Reflexes of information structure in the syntax-prosody interface: prominence and alignment

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It is widely agreed upon in the literature on syntax-prosody interface that information structure, and more specifically focus and givenness, have reflexes in syntax and/or prosody. And it is often taken for granted that alignment and prominence are two sides of a same coin as far as expression of focus is concerned (Truckenbrodt 1995, Selkirk 2000, Féry & Samek-Lodovici 2006, Büring 2010). In this talk, I will show that this conception is mistaken, and that alignment and prominence have to be formally separated. All languages manipulate phrasing for the expression of information structure and thus tend to align their focused constituents with edges of prosodic constituents. But prominence is not necessarily affected. Prominence, understood in the original meaning of Jackendoff (1972), and adapted by Truckenbrodt (1995), is only changed if the language has the prosodic means to change the F0 height of designated syllables, that is (most of) intonation languages and some tone languages. Phrase languages and the majority of tone languages do not manipulate F0 for the sake of focus. I will thus propose that alignment and prominence are different methods to signal focus, which can but need not cooperate. Both methods relate to attentiveness and enhance perceptivity of a communicatively important part of an utterance. Languages with different syntactic and prosodic systems will be exemplified and an optimality-theoretic framework will be offered. In the talk, a typology of prosodic systems on the base of sentence prosody will be shortly addressed, and it will also be shown that the notion of focus should best be conceived as a hierarchy of phenomena, going from information focus to corrective focus. The stronger the focus, the stronger the tendency for the focused constituent to be aligned. Alignment may be achieved in various ways: Ā-movement, A-movement, ellipsis, discontinuous constituents, predicate doubling, insertion of prosodic boundaries, morphological operations, etc. These operations will be illustrated in the talk, partly with experimental data and partly with examples taken from the literature.

References

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