

The Interaction of Nuclear Pitch Accents and Information States in English

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In the course of exploring the pragmatics-prosody interface, studying the interdependence of intonation and givenness has been a major research interest. Identifying pitch accents as the main phonological correlate of perceived prominence, recent studies found that, in general, new (active) information is marked by a pitch accent, while given (inactive) information is deaccented. An empirical study on German, conducted by Baumann and Grice (2006), took this distinction a step further by overcoming the dichotomic approach to givenness and taking into account "accessible" (semi-active) information as an intermediary information state, as proposed by Chafe (1994). In a perception experiment, participants judged the appropriateness of three different accent patterns (H*, H+L*, deaccentuation) for different types of accessible information in sentence final position. To this effect, the basic hypothesis that the type of accessibility correlates with the type of pitch accent was confirmed, pointing to a preference of H+L* for signalling accessible information.

The applicability of these findings to other West Germanic languages, such as English, is commonly assumed, although it is not well-investigated. Hence, the present study applies Grice and Baumann's hypothesis to English. In order to allow for comparable results, the chosen experimental setup is similar to the existing study on German, albeit on a reduced scale. In return, scenarios of unambiguously given and new information were added so as to depict the entire assumed continuum of givenness. Moreover, the results of L1 participants are compared to a control group of L2 speakers (German students of English). The control group additionally allows for comparing the speech perception by German speakers in their L1 (Baumann and Grice 2006) and English as L2.

References

Stefan Baumann and Martine Grice 2006. The intonation of accessibility. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38, 1636-1657.

Wallace Chafe 1994. *Discourse, Consciousness and Time*. University of Chicago Press.