Prosodic rendering
of conflicting information structures
in narrrative texts

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Direct speech has to be faithful to the original utterance

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Judy: "Ian is cooking potatoes and beans."

Paul: #"Judy said: 'Ian is cooking vegetables.' "

Judy: "No, I said: 'Ian is cooking potatoes and beans.' "

Direct speech has to be faithful to the original utterance

Does the imperative for faithfulness to the original hold for prosody as well?

Of course! At leasts for prosodic features that encode syntax/information structure

Ron: "Beth is SMOKING and Tim is selling HERBS."

Liz: # "Ron said: 'Beth is SMOKING and Tim is SELLING herbs.' "

Ron: "I didn't say that!"

Difficulties may arise in narrativen texts, when the information structure that is due to the narrator's text clashes with the information structure of a character speaking in the text.

(1)   Pippi went off to hunt for her purse, which was full of <u>gold coins</u>. "Spink," she said. "It sounds as if it might be expensive. I'd better take a <u>gold coin</u> along."

... take a GOLD COIN along.
or
... take a gold coin ALONG.

The problem

(1)   Pippi went off to hunt for her purse, which was full of <u>gold coins</u>. "Spink," she said. "It sounds as if it might be expensive. I'd better take a <u>gold coin</u> along."

(2)   a.   ... *take a* GOLD COIN *along.*
          b.   ... *take a gold coin* ALONG.

(2-a): nuclear stress on the object (where it belongs in transitive VPs) - Pippi's voice, Pippi being unaware of the narrator's text. On the part of the reader, this requires blocking out the information of the narrator's text. (2-b): nuclear stress on *along*, signalling givenness of object. Unfaithful to Pippi's speech – but faithful to overall text.

Reading experiment. How do readers handle conflicting information structures in narrative texts? Diagnostic: prosodic rendering of object-verb sequences.

(3)   Conditions
        a.   Object given in narrator's text
               (i)   referent salient in the character's discourse
               (ii)   referent not salient in the character's discourse
        b.   Object not mentioned
        c.   Object given in character's speech

$+$ translation to indirect speech

(4) Direct speech: Object given in narrator's text (a. salient; b. non-salient)

    a. Thomas beäugte das <u>Fenster</u>, dessen Rahmen ziemlich morsch war. Thomas sagte zu seinem Mitbewohner: "Wir sollten das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen."
Thomas looked at the <u>window</u> [...] and said to his roommate: "We should replace the <u>window</u>."

    b. Thomas hatte keine Ahnung, dass das kaputte <u>Fenster</u> längst ersetzt worden war. Eines abends sagte er zu seinem Mitbewohner: "Wir sollten das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen."
Thomas didn't know the <u>window</u> had been replaced already. One night, he said to his roommate: "We should replace the <u>window</u>."

(5) Direct speech: Object not mentioned

    Thomas sah sich in der Küche um, die er renovieren sollte. Thomas sagte zu seinem Kollegen: "Wir sollten das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen."
Thomas glanced around in the kitchen, [...]. Thomas said to his colleague: "We should replace the <u>window</u>."

(6) Direct speech: Object mentioned in character's own speech

    Thomas sah sich in der Küche um und sagte zu seinem Kollegen: "Schau mal - das <u>Fenster</u> ist völlig kaputt und der Rahmen morsch. Wir sollten das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen."
Thomas [...] said to his colleague: "Look, the <u>window</u> is broken and the frame is rotten. We should replace the <u>window</u>."

(7) Indirect speech: Object given in narrator's text (a. salient; b. non-salient)

   a. Thomas beäugte das <u>Fenster</u>, dessen Rahmen ziemlich morsch war. Thomas sagte zu seinem Mitbewohner, dass sie das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen sollten.
   Thomas looked at the <u>window</u> [...] and said to his roommate that they should replace the <u>window</u>.

   b. Thomas hatte keine Ahnung, dass das kaputte <u>Fenster</u> längst ersetzt worden war. Eines abends sagte er zu seinem Mitbewohner, dass sie das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen sollten.
   Thomas didn't know the <u>window</u> had been replaced already. One night, he said to his roommate that they should replace the <u>window</u>.

(8) Indirect speech: Object not mentioned

   Thomas sah sich in der Küche um, die er renovieren sollte. Thomas sagte zu seinem Kollegen, dass sie das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen sollten.
   Thomas glanced around in the kitchen, [...]. Thomas said to his colleague: "We should replace the <u>window</u>."

(9) Indirect speech: Object mentioned in character's own speech

   Thomas sah sich in der Küche um und sagte zu seinem Kollegen, dass das <u>Fenster</u> kaputt und der Rahmen morsch sei, und dass sie das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen sollten.
   Thomas [...] said to his colleague that the <u>window</u> was broken and the frame rotten and that they should replace the <u>window</u>.

Predictions

- Direct speech: No influence of PREVIOUSMENTION in narrator's text (under assumption that reader impersonates character who is unaware of narrator)
- Indirect speech: character is merged with narrator - PREVIOUSMENTION → deaccentuation of object
- → interaction PREVIOUSMENTION:SPEECHTYPE
- more deaccentuations of DEFINITE NPs
- more deaccentuations of referents that are SALIENT in the character's discourse

Participants and Procedure

24 participants read out loud 8 items in 8 conditions (64 trials in pseudo-randomised order).

Additional between-item factor: 4 Items with definite, 4 with indefinite object.

Binomial dependent variable: Nuclear accent within the VP (on object or verb)

Results
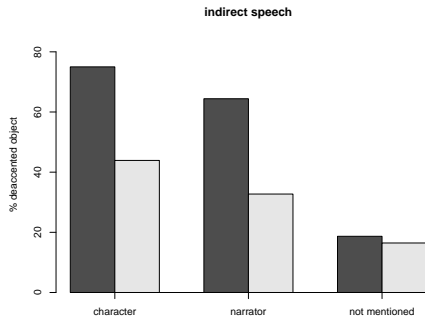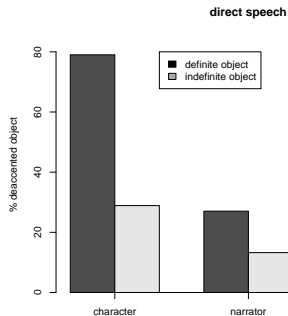
	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p value	
PREVMENT.NARRATOR	-1.9919	0.2381	-8.368	<0.0001	***
PREVMENT.NONE	-3.3160	0.3670	-9.036	<0.0001	***
SPEECHTYPE	0.3249	0.2510	1.295	0.1955	
DEF.INDEF	-1.5444	0.4933	-3.131	0.0017	**
PREVMENT.NARR:SPEECHTYPE	1.3887	0.3197	4.344	<0.001	***
PREVMENT.NONE:SPEECHTYPE	0.7495	0.4571	1.640	0.101	

Results

- Previous mention affects accentuation
- Readers differentiate between previous mention by narrator vs previous mention by character
- Interaction previous mention:direct/indirect speech: status of narrator-givenness changes
- Definite NPs deaccented more often than indefinite NPs
- No effect of salience
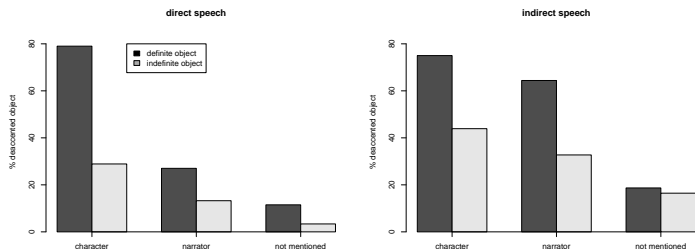
(10)   Direct speech: Object given in narrator's text
       Thomas beäugte das <u>Fenster</u>, dessen Rahmen ziemlich morsch war. Thomas
       sagte zu seinem Mitbewohner: "Wir sollten das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen."
       *Thomas looked at the <u>window</u> [...] and said to his roommate: "We should
       replace the <u>window</u>."*

Readers deaccent object in ∼20% of cases in direct speech
→ prosodically unfaithful renditions of the character's speech
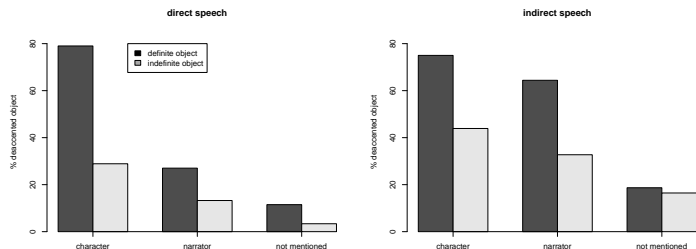
(11)   Indirect speech: Object given in narrator's text
       Thomas beäugte das <u>Fenster</u>, dessen Rahmen ziemlich morsch war. Thomas
       sagte zu seinem Mitbewohner, dass sie das <u>Fenster</u> austauschen sollten.
       *Thomas looked at the <u>window</u> [...] and said to his roommate that they
       should replace the <u>window</u>.*

Readers appear to distinguish givenness by narrator vs character
even in indirect speech $\rightarrow$ evidence against complete merge of
narrator and character.

Some limitations of this study:

- motivation for accentuation/de-accentuation not entirely clear

  - accent on object because readers are faithful to prosodic
    rendition of character
    vs
    accent on object because readers forgot it was given

- comparison direct speech vs indirect speech not entirely fair:
  verb-second structure in direct speech vs verb-final structure
  in indirect speech:
  sollten Fenster austauschen vs. *Fenster austauschen sollten*
  $\rightarrow$ likelihood for nuclear stress on verb increases in ind. speech

Discussion

Reading prosody points towards the involvement of the reader with the text and the characters speaking in it.

Do the readers have to bring their prosody into line with the discourse representation of the character in the text? The data suggest they do so – but not consistently.

$\rightarrow$ Harnessing data from the linguistic lab for answering genuinely literary questions.

Thank you!