Focus assignment in complex words with two prosodic words in Brazilian Portuguese

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Introduction

A minimal domain for focus assignment?

- Phonological focus may be assigned to non-final prosodic words (PW) within the phonological phrase (Ph), both in European and in Brazilian Portuguese (EP and BP, respectively) – Frosa (2000, 2002); Fernandes (2007).
- In EP, a morphosyntactic word with two PWs, focus is restricted to the prominent PW of the Prosodic Word Group (PWG) (i.e. the prosodic domain that includes all the material within a morphosyntactic word) – Vigário (2010); in Swedish, focus is not assigned to word internal elements (Bruce & Hermanns 1999; Gussenhoven & Bruce 1999).

Prosodic focus and emphatic stress marking in Portuguese

- Prosodic focus in EP and BP: specific pitch accent, H+L on the head of focused constituent, followed by pitch range compression (Frosa 1995, 2000; Fernandes, 2007).
- In BP, L+H may also be associated with the head of the focused constituent, optionally followed by a phrasal tone (Up) (Fernandes 2007; Frosa et al. to appear).
- Emphatic stress: high pitch at the beginning of the word; highlights the whole word in several Romance languages (e.g. Vigário 2003; Hualde 2007).

- Contrastive focus differs from emphatic stress both in pragmatic meaning and in the phonological grammar.

Main goals

- To describe the strategies used by speakers in a task eliciting focus on PWs within morphologically complex words (e.g. root- compounds, V+N compounds, -mente adverbs).
- To test whether the restriction that focus is limited to the head of PWG extends to BP.

Method

- Targets: 32 sentences in contexts eliciting focus on PW1 (22), on PW2 or the whole PWG (10); 3 speakers x 3 repetitions; 108 sent. excluded (produced as neutral/mispronounced); 180 analysed.

- 20 sentences in context eliciting broad focus, included for comparison; 20 sentences x 3 repetitions; 76 sent. excluded (mispronounced); 104 analysed.

Speakers: 3 Female speakers from Cascais, Paraná (Brazil), aged 20-25 years.

Production task: a context sentence was presented on a PC screen, followed by a question head on the headphones, referring to that sentence; subjects had to answer the question using the material displayed on the screen.

(1) The three steps in the production of a sentence with focus elicited on PW1 of a branching PWG (\{TEL\} <process (ME)\} <exp (ME)>

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Prosodic labeling: Pitch accents and boundary tones were labeled on the basis of the inspection of the F0 contour and perception, using P-TiDi (Frosa et al. to appear).

Results

Branching PWG Focus elicited on PW1

- Neutral non-pressure
- Non-neutral (LH) PWG

- Emphatic stress Left-edge (L) – PWG
- Emphatic stress PW head – PWG
- Local accent (L+H) – PWG

Table 1 – Non-neutral prosody in the realization of PWG in contexts eliciting focus on PW1 (Figs. 1-5).

Branching PWG Focus elicited on PW2/PWG

- Neutral non-pressure
- Neutral (LH*) PWG
- Neutral (LH*) PW head – PWG

Table 2 – Non-neutral prosody in the realization of PWG in contexts eliciting focus on PW2 or PWG (Figs. 4-5).

Selection contexts

- Neutral contexts

Table 3 – Non-neutral versus neutral prosody within branching PWG in neutral contexts.

Discussion & conclusions

- Prosodic strategies for marking contrastive focuselicited on branching PWG.
  - Focus elicited on PW1:
    - Emphatic stress marked with initial rise (LH) – at the left edge of PW1 or LH on the stressed syllable of PW1 (LH linked to the left edge of PW1 and secondary association to PW1 stressed syllable in the latter case)
    - Final stress (LH*) on PW1 (less frequent) – PA also found in other variables of BP and EP + optional phrasal tone (L) at PW1 left-edge? Or a variant of L+H? – Frosa (2007).
  - Focus elicited on PW2 or PWG:
    - Emphatic stress L+H on the left-edge of PW2 (less frequent).
    - LH* with extended pitch range on PWG’s head – exploring pitch range dimension only in focus marking (other languages; diff. from EP and other variables of Portuguese?)
  - A local accent (L+H) may appear on PW1 followed by pitch range compression – could it be that in this variety of BP speakers use the same phonological codification for emphasis and focus? Can emphatic stress on PW2 pragmatically highlight the whole PWG?
  - No focus PA. (L+H) – on the head of branching PWG when focus is elicited on PW2, unlike when elicited on PW1 – no obvious reason for this symmetry or other factors: focus marking is independent of status of PW within RH.
  - Frequent use of pitch range compression before and after the element in contrast, both with emphasis and focus accent (63% of non-neutral focus elicited sentences; and 51% either before or after) – pitch compression may play a crucial role in signal contrast in BP (e.g. Romanian – Manolescu – Olgohe, 2009).

- The same emphatic stress on first-stress syllables of PW1 in neutral contexts, but no pitch compression; a slight preference for initial emphatic left-edge of PW1 of non- over local accent in contrastive focus contexts.

If there is a minimal domain for focal prosody, it seems to be lower than the PW in BP.

Selected references


- In most sentences with focus elicitation the element in contrast – either focused or emphasized – is preceded and followed by tonal compression (67% when the focus is elicited on PW1 and 71% when the focus is elicited in PW2). PWG).

- Tonal compression before and after emphatic stress is not found in neutral contexts (Figs. 1-6 vs 7-8).

