

On the Meaning of Nuclear and Prenuclear Accents

Stefan Baumann

Pitch accents are the most important prosodic tool for highlighting information in Germanic languages. The majority of studies on the relation between prosody and meaning restrict themselves to the form and function of *nuclear* accents, commonly defined as the last pitch accent in an intonation unit. The status of *prenuclear* accents – i.e. pitch accents that occur *before* the nucleus within the same intonation unit – is less clear, however. It has been claimed that prenuclear accents do not contribute much to the meaning of an utterance and that they are optional in many cases (cf. Büring's [2007] *ornamental accents* on prefocal elements). Other studies found that prenuclear accents were placed consistently, even on textually given information [e.g. Féry & Kügler 2008].

In this lecture, we will discuss several production and perception studies (including neurocognitive investigations) on the form and function of nuclear and prenuclear accents (as well as deaccentuation) in German and English. We will see that not only the position of an accent in the phrase but also its type/shape has an influence on the meaning the accent conveys (and vice versa) – which is often related to its degree of prominence. Listening examples and exercises (maybe also a simple pitch contour manipulation task in *praat*) will sharpen our understanding of the sometimes subtle meaning differences.

Worlds and Models in Alternative Semantics

Thomas Ede Zimmermann

Going back to Montague (1970), the model-theoretic tradition in natural language semantics distinguishes three levels of denotations:

- a) global meaning, which varies across a space of intensional models (= Model Space);
- b) regional content, which varies across a model-dependent space of worlds or indices (= Logical Space);
- c) local reference, which is both model- and index-dependent.

Though frequently identified, the levels a) and b) must be sharply distinguished. In particular:

- Variation across Model Space does not reflect semantic features of the object language but rather the semanticist's knowledge about it (Zimmermann 1999).
- While Logical Space(s) need(s) to be as large as possible, Model Space ought to be as small as possible, ideally consisting of [the isomorphism class of] the intended model.

Drawing on material from Zimmermann (2017), this talk will concentrate on a case study on quantification over alternative intensions (Rooth 1985) that takes a closer look at the relation between a) and b) and confirms the above assessment.

References

- Montague, R. (1970): Universal Grammar. *Theoria* 36, 373–398.
- Rooth, M. (1985): *Association with Focus*. University of Massachusetts at Amherst dissertation.
- Zimmermann, T. E. (1999): Meaning Postulates and the Model-Theoretic Approach to Natural Language Semantics. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 22, 529–561.
- Zimmermann, T. E. (2017): Quantification over alternative intensions. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 10.