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Link-associated and focus-associated accent patterns in Bulgarian

On the basis of experimental data, we investigate how the pre-nuclear and post-nuclear accents are realised in Bulgarian with respect to the type of utterance – question or statement – and the information structure. We use the terminology of the information packaging approach (e.g., Vallduví and Engdahl 1995) in assuming a partitioning of the utterance into a focus component (rheme) and a ground component.

Within the ground component, a further distinction is made between *link* (topic) and *tail*. The former is a prominent sub-part of the ground that establishes connections to the preceding text / discourse, while the latter functions as a kind of 'filling' specifying some redundant information and, therefore, tends to be 'intonationally elliptical'. In general, the ground contains 'known' data and does not contribute to the context. It is rather context-dependent and presupposed. In the information structure of utterances, the focus can be viewed as a default information state, since the primary goal of any communication is to transmit some information. The focus pushes the communication forward by virtue of being the (new) information that is being added to the context, but the focus itself is context-independent. In this sense, it is the unmarked case. Neutral utterances are prototypically associated with canonical configurations, both syntactically and prosodically.

Important factors in the realisation of the information structure in Bulgarian utterances are:

- the interaction – association or dissociation – between the actual word order and the canonical obliqueness-based ordering of grammatical functions;

- the well developed mechanism of clitic replication;

- the existence of a morphologically realised category of definiteness / determinedness;

- the plastic / malleable intonation.

We are primarily interested in the contribution of the intonation here. Therefore, in the design of the experiment, we fixed the word order to reflect the canonical one, e.g., *subject – verb – direct object – indirect object*. This increased the role of the intonation as an information-structure factor, allowing us to observe more independently the realisation of the link-associated and focus-associated accent patterns in Bulgarian statements and questions. In particular, we considered the following types of utterances in our experiment:

- *non-contrastive broad focus* utterances: these are potentially ambiguous due to focus-projection possibilities;

- *non-contrastive ground – narrow focus* utterances: here the combinations link-link and link-focus can be observed (in the former combination, the accent patterns turned out to be different for statements and questions);

- *non-contrastive multiple (double) focus* utterances: here all focus instances have narrow interpretation;

- *contrastive ground – narrow focus* utterances: here the opposition between the link-link accent pattern and the link-focus accent pattern becomes neutralised.

The subjects for the experiment were four persons from Sofia (3 female and 1 male). Four statement / question sentences were constructed with one to four unaccented syllables between the three accented syllables. The sentences were produced three times per task in a random order.

The results are summarised in Figure 1 for statements and Figure 2 for questions.

References

Enric Vallduví and Elizabet Engdahl. 1995. Information Packaging and Grammar Architecture. In: J. N. Beckman Proceedings of North East Linguistic Society 25. 1. University of Pennsylvania. 519-533.
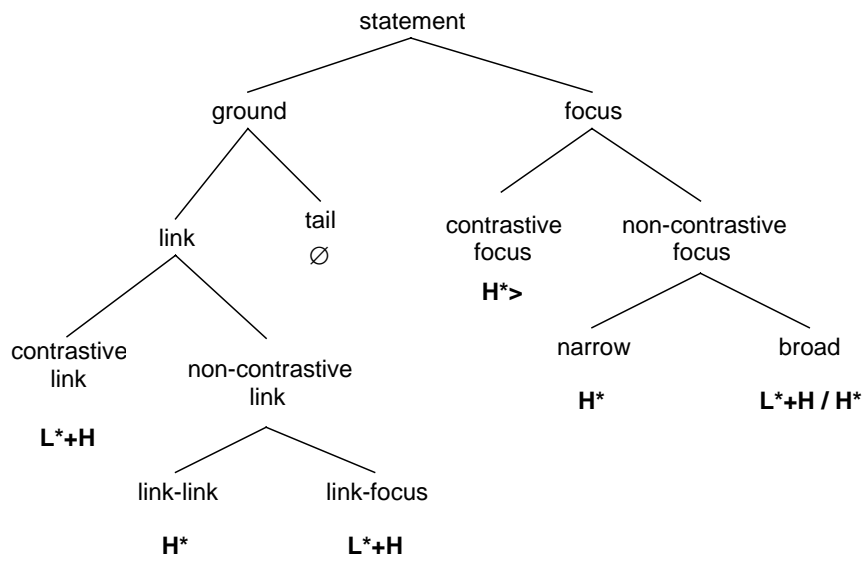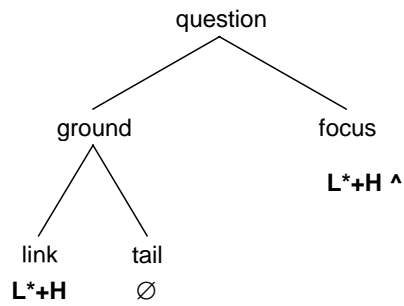
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                              statement
                     ┌────────────────────────┐
                  ground                     focus
              ┌──────────┐              ┌──────────────┐
            link        tail      contrastive    non-contrastive
        ┌──────────┐     ∅          focus           focus
   contrastive  non-contrastive     H*>        ┌──────────┐
      link         link                     narrow      broad
     L*+H       ┌──────────┐                  H*       L*+H / H*
             link-link  link-focus

                H*         L*+H
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Figure 1

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                    question
              ┌──────────────────┐
           ground              focus
         ┌────────┐
       link      tail          L*+H ^
       L*+H       ∅
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Figure 2