

Postfocal material in sentences with contrastive focus in Catalan and Spanish

Marianna Nadeu & Maria del Mar Vanrell

Penn State, Freie Universität Berlin

nadeu@psu.edu, mariadelmar.vanrell@fu-berlin.de

Catalan and Spanish employ a variety of syntactic strategies to assign contrastive focus (CF) to a constituent. One such strategy, fronting, involves moving the focalized constituent to preverbal position ([*La Maria*]CF *vaig veure* ‘I saw Maria’), where it receives nuclear prominence (Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2013). In several languages, the realization of CF in non-final position is followed by a flat f₀ up to the end of the utterance (Estebas 2003). Traditionally, postfocal material has either been considered to be deaccented or to present one or more L+!H* pitch accents with an extremely reduced pitch range (e.g. Prieto 2014). This issue is not uncontroversial, because the existence of an empty intermediate phrase (as follows from the interpretation that the flat f₀ of the postfocal material is due to deaccentuation) clashes with a basic tenet of the Autosegmental Metrical Model (Pierrehumbert 1980; Pierrehumbert & Beckman 1988). Nevertheless, other elements described as involving deaccentuation do indeed lack tonal prominence (Astruc 2003a). Whereas a number of studies have investigated the realization of CF (Vanrell, Stella, Gili-Fivela & Prieto 2013, among others), studies on the acoustic characteristics of postfocal material are practically inexistent. In this controlled laboratory study, we examine the phonetic realization of postfocal material in Catalan and Spanish.

Methodology. 18 female speakers (nine per language) participated in the experiment. They were presented with 20 sentences. The participants saw one sentence at a time (e.g. *El Teti tira fotos* ‘Teti takes pictures’) preceded by the question “What did they say?”, which elicited the sentence in broad focus. Afterwards, they received a clarification question (e.g. *El Fèlix?* ‘Felix’), to which they responded by producing the same sentence with CF (following Vanrell et al. 2013). In total, 1080 sentences (20 sentences * 3 repetitions * 2 languages * 9 speakers) were recorded. We measured duration, speech rate, f₀ (mean, maximum, and range), and proportion of creaky voice in the portion of the utterance following the subject (the focalized constituent in the CF condition).

Results. Preliminary results indicate the postfocal material is produced with lower mean and maximum f₀ and a more compressed pitch range (see Fig. 1). These features have also been observed in right-dislocations, parenthetical elements, and other external constituents (Astruc 2003a, 2003b; Astruc & Nolan 2007; Ortega-Llebaria & Prieto 2011). For Spanish, we also observe a faster speech rate (in line with the findings in Ortega-Llebaria & Prieto 2011 for reporting clauses, also claimed to involve deaccentuation). Faster speech rate, together with no tonal prominence, can be interpreted as hypoarticulation (whether “planned” or “accidental”, in Harris’s (2005) terms, is not clear) to background the postfocal material, thus making the focalized constituent more salient. The CF condition also presents a higher incidence of creaky voice (Fig. 1), as expected due to the lower f₀ (Johnson 2003, Lindblom 2009).

Investigating the characteristics of the postfocal material may shed light on its phonological status and may also help us better understand cases of sporadic deaccentuation of constituents in accentable contexts (as in Rao 2009).

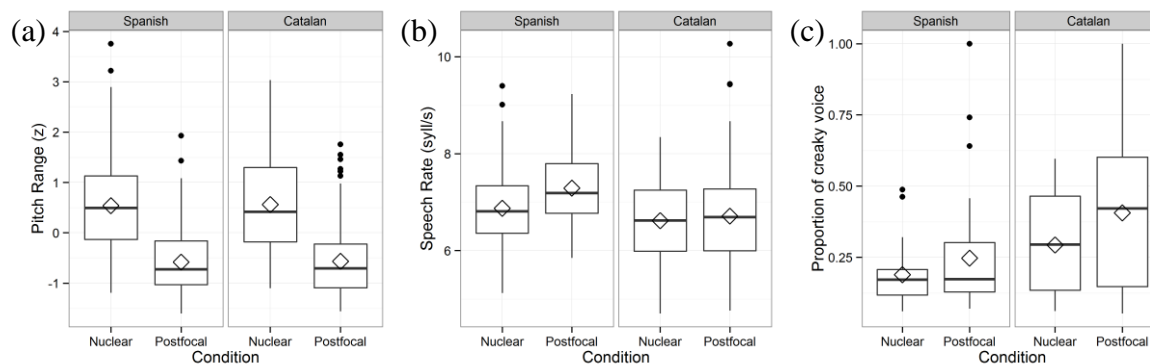


Figure 1. (a) Pitch range; (b) speech rate; (c) proportion of creaky voice in the nuclear vs. postfocal conditions in Spanish and Catalan.

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