

Workshop on

**Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives  
on the Interrelation of **Syntax**, **Semantics** and **Prosody****

Cologne, Germany · 1-2 December 2014

**PROGRAM & ABSTRACTS**

**VENUE**

Seminarraum 1.9, Institut für Linguistik – Phonetik  
Gebäudenummer 212 (Herbert-Lewin-Haus) – Universität zu Köln  
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**INFO**

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# PROGRAM

## MONDAY 1 December 2014

10:00-10:45	WELCOME RECEPTION	
10:45-11:00	OPENING SESSION	
11:00-12:00	<b>Stefan BAUMANN</b> – <i>IfL Phonetik, University of Cologne</i> Introduction and Overview: Prosody	3
12:00-13:00	<b>Volker STRUCKMEIER</b> – <i>IDSL I, University of Cologne</i> Introduction and Overview: Syntax and its interfaces	16
13:00-14:15	LUNCH	
14:15-14:45	<b>Melanie UTH</b> – <i>Romanisches Seminar, Universität zu Köln</i> Yucatecan Spanish focus fronting constructions at the prosody-syntax interface	18
14:45-15:15	<b>Jacopo TORREGROSSA</b> – <i>University of Cologne</i> Variation in the left periphery and prosodic structure: A view from Italian and Spanish	17
15:15-15:45	<b>Anke GRUTSCHUS</b> – <i>Romanisches Seminar, Universität zu Köln</i> Prosodic Cues to Reported Speech	5
15:45-16:05	BREAK	
16:05-17:20	<b>Frank KÜGLER</b> – <i>Department of Linguistics, Potsdam University</i> Information structure – basic concepts and its realization in a cross-linguistic perspective	8
19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER	

# PROGRAM

## TUESDAY 2 December 2014

10:00-11:00	<b>Petra B. SCHUMACHER</b> – <i>IDSL I, University of Cologne</i> Neurolinguistic Processing at the Interface of Syntax, Semantics and Prosody	15
11:00-11:30	<b>Manuel DANGL</b> – <i>IDSL I, University of Cologne</i> Context and Position – A Reaction-Time Study	4
11:30-12:00	<b>Nadja SCHAUFFLER</b> – <i>Institut für Linguistik/Anglistik, Universität Stuttgart</i> Prosody-inherent factors affecting pitch accent placement - deaccentuation of foci due to pitch accent clashes	12
12:00-13:15	LUNCH	
13:15-13:45	<b>Sara MYRBERG</b> – <i>Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism, Stockholm University</i> Big accents and PP-phrasing in Swedish	9
13:45-14:15	<b>Fatima HAMLAOUI</b> – <i>Universität zu Köln/Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft</i> & <b>Kriszta SZENDROI</b> – <i>University College London</i> A Flexible Approach to the Syntax-Phonology Mapping of Intonational Phrase	6
14:15-14:45	<b>Fabian SCHUBÖ</b> – <i>University of Stuttgart</i> Intonation Phrase formation in German narrow focus constructions	14
14:45-15:05	BREAK	
15:05-15:35	<b>Arndt RIESTER</b> – <i>IMS, University of Stuttgart</i> Analysis of Discourse Structure and Information Structure using Questions under Discussion	10
15:35-16:05	<b>Christine T. RÖHR</b> – <i>IfL Phonetik, University of Cologne</i> The Effect of Verbs on the Prosodic Marking of Information Status: Production and Perception in German	11
16:05-16:35	<b>Janina KALBERTODT</b> – <i>IfL Phonetik, University of Cologne</i> The issue of contextual punctuation studies on right dislocation and afterthought	7
16:35-16:45	CLOSING SESSION	

# Introduction and Overview: Prosody

*Stefan Baumann*

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The talk gives an overview of the two general tasks of prosody in many languages, namely highlighting and phrasing, and the phonetic parameters used to fulfil these tasks. As a step further, specific functions of prosody (mainly in West-Germanic languages) will be introduced, including the marking of information structure on various levels (in particular focus-background and information status) and by various means (e.g. deaccentuation, pitch accent type).

However, prosody should not only be regarded as a marker of other linguistic levels, since it is structured itself. The grammatical aspects of prosody, which are subject of phonological representations, can be claimed to subsume three types of structure, namely prosodic constituent structure (cf. Prosodic Hierarchy), metrical structure (relative strength of syllables and words) and tonal structure (location and type of pitch accents and boundary tones). Some factors influencing prosodic structure will be discussed.

# Context and Position – A Reaction-Time Study

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In our experiment we examine the contribution of syntax and context to information structure, specifically the influence of context on the processing of referential expressions occurring in the German pre- and middlefield.

Previous studies have already shown that given information is processed more easily than new information, with indirectly given, inferred information ranking somewhere in between (cf. e.g. Burkhardt, 2006; Haviland & Clark, 1974; Schumacher & Hung, 2012). When it comes to the impact of contextual information on specific sentential positions, namely the pre- and middlefield positions, the findings are less clear: Some studies suggest that referents in the prefield must be contextually licensed, resulting in an advantage for contextually given information in this position (Hankammer, 1971; Ward, 1988; Weskott, Hörnig, Fanselow, & Kliegl, 2011 for specific inference types), others report that the influence of context for referents in the prefield position is only minimal for information packaging (Schumacher & Hung, 2012).

The goal of the present reaction time study was to shed some more light onto this issue. For this purpose we compared referential expressions in the pre- and middlefield position of canonical and non-canonical sentences paired with three different kinds of context, namely i) given information in the form of repeated NPs, ii) inferred NPs, and iii) new NPs. Following each context-target sentence pair, participants were asked to perform an agent identification task. The reaction times revealed an interaction of context by syntactic position, which appears to be more pronounced in the prefield position. The data thus suggest that the prefield position in German is indeed licensed contextually with co-reference contributing the most to facilitate processing in this position.

Burkhardt, P. (2006). Inferential bridging relations reveal distinct neural mechanisms: evidence from event-related brain potentials. *Brain and Language*, 98(2), 159–68.

Hankammer, J. (1971). Constraints on deletion in syntax. Yale University.

Haviland, S. E., & Clark, H. H. (1974). What's new? Acquiring New information as a process in comprehension. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 13(5), 512–521.

Schumacher, P. B., & Hung, Y.-C. (2012). Positional influences on information packaging: Insights from topological fields in German. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 67(2), 295–310.

Ward, G. (1988). The Semantics and Pragmatics of Preposing. In *Outstanding Dissertations in Linguistics series* (p. 272). New York: Garland.

Weskott, T., Hörnig, R., Fanselow, G., & Kliegl, R. (2011). Contextual licensing of marked OVS word order in German. *Linguistische Berichte*, 225, 3–18.

# Prosodic Cues to Reported Speech

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Prosodic cues are often used to signal different discourse functions, notably in the absence of syntactic or lexical cues. This is especially true regarding enunciative shifts like those occurring in sequences of reported (direct) speech: quotatives (e. g. *he said*) as well as shifts in personal deixis may be omitted or can at least remain ambiguous in spontaneous speech, so that hearers rely heavily on vocal changes in order to identify shifts of footing. Apart from helping hearers to identify the enunciative structure of utterances, prosodic marking of reported speech may also fulfil narrative or dramatic functions, thus rendering narrations more vivid in cases where the reporting speaker actually impersonates the quoted speaker's voice.

On the basis of a small Spanish corpus combining two genres in which reported (direct) speech is frequently used – (evangelical) sermons and stand-up comedy – our presentation will address the following questions: Which prosodic cues seem to be particularly important when it comes to marking shifts of footing? Are there different degrees of prosodic marking, possibly resulting in different types of reported speech animation, with regular clusters of prosodic parameters? To what extent is prosodic marking particularly salient when syntactic or lexical cues are lacking? And finally, do prosodic cues systematically coincide with syntactic boundaries such as the one between the reporting clause and the reported clause?

# A Flexible Approach to the Syntax-Phonology Mapping of Intonational Phrases

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This talk addresses the question of how to best characterize the notion of ‘clause’ in ALIGN/MATCH constraints related to the syntax-prosody mapping of intonational phrases. We propose that the notion of ‘clause’ should be determined in each construction and each language by making reference to the highest projection in the root clause, to which the verbal material (i.e. the verb itself, the inflection, an auxiliary, a question particle) is overtly moved or inserted, together with the material in its specifier. In other words, we argue that no particular functional head plays a role in the theory of intonational phrasing. In support of this flexibility in syntax-prosody mapping, we discuss data from the Bantu language, Bàsàá, and the Finno-Ugric language, Hungarian. We show that a left-peripheral constituent may be prosodically outside the core intonational phrase even though its syntactic position is relatively low, so long as the verb is even lower, and that conversely, a constituent may be phrased inside the core intonational phrase even if it is in a syntactically high position, so long as the verb also moves high.

# The issue of contextual punctuation studies on right dislocation and afterthought

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The right periphery is linked to distinct information structural functions. Most researchers agree on the form, e.g. the prosodic and syntactic structure, and the function of right dislocation and afterthought – at least in spoken utterances. But only little research has been done on the use of right dislocation and afterthought in written language. In a previous study we found that listeners are able to identify these structures in written novels correctly. But it remains unclear what the main cue for identifying those constructions is: it could either be the preceding context or the punctuation of the utterance; or even a complex interplay of these parameters.

In the present studies, we concentrated on the contextual aspects of right dislocation and afterthought to investigate whether context represents the main cue for identifying these two types of constructions correctly. The difference between right dislocation and afterthought is that in the context of a right dislocation there is only one continuous topic, while in the context of an afterthought there are two competing topics. Furthermore, theories on German punctuation suggest that – because of this difference, among others – right dislocations are marked with a comma, afterthoughts with a full stop.

With this in mind, in the first experiment participants were given the preceding context and the non-punctuated target sentence and their task was to punctuate the target sentence with the punctuation inventory reduced to full stop and comma. In the second experiment the participants received the preceding context and the already punctuated target sentence; here the participants had to decide whether the punctuation of the target sentences was correct or not. Both experiments did not reveal clear punctuation preferences.

These results suggest that punctuation is not an adequate parameter for measuring the contextual understanding of a text. In many cases, there is not enough competence on the participants' side and, hence, the results are not fully reliable.



# **Abstract**

*Frank Kügler*

# Big accents and PP-phrasing in Swedish

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I discuss the definition of the Phonological Phrase, PP, in Swedish. In much previous work on Swedish no distinction has been made between the PP and the intonation phrase, IP (cf. e.g. Hansson 2003). In Myrberg (2010) however, I claimed that such a distinction should be made. This claim was however, based on a relatively small data set. Several questions were left unanswered, primarily relating to the distribution of PP edges and the phonological status of accents that appear close to the left edge of an IP (so-called initiality accent).

In this talk, I present a dataset designed to answer these questions, and to provide a solid empirical base for the definition of the PP in Swedish. Five Stockholm Swedish speakers read in total 1200 sentences. The clause initial constituent (subject) was controlled for length (2, 3, 4, or 5 Prosodic Words) and information structure (given vs. focus). I discuss the distribution of different types of accents in the clause initial subject of these sentences (big accent and small accent, previously referred to as focal accent and word accent).

The distribution of big accents in the dataset implies that the distinction between PP and IP should be upheld in Swedish, as was argued by Myrberg (2010). In several respects, the PP in Swedish is similar to the phonological phrase/intermediate phrase that has been assumed for the West Germanic languages.

However, I also argue, counter to my previous analysis and counter to what is commonly assumed for West Germanic languages, that PP heads can be aligned with either the right or the left edge of the PP. Left alignment of PP heads is common in the leftmost PP of an Intonation Phrase.

Further, the dataset allows generalizations regarding optionality and variation in terms of the distribution of PP edges. I show that the preverbal constituent obligatorily forms at least one PP, but that it may optionally form multiple PPs (primarily when it is long). There is also variation in terms of the left- vs. right headedness of (sequences of) PPs in the clause initial constituent.

# Analysis of Discourse Structure and Information Structure using Questions under Discussion

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I present a pilot study demonstrating the use of implicit Questions under Discussion (QUDs; Roberts 1996) for the joint analysis of spoken or written discourse in terms of discourse structure and information structure. Assuming that (rational) speakers / writers follow strategies to break down complex questions / issues into simpler subquestions, the annotator's task is to recover this strategy by transforming a written text or transcript into a discourse tree in which terminal nodes represent assertions (in linear order) and non-terminal nodes represent (typically implicit) questions. Against Roberts (1996), but in line with theories of discourse structure such as RST (Mann & Thompson 1988) or SDRT (Asher & Lascarides 2003), I assume that a subquestion in the tree need not necessarily stand in an entailment relation with its parent question. However, subquestions must at least be anaphorically dependent on previous material. The benefit of determining discourse structure in terms of QUDs is twofold. On the one hand, it provides us with a tool for identifying parallel structures in text (sequences of partial answers to the same QUD), whose information-structural (and therefore prosodic) relevance has been shown by Büring (2003). On the other hand, implicit questions enable us to determine focus constituents in the ongoing discourse. On the basis of a transcribed section from an English-language TV interview, I give a walkthrough of the current analysis procedure. The prosody (pitch accent placement and phrasing) predicted from the resulting information-structural analysis is evaluated against the actual prosodic realisation. If you are not able to use this template, please use the txt file.

# The Effect of Verbs on the Prosodic Marking of Information Status: Production and Perception in German

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In intonation languages like German the marking of information status is an important linguistic function of prosody. Recent annotation systems are able to capture fine-grained differences in an item's information status (e.g. types of accessible information), which have been shown to be marked by nuclear pitch accent placement and/or type. However, most annotation systems tend to concentrate on the information status of noun phrases (NPs), based on relations between two nominal expressions. Some systems also include verbs and verb phrases as a possible source of a referent's accessibility, but verbs are usually not assigned an information status themselves. Furthermore, the effect on prosody of verbs has not yet been investigated.

In a production and a follow-up perception experiment we tested the effect of reference relations between nouns and verbs on their prosodic realization. Beside *new* information, i.e. nouns/verbs that are not derivable from the previous text, we distinguish between three different types of accessible/given information by using different types of noun-verb pairs. The verbs denote an event of intentionally creating an element (e.g. *fotografieren* 'to photograph') and the corresponding nouns either denote an *instrument* for creating a related element (e.g. *Kameras* 'cameras') or the created element itself, namely the *result*. The noun denoting the *result* was either morphologically unrelated to the verb (e.g. *Bilder* 'pictures') or displayed the same word stem (labelled *result-stem*, e.g. *Fotografien* 'photographs'). The target nouns and verbs were part of constructed mini dialogues and occurred in consecutive sentences in both orders.

Results show that nouns denoting a created element (independent of whether morphologically related or not) were less often marked by a nucleus than *instrument* nouns and *new* nouns. This mirrors the stronger semantic relatedness of both types of *result* nouns to the corresponding verb. For the verbs, the differences in prosodic marking are less distinct, but seem to reflect more fine-grained differences in their information status: With increasing discourse-givenness of the verb (from *new* through *instrument* and *result* to *result-stem*), the nuclear accent was placed increasingly often on the adverb, rather than the verb itself. Acceptability ratings by listeners verify the different preferences in prosodic marking with regard to the investigated semantic relations. Thus, differences in a verb's informativeness are reflected by some variation in nuclear accent placement, and should thus be integrated into a wider notion of information status.

# Prosody-inherent factors affecting pitch accent placement - deaccentuation of foci due to pitch accent clashes

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Information structure can be marked by both pitch accent placement and pitch accent type. In German, new information has been shown to be marked by falling accents, while given information is associated with rising accents or deaccentuation (cf. e.g. Baumann, 2006; Schweitzer et al., 2009). However, a one-to-one mapping of this kind does not seem to be possible as there is quite a lot of variation in the actual choice of pitch accent type and pitch accent placement: for instance, some constituents may remain unaccented even if a pitch accent would be demanded by the information structural context, and others carry an accent although there is no such semantic bias.

The current pilot study, a sentence reading experiment, is intended to examine factors that contribute to this variation in pitch accent placement. The stimuli were designed to test the production of double foci in two different sentence constructions. The hypothesis is that an information structurally required accent may be omitted if its production were to lead to a pitch accent clash, like in the conditions 1a and 2a.

## Stimuli Type I

Context sentence:

Hat Konrad erzählt, dass Heinz in Köln den Pfleger gefeuert hat?  
(Did K. say that H. in Cologne has fired the nurse?)

Condition 1a: 2 Foci with pitch accent clash:

Nein, er hat erzählt, dass Heinz in Köln den ARZT ANgestellt hat.  
(No, he said that H. in Cologne has hired the doctor.)

Condition 1b: 2 Foci without pitch accent clash:

Nein, er hat erzählt, dass Heinz in Köln den ARZT verHAFtet hat.  
(No, he said that H. in Cologne has arrested the doctor.)

## Stimuli Type II

Context Sentence:

Hat Ole gesagt, dass Frank das Essen Pflegerinnen gegeben hat?  
(Did O. say that F. has given the food to nurses?)

Condition 2a:

Nein, er hat gesagt, dass Frank das GeSCHENK MAlerinnen gegeben hat.  
(No, he said that F. has given the present to painters.)

Condition 2b:

Nein, er hat erzählt, dass Frank das GeSCHENK MaSSEUrinnen gegeben hat.  
(No, he said that F. has given the present to masseuses.)

In the pilot study, the type I stimuli were mostly realized with one accent. Condition 2b exhibited the most realizations of two pitch accents, compliant with our hypothesis (since there is no clash).

We aim to ask the following questions:

- Is the difference in productions of the two stimuli types the result of purely syntactic differences?
- Does the prosodic context (accent clash vs. no accent clash) influence the interpretation of the underlying question?

The stimuli type II will be used in an ERP study examining pitch accent clashes and their influence on sentence processing in silent reading.

# Intonation Phrase formation in German narrow focus constructions

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This study tests for the impact of focus and givenness on the prosodic phrasing of sentences with clausal embedding in German. Prior works showed that givenness leads to prosodic reduction in form of ‘deaccentuation’ and pitch accent compression (e.g. Féry & Kügler 2008); it is unclear, however, if the presence of given elements also influences prosodic phrase structure, in particular the formation of Intonation Phrases (i). In the framework of Prosodic Phonology (Nespor & Vogel 1986), *ι*-phrases are grounded in the syntactic clause: While root clauses obligatorily coincide with *ι*-phrase boundaries, embedded clauses trigger their insertion on an optional basis (Downing 1970 for English, Truckenbrodt 2005 for German). Clause boundaries and givenness may thus be hypothesized to constitute opposing forces in the formation of *ι*-phrase structure: Clause boundaries enforce the insertion of *ι*-phrase boundaries whereas given elements may prevent them. Furthermore, the length and the prosodic weight of constituents can be assumed to have an influence.

The present study shows that pre- and post-focal givenness reduces the *ι*-phrase structure in sentences with clausal embedding, thus overriding the force of the internal clause edge to trigger an *ι*-phrase boundary. In the framework of an elicited production study, sentences with an extraposed object clause, as illustrated in (1), were tested under three focus conditions: first, with broad focus; second, with a narrow focus on the object of the main clause (*Lehrer* ‘teacher’), i.e., preceding the internal clause edge; and, third, with a narrow focus on the subject of the embedded clause (*Manuel*), i.e., following the internal clause edge. The unfocussed material was explicitly given in a preceding context question. The results reveal that speakers regularly insert an *ι*-phrase boundary in the broad focus condition, but not in the narrow focus conditions; a narrow focus in the main clause prevents the insertion of an *ι*-phrase boundary in almost all cases whereas a narrow focus in the embedded clause leads to variability in *ι*-phrase formation. The reduction of *ι*-phrase structure in the narrow focus conditions is accounted for by means of prominence manipulation in the post-focal area.

- (1) *Cornelius will dem **Lehrer** melden, dass **Manuel** eine Brille gestohlen hat.*

‘Cornelius wants to report to the teacher that Manuel stole a pair of glasses.’

# **Neurolinguistic Processing at the Interface of Syntax, Semantics and Prosody**

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The talk provides an overview of recent electrophysiological research on the time course of referential processing. Referential expressions are essential ingredients for information packaging. Speakers use different referential forms but also prosodic or syntactic cues to convey different information structural functions.

Using event-related brain potentials (ERPs), we can investigate the time course of reference resolution and examine how comprehenders utilize multiple cues during the construction of a mental representation. I present a series of ERP studies on the processing of information status which can be realized i) by different semantic relations with the preceding context or ii) prosodically. iii) Positional information also plays a role during reference resolution. Taken together, the data indicate that reference resolution is guided by two core mechanisms associated with i) referential accessibility and expectation (N400) and ii) mental model updating (Late Positivity).



# Basic Introduction: Syntax

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The talk gives an overview of general aims and methods of syntactic theorizing. While representing word order in a language (and explaining cross-linguistic variation in this field) is often seen as the *raison d'être* of syntactic theory, many contemporary theories actually

- have much more ambitious aims (in that they try to represent sentence-level semantics and/or information structural properties),
- but do not aim to explain word order properties completely (which are, in part, delegated to phonological components of the grammar).

Syntactic theory thus maps interpretative properties of language onto (partially determined) form aspects. The two interfaces impose radically different requirements:

- On the form side, ordering properties as well as prosodic properties that depend on syntactic configurations must be specified (to the degree that they are determined syntacto-semantically).
- On the meaning side, syntactic structures must determine semantic as well as information structural interpretations (to the degree that these are morphosyntactically determined).

In my talk, I want to present an overview of the current state of the art in generative syntactic theories and point out some particularly vexing questions that demonstrate the intricate problems syntax faces at the moment.

# Variation in the left periphery and prosodic structure. A view from Italian and Spanish

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According to Rizzi's (1997) split-CP hypothesis, the left periphery of Italian sentences hosts a fronted focus which is both preceded and followed by topic constituents (see (1) and the syntactic representation in (2)). Spanish behaves differently, since no topic is allowed to occur after a fronted focus, independently of its argumental status (e.g., direct object in (3)).

- (1) Credo che domani **QUESTO** a Gianni gli dovremmo dare. [It]  
(I think that tomorrow it is **THIS** that to Gianni we should give \_).
- (2) Credo[ForceP che[TopP domani[FocP **QUESTO**[TopP a Gianni[IP gli dovremmo dare]]]]]
- (3) ?? Creo que mañana **ESO** a Juan se lo tendríamos que dar. [Sp]

This difference does not correlate with other significant differences in the structure of the left periphery in the two languages. This paper aims to provide a prosodic account of the variation. It provides experimental evidence that: i) topics are mapped into independent intonational phrases in both Spanish and Italian; ii) focus triggers different phonological phrasing effects in the two languages. In particular, focused constituents are followed by an intonational boundary only in Italian. Following Jun's (2005) typology, Italian marks focus *demarcatively*, while Spanish *culminatively*.

On the basis of i) and ii), it will be shown that in Spanish the order Focus > Topic is ruled out by prosodic wellformedness constraints. After the postfocal topic gets mapped into its own I, the fronted focus in Spanish can be phrased in two alternative ways: either it is phrased along with the topic into a single I or it is mapped into an I on its own. However, both options are ruled out. In the former case, the I onto which the topic is mapped would be dominated by the I comprising the topic itself and the focus – (Foc(Top))<sub>I</sub>, which violates Recursivity (see Selkirk 1984 and Frota 2014). In the latter case, boundary insertion after the fronted focus is incompatible with the culminative way in which Spanish marks focal prominence. The same problem does not arise for Italian, due to its demarcative nature.

The analysis accounts for other phenomena involving the sentential left periphery, such as the impossibility for parentheticals to follow fronted foci and the multiple occurrence of topic projections. Moreover, it shows that parametrization may be the result of differences in the process of externalization of syntactic structures.

# Yucatecan Spanish focus fronting constructions at the prosody-syntax interface

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This talk deals with the prosodic realization of focus fronting constructions in Yucatecan Spanish (YS). YS is the Mexican variety of Spanish spoken at the Peninsula of Yucatán. It has been in close contact with Yucatec Maya for over 500 years by now, and it has a variety of highly peculiar focus fronting constructions (cf. 1). The fronting constructions are considerable both in terms of quality (distinctness of the constructions from standard Mexican Spanish strategies of focus realization, where focus fronting is “downright ungrammatical”, Gutiérrez-Bravo 2006: 171), and in terms of their high usage frequency/habitualness. In Gutiérrez-Bravo et al. (submitted), the corresponding focus constructions are traced back to language contact with Yucatec Maya.

- (1) *Sólo*            *PASEAR*            *haces.*  
only            take.a.walk    do.pres.2sg  
‘You only go WALKING AROUND.’ (Sobrino 2010: 90)

The prosodic analysis of the focus fronting constructions reveals further interesting peculiarities of YS, when compared to close-to-standard varieties of Spanish. In our elicitation data, the corresponding Intonational Phrases (IPs) generally begin with a high left edge followed by a relatively sharp downward slope. Most remarkably, the IPs do not contain any further ‘contrastive pitch accents’, as would be typical in close-to-standard varieties of Spanish. Interestingly, Yucatec Maya has recently been analyzed as an edge language (in the sense of Büring 2009), which realizes the most prominent pitch contour, in terms of pitch height, at the left of the IP (Verhoeven & Skopeteas, 2015).

In this talk, we first of all offer a prosodic analysis of the peculiar YS fronting constructions. The corresponding left edge pitch peaks will be analyzed as floating tones in the sense of Grice et al. (2009). Secondly, we dwell on the issue of the prosody-syntax-interface in YS: Since two of the most remarkable peculiarities of this variety of Spanish are (i) the increased number of fronting constructions in e.g. contrastive contexts, and (ii) the floating high tone at the left edge of IPs, it is an evident question if both phenomena are interrelated (e.g. the fronting affinity depending on the special prosodic strategy of the variety to mark the left edge of IPs with a high tone), or if we are faced with two independent characteristics.

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