

The multimodal marking of information status in L2 speech: the case of Catalan learners of French

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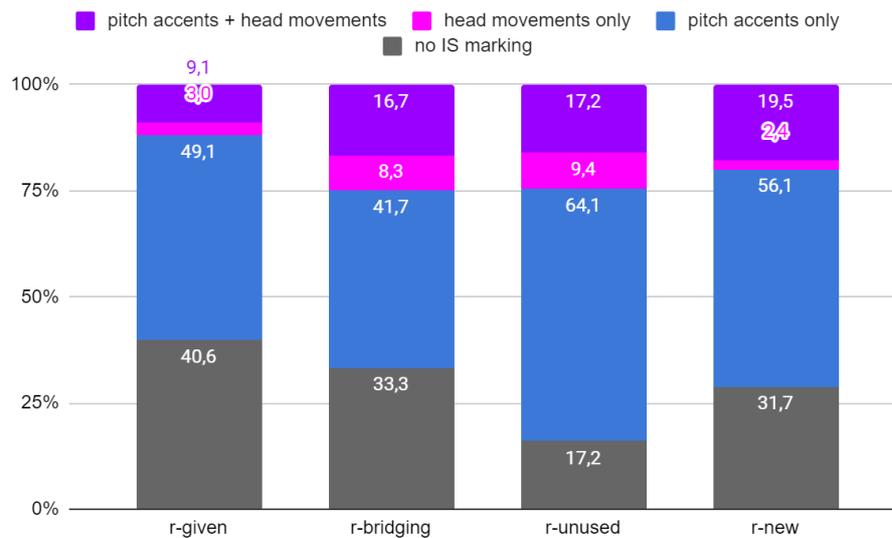
Languages do not only differ in the linguistic devices used to signal information structure (lexical markers, syntax, prosody) but also in the way (prosodic) prominence is implemented to mark focus or information status [1, 2]. At a parallel level of description, manual gestures have been found to occur more frequently with new and inferable referents than with given ones [3], and specific head movements have been attributed a prominence-lending function as well [4]. While the synchrony between prosody and gesture has been established for native speech, little is known about how second language learners mark information structure through prosody and gesture.

Previous studies mostly described the expression of focus in L2 English, and showed that learners tend to adopt the prosodic patterns of their L1, including accent placement [5, 6] and type of pitch accent [7]. Regarding information status, previous research has shown that de-accenting *given* information may be a challenge for speakers of languages which do not feature an equivalent cue [8]. As for gestures, there is evidence that learners tend to over-explicitly mark referring expressions such as pronouns [9]. To our knowledge, an analysis of information status expressed through both prosodic and gestural prominence by L2 learners has not been carried out so far.

In the present study, we aim at uncovering the mechanisms of information status marking with prosodic and gestural cues (here: head movements) in spontaneous speech by Catalan learners of French. Twenty-five Catalan speakers with intermediate proficiency in French recorded short audiovisual sequences describing a) their Erasmus stay abroad and b) their best friend. In total, fifty recordings are currently being annotated in terms of a) information status of words at the referential and lexical levels, following a simplified version of the RefLex Scheme [10], b) phrasing and pitch accents, applying the ToBI labeling system and, when possible, the F_ToBI system [11], c) perceived prominence following the DIMA guidelines [12], and d) head movements' types, strokes and peaks (points of maximum extension), as specified in the M3D guidelines for gesture annotations [13].

A preliminary analysis of a subset of the data shows that *new* and *inferable* (i.e. *unused* and *bridging*) referents were more frequently marked than *given* information, predominantly with pitch accents, and to a lesser extent with a combination of pitch accents and head movements (see Figure 1). At the lexical level, *new* words seem to be more frequently marked than *given* words. Nevertheless, we found a high proportion of *given* content words featuring pitch-accented syllables, which suggests that over-explicitly marking *given* information may be a characteristic trait of L2 speech. Interestingly, our analysis reveals that *new* and *inferable* information tend to be marked by pitch accents which show a higher degree of prominence, indicating that L2 learners may vary the *strength* of prominence to mark information status instead of switching between extreme poles of accentuation and lack of accentuation. Speakers did not show any preference for a particular type of head movement, however. Further analysis will show whether specific types of movement are associated with specific levels of prosodic prominence and/or information status.

Figure 1. *Multimodal marking of information status – referential level (simplified RefLex)*



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