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ScienceDirect

Lingua 165 (2015) 179–182

Lingua

www.elsevier.com/locate/lingua

Editorial

# Prosody and information status in typological perspective – Introduction to the Special Issue

Many languages employ similar prosodic strategies to express the information structure of utterances. These strategies commonly fulfil the basic functions of highlighting and phrasing of information, which are encoded by changes in phonetic parameters such as fundamental frequency, duration and intensity. Nevertheless, the growing body of studies investigating the prosodic marking of information structure also show considerable cross-linguistic variation (Büring, 2009; Kügler, 2011). Therefore, the goal of this special issue is to bring together scholars working on typologically different languages with a special focus on the information status of discourse constituents.

In fact, the notion of information structure has often been equated with the level of focus (but also concepts such as topic or theme/rheme are more or less well-established; see e.g. Krifka, 2008). Our special issue aims at placing more emphasis on the level of information status or givenness of discourse constituents, which currently receives increasing interest in the field (e.g. Büring, 2007; Selkirk, 2008; Baumann and Riester, 2012).

We consider information status a dimension of information structure that is orthogonal to the concept of focus (cf. Krifka, 2008). The information status of a discourse constituent ranges on a scale between completely new to completely given. According to Halliday (1967:204, 211), a speaker presents new information as ''not being recoverable from the preceding discourse'', while given information ''is offered as recoverable anaphorically or situationally.'' The example from Umbach (2001:252) illustrates this dichotomy where in (1a), *the shed* is accented and represents new information, while in (1b) *the shed* is deaccented, i.e. a potential pitch accent has been removed. This constituent has thus to be understood as referring to a building mentioned before, *the cottage* in this case. That is, the two expressions are coreferential. The accent on *shed* in (1a), in contrast, indicates that this expression does *not* refer to the same building as *the cottage*.

(1) John has an old cottage.
  a. Last summer he reconstructed the SHED.
  b. Last summer he reconSTRUCted the shed.

(Umbach, 2001:252)

Although Halliday introduces the information status dichotomy as a relevant concept of information structure, he relates new information to focus: ''what is focal is 'new' information'' (Halliday, 1967:204). Accordingly, information in the background is 'given'.

Prince (1981) moved away from the binary division introduced by Halliday (1967) and proposed a three-way distinction of a ''familiarity scale'', distinguishing between new, inferable and evoked (i.e. given) information. According to Krifka ( 2008:262), a given constituent expresses that the ''denotation of an expression is present in the immediate CG [Common Ground, SB&FK] content''. Krifka's definition of givenness presented in (2) makes reference to different degrees of givenness (cf. also Baumann, 2006), thus taking the scalar view of information status proposed by Prince (1981) as a basis.

(2) A feature X of an expression $\alpha$ is a Givenness feature iff X indicates whether the denotation of $\alpha$ is present in the CG or not, and/or indicates the degree to which it is present in the immediate CG. (Krifka, 2008:262)

Givenness can be expressed by different means. Most common in West Germanic languages is the deaccentuation of given information, cf. *the shed* in (1b) (cf. Cruttenden, 2006; Ladd, 2008). Given information may also be deleted. In German or English, givenness also correlates with word order variation (cf. also Clark and Haviland, 1977). If a given

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2015.08.001

constituent carries a pitch accent, the accent is usually less prominent than an accent marking a non-given constituent (Baumann and Grice, 2006; Baumann et al., 2015).

From the orthogonal relation between the information status of a constituent and focus marking of a constituent it follows that expressions with differing degrees of givenness can be in focus. If so, focus usually overrides givenness in terms of its prosodic marking, i.e. a given constituent that is focused carries a pitch accent. However, if a larger constituent is focused, givenness can influence the accent rules: The constituent that bears an accent in the unmarked case can be deaccented, and accent can be realized on some other constituent within the focus expression (cf. Féry and Samek-Lodovici, 2006). For example, while in VP focus the accent is normally realized on the argument, it is placed on the verb if the argument is given. A similar accent shift is reported in the article by Verhoeven & Kügler where it is shown that a factor like 'predictability' influences default accent placement, in this case from the verb to the subject NP in a transitive sentence in German.

From a typological perspective, languages differ in their prosodic profiles, and there have been a number of attempts to propose criteria along which languages can be classified prosodically. This classification of languages refers to different levels of description, i.e. word-prosodic properties (e.g. Hyman, 2001, 2006; van der Hulst, 1999), sentence-level prosodic properties (Ladd, 2008; Féry, 2010), or both (Jun, 2005, 2014). Hyman (2001, 2006) proposes to classify languages along the word-prosodic features 'tone' and 'stress', which yields four pairings ([±tone] and [±stress]) allowing for more than two distinct types. On the basis of sentence-level prosody, Féry (2010) proposed the term 'phrase language' to classify languages such as Hindi, French, or West Greenlandic that only use phrasal (or boundary) tones as opposed to intonation languages like English or German which use both pitch accents and boundary tones. There is no clear-cut distinction between tone and intonation languages, or any other subdivision as pitch-accent or phrase languages (Hyman, 2009). Tone languages have intonation, defined as meaningful alternations in pitch across the sentence (e.g. Xu (1999) for focus in Chinese; Rialland (2009) for several African languages from distinct language families). Similarly, the phonetic realization of pitch accents shows tonal behaviour in a non-tone language such as German (Féry and Kügler, 2008).

For reasons like these, Jun (2005) argued that languages should be classified along a typological continuum taking word-prosodic and sentence-level prosodic features into account. These prosodic features are related to their functions of (i) prominence marking and (ii) phrasing (Jun, 2005, 2014). In the revised model of prosodic typology, Jun (2014) introduced the additional feature 'macro-rhythm' as a classifying parameter to capture tonal aspects of prosody. Macro-rhythm distinguishes between a variety of global tonal patterns referring to the occurrence of phrase-medial pitch events, which have been found in a number of languages (see for instance the article by Burdin et al.).

Despite a growing body of studies that consider the prosodic realization of information structure in different languages, research on the prosody of information *status* in a typological perspective is rare. Recent studies, which are almost exclusively concerned with West Germanic languages, suggest that the information status of discourse constituents (prototypically referential expressions but also verbs, cf. the article by Verhoven & Kügler in this volume, Röhr et al., 2015) is encoded by fine-grained prosodic differences, e.g. by varying the type of pitch accent or by exploiting both tonal and non-tonal prominences (see Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg, 1990; Baumann and Riester, 2013; Beaver et al., 2007). A considerable amount of typological variation can be expected not only with regard to focus marking but also to the packaging of the information status of discourse referents and verbs. The collection of papers in this special issue takes this new typological perspective on both levels of information structure.

Thus, the common basis of the papers is the awareness of a distinction between the orthogonal levels of focus – generally understood as evoking alternative sets of varying sizes (following Rooth, 1992) which serve as potential answers to a Question Under Discussion (following Roberts, 1998) – and information status (as the context-dependent level of cognitive activation of discourse referents/items/constituents; cf. Chafe, 1994) on the one hand and their marking by means of prosodic prominence and phrasing on the other. Nevertheless, both levels of information structure may interact, and the papers stress different aspects of this interaction.

The contribution by Genzel, Ishihara & Surányi shows the potential independence of focus and information status most explicitly. In an accurately designed production study of Hungarian the authors reveal that the textual givenness of an item leads to an independent prosodic effect in the background part of controlled utterances, with given items being produced in a more attenuated way than new items. Furthermore, contrastiveness of the narrow focus part added to the attenuation of the background, reducing the pitch range of the background even further. Although all test sentences already displayed unambiguous syntactic focus marking, both categorical (e.g. contour types) and gradient (e.g. scaling) prosodic effects could be found.

An important finding by Genzel et al. is thus that information structure in Hungarian is marked by relative prosodic prominence between elements, in particular between focus and background items. In a very similar vein, Calhoun (2010a, 2010b, 2012) has claimed that relative, i.e. metrical, prominence is central for signalling information structure in English (attributed especially to focus and the theme/rheme distinction). In her contribution to the special issue, Calhoun extends her approach to production data from Samoan, an understudied Austronesian language. She found, again similar to Hungarian, that focus was most consistently marked by a combination of prosodic prominence and syntactic movement, making the initial phonological phrase the position of maximal prominence.