
How prosody and syntax interact: the case of English *it*-clefts

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The aim of this presentation is to bring in factual data concerning the prosody of cleft sentences in English. It is based on 148 *it*-clefts drawn from the oral component of the ICE-GB corpus. For each cleft we determined several features: information-structural features for both the focused (highlighted) element and the presupposed part (discourse status and “informativeness”, i.e. relevance at this point of discourse); the discourse function of the cleft; the type of main clause; contrast and emphasis. The prosody of clefts is here analysed through Halliday’s three Ts (Tonality, Tonicity, Tones) (Halliday, 1967).

In some cases at least prosody and syntax tightly combine to yield meaning: for instance, a cleft produced in one Intonation Phrase with a Nucleus on the focused element invariably induces contrast, and we claim that this is due to the interaction between the type of syntactic structure and the prosodic pattern. Here focus and prominence coincide. Tones, when non-neutral, seem on the contrary to act independently from syntax (though not completely) to add meaning: Falling-Rising and High Falling tones are used for contrast (whatever the prosodic pattern) and emphasis. This is true also of tonality, whose role is to indicate the informativeness of each part of the cleft (here we join Lambrecht, 2001). Finally, tonicity, when non-canonical, may (indirectly) rebound on syntax to modify what we shall call the scope of the presupposition. So there seems to be evidence for a two-way model of the syntax-phonology interface (Selkirk 1986). Prosody and syntax interact in very complex ways, and their relationship differs according to which part of prosody is at stake.

References: • Halliday, M.A.K., (1967): *Intonation and Grammar in British English*. The Hague-Paris: Mouton. • Lambrecht, K. (2001): A framework for the analysis of cleft constructions. In: *Linguistics* 3(3), 463-516. • Selkirk, E. (1986): On derived domains in sentence phonology. In: *Phonology* 3, 371-405.