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## Sentence stress in presidential speeches

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English phrasal stress is rule-governed, but variable. A sentence like

- (1) the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone  
(F.D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933, Sentence 19)

can be performed with different stress contours. Both the regularities and the variation require an explanation. We explore the view that regularities in phrasal stress come from stress rules such as the Nuclear Stress Rule and the Compound Stress Rule that operate on syntactic structures (received wisdom), while variability partly depends on ambiguity at the level of lexical phonology (new proposal). For example, words like *in* may or may not be lexically stressed. Since phrasal stress is a function of lexical stresses and their mode of combination, variation results.

On the empirical side, we report on our ongoing study of rhythm in presidential speeches. Building on data made available by the American Presidency Project (Peters and Woolley 1999-2017), syntactic analysis by the Stanford Parser (Chen and Manning 2014), automatic metrical analysis by *MetricalTree* (Dozat 2015), and native speaker stress judgments collected using the web application *MetricGold* (Shapiro 2016) we compare the theoretically predicted stress patterns to the actually experienced stress patterns, exploring the interaction of stress, lexical frequency, and syntactic linearization. In particular, we consider the hypothesis that informative words tend to be placed in positions where they are highlighted by phrasal stress (Bolinger 1972, Cohen Priva 2012).

**References:** • Bolinger, D. (1972): Accent is predictable (if you're a mind reader). *Language* 48: 633-644. • Chen, D. & Manning, C. D. (2014): A Fast and Accurate Dependency Parser using Neural Networks. *EMNLP* 2014. • Cohen Priva, U. (2012): *Sign and signal: Deriving linguistic generalizations from information utility*. Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University. • Dozat, T. (2015): *MetricalTree*. Software package. Stanford University. • Shapiro, N. (2016): *MetricGold*. Software package. Stanford University.

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