - other additional pragmatic factors (evidentiality and epistemicity)
 - etc.

Discussion

- Is it possible to have a one-to-one correspondence between intonation pattern and IS category?
- Not necessarily: Natural languages are full of ambiguities, and there are differences among them
 - (7a) Sp. *yo hablaba* vs. *él/ella hablaba* ('I / s(he) spoke')
 - (7b) It. *io parlavo* vs. *lui /lei parlava* ('I / s(he) spoke')
- Intonation is no exception:

Discussion

- One intonational pattern can convey more “meanings”
 - Boundary tone **H-** occurs in different contexts:
 - at the end of the first conjunct in coordinations (Aguilar et al. 2009)
(*Leche merengada*)_{H-} y helado de vainilla.
‘Merengued milk and vanilla ice cream’, taken
 - at the end of the first disjunct in alternative questions (Vizcaíno Ortega et al. 2008): (*¿Eres de Málaga*)_{H-} o de Granada?
‘Are you from Málaga or Granada?’
 - all-new focus statements: (S)_{H-}(VO) (D’Imperio et al. 2005a, Frota et al. 2007, Feldhausen et al. 2010)
 - Prosodic weight: (SV)_{H-}(O) with heavy objects in Barcelona Spanish (Rao 2007, 2008)
 - After Clitic Left-Dislocations: (CLLD)_{H-} (S clV ...) (Feldhausen 2016)
 - Theme-Rheme division (Hualde 2005: 261ff.)

(see Feldhausen 2014:62f. for a detailed discussion)

Discussion

- A phonological correlation in one language need not be present in another.
 - For example, Romance languages and their dialects can differ considerably from each other with respect to their tonal inventories (see Frota & Prieto 2015):
 - **Catalan**: 9 pitch accents, 7 boundary tones, 15 nuclear configurations
 - **Friulian**: 6 pitch accents, 5 boundary tones, 9 nuclear configurations (but it has more additional particles or lexical elements!)

Concluding remark

- «To what extent do we rely on prosodic information to understand discourse structure?»
- As for the use of PS in spoken language (Spanish), we have shown that we can partially rely on intonational cues, since the information can be decoded in the whole context.
- Further empirical work is still needed which ideally would combine a corpus-based (i.e. quantity-based) approach with different experimental laboratory techniques to achieve a better understanding of the tonal categories in natural discourse.

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Thank you very much
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