

On prosodic prominence of heads: Nuclear stress placement in Hill Mari

Current models of prosodic prominence based on Germanic languages are designed to disallow nuclear stress (NS) on heads under wide focus (Bresnan 1971; Büring 2003, a.o). They do allow stress to shift to the head under contrastive/narrow focus. In this paper, I present data from Hill Mari (HM; Finno-Ugric, Uralic) challenging both of these assumptions. First, HM places the default NS under wide focus on heads, not on complements. Second, the converse pattern of contrastive stress shifting on to the complement is found in VPs but not in PPs. To account for these findings, I first propose a modified ranking of parameters in Büring's NS placement model. Next, I argue that the possibility of stress shift depends on specific properties of the head-complement relationship.

Following Büring (2003, 2011), I assume that prosodic structure consists of prosodic phrases corresponding to syntactic constituents. Prosodic words (PWds) group to form accent domains (ADs); each phrase has one head that is acoustically more prominent. In an intonational phrase (IP), the main stress is called NS (1).

(1) Q: What did Lesley sell?

A: ((*)_{AD} ((*)_{AD})_{IP}
 (Lesley)_{PWd} (sold)_{PWd} ([my umbrella]_F)_{PWd} (Büring 2003:17)

Potential prosodic structures are evaluated through the following constraints (from highest- to lowest-ranked): (i) Focus Prominence (FP): Focus needs to be maximally prominent (Truckenbrodt, 1995) >> (ii) Adj=AD: Adjuncts form accent domains >> (iii) *Stress Pred: Verbs/ predicates/ heads don't bear prominence >> (iv) XP=AD: XPs form accent domains. The literature does not discuss variation in the ranking of *Stress Pred (e.g., Büring 2003).

All-new and VP-focus utterances in HM, NS (in bold) is on the verbal head, not on the complement (2).

(2) *futbol'ist mää-âm čâm-a// # futbol'ist mää-âm čâm-a*
 football.player ball-ACC kick-NPST.3SG
 'A football player is kicking a ball'.

As I will show in the talk, the only way to capture the possible prosodic structures in HM ruling out the impossible candidates is by revising the constraint hierarchy as follows: (3) FP >> Adj=AD >> XP=AD >> *Stress Pred.

Unlike VPs, where narrow focus on the complement shifts the stress to that complement, no information-structure driven stress shift is observed in PPs; even if the information expressed by the P is given, it remains stressed.

(3) *imn'i [tääkä]_F šajâl-nâ šalg-a*
 horse bush behind-IN stand-NPST.3SG

'[CONTEXT: The horse is standing behind the rock.] The horse is standing behind the bush'.

Suppose that ADs do not have to be isomorphic with syntactic constituents (*pace* Taglicht 1984), though formal-focus marking (F-marking) is dependent on syntax, as in (4). While the verb and its complement can be F-marked independent of one another, such independent F-marking is impossible within PPs. One way of capturing this difference is that the complement of V can be dislocated (extracted), based on information structure, but such stranding of P is never possible in HM. That suggests that postpositions and relational nouns are more tightly related to their complements than verbal heads, and that tighter relationship means that they cannot have different information-structural features.

(4) ((*)_{AD} ((*)_{AD} (*)_{AD})_{IP}
 (imn'i)_{PWd} (tääkä)_F_{PWd} (anzâl-nâ)_F_{PWd} (šalga)_{PWd}
 horse bush front-IN stand-NPST.3SG
 'The horse is standing in front of a tree'.

The HM data, therefore, show that approaches to NS placement have to be modified in order to account for prosodic prominence of heads cross-linguistically. This is accomplished by the proposed reordering of the constraints present in the theory. HM stress-placement patterns suggest a more flexible mapping between prosodic and syntactic constituents. At the same time, the distribution of formal focus features is sensitive to fairly fine-grained syntactic distinctions.

References: Bresnan J. (1971). "Sentence stress and syntactic transformations." *Language* 47: 257–81; Büring D. (2003). *Focus Projection and Default Prominence*. Ms.; Büring D. (2011). *Syntax, Information Structure and Prosody*. Marcel den Dikken (ed) 'The Cambridge Handbook of Generative Syntax', Cambridge University Press. (draft version); Truckenbrodt H. (1995). *Phonological Phrases: Their Relation to Syntax, Focus, and Prominence*. Ph.D. thesis, MIT. Published 1999 by MITWPL; Taglicht, J. (1984). *Message and emphasis: On focus and scope in English* (Vol. 15). Addison-Wesley Longman Limited.