

Prosodic cues to information structure

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The talk will discuss various levels of information structure that have been found to be encoded by prosodic means (especially in Germanic languages). These comprise the information status or degree of activation of referring expressions – including coreference and bridging relations – as well as different types and sizes of focus – including notions such as broad, narrow and contrastive focus.

Prosody may be used to highlight or delimit linguistic elements, often influencing the information structural interpretation of an utterance. Relevant prosodic means can be both gradient (e.g. duration or pitch range manipulation) or discrete (e.g. choice of position and type of a pitch accent) in nature, and their application is often connected to the speaker's wish to express a prominence relation between items.

I will present a variety of empirical methods (mostly on German data) for investigating the relation between prosody and information structure, in particular acoustic and neurolinguistic perception studies as well as a simple prosodic transcription task for untrained listeners.