Focus as prosodic alignment

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Abstract This article demonstrates that the most common prosodic realization of focus can be subsumed typologically under the notion of alignment: a focused constituent is preferably aligned prosodically with the right or left edge of a prosodic domain the size of either a prosodic phrase or an intonation phrase. Languages have different strategies to fulfill alignment, some of which are illustrated in this paper: syntactic movement, cleft constructions, insertion of a prosodic boundary, and enhancement of existing boundaries. Additionally, morpheme insertion and pitch accent plus deaccenting can also be understood as ways of achieving alignment. None of these strategies is obligatory in any language. For a focus to be aligned is just a preference, not a necessary property, and higher-ranked constraints often block the fulfillment of alignment. A stronger focus, like a contrastive one, is more prone to be aligned than a weaker one, like an informational focus. Prominence, which has often been claimed to be the universal prosodic property of focus (see Truckenbrodt 2005 and Büring 2010 among others), may co-occur with alignment, as in the case of a right-aligned nuclear stress, but crucially, alignment is not equivalent to prominence. Rather, alignment is understood as a mean to separate constituents with different information structural roles in different prosodic domains, to 'package' them individually.

Keywords Focus · Prosodic structure · Syntax-phonology · Typology · Alignment

1 Introduction: alignment and prominence

This article proposes that focus universally tends to be aligned prosodically with the right or left edge of a prosodic domain. In aligning a focused and a prosodic constituent, morpho-syntax is also involved, since edges of prosodic constituents often

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