

Discourse features in the interface interpretation of Topics

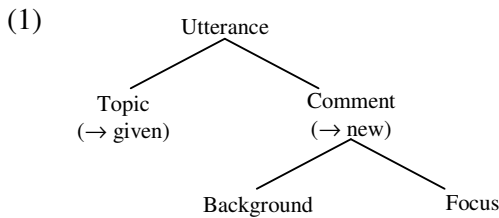
A phase-based compositional account

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1. Basic assumptions

1.1 Hierarchical distribution of informational meanings

- In the Topic-Comment partition, new information is conveyed by the Comment, while Topic is typically associated with given information (cf. Reinhart's 1981)
- Within the Comment: partition of the sentence into an informative (i.e., focused) and a backgrounded part (Jackendoff 1972, Krifka 1992 and subsequent works)



1.2 What counts as marked in the Discourse

Traditionally, new information → H; given information → L (cf. Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990).

- In an Interface perspective, discourse and prosodic markedness are expected to match
- **Discourse markedness:**
 - ⇒ PF interpretation marks what is **not expected** in the relevant informational domain (cf. also Steedman's 2002 'kontrast')¹
- COMMENT
 - a) all-new (Broad Focus) → no background; a single Intonational phrase showing a downgrading contour (H+L*)
 - b) partitioned into Focus and Background (Narrow Focus):
 - i) expected: [-given] = unmarked information → H
 - ii) unexpected: [+given] = marked information → L (cf. destressing in English-type languages)
- TOPIC
 - a) all-given → L
 - b) partitioned:
 - i) expected: [+given] = unmarked information
 - ii) unexpected: what is different from (or added to) [+given] = marked information → (L)H(L)

¹ This is in line with the idea that "all pitch accents render salient the material with which they are associated [...] regardless of the type of the accent in question" (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990: 288). On the contrary, most authors consider givenness as marked (evidently based on the assumption that high-toned new information is always expected in the discourse): cf. Schwarzschild (1999: 142): "grammar makes reference to givenness [...] but no mention is made of novelty"; "deictics and other words appear to be inherently given (Halliday 1967: 206), but one doesn't find words that are inherently novel"; Wagner (2006: 310): "a constituent can be grammatically marked as given by shifting the prominence away from it". Selkirk (2007: 133): "it is discourse-givenness that is marked in the syntax, and [...] discourse-newness should not be marked at all".

→ *Prosodic markedness is related to discourse markedness* (Frascarelli & Ramaglia 2011a,b)

2. The analysis of the Topic domain

2.1 Different types of Topic

“what the sentence is about” (Reinhart 1981), generally connected with given information.

- **Aboutness-Shift Topic (AS-Topic)** (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007)
this Topic connects Reinhart’s (1981) *aboutness* (= sentence Topic²) with the property of being *newly introduced* or *reintroduced and changed to* (=shift).

- (2) *Il materiale era tantissimo quindi all'inizio l'ho fatto di corsa cercando di impiegarci il tempo che dicevate voi magari facendolo un po' superficialmente pur di prendere tutto- l'ultima unit la sto facendo ora [...]*
‘The material was quite a lot, so at the beginning I did it all in a rush, trying to do it in the time that you had fixed, perhaps a little superficially, so as to do everything- I’m doing the last unit now [...]

- (2') *l'ultima unit_k la_k sto facendo.*
the last unit it be.PRES.1SG do.GER
‘The last unit, I’m doing it now’

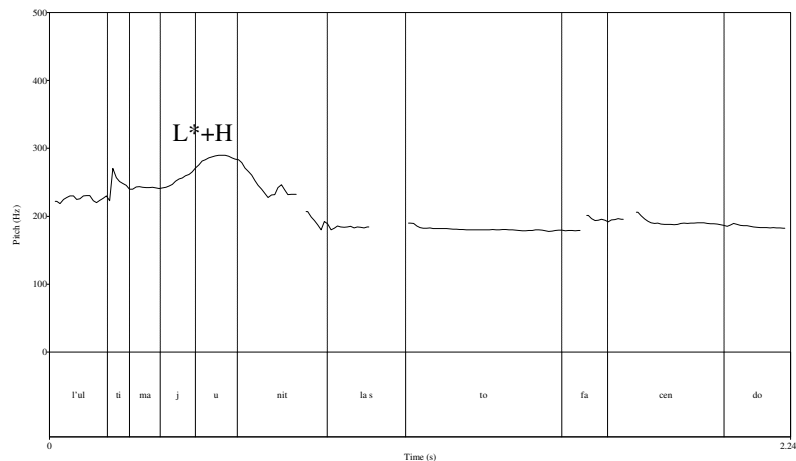
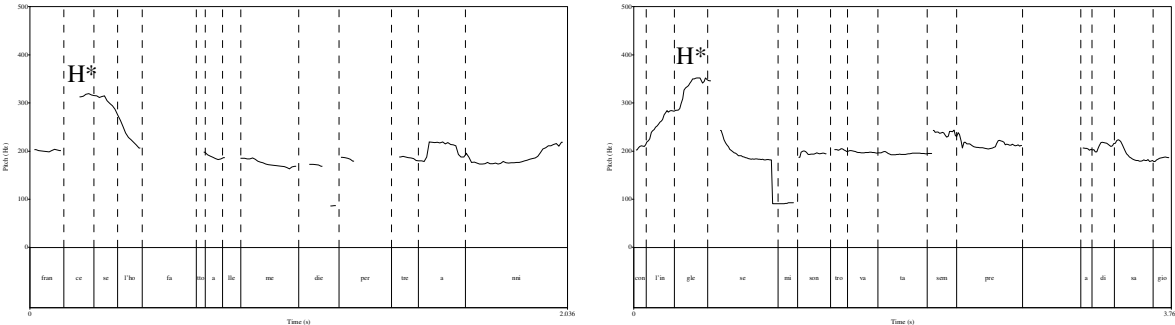


Figure 1- AS-Topic

- **Contrastive Topic (C-Topic)**
this Topic induces alternatives in the discourse with no impact on the Focus value of the sentence and creates oppositional pairs with respect to other Topics. According to Büring (2003), it provides an instruction for the hearer on how to relate the asserted proposition(s) to a strategy of inquiry.
- (3) A: *come mai hai fatto due lingue, cioè, inglese e francese?*
B: francese l'ho fatto alle medie per tre anni con una professoressa con cui mi sono trovata benissimo [...]- con l'inglese mi son trovata sempre a disagio
A: ‘Why did you study two languages, namely English and French?’
B: ‘French, I have studied at school for three years with a professor that I liked a lot [...] (while) with English, I never felt at ease’

² That is to say, the “file card” under which the information expressed in the following proposition should be stored.

- (3) *francese_k* *l_k'ho* *fatto* *alle* *medie* *per* *tre* *anni* [...]
 French it have.1SG done at.the school for three years
- con l'inglese* *mi* *son* *trovata* *sempre* *a disagio*
 with the English me be.1SG found.F always uneasy
 'French I have studied at school for three years [...] with English I never felt at ease'



Figures 2a-b: C-Topics

- **Given Topic (G-Topic)**

this Topic refers to *given* information (Schwarzschild 1999³) in the discourse. They are d-linked constituents which are used:

- for continuity with respect to the current sentence Topic (*Aboutness G-Topic*), or
- to resume background information (*Familiar G-Topic*).

- (4) *il problema secondo me di questo autoapprendimento è stato affrontare la grammatica - lì ti trovi davanti ad argomenti nuovi nei quali avresti bisogno appunto di qualcuno [...] invece l'autoapprendimento questo non-non me l'ha dato ecco.*

'In my opinion the problem of this self-learning course was the grammar part – you deal with new topics for which you would exactly need someone [...] on the contrary, self-learning could not give it to me'

- (4') *l'autoapprendimento* (Ab G-Topic) *questo* (Fam G-Topic) *non me l'ha dato.*
 self-learning this not to.me it-has give.PART
 'Self-learning did not give this to me'

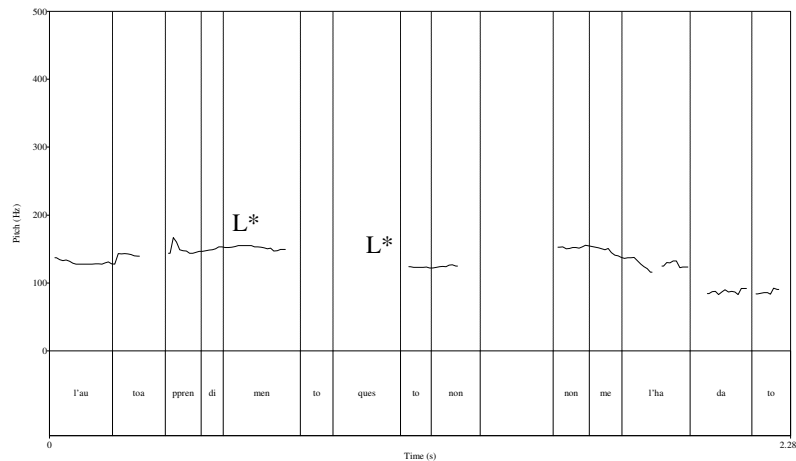


Figure 3 – Co-occurrence of G-Topics in the left periphery

³ In Schwarzschild's (1999) sense, a constituent is GIVEN if either it corefers with a salient antecedent (type e), or the result of replacing Focus-marked constituents with variables and existentially closing them is entailed by a salient antecedent, shifted to type t (conjoinable types).

- (5) *In inglese c'è un programma per il vocabolario e vanno a temi però non mi ricordo ora e io ci ho dato un'occhiata perché c'erano dei titoli carini insomma c'erano tutta una serie di sentimenti per esempio e io non ho mai saputo come si dicevano 'sti sentimenti, in inglese.*

'In English, there is a program to learn words, they are arranged by subjects, however I can't remember now and I gave it a look because there were some nice titles, that is to say, a number of feelings were listed, for instance, and I never learnt how you can say these feelings in English'

- (5') *come si dicevano sti sentimenti (Fam G-Topic) in inglese (Ab G-Topic).*
 how IMPERS tell.PST.3PL DEM feelings in English
 'How you can say these feelings in English'

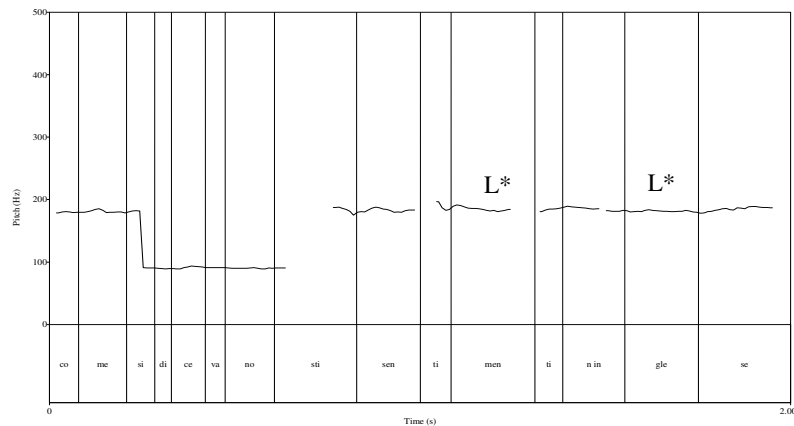


Figure 4 – Co-occurrence of G-Topics in the right periphery

→ Different types of Topics can co-occur and are realized in a specific order (cf. also Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007):

- (6) AS-Topic > C-Topic > Aboutness G-Topic > Familiar G-Topic

2.2 The impact of Topics in Conversational Dynamics

Topics have different functions in *conversational dynamics* (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010).

→ *Two dimensions of the Common Ground (CG)* (cf. Krifka 2007)

➤ CG CONTENT: the truth-conditional information accumulated up to a given point in the conversation.

➤ CG MANAGEMENT:

- (i) the sequence of **conversational moves** (assertions, questions, rejections...) performed by the speech act participants, which require illocutive force.
- (ii) **instructions** that help the interlocutor determine the way in which the CG content develops and is organized, but do not constitute, in themselves, independent conversational moves.

- **AS-Topics:** they pertain to the dimension of CG management (i): they implement a *conversational move* and are subject to the Interface Root Restriction (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010). In particular, "Topic selection is a speech act itself, an initiating speech act that requires a subsequent speech act, like an assertion, question, command, or curse about the entity that was selected" (Krifka 2001: 25).

→ The AS-Topic is compatible with *any type of illocutive force*: it is external to the following sentence and to the speech act that it conveys. This explains its highest position in the hierarchy.

- **C-Topics:** they pertain to the dimension of CG management (ii); they provide an *instruction*. CT-marking is used to «break down» a complex proposition into a conjunction of simpler propositions in which a predicate applies separately to each member of a salient set. The meaning of clauses containing C-Topics remains at the propositional level.

From Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) [Note: AS-Topic = Left Dislocation; C-Topic = Topicalization]

factive clauses

- | | | | |
|-----|----------|--|---------------------|
| (i) | AS-Topic | I am glad that <u>this unrewarding job</u> , she has finally decided to give it up | (0/15) ⁴ |
| | C-Topic | I am glad that <u>this unrewarding job</u> she has finally decided to give _ up | (12/15) |

complements to negative predicates

- | | | | |
|------|----------|--|---------|
| (ii) | AS-Topic | He tried to conceal from his parents that <u>the maths exam</u> , he had not passed it. | (0/15) |
| | C-Topic | He tried to conceal from his parents that <u>the maths exam</u> he had not passed _, and <u>the biology exam</u> he had not even taken _ . | (13/15) |

anti-factive volitional complements

- | | | | |
|-------|----------|--|---------|
| (iii) | AS-Topic | I hope that the past he will forget it soon, so as to bravely face the future. | (0/15) |
| | C-Topic | I hope that the past he will forget _, and the future he will face _ bravely. | (13/15) |

→ The C-Topic is internal to the assertion expressed by the main clause; syntactically, it must be in the scope of the assertion operator. This explains its lower position in the topic hierarchy.

- **G-Topics:** Givenness is calculated on the basis of the CG content and does not affect the conversational dynamics → G-Topics never instantiate a conversational move; they do not depend on illocutive force and can be found in any type of subordinate clause (also event modifiers).

From Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010)

- | | | | |
|----------|------|--|--|
| G-Topic: | (i) | A: <i>Devo guardare anche la torta?</i> ('Should I watch the cake too?') | |
| | | B: <i>Sì, te l'ho detto: resta in cucina finché la torta non la vedi pronta da sfornare</i> (80%, 7/9) | |
| | | yes, I told you: stay in the kitchen until <u>the cake</u> you see-it ready to be taken from the oven | |
| C-Topic: | (ii) | <i>Resta in cucina finché il riso non l'avrai cotto e la torta l'avrai tolta dal forno</i> (0%, 0/9) | |
| | | stay in the kitchen until <u>the rice</u> you have cooked-it and <u>the cake</u> you have taken-it from the oven | |

2.3 The compositional nature of Topics and discourse markedness

Compositional nature of Topics:

- AS-Topic [shift] [aboutness] [±given]
- C-Topic [contrast] [±given]
- Aboutness G-Topic [aboutness] [+given]
- Familiar G-Topic [background] [+given]

→ *Discourse and prosodic (un)markedness of topical features*

⁴ The figures refer to the rate of acceptance of these and structurally similar examples by native speakers.

Since discourse and prosodic markedness are expected to match, marked information within the Topic domain must be *what is different from (or added to) [+given]* (§ 1.2)

- AS-Topics [\pm given] \rightarrow L+H (cf. Figure 1)
 - C-Topics [\pm given] \rightarrow H (cf. Figures 2)
 - G-Topics [+ given] \rightarrow L (cf. Figures 3-4)
- Only Topics affecting conversational dynamics are marked with a rising tone since they are endowed with discourse features that qualify them as IS-marked in the Topic domain:
- G-Topics are the unmarked (i.e., low toned) type of Topic as (a) they have no impact on conversational dynamics, and (b) they are IS-unmarked (i.e., what is expected) in the Topic domain.

3. The correlation between phases and discourse features

\rightarrow How is IS-feature compositionality implemented?

Working hypothesis and proposal

IS-categories are characterized in terms of discourse features which combine (§ 2.3) \rightarrow

- (a) Different IS-features are interpreted at specific “structural layers”. These can be profitably identified with **phases** (i.e., CP and DP)
 - (b) Different phases contain specific types of discourse features
- \rightarrow Against iteration of discourse features in different phases
Criteria must be established to define the correlation between (discourse) features and phases \rightarrow
- (c) Crucial connection between discourse features and **illocutive force**

- Discourse features that require illocutive force pertain to the **CP phase**
- (i) **AS-Topics** (they instantiate an independent speech-act) \rightarrow *root CP*
 - (ii) **C-Topics** (they can only be found in a propositional CP phase).

\Rightarrow What about G-Topics?

- *G-Topics do not require illocutive force*; hence, they are **not** necessarily connected with the CP phase

Givenness

- a) givenness is a cross-topical feature;
- b) givenness-characterized Topics (G-Topics):
 - can be iterated (Familiar G-Topics) (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010);
 - can be located in the right periphery of the sentence (also via *marginalization*).

\rightarrow Givenness is a discourse feature that pertains to the **DP phase**; hence the [\pm given] quality depends on the DP that contains the Topic;

\rightarrow unlike other topical features (such as [shift], [aboutness], [contrast]), givenness can be realized sentence-internally (i.e., “*in situ Topics*”) through destressing (English, German, etc.)

⇒ What about contrast? (cf. Neeleman & Van de Koot's (2008) *in situ* contrastive Topics)

3.1 The notion of Contrast as a selection of alternatives

I) Contrast as a selection of a denotation over alternative ones (Krifka 2007) → Contrastive Focus

- (7) A. *I know John spent last week-end in Florence*
B. *No, PETER spent last week-end in Florence*

II) Contrast as a strategy of “breaking down” a complex proposition (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010)
→ C-Topic (§ 2.2)

- (8) *Who prepared the dinner?*
Mary cooked the RISE (and) John grilled the FISH

III) Contrast as an opposition between a denotation and a salient meaning in the discourse (Wagner 2006, Büring 2008)

- (9) *An American farmer was talking to a Canadian farmer*

- Cases (I) and (II) pertain to the CP phase → [CONTRAST]
- Case (III) pertains to the DP phase → [contrast]

→ both [±given] and [±contrast] pertain to the DP phase.

4. Conversational dynamics, discourse features and prosodic properties: exploring the correlation (joint work in progress with Francesca Ramaglia)

Discourse and prosodic markedness are expected to match.

→ what about prosodic marking *within Topic constituents* in a *feature combination* approach?

I) Features basically associated with different tonal events on a single terminal node

- (a) [_{CP} [CONTRAST]] H
 [_{DP} [+given]] L

- (9) A. *Come mai hai fatto due lingue, cioè, inglese e francese...?*
B. *Francese l'ho fatto alle medie per tre anni [Fig.5] *con una professoressa con la quale mi sono trovata benissimo [...], con l'inglese mi sono trovata sempre a disagio [Fig.6]**
- A. 'Why did you study two languages, namely English and French...?'
B. 'French, I studied for three years with a professor that I liked a lot [...], with English, I never felt at ease'

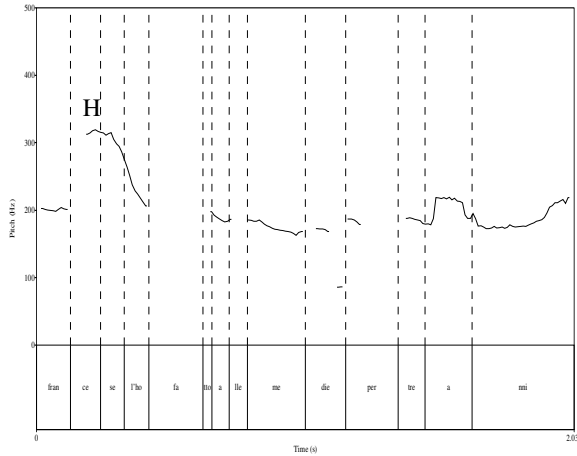


Figure 5

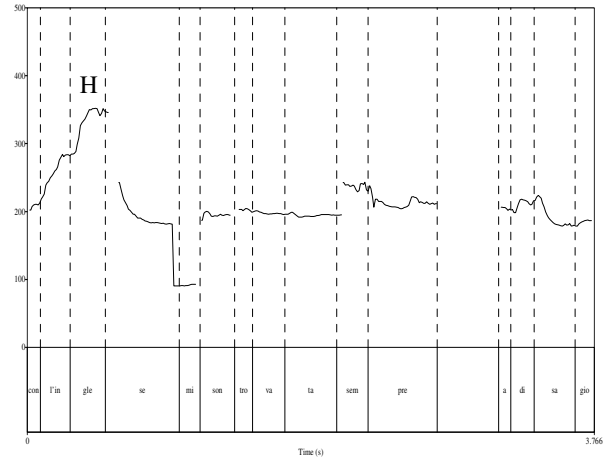


Figure 6

⇒ **H** on the two [+given] C-Topics (*inglese* and *francese*)

→ Supporting evidence from English:

- (10) A. *Where did John and Mary go?*
 B. *John went to Paris, Mary went to London*

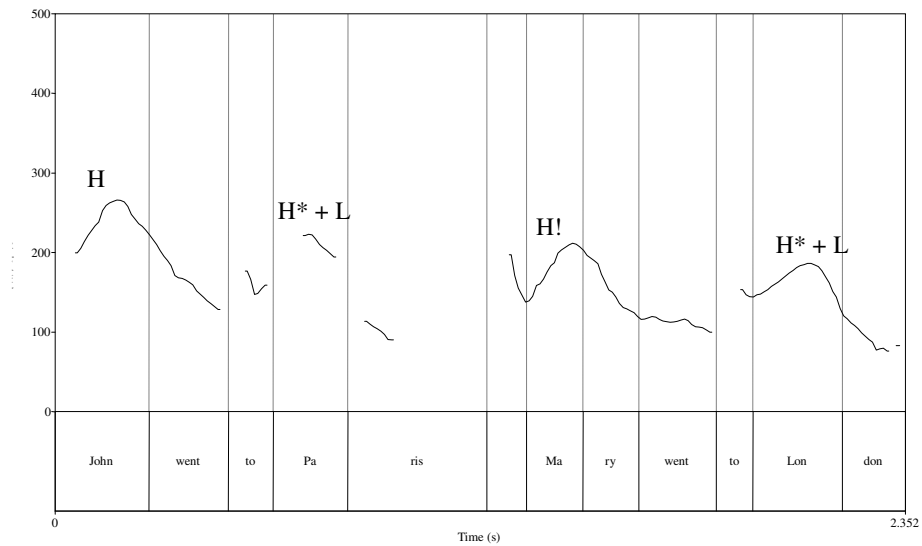


Figure 7

⇒ H*+L tone (“A-Accent”) marking the Focus (cf. Büring 2003)

(b) [CP [CONTRAST]] **H**
 [DP [-given]] **H**

- (11) A. *Do you think John will like this book?*
 B. *I'd never buy it*

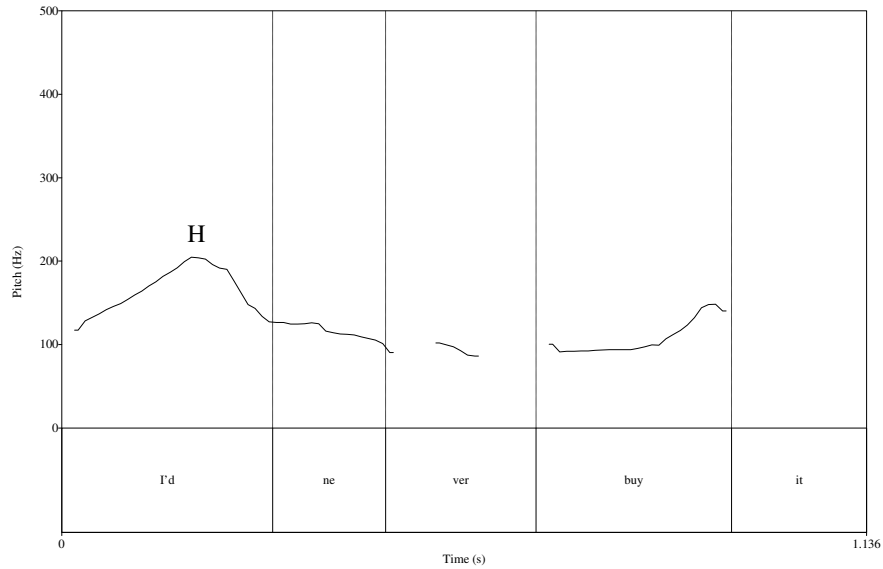


Figure 8

⇒ H tone associated with [CONTRAST], independent of the [\pm given] feature at the DP level

- According to Chomsky (2001), when a phase is closed, its content is shipped to the interfaces for interpretation.
- Apparently, IS-features in the DP have no impact on the PF interface.
- But:

- ***The case of «Parallel structures»: contrast in the Comment***

- Hartmann (2000) deals with cases in which the contrast implies different Focus domains
- Büring's (2008) definition implies that the two elements must belong to a single 'Focus domain'

→ At the PF interface [contrast] is interpreted as H* on the second member

- [contrast] on the modifier:

(13) *An American farmer was talking to a Canadian farmer*

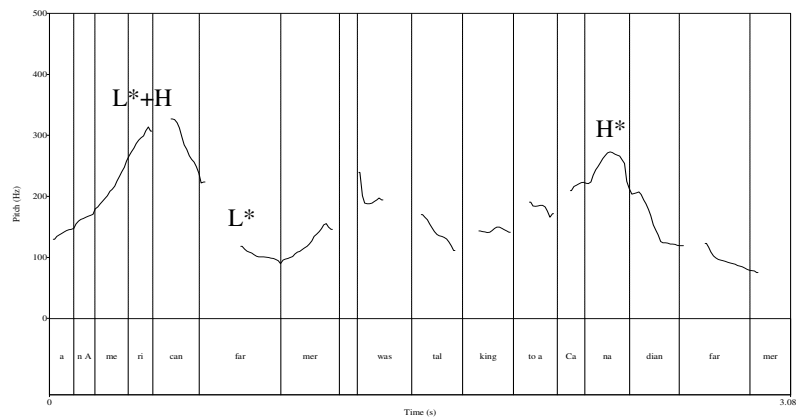


Figure 9 – [contrast] in the Comment (edge)

- [contrast] on the head:

(14) *Yesterday John told me such a funny joke! Listen: An American farmer was talking to an American carpenter. He intended to complain about the general crisis and...*

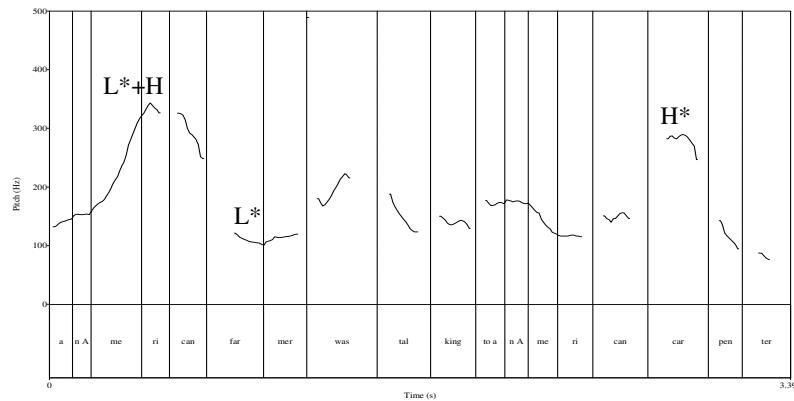


Figure 10 – [contrast] in the Comment (head)

(15) **Intonational pattern**

[contrast] on the second member → [1st member L*+H L*] [2nd member (L) H* (L)]
AS-Topic [contrast]

➤ **[contrast] in the DP has an impact on Discourse**

- ➔ Interface interpretability of [contrast] implies syntactic visibility of the relevant constituent at the CP phase; a “feature match” must be assumed
- ⇒ In a phase-based framework, the interface interpretation of [contrast] requires its location either in the *head* or in the *edge* position of the DP

➔ **Agree** – compatible matching feature in the CP probing for [contrast] → [CONTRAST]

➔ DP-internal [contrast] is valued against Contr° in the C-domain

(15) [_{ShiftP} [_{DP} *an American farmer*] [_{ContrP} [_{Contr'} [+CONTR] [_{IP} *was talking to* [_{DP} *a Canadian*_[+contrast] *farmer*]]]]]

→ L*+H tone on the first member

when the first alternative is an AS-Topic, it is an independent speech act and no syntactic Agree is possible with Contr° → only [shift] is interpreted

→ L* on farmer

farmer in the first member is L* because of the parallel structure (cf. Hartmann 2000)

a) **Edge vs. complement: evidence from Italian**

- (16) a. Dopo che la nuova miss Italia ha indossato la corona della **precedente**_[contrast] **reginetta**, i giornalisti hanno cominciato a fare le solite domande sciocche
 ‘When the new Miss Italy wore the crown of the previous queen of beauty, journalists started asking the usual stupid questions’

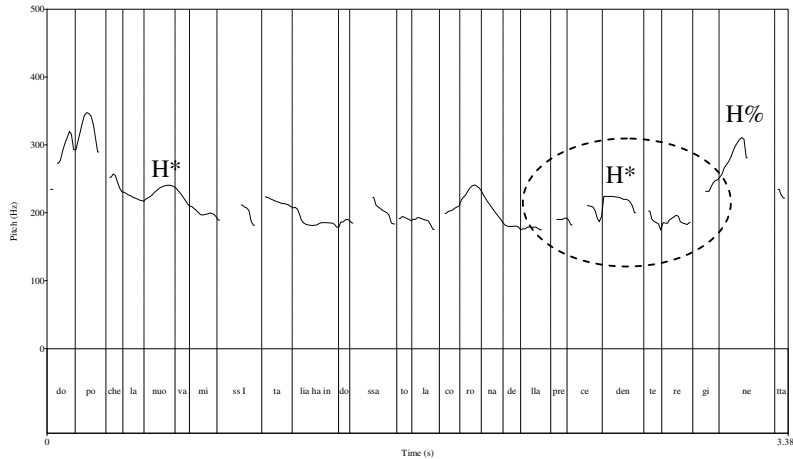


Figure 12 – [contrast] on the edge

- b. Dopo che la nuova miss Italia ha indossato la corona della **reginetta uscente**_[contrast], i giornalisti hanno cominciato a fare le solite domande sciocche

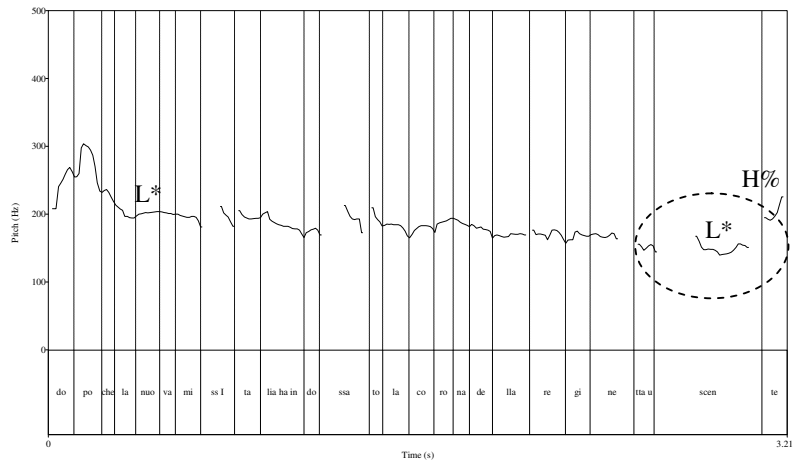


Figure 13 – [contrast] on the complement

⇒ [contrast] is not visible on the complement

b) **Head vs. complement**

- (17) *Il padre di Mario lavora in un concessionario e vende Volvo fiammanti. E cosa ha regalato a suo figlio?...*
 ‘Mario’s father works at a car shop and sells brand new Volvos. Well, guess what he gave his son as a present for his birthday?...
- A. *Una moto*_[contrast] *fiammante* ([contrast] on the head; Figure 11a)
 ‘A brand new motorbike’
 - B. *Una Volvo usata*_[contrast] ([contrast] on the Compl; Figure 11b)
 ‘A second-hand Volvo’
 - C. *Una Volvo cromata* (no [contrast]; Figure 11c)
 ‘A chromium-plated Volvo’

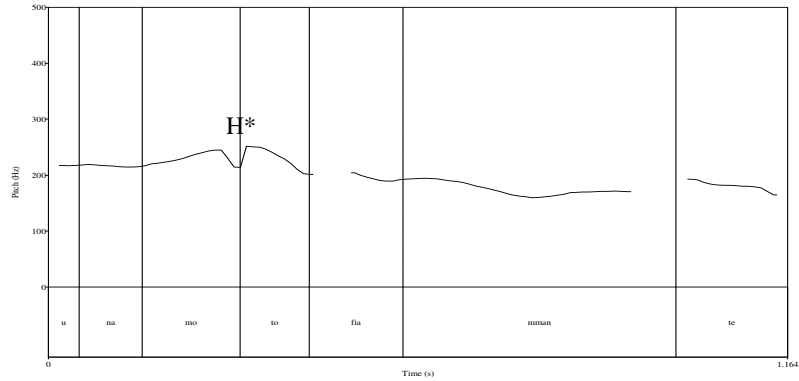


Figure 14a – [contrast] on the head

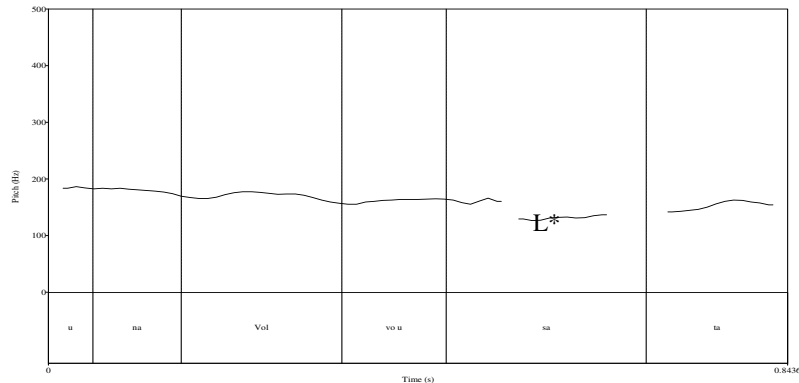


Figure 14b – [contrast] on the complement

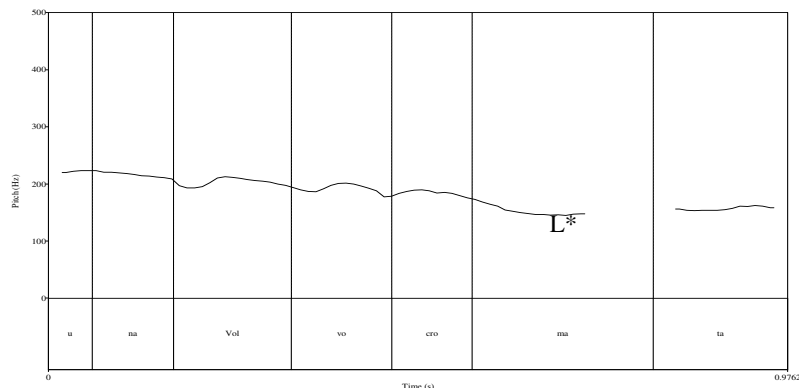


Figure 14c – no [contrast]

- ⇒ [contrast] is visible on the head (cf. Figure 14a)
- ⇒ again, [contrast] is not visible on the complement (cf. Figure 14b): no PF distinction w.r.t. absence of [contrast] (cf. Figure 14c)

To conclude:

- [contrast] is a DP feature; to be interpreted it must be visible to the CP phase
 - the notion of phase is relevant for its interpretation:
 - it must be located either in the **edge** or in the **head** position of the DP
- when the two alternatives are realized within the same Focus domain, multiple Agree can be considered (Hiraiwa 2000):

(18) [_{ContrP} [_{Contr'} [_{+contrast}] ... *dopo che* [_{DP} *la nuova*_[+contr] *miss Italia*] ... [_{DP} *la precedente*_[+contr] *reginetta*]]] (= 16a)

❖ **A finale note: [contrast] in a G-Topic?**

[background] is normally associated with [+given], at the DP-level (unmarked case). However, it is possible to have [-given] [background] information:

- (19) A. *Forse dovresti prendere un'aspirina*
 B. *Anche due aspirine: ce l'hai quella **effervescente**?*

[DP [+given] [-given]]
 L H

- A. 'Maybe you should take an aspirin'
 B. 'Even two aspirins. Do you have an effervescent one?' (lit.: do you have it, the effervescent one?)

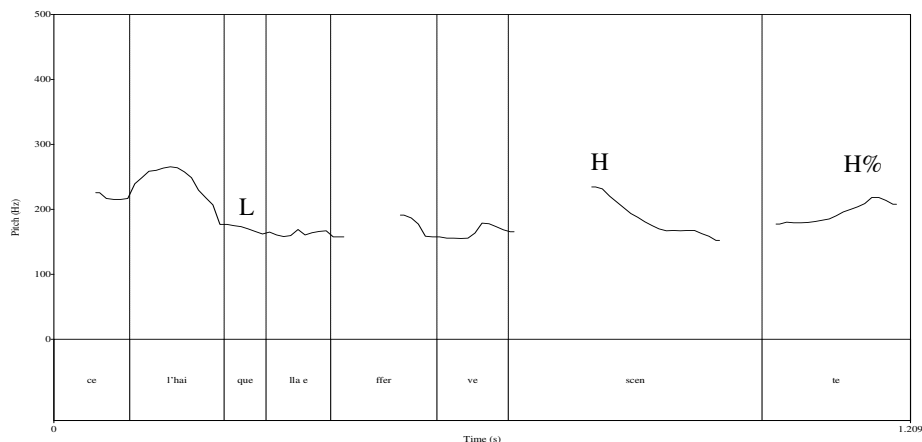


Figure 15

- ⇒ *effervescente* is realized with a H tone, though it is in a right-hand Topic
- it is not the Focus of the sentence → the predicate is focused (a case of “verum Focus”)
 - it is not [contrast], since it does not imply an opposition between a denotation and a salient meaning in the discourse

⇒ consider **feature composition**: [background] + [-given]

Proposal: this element is Roberts' (2003) 'weak familiar' constituent⁵

- Schwarzschild's (1999) *givenness* = [background] + [+given]
- Roberts' (2003) *weak familiarity* = [background] + [-given]

➤ [-given] qualifies as marked information for a [background] Topic, hence *effervescente* is H

⁵ In Roberts' (2003) *Weak Familiarity*, the entity referred to is a discourse referent that (i) is perceptually accessible in the utterance (= Heim's 1982 Strong Familiarity), (ii) is globally familiar from shared cultural knowledge, (iii) is contextually entailed to exist, or (iv) arises via “bridging”.

5. Conclusions

- The notion of markedness is dependent on the IS-domain under analysis
- Discourse categories must be analyzed in terms of feature combination:

SPEECH ACT		PROPOSITION	
CG MANAGEMENT		CG CONTENT	
ShiftP [shift]	ContrP [CONTRAST]	AboutP [aboutness]	FamP [background]
DP [±given] [±contrast]	DP [±given] [±contrast]	DP [+given]	DP [+given]
L-H*	H*	L*	

- Not all discourse features pertain to the CP phase; some of them are interpreted within the DP
- Not all discourse features have an impact on conversational dynamics
- Relevance of the notion of phase (cf. edge/head vs. complement asymmetry in the interpretation of [contrast])

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