

On pronouns and their prosodic phrasing in German

Pronouns are function words syntactically, and are commonly viewed as weak elements in prosodic constituency (Selkirk, 1996; Truckenbrodt, 2007). A pronoun constitutes a functional head without any complement, and thus the pronoun usually does not project a mapping constraint from syntactic to higher prosodic structure (Truckenbrodt, 2007; Bennett et al. 2015). For instance, compared to a full subject NP, which maps to a phonological phrase (φ -phrase), a pronoun does not project a φ -phrase boundary (cf. e.g. Chen, 1987 for Xiamen Chinese; Selkirk, 2011). Selkirk (1996, p.188) lists two options of prosodic phrasing of function words: (i) either as a prosodic word (ω), or (ii) as a prosodic clitic. The fact that function words may be phrased as a ω shows the possibility of pronouns to receive prominence by pitch accent assignment since only full prosodic words may be associated with pitch accents. In languages such as English or German, the head of a φ -phrase is realized as a pitch accent (e.g. Selkirk, 1995). Given this fact, a pronoun phrased as ω may function as a head of a φ -phrase. Recently, increasing evidence arises that function words, such as pronouns, have both weak and strong versions, and that strong functional elements are treated similar to lexical words in that they receive a pitch accent (Bennett et al. 2015).

This study is concerned with pronouns in German and their conditions for prosodic phrasing. We will explore the ability to carry an accent for different types of pronouns (monosyllabic personal pronouns such as *ich*, *sie*, *ihm*, *es* ‘I, she, him, it’ vs. polysyllabic indefinite pronouns such as *irgendwer* (*wer*), *irgendwas* (*was*) and *jemand* ‘someone, somewhat, somebody’). The presence or absence of a pitch accent is tested in different syntactic positions (sentence-initial, -medial, and -final) and for objects either as an argument or an adjunct. Ten German native speakers read about 50 different sentences each. Pronouns may either receive a full pitch accent, or receive less prominence being a generally weak prosodic element. Less prosodic prominence would lead to less prominent accent realizations by using less prominent accent types (cf. Baumann & Röhr, 2015). Alternatively, accents may be realized in a compressed pitch register and thus less prominent (cf. Kügler & Féry, 2016 for pitch accents on full argument NPs in compressed pitch register in postfocal position). The conditions for pronouns receiving a pitch accent or not, and the type of realization will be discussed in relation to their prosodic phrasing.

References

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