

Prominence and Redundancy: A wish list of questions

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1 Introduction

This contribution to a Festschrift for Klaus von Heusinger is essentially a wish list of one item: to add a particular question, along with some sub-questions, to the rich array of questions and topics of the Collaborative Research Center “Prominence in Language”: Does redundancy play a role in the interfaces between syntax, morphology, and phonetics/phonology with respect to information-structural prominence, and if it does, to what extent? Is that extent predictable? Also, is there a difference between the interfaces, i.e. is redundancy between syntactic and morphological expression of prominence more acceptable, or less so, compared to redundancy between syntactic and phonetic / phonological expression of prominence on the one hand, and redundancy between morphological and phonetic / phonological expression of prominence, on the other?

2 Discussion

It is quite clear that there is some redundancy between phonetics / phonology, in the form of intonation, on the one hand, and syntax, on the other hand, with respect to prominence. For example, in Turkish, a focused, and thus prominent, constituent tends to be to the immediate left of the verb, thus often going against the canonical SOV order. Some examples follow for a variety of focus types:

Focused DP:

- (1) Makale-yi OYA yaz-dı (Ayşe değil).
article-ACC Oya write-PST Ayşe not
‘OYA wrote the article (not Ayşe).’

Wh-constituent (which, I assume, is focused by default):

- (2) Makale-yi KİM yaz-dı?
article-ACC who write-PST
‘Who wrote the article?’

Polar question with constituent focus:

- (3) Makale-yi OYA mı yaz-dı?
Article-ACC Oya Y/N Q write-PST
‘Did OYA write the article? (i.e. ‘Was it OYA who wrote the article?’¹)

In all three examples, the subject is prominent, while the direct object is old information and is presumably topicalized, and thus in clause-initial position. Thus, in all three examples, we have

¹ These polar questions with constituent focus have the flavor of clefts, but are not clefts syntactically. Turkish does have a dedicated cleft construction, whose description would take us too far afield here. Suffice it to say that in clefts, too, the prominent constituent is redundantly marked via intonation as well as via its special syntactic position, the latter as part of the predicate.

OSV order, rather than the canonical SOV order. In addition, in all three examples, the syntactically (because V-adjacent) prominent subject is also intonationally prominent; the latter is expressed via high pitch and loudness.²

At the same time as displaying redundancy between syntax and phonetics / phonology (the latter via intonation), example (3) also displays redundancy between morphology and syntax on the one hand, and redundancy between morphology and intonation, on the other. Thus, it appears that all of the logically possible interfaces can and do accommodate redundancy when representing prominence. But are there any differences between these interfaces in this respect?

There is some literature on intonation and the way it expresses information-structural features that might lead us to expect that languages tend to avoid redundancy, or at least that they can “choose” to do so. For example, Féry (2013: 685) states: “if alignment is fulfilled by default, word order is left untouched, no special or higher pitch accent is required, phrasing is also not manipulated and no special morpheme is inserted. And indeed, in every language, focus is sometimes realized with **marked grammatical reflexes, and sometimes it is left unmarked**. However, a **focus that is *not* aligned per default** needs **something special** in order for the hearer to be able to perceive it as such. It is claimed here that **this something special is often alignment, and sometimes prominence**.³” (Emphasis mine.) Although this statement is not crystal-clear, it seems that what’s stated here is that if there is no syntactic prominence, there has to be either morphological or intonational prominence, if not both. If nothing else, the prediction seems to be that non-redundant marking of prominence does exist at least as an option, i.e. marking in just one component of language, especially via either morphology or intonation, particularly when there is no syntactic expression of prominence.

Some of Gussenhoven’s work, e.g. Gussenhoven (2004), seems to point in a similar direction. Thus, we find the statement (cf. Gussenhoven 2004: 22) that “an intonation contour has two structures: a morphological one, which identifies the morphemes and thus gives the meaning of the contour; and a phonological one, which gives its tones.” We can then argue that if there is an overt morpheme with a particular meaning, an intonation contour with the same meaning would be redundant and can be left out, and perhaps vice versa: if there is a particular intonation contour with a given meaning, then a dedicated morpheme with the same “meaning” (i.e., for our purposes, with the same information-structural features) can be left out.

Please note that neither Féry nor Gussenhoven make statements about redundancy; they just leave open the possibility of having or avoiding it, and thus enable us to expect to find expressions of prominence either separately or together, with respect to different components, and, in particular, with respect to morphology versus intonation. This general approach seems to be justified, especially if we compare variation across closely related languages. A telling example is offered via constituent polar questions. As illustrated in (3), Turkish allows, and even requires, redundancy with respect to morphology and intonation. However, some other Turkic languages allow only intonation. For example, in both Uyghur and Uzbek, polar questions are marked morphologically only on the verb, thus having the entire clause in the scope of the question marker. If a particular constituent in a polar question is supposed to be marked as prominent, i.e. in a polar question equivalent to the Turkish (3), that constituent is made prominent via intonation only, thus avoiding redundancy between morphology and intonation.

Are there languages where there is, likewise, avoidance of redundancy, but with morphology being chosen as the conveyor of prominence, without any additional intonational expression?

There do seem to be some; e.g. Imbabura Quechua appears to be like Turkish with respect

² Whether longer duration is also part of this is unclear and worth being investigated.

³ Here, “prominence” obviously means intonational prominence.

to the possibility of using the morphological marker for polar questions on a focused constituent (while the typical position for that same marker is on the verb in non-focused polar questions, also like Turkish); see, e.g., Dryer 2005a: 375, based on Cole (1982). However, unlike in Turkish, focused constituents in polar questions in Imbabura Quechua cannot be intonationally prominent (cf. Dryer 2005b: 471, based on Cole 1982).⁴

Turkish and Quechua are typologically rather similar morpho-syntactically in a number of respects; just to mention a few: they are both head-final, they both have typically nominalized embedded clauses, with such clauses bearing overt case morphology, and with genitive-marked subjects in such nominalized clauses. Why does Turkish make redundancy between morphology and intonation obligatory with respect to prominent constituents, while Quechua avoids such redundancy and resolves it in favor of morphology, and why do some Turkic languages, while likewise avoiding redundancy, resolve such avoidance in favor of intonation?⁵ Can such properties be predicted based on other properties of the languages addressed here? Also, are there cross-linguistic tendencies with respect to allowing, requiring, and avoiding the type of redundancy in question?

3 Conclusions

One might have expected to find some answers to the questions raised in this squib, especially with respect to the last question, in an enterprise such as *WALS*; however, *WALS* does not give us any answers in this respect. Concerning polar questions in particular, intonation is mentioned only where there is no morphological marking. This gap in statistical knowledge as well as in individual and general description shows us how important and needed research of this kind is. Cologne, under the guidance of the dedicatee of this Festschrift, would be an ideal location for this research.

Author note

The dedicatee of this Festschrift has been a co-author as well as a cherished colleague and friend, over many years. His intellectual guidance as well as generosity have been inspirational to his many students, postdocs, and colleagues. This squib cannot express the depth of my gratitude for having had the opportunity of collaborating with Klaus and sharing some of his intellectual entourage. I would also like to express my thanks to Matthew Dryer for correspondence about *WALS*, intonation, focus, and interrogatives, to Travis Major for discussion of Uyghur data, and to Vera Gribanova for discussion of Uzbek facts. All shortcomings of this squib are my responsibility.

References

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⁴ Quechua appears to avoid redundancy between morphology and intonation in other instances of prominence, as well. Thus, the evidentiality marker is used as a focus marker, too, but without an accompanying intonational contour of prominence.

⁵ This doesn't mean that such Turkic languages avoid the type of redundancy displayed by Turkish with respect to other kinds of prominence. Thus, both Uyghur and Uzbek have morphological focus markers which do require intonational prominence of the constituent that they attach to.

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