

Focus and Monotony

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The present study analyzes a Wh-focus prosodic domain in Japanese. Specifically, we offer a general analysis that (i) would permit the grammar to establish fine and precise synchronization between PF and LF (beyond scope interpretation) and (ii) would uniformly capture varied surface realization of focus prosody in different dialects of Japanese.

Until recently, many of the studies conducted in the existing frameworks of prosody failed to pay sufficient attention to the correlation between prosody and semantic interpretation. For example, in one of the most influential works on Japanese prosody, Pierrehumbert and Beckman (1988) (P&B) propose that focus starts a new Intermediate Phrase, which functions as the domain of downstep. On the basis of their model, which is essentially not aiming at the explanation of prosody-syntax relation, it is impossible to precisely determine the end of the focus domain. The model, therefore, fails to grasp the recent findings on Japanese Wh-interrogatives that a distinction between ‘Subordinate Wh-scope’ and ‘Matrix Wh-scope’ is marked by prosody (Deguchi and Kitagawa 2002; Ishihara 2002). More crucially for the P&B’s proposal, a recent study on Japanese prosody has revealed that the Wh-focus does not block downstep (Kubozono 2007), and hence the focus prosody domain it starts can not be regarded as Intermediate Phrase.

Most of the previous works on Japanese focus prosody have also been limited in that they provide the analysis of only a single or a handful of dialect(s), often of the standard (Tokyo) variety. Many other Japanese dialects, however, are known to exhibit a rich variety of prosodic systems, and a surface pitch contour of the post-focal domain considerably differs from one dialect to another — while the contour of the post-focal domain in Tokyo is more or less flat low (and flat high), it is flat high in Fukuoka, continuous fall in Kobayashi and continuous rise in Koriyama (Igarashi 2007). As far as we know, no attempt has hitherto been made to uniformly treat such cross-dialectal variations in pitch contours of the Wh-domain.

We propose and argue for what we call "Post-Focal Restraint" and its micro-parametric variations among different dialects in Japanese. Post-Focal Restraint phonetically restrains radical rise or fall in pitch in the post-focal domain, thereby inducing non-alternating, monotonous pitch contours. We point out that the Post-Focal Restraint can be completely synchronized with the mapping of the post-focal items in the syntactic representation to those in the background portion of a "structured" semantic representation which is to be interpreted as the tail of the focus. It is also suggested that Post-focal Restraint is part of the grammaticalization of the language users’ need to have phonetic prominence and phonetic monotony correctly paired with focus and its tail, respectively, in the packaging of information. We also take the position that such pairing is established with the mediation of the association of [F(ocus)] features at PF and LF in the grammar (cf. Kitagawa 2005; Kitagawa and Tomioka 2005) and by way of the processing of sentences in performance.