On the elicitation of focus –
Prosodic differences as a function of sentence mode of the context?

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Context and discourse moves

(1) a. Sam’s home. {Sam is home} ↩
    b. Yes/Yeah, he’s home. ✓
    c. No, he isn’t home.

(2) a. Is Sam home? {Sam is home; Sam is not home}
    b. Yes/Yeah, he’s home. ✓
    c. No, he isn’t home. ✓

(Farkas & Bruce 2010)

• Identical conversational moves in (1) and (2)
• “Conversational crisis” in (1c) – denial/rejection of presupposition
Overview

Question:
• Is a conversational crisis marked prosodically and/or syntactically? Hence, does the sentence mode of the context influence the prosodic and/or syntactic expression of focus?

Two picture naming tasks – I syntax, II prosody:
• Eliciting of focus structures via context-questions and context-statements
• Mandarin Chinese
  - Focus is prosodically (Xu 1999) and syntactically (Li 2008) marked
  - Counter-presuppositional focus seems to be marked prosodically and syntactically (Greif 2012)

Results:
• Effect of focus on prosody is borne out.
• No effect of context on prosody is found.
• No increase of usages of cleft-structures under focus.
Focus in Mandarin Chinese

**Prosody** – four tone language (1–high, 2–rising, 3–low, 4–falling tone)
- Focus expands pitch register (Xu 1999) and increases duration (Chen 2006)
- Counter-presuppositional focus: raised pitch span, longer duration (Greif 2012)

(3) Narrow corrective focus / question-context
- a. Does Xiaxia have mangos? \{Xiaxia has mangos, Xiaxia has no mangos\}
- b. Mulei has mangos. Confirmation of 2nd presupposition, correction.

(4) Counter-presuppositional focus / statement-context
- a. Xiaxia has mangos. \{Xiaxia has mangos\}
- b. Mulei has mangos Correction of presupposition.

**Syntax** – SVO
- Focus in situ (see e.g. data in Xu 1999)
- Cleft structures in corrective and counter-presuppositional focus (Li 2008, Greif 2012)

(5) It is Luwei who has litchis
shi4 lu4wei1 you3 li4zhi1
Research question and Hypothesis

**Question:**
Is a conversational crisis marked prosodically and/or syntactically? Hence, does the sentence mode of the context influence the prosodic and/or syntactic expression of focus?

**Hypothesis:**
Effect of focus and effect of context are marked prosodically and/or syntactically in Mandarin Chinese.

**Expectations:**
- **Focus** – broad vs. narrow corrective focus
  - Expanded pitch register (Xu 1999)
  - Use of more cleft structures (Li 2008, Greif 2012)
- **Context** – question vs. statement
  - More emphasis in terms of raised pitch span (Greif 2012)
  - Use of more cleft structures (Greif 2012)
Experiment and Factors


Experiment I – syntactic preferences ~ uncontrolled
Experiment II – prosodic realization ~ priming

1. Tone on subject – (Lou4.ya3, Wei4.na4, Lu4.wei1, Mu4.lei2)
2. Focus type – (broad, corrective)
3. Elicitation method –
   (question ~ corrective, assertion ~ counter-presuppositional)

SVO target structures:

i. Lou4ya3 you3 yang2 mei2. 'Louya has waxberries.'
ii. Lu4wei1 you3 li4zhi1. 'Luwei has litchis.'
iii. Mu4lei2 you3 mang2guo3. 'Mulei has mangos.'
iv. Wei4na4 you3 ying1tao2. 'Weina has cherries.'
Material

Target words (subjects)

洛雅 luo4ya3  魏娜 wei4na4  陆薇 lu4wei1  穆蕾 mu4lei2

Objects

杨梅 bayberry  荔枝 litchi  芒果 mango  樱桃 cherry
Experimental task – broad focus

简单描述下面的图片

Give a brief description of the picture below.

魏娜 (Weina)
Experimental task – corrective focus

Sound: Chenxia has bananas.

Sound: Is it Chenxia who has bananas?

苗苗Miaomiao  陈霞Chenxia  夏夏Xiaxia
Experimental task

Experiment I – syntactic preference
Instructions:
1. Your task is to describe the picture as in the examples
2. Some slides contain a question. Respond to the sound you have heard according to the pictures.

No Priming!

Experiment II – prosodic realization
Instructions:
1. Your task is to describe the picture as in the examples. Look at the examples carefully.
2. Some slides contain a question. Your task is to answer the questions as in the examples. Respond to the sound you have heard according to the pictures.

Priming – only by visual presentation of a sentence, no sound:

回答：夏夏有桃子。 (Xiaxia has peaches.)
Speakers & Analyses

12 speakers per experiment:

- Experiment I: 10 female & 2 male students; average age 20
  288 sentences (12 speakers x 2 repetitions x 4 items x 3 conditions)
- Experiment II: 9 female & 3 male students; average age 22
  384 sentences (12 speakers x 2 repetitions x 4 items x 2 focus types x 2
  elicitation method)

Experiment I:
- Identification of the syntactic structure by a native MC speaker

Experiment II:
- Min/Max $F_0$ in st (ref. 100)
- $F_0$ range (H-L) of each syllable of each constituent for tones 2 and 4
- Duration in ms of each syllable of each constituent
The effect of focus on prosody

- First syllable – pitch register raising by about 0.4 st (**) for H tone and 0.3 st (*) for L tone
- Second syllable – pitch register raising for H tone, pitch span expansion for rising, falling and low tone.
- No effect on duration

Wei4 na4 you3 ying1 tao2.
'Weiina has cherries.'
The effect of context on prosody

- First syllable – no significant effect for H tone (*ns*), marginal significant raising of L tone (*) by 0.1 st for question contexts

- Second syllable – some marginal significant raisings (H of tone 2, and tone 4)

- No effect on duration

魏娜 有 樱桃
Wei4na4 you3 ying1tao2. 'Weina has cherries.'
The effect of focus & context on syntax

Effect of focus
- Broad focus – 100% in situ subjects
- Corrective focus – 84% in situ subjects

Effect of context
- Statement – 92% in situ subjects
  (8 instances of shi4-clefts, realized by one speaker)
- Questions – 76% in situ subjects
  (23 instances of shi4-clefts, realized by three speakers including the one using clefts in statement contexts)

- More frequent usage of cleft with Q context possibly due to syntactic priming.
Summary

• Focus – increase of emphasis from broad to corrective focus
  – pitch register raising/expansion (cf. Xu 1999)  CONFIRMED
  more cleft structures (Li 2008, Greif 2012)  NOT CONFIRMED

• Context – increase of emphasis from question to statement
  – pitch register raising (Greif 2012)  NOT CONFIRMED
  more cleft structures (Greif 2012)  NOT CONFIRMED

➢ No syntactic preferences of cleft structures in case of focus.

• Some marginal significant pitch register raising in question contexts:
  – Raisings were expected in case of statement contexts, cf. (1c).

  (1)  a. Sam’s home.
       b. Yes/Yeath, he’s home.
       ☝ c. No, he isn’t home.

CONCLUSION
Context statements and context questions do not result in different prosodic realizations of the answers, at least in Mandarin Chinese.
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http://www.sfb632.uni-potsdam.de/projects_d5eng.html

References