

Focus, prosody, and word order: How new information is encoded in language and how one can investigate focus experimentally

Ingo Feldhausen (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

[joint work with Maria del Mar Vanrell (UIB) & Lluïsa Astruc (Open University)]

Discovering linguistics/Linguistic Discoveries (DLLD) lecture series

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First part: Focus in Spanish

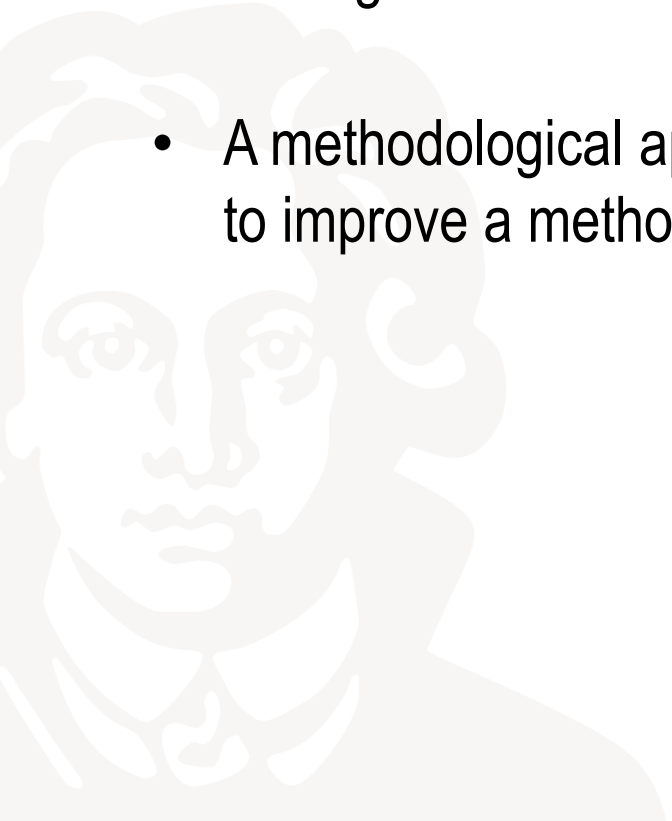
- Research question: Is Spanish a language that can mold the intonation contour to attain the togetherness of focus and prominence [+ plastic] or not [- plastic]?

Second part: The Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

- Critical evaluation of the DCT
- Presentation of DCT, discussion of pros and cons, and presentation of some ideas on how the method can be strengthened

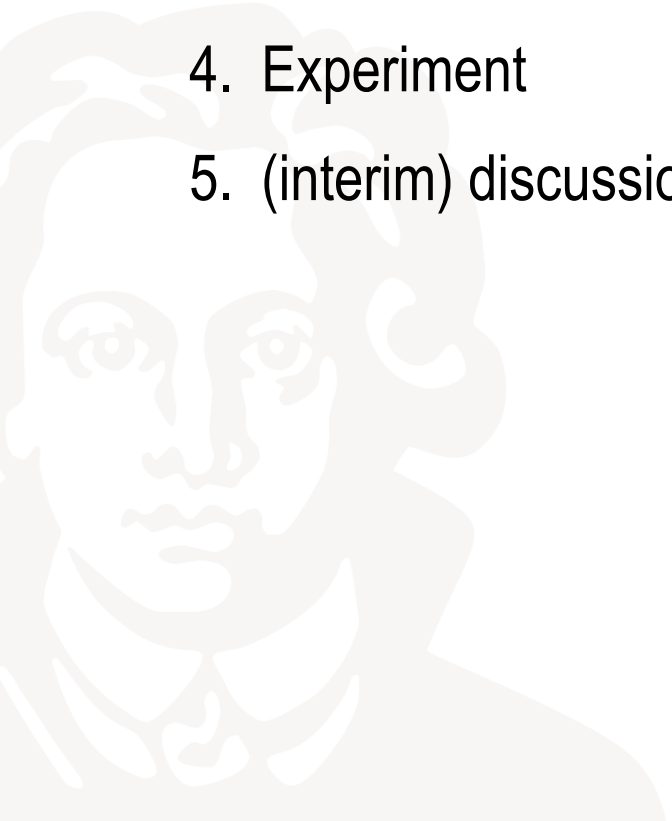
Take home message of today's presentation

- Focus in Spanish:
Our study suggests that dialectal variation must be taken into account as a decisive factor involved in the variation of focus realization strategies
- A methodological approach has to be chosen wisely and it is possible to improve a method and to combine it with other methods



Overview - Part 1

1. Background: Information Structure
2. Background: Focus in Spanish and (non-)plastic languages
3. Research questions and hypotheses
4. Experiment
5. (interim) discussion



Background: Information structure

(1) Spanish

- a. (Él) compraba el periódico todos los días.
(he) bought the newspaper all the days
- b. (Él) compraba todos los días el periódico.
- c. El periódico, (él) lo compraba todos los días.
The newspaper, (he) bought all the days
- d. Él, el periódico lo compraba todos los días.
- e. El periódico lo compraba (él) todos los días.
- f. El periódico es lo que (él) compraba todos los días.
The newspaper is it what (he) bought all the days
- g. El periódico es lo que compraba todos los días (él).
- h. Compraba (él) el periódico todos los días.
- i. Todos los días compraba (él) el periódico.

Background: Information structure

(1) Spanish

- | | S | V | O | adjunct | |
|----|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| a. | (Él) | compraba | el periódico | todos los días. | <= canonical word order |
| | (he) | bought | the newspaper | all the days | |
| b. | (Él) | compraba | todos los días | el periódico. | <= O final |
| c. | El periódico, | (él) | lo compraba | todos los días. | <= left-dislocation |
| d. | Él, | el periódico, | lo compraba | todos los días. | <= left-dislocation |
| e. | El periódico, | lo compraba | (él) | todos los días. | <= left-dislocation |
| f. | <u>El periódico es lo que</u> | (él) | compraba | todos los días. | <= cleft sentence |
| g. | <u>El periódico es lo que</u> | compraba | todos los días | (él). | <= cleft sentence |
| h. | Compraba | (él) | el periódico | todos los días. | |
| i. | Todos los días | compraba | (él) | el periódico. | |

Background: Information structure

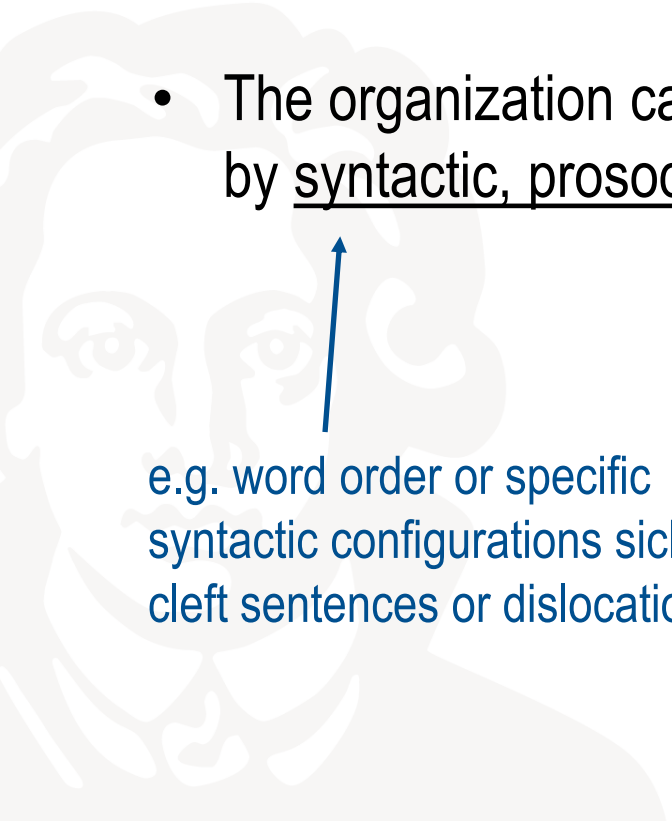
- All the sentences in (1) and (2) have the same propositional content
 - it would be difficult to imagine a situation in which any one of them is true, but the rest are not
- The syntactic variants of the same sentence differ from each other not only in the order of their constituents, but also in their discourse informational content and in their prosodic properties
 - Specific constituents are interpreted as either **background** or **new information**, or as belonging to a restricted set of options.
 - They are emphasized with respect to other sentential constituents or may show different intonation patterns to express syntactic and informational prominence

Background: Information structure

- All of the sentences in (1) and (2) are well-formed sentences that satisfy all the syntactic, morphological, semantic and phonological principles of Spanish or French grammar
- However: not all of them can be used interchangeably in a given discourse context
- The purpose of the first part of this talk is to see how **new information** is encoded in Spanish

Background: Information structure

- Information structure (IS) is the phenomenon of *information packaging* (Chafe 1976, Vallduví 1993, Krifka 2007) that responds to the demands of the communicative situation by organizing the constituents of the sentence according to communicative needs
- The organization can be understood as a structuring of the sentence by syntactic, prosodic, or morphological means.



e.g. word order or specific syntactic configurations such as cleft sentences or dislocations

e.g. prosodic prominence of specific constituents or deaccentuation of specific constituents

Information structure: Focus

Information focus (see Schwarzschild 1999)

a. *Who* slept?

b. JOHN slept.

- The context (here (a)) determines what is taken as focus
- Typically: Correlation between focus and the wh-word of questions (Musan 2010: 18)
- Capitals (such as JOHN) mean: sentence stress; i.e. the most prominent accent of an entire utterance
- **FPR: Focus Prominence Rule** (Jackendoff 1972): Focus bears main prominence

Information structure: Focus

S V DO IO

- (3) Example: María le da el diario a su hermano. (Spanish)
'Mary gives her brother the newspaper'
- (4) context: *Whom does Mary give the newspaper?*
answer: María le da el diario _F[a su herMAño]_F narrow focus (O)
- (5) context : *What is Mary doing?*
answer : María _F[le da el diario a su herMAño]_F broad focus (VP)
- (6) context : *What happens?*
answer : _F[María le da el diario a su herMAño]_F all-new focus
(thetic sentence = no topic)
- (7) context : *Who does give the newspaper to her brother?*
answer : Le da el diario _F[MaRía]_F. narrow focus (S)

Information structure: Focus

'Plastic' and 'non-plastic' languages (Vallduví 1991)

- 'Plastic' language: e.g. English

- (10) a. The boss hates BROCCOLI.
b. The boss HATES broccoli.
c. The BOSS hates broccoli.

- **Plasticity parameter** (Vallduví 1991: 295)

[+plastic]: intonation contour may be molded to attain the togetherness of focus and prominence (English)

'Plastic' and 'non-plastic' languages (Vallduví 1991)

- 'Non-plastic' languages: e.g. Catalan, Spanish, Italian
- In Spanish [traditional view] (e.g. Zubizarreta 1998, 1999):
 - Intonational prominence is fixed on clause-final position
 - Syntactic operations must be used to make the focus (or a subset of it) fall under prominence
 - Thus: Syntactic structure of the sentence is altered while the intonational structure remains constant (=> No stress shift; no (7a))
- **Plasticity parameter** (Vallduví 1991: 295)
 - [-plastic]: intonation contour may not be molded to attain the togetherness of focus and prominence, which must be attained by other means (Spanish)

'Plastic' and 'non-plastic' languages (Vallduví 1991)

- **Plasticity parameter** (Vallduví 1991: 295)

[+plastic]: intonation contour may be molded to attain the togetherness of focus and prominence (English)

[-plastic]: intonation contour may not be molded to attain the togetherness of focus and prominence, which must be attained by other means (Spanish)

word order

(Catalan, Spanish, Italian)



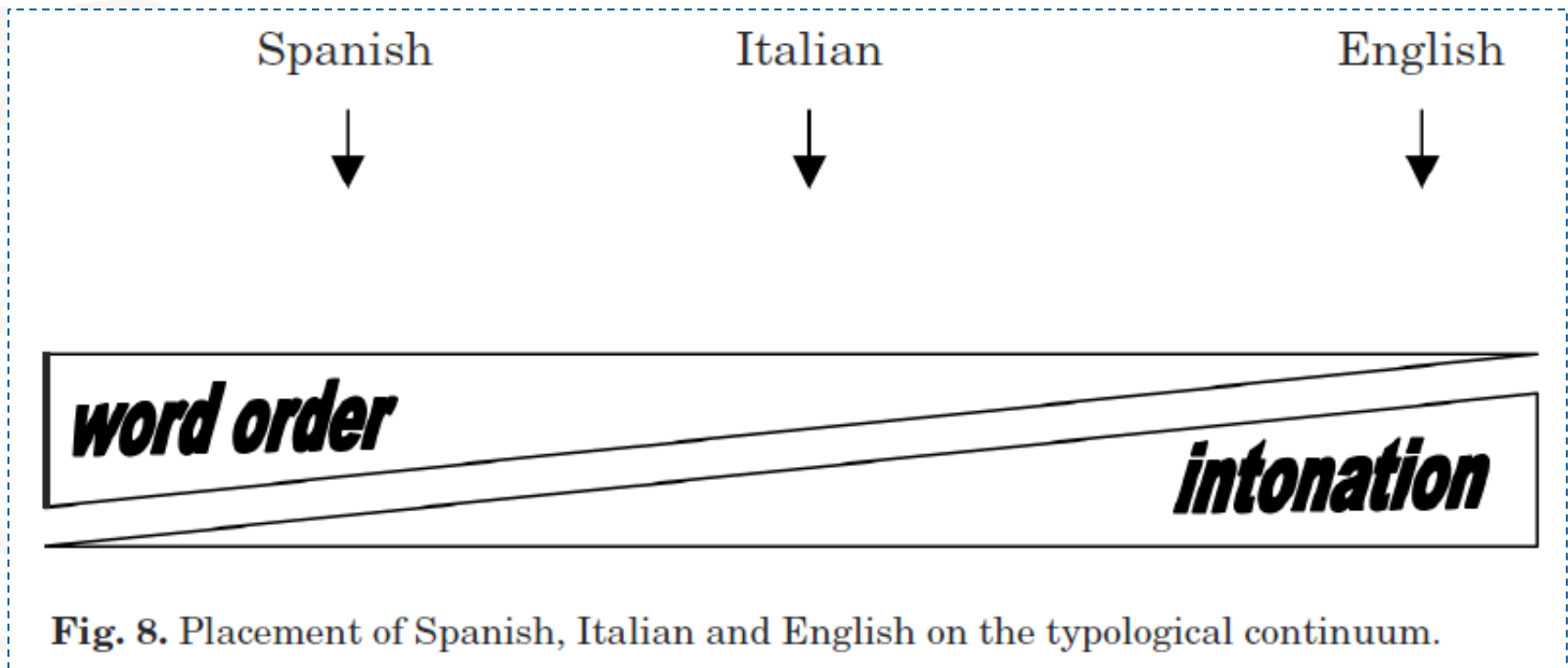
vs.

intonation

(English)

'Plastic' and 'non-plastic' languages (Face & D'Imperio 2005)

- Doubts on rigid distinction between languages that mark focus with word order (i.e. non-plastic languages) and those that use intonation (i.e. plastic languages)



'Plastic' and 'non-plastic' languages

- Further doubts on rigid distinction / classification of Spanish: Experimental-oriented studies (e.g. Muntendam 2009, Gabriel 2010, Hoot 2012, Leal et al. 2018)

a. FPR NSR
↓ ↓
[Juan]_F compró una bicicleta.

Stress shift is possible
(NSR is not always
sentence-final)

b. FPR NSR
↓ ↓
[_{VP} Compró una bicicleta] [JUAN]_F t_{VP}.

P-movement is not relevant

(Figure adapted from Leal et al. 2018: 6)

'Plastic' and 'non-plastic' languages

- Further doubts on rigid distinction / classification of Spanish: Experimentally-oriented studies (e.g. Muntendam 2009, Gabriel 2010, Hoot 2012, Leal et al. 2018)

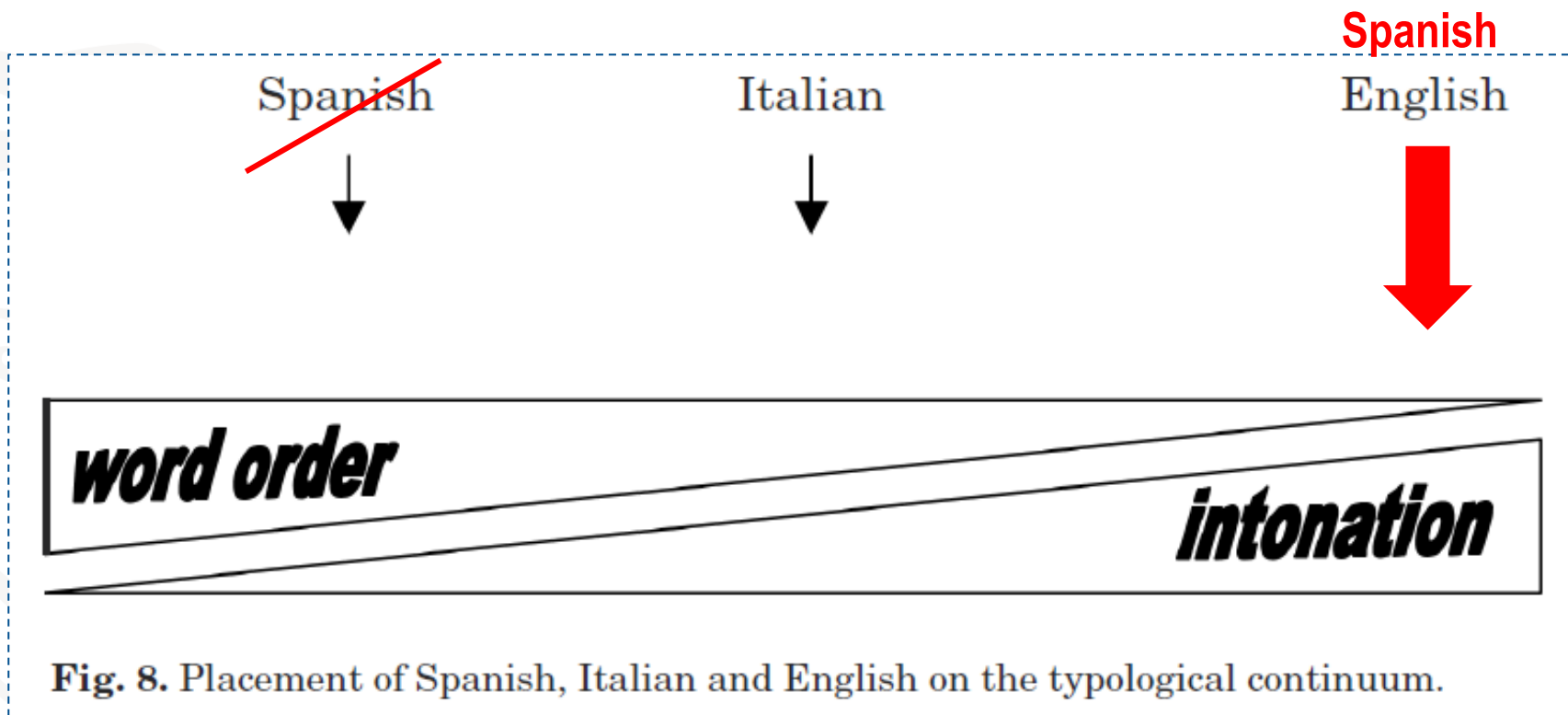


Fig. 8. Placement of Spanish, Italian and English on the typological continuum.

Discrepancies

	Theoretically-oriented studies (Zubizarreta 1998, 1999 etc.)	Empirically-oriented studies (Muntendam 2009, Gabriel 2010, Hoot 2012, Leal et al. 2018)
Neutral Focus	P-movement	stress shift

- **Central-Peninsular (Madrid) Spanish.**
- Use of **introspection** and **grammaticality judgments.**

- **Non-Central-Peninsular varieties** of Spanish.
- **Production experiments** and **judgment tasks.**
- Studies suggest that **word order** and **intonation** can be used to **different degrees.**

- Cleft sentences are normally not considered with respect to neutral focus (cf. Feldhausen & Vanrell 2014, 2015)

Is Spanish a plastic or a non-plastic language?

Question: How is focus realized in Peninsular Spanish (in an experimental setting)?

Hypothesis 1: Experimental study supports Zubizarreta's (1998) claims

Question: How do German-Spanish heritage speakers (HS) realize focus in Peninsular Spanish?

Hypothesis 2: Stress shift for information focus is an option for those speakers (in contrast to monolingual speakers)

- *Reasoning:* The syntax-discourse interface is vulnerable by bilinguals (including information-structural categories such as *focus*) (see Hulk & Müller 2000, Montrul & Polinsky 2011, Sorace 2011)

Experimental study



Experimental study: Methodology

- Task: production experiment, semi-spontaneous speech.
 - This presentation: **information and contrastive focus on subject and (direct and indirect) object.**
 - Question-answer pairs from short picture stories (Gabriel et al. 2009, Gabriel 2010).



- (6) *Blancanieves trajo las manzanas con fatiga.* [Short story]
 Snow.White bring.PAST.3SG the apples with tiredness
 ‘Snow White brought the apples with tiredness.’
- (7) a. *¿Qué trajo Blancanieves con fatiga?* [_F DO]
 what bring.PAST.3SG Snow.White with tiredness
 ‘What did Snow White brought with tiredness?’
- b. *Blancanieves trajo con fatiga las naranjas, ¿verdad?* [_{CF} DO]
 S.W bring.PAST.3SG with tiredness the oranges right
 ‘S.W. brought the tangerines with tiredness, right?’

Experimental study: Methodology

- Task: production experiment, semi-spontaneous speech.
 - **short stories:**
 - full sentences with a canonical syntactic structure (SVO_{DO} O_{IO})
 - controlled for the focused constituent (S, V, O_{DO} and O_{IO}).
 - Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions by using all of the constituents that appeared in the short stories.

- Participants
 - 4 Madrid Spanish ♀ speakers (aged between 20 and 29, mdn = 20).
1056 contours for Spanish (24 short stories x 11 questions x 4 speakers)
 - 5 German / Peninsular Spanish bilingual Heritage Speakers, 3♀, 2♂ (aged between 19 and 32, mdn = 25).
660 contours (12 short stories x 11 questions x 5 speakers)

Experimental study: Methodology

- The data were then annotated in *Praat* (Boersma & Weekink 2013) according to the:
 - orthographic transcription
 - prosodic transcription
 - syntactic strategy used by the speaker
 - syntactic order
 - focus type and focused constituent
- Prosodic transcription based on **Sp_ToBI system** (Hualde & Prieto 2015)
Zoom H4n digital audio recorder, AKG C520 condenser microphone (44100 Hz sample rate, 16 bit amplitude resolution).

Experimental study: Results



Results: Strategies used

- Information focus - summarizing overview

strategy	Bilinguals (Spain/Germany)	SPA (Spain)	SPA (America)
• P-Movement	(✓)	✓	(✓)
• Stress shift	✓	/	✓
• Clefting	(✓)	✓	✓
• Focus fronting	/	/	/
• Dislocation of given material	(✓)	/	/

- Overview of strategies used to realize information focus (based on experimental studies)

✓ = attested
/ = not attested
(✓) = very rare

Results: Strategies used

- **Information focus**

Monolinguals	
[_F S]	Clefting 71.1% P-movement 14.5%
[_F O _{OD}]	P-movement 47.9% Clefting 23.3%
[_F O _{OI}]	Neutral WO 43.6 % Clefting 21.3%

Bilinguals	
[_F S]	Stress shift 77% (N=46) Clefting 18% (N=11)
[_F O _{OD}]	Stress shift 83% (N=50) P-movement 15% (N=9)
[_F O _{OI}]	Neutral WO 98% (N=59) "P-Movement" 2% (N=1)

- **Monolinguals:** Both clefting and p-movement
- **HS bilinguals:** Mainly stress shift, but also clefting (for S) and p-movement (for DO)

Results: Bilinguals (syntactic strategies)

- **Examples:** stress shift / *in situ*-marking

(1) All-new:

¿Qué ha pasado? - María metió el coche con dificultad.

(2) Narrow informational focus on S

¿Quién metió el coche con dificultad? - María metió el coche con dificultad.

(3) Narrow informational focus on DO

¿Qué metió María con dificultad? - María metió el coche con dificultad.

(4) Narrow informational focus on Adjunct

¿Cómo metió el coche María? - María metió el coche con dificultad.

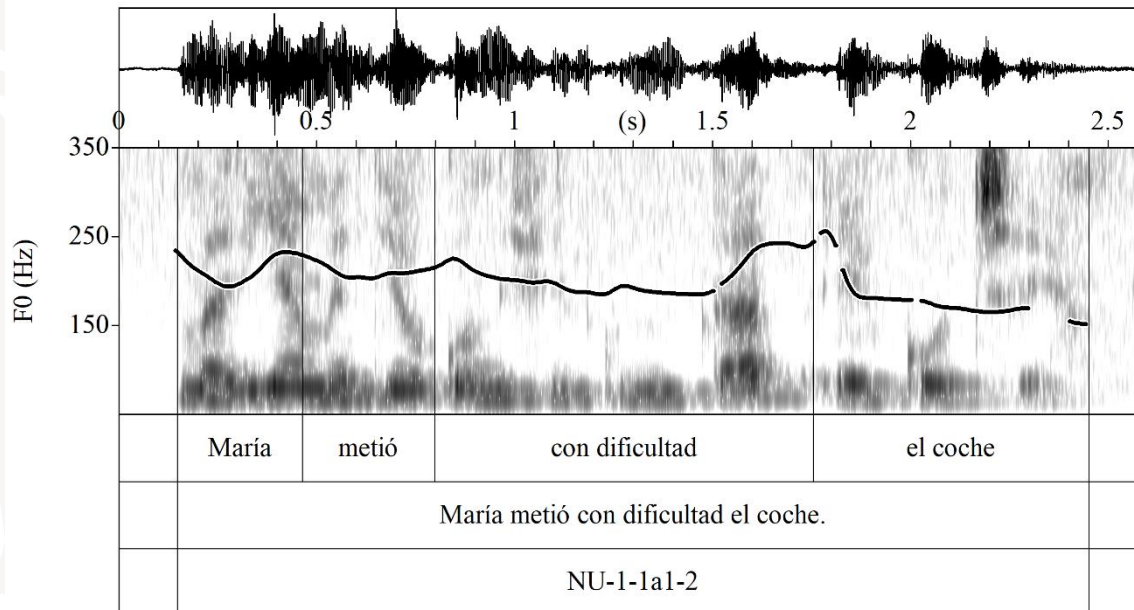


Results: Bilinguals (syntactic strategies)

- **Example:** P-movement

(5) Narrow informational focus on DO

¿Qué metió María con dificultad? - María metió con dificultad el coche.



(Interim) Discussion



Question: How is focus realized in monolingual Madrid Spanish (in an experimental setting)?

Hypothesis 1: Experimental study supports Zubizarreta's (1998) claims

- Our data for Spanish **partially support Zubizarreta's** (1998) claims about p-movement to mark neutral focus in Spanish and focus fronting being restricted to a contrastive interpretation.
- Our results also diverge from those of Zubizarreta (1998):
 - **Clefting** most common choice in the **contrastive focus condition**.
 - **Clefting** also a common strategy in the **neutral focus condition**.

- Our results **contradict previous experimental studies** (e.g. Gabriel et al. 2009, Gabriel 2010, Hoot 2012a,b and others): hardly any prosodic marking of focus *in situ* in monolingual Spanish
 - Contradiction is surprising, as we used the same methodology as in Gabriel and colleagues.
- Dialectal variation:
 - One possible explanation: American Spanish vs. Peninsular Spanish.
 - There may be an **important difference between the geographical varieties**, confirming the important role of dialectal variation
 - a) in intonational phonology (e.g. Prieto & Roseano 2010, Feldhausen et al. 2010, Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2013, Feldhausen & Lausecker 2018).
 - b) in syntax (e.g. Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2013, 2018; Jiménez Fernández 2015a, b)

(Interim) Discussion

Question: How do German-Spanish heritage speakers (HS) realize focus in Spanish?

Hypothesis 2: Stress shift for information focus is an option for those speakers (in contrast to monolingual speakers)

- Hypothesis is supported: Clear preference for *stress shift*
 - Valid for both types of focus on S, DO, IO, and adjunct
 - Our HS behave similar to the ones in Leal et al. (2018)
- Clear difference to monolingual speakers of Peninsular Spanish:
 - Influence of German? (since stress shift is possible in German)
 - Is it the default strategy of HS?

Data provide further evidence for vulnerability of the syntax-discourse interface by bilinguals (in line with Hulk & Müller 2000, Tsimpli & Sorace 2006, Montrul & Polinsky 2011, Sorace 2011)

- Study contradicts recent studies that show that syntax-discourse interface is not instable (e.g. Rothman 2009, Hoot 2012, 2016, Leal et al. 2015, 2018)
- Strategies all known and all used (partly with strong differences between speakers), but:
 - Use of strategies does not correspond to their use by monolingual speakers

(Interim) Discussion

Is Spanish a plastic or non-plastic language?

- Yes and no: It seems to depend on the dialect

**Northern/Central
Peninsular Spanish**

**Latin American
varieties of Spanish**

Spanish

Italian

English

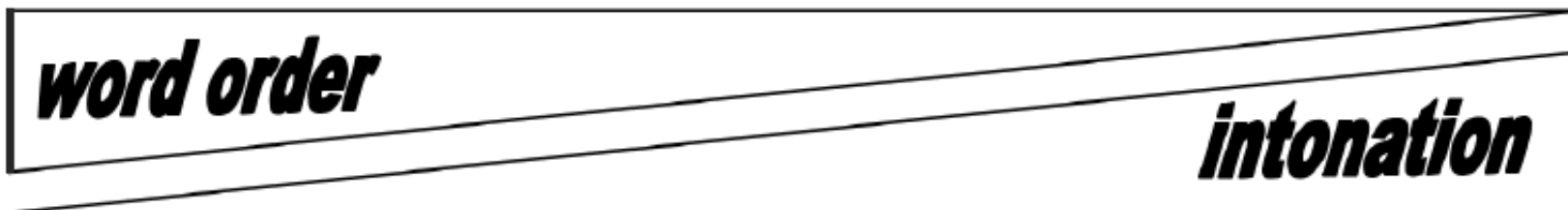


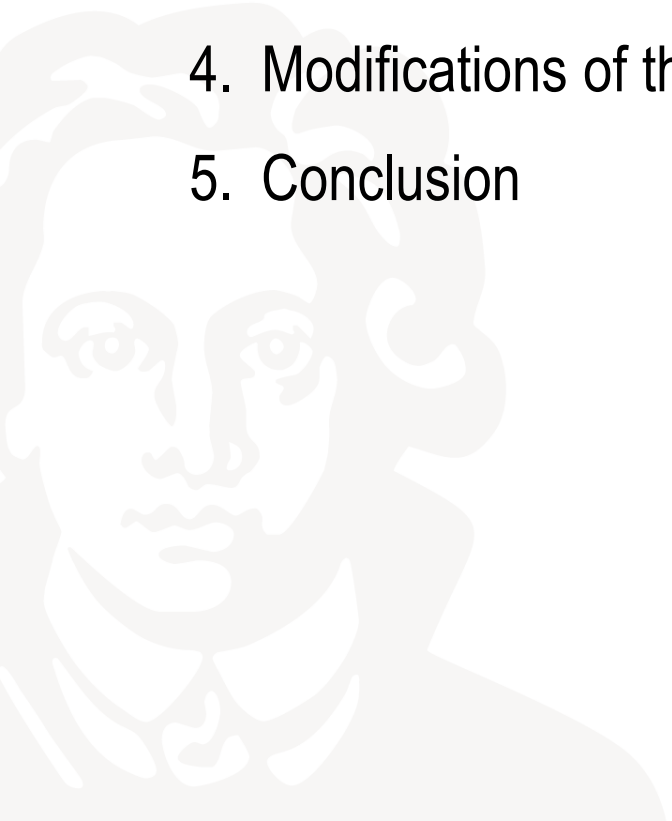
Fig. 8. Placement of Spanish, Italian and English on the typological continuum.

Part 2: The Discourse Completion Task

- Critique of picture-based stories:
 - Repetitive: Participants might get confused by the similar questions
 - Newness of material: There are around 8 questions for one short story. Thus the material is known, but participants have to imagine that the focus in their answer really contributes something new to the common ground
- Nevertheless many advantages (participants utter the same words; structure of words can be controlled,...)
- There are also other methods for experimental settings
 - Which can be used for studies on focus
 - But also for studies on other aspects

Overview - Part 2

1. Introduction
2. Design and application of the DCT
3. Strengths and weaknesses of the DCT
4. Modifications of the DCT
5. Conclusion



1. Introduction

The *Discourse Completion Task* (DCT)

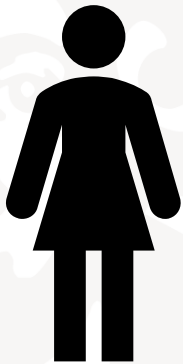
- is a relatively new method in prosodic research
- adopted from the field of pragmatics
- due to the numerous advantages of this method, the DCT has found a place in the field of prosody.
- It is time now to take a step back and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the DCT, and to consider how it can be improved and strengthened in future studies.

1. Introduction

Example 1: Information-seeking question

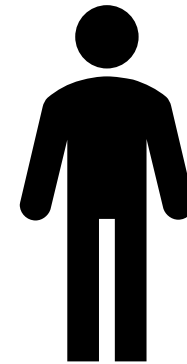
INTERVIEWER:

You enter a store that you have never been in before and ask if they have tangerines.



INTENDED RESPONSE:

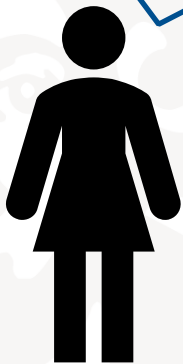
Tienes mandarinas?
'Do you have tangerines?'



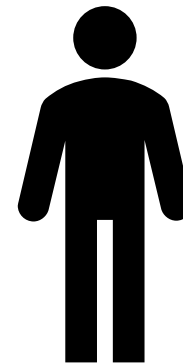
1. Introduction

Example 2: first contact calls

INTERVIEWER: You enter the flat of your friend Maria but she is not visible from the hall. You guess that she is up in her room. You call up to her.



INTENDED RESPONSE:
Maria!



(Example taken from Prieto et al. 2015: 39)

1. Introduction

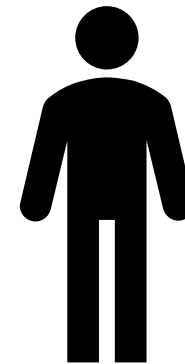
Example 3: Information focus

INTERVIEWER:

You have a new tablet and a friend of yours would like to buy the same one. Now, she asks you where you bought the tablet. Please answer.



INTENDED RESPONSE:
I bought the tablet at the local computer store



(Example taken from Prieto et al. 2015: 39)

2. Design and application of the DCT

Definitional aspects of the *Discourse Completion Task*

(Kasper & Dahl 1991, Brown 2001, Vanrell, Feldhausen & Astruc, 2018)

- **Different scenarios / situations** are created in order to elicit the desired speech act or sentence type (see examples in the introduction)
- **Survey / questionnaire**, which can be carried out either verbally or in writing (within the field of prosody typically verbal)
- Test subjects answer by making the **dialogue situation complete**
- The situation comprises not only information about the background of the described event, but also information on the **social distance** between speakers

2. Design and application of the DCT

- The method was developed in the field of **pragmatics** (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989, Kasper & Dahl 1991, Brown 2001, Nurani 2009), where it has been used for decades for both research and assessment
- It is a relatively new method within the field of **prosody**
 - Introduced in Prieto (2001) for Catalan
 - Since then strong spread of method, especially within the research on Romance languages (nota bene, the method is not language family specific)
 - DCT has a proper place within the field of empirical prosody research

2. Design and application of the DCT

Application within the field of **pragmatics**

- *Pragmatics*: "The study of how context affects meaning—for example, how the sentence *It's cold in here* comes to be interpreted as 'close the windows' in certain situations—" (Fromkin et al. 2013: 140)
- The DCT is an effective method when the aim of the study is "to inform about the speakers'...
 - **pragmalinguistic knowledge** of the strategic and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented, and about their
 - **sociopragmatic knowledge** of the context factors under which particular strategies and linguistic choices are appropriate" (Kasper 2000: 39)
- It should be avoided if the focus is on conversational interaction.

2. Design and application of the DCT

Application within the field of **pragmatics**

- Different test designs or types of the DCT

Classic format: Walter and Leslie live in the same neighborhood, but they only know each other by sight. One day, they both attend a meeting held on the other side of town. Walter does not have a car but he knows Leslie has come in her car.

Walter: _____

Leslie: I'm sorry but I'm not going home right away.

(Blum Kulka et al. 1989)

Prompt ends with
a reply

Dialogue construction: Your advisor suggests that you take a course during summer. You prefer not to take classes during the summer.

Advisor: What about taking a course in the summer?

You: _____

(Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1993)

the dialogue is initiated by
the interlocutor and no reply
is offered

2. Design and application of the DCT

Application within the field of **pragmatics**

- Different test designs or types of the DCT

Open item-verbal response only: You have invited a very famous pedagogue at an institutional dinner. You feel extremely hungry, but this engineer starts speaking and nobody has started eating yet, because they are waiting for the guest to start. You want to start having dinner. What would you say?

(Safont-Jordà 2003)

there are neither interlocutor initiations nor replies, and participants are completely free to respond whatever they wish, but they have to give a verbal response

=> This design is typically used in prosody research

(see Nurani 2009 or Vanrell et al., 2018, for further types of the DCT)

2. Design and application of the DCT

Application within the field of **prosody**

- First applied to Romance prosody research by Prieto (2001)
- Later, the DCT was used for the different atlases of intonation
 - Catalan (Prieto & Cabré 2007-2012)
 - Spanish (Prieto & Roseano 2009-2013, 2010)
 - Romance languages (Prieto et al. 2010-2014; Frota & Prieto 2015)
- The DCT is nowadays an established method in the field of prosody
 - Interesting because it has been noted that DCTs neglect the use of non-verbal features (gestures or facial expressions) and paralinguistic elements (pitch and intonation) (vgl. Kasper 2000: 326, Cyluk 2013)
 - The Romance languages explored through the use of this method include Catalan, French, Friulian, Italian, Occitan, Portuguese, Romanian, Sardinian and Spanish

2. Design and application of the DCT

Application within the field of **prosody** - different subfields

- **Intonational phonology; incl. dialectal variation** (Prieto 2001, Prieto & Cabré 2007-2012, Prieto & Roseano 2010, Brehm, Lausecker & Feldhausen 2014, Frota & Prieto 2015, Roseano et al. 2015, Huttenlauch, Egger, Wochner & Feldhausen 2016)
- **Language contact** (Sichel-Bazin & Meisenburg 2015)
- **L2 acquisition** (Craft 2015, Astruc & Vanrell 2016)
- **Sociophonetics** (Mascaró & Roseano 2015)
- **Prosody and its interfaces** (Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2014, Vanrell et al. 2014a,b, Elvira-García, Roseano & Fernández Planas 2017, Huttenlauch, Feldhausen & Braun under review, Sánchez-Alvarado under review)
- **Politeness theory** (Astruc et al. 2011, 2016, Borràs-Comes et al. 2015)
- **Visual prosody** (Cruz et al. 2015, González-Fuente et al. 2015)

2. Design and application of the DCT

Application within the field of **prosody**

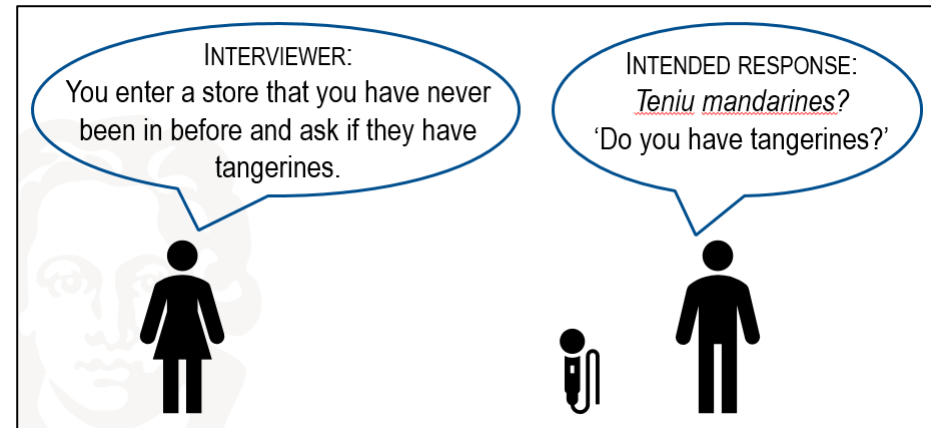
Example: Intonational phonology

- Typical research question:
 - Which intonational contours do have different utterances?
 - Goal: establishing a tonal inventory for different languages and varieties within a language
- The surveys (of the atlases) consisted of different situations, each intended to elicit a particular type of utterance used in the conversations. Utterances were organized as follows:
 - Statements, yes-no questions, wh-questions, echo questions, imperatives, vocatives

2. Design and application of the DCT

Preparation and application - typical course

- What shall be studied?
- Careful preparation of the corresponding scenarios
- Language/variety specific adaption of the lexical content
- Recording device and microphone
- Silent room
- Interviewer / investigator should know the scenarios very well and should mentally adapt to the situation
=> more realistic situation for the test subject
- Interviewer utters the scenario verbally, test subject reacts verbally to each situation
- Pilot study is recommend



2. Design and application of the DCT

Classification of the DCT

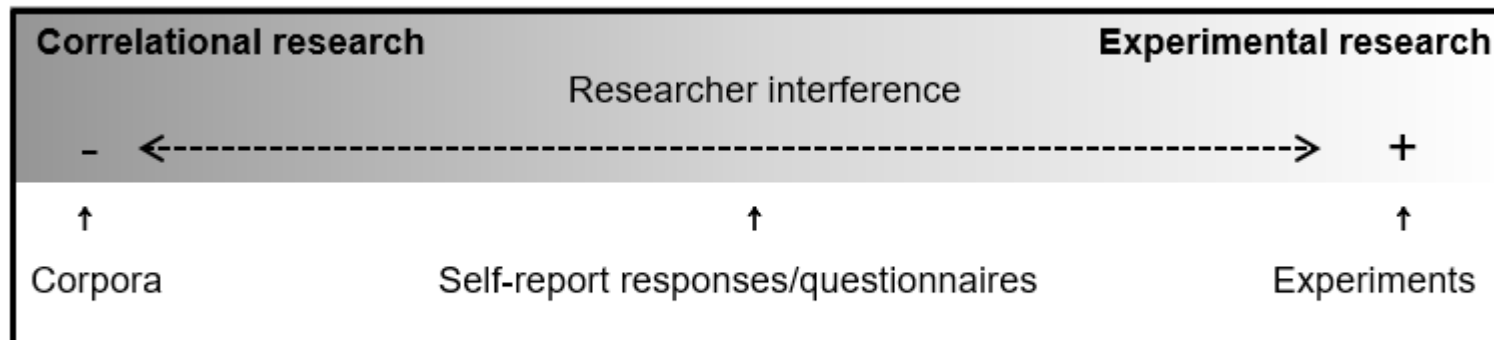


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the continuum existing between correlational and experimental research.

- DCT / survey:
 - No correlational study, in which the researcher observes what naturally goes on in the world with no direct or little interference by the researcher.
 - No pure experimental study, which aims to isolate cause and effect by manipulating one or more variable/s to assess the effect of such manipulation in another variable, the dependent variable.
 - DCT: placed in the middle of this continuum, semi-spontaneous speech, little interference by the researcher

3. Strengths and weaknesses of the DCT

Strengths I

- Considerable amount of data within a short period of time (Nurani 2009, Cyluk 2013)
- Elicitation of comparable (semi-) spontaneous data across speakers and varieties (see, e.g., Interactive Atlas of Romance Intonation)
- Feasible for elderly and illiterate people (see, work on Occitan by Sichel-Bazin & Meisenburg 2015)
- Only little and easily transportable recording equipment is needed (e.g. Sichel-Bazin & Meisenburg 2015)
- Control of both the context (pragmatic and politeness factors) and the target sentence (stress pattern, sentence type and segmental and syntactic structure) (see work on Politeness Theory in, e.g., Astruc et al. 2011, 2016)

3. Strengths and weaknesses of the DCT

Strengths II

- Interface phenomena (such as syntax and prosody, word order and information structure or pragmatics etc.) can be easily addressed (e.g. Interaction of prosody and word order in Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano (2014), interaction between pragmatic context and prosody in Borràs-Comes et al. (2016) or Huttenlauch et al., submitted)
- The task can be used for studies on monolingual speakers (L1) and (different types of) bilingual speakers (L2, 2L1, eL2, heritage speakers...) (see, e.g., the work on the interaction between politeness and intonational phonology in L2 acquisition in Astruc & Vanrell 2016)
- Allows the speaker to freely utter whatever response as long as it fits the situation evoked by the prompt

3. Strengths and weaknesses of the DCT

Weaknesses I

- Not always easily understandable situations (which may lead to rising contours meaning “Did I do it well?” or to contours expressing obviousness) (Sichel-Bazin & Meisenburg 2015, Vanrell et al. 2014a)
- The intonational patterns obtained may not always coincide with those previously found (Gili Fivela et al. 2015, Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2014)
- Elicitation of less trivial speech acts can be a difficult task
- Cultural differences or social/psychological factors may arise (see, e.g., the use of imperatives in Mexican Spanish, Brehm et al. 2014)
- The range of situations may not portray the variety of the language uses in real situations

3. Strengths and weaknesses of the DCT

Weaknesses II

- Setting up the different contexts might be difficult in case the pragmatic differences between contexts is fuzzy (e.g., neutral and counterexpectational echo wh-questions, Huttenlauch et al. 2016)
- Collecting the target sentences always implies a (certain degree of) free choice in the answer strategies by the speakers. The DCT does not allow for scripted speech (and thus cannot easily address research questions that need predetermined answers)
- Each context allows for only one answer (a single speaker cannot show possible variation)

4. Modifications/Improvements of the DCT

Improvements I

- Not always easily understandable situations
 - Scenarios should be carefully crafted
 - The context should be brief but concise
(if it is too long, speakers might get confused and not recall the relevant parts of the context)
 - The relevant information should be explicitly mentioned
(so that no information is introduced only in passing)
 - The use of images should be avoided
(Since the participants are asked about what they see in the images this can favor the marking of evidentiality (to refer to a visual source of information) and also epistemicity (given that what they are asked is evident since it appears in the pictures; talk by Uth))

4. Modifications/Improvements of the DCT

Improvements II

- The intonational patterns obtained may not always coincide with those previously found
 - Critical assessment of own scenarios, but also considering differences in the elicitation methods (Gili Fivela et al. 2015, Vanrell & Fernández-Soriano 2014), formality of speech situation (Henriksen 2013, Henriksen et al. 2016))
- Elicitation of less trivial speech acts can be a difficult task
 - Care and attention in the design to ensure that the different speech acts are not mixed.
 - Involvement on the part of the interviewer and small adaptations should guarantee that the participant fully immerses herself in the task.

4. Modifications/Improvements of the DCT

Improvements III

- Cultural differences or social/psychological factors may arise
 - Awareness on the part of the interviewer that this may happen and readiness to intervene (e.g. asking the participants to ignore certain culture-dependent conventions) (Brehm et al. 2014)
- The range of situations may not portray the variety of the language uses in real situations
 - This is a limitation in pragmatics but not so much in prosodic research, where the focus is on eliciting prototypical answers from a variety of speakers rather than on assessing the pragmatic repertoire of any given individual

4. Modifications/Improvements of the DCT

Improvements IV

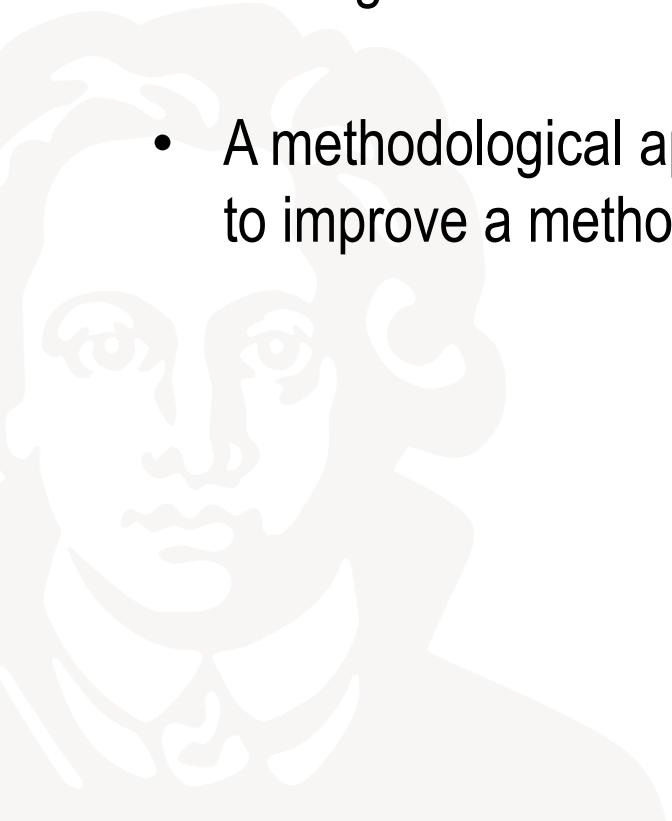
- Setting up the different contexts might be difficult in case the pragmatic differences between contexts is fuzzy
 - A clear definition of the speech acts required is needed and the context should be carefully set up according to these definitions
 - Pilot studies might help to figure out which contexts work well
- The DCT does not allow for scripted speech
 - This is not a problem, but a consequence of the type of method (see figure 1)
- Each context allows for only one answer (a single speaker cannot show possible variation)
 - Several situations for one and the same speech act / sentence type can be created

5. Conclusion

- The DCT shows how one scientific discipline can benefit from looking at other (linguistic) disciplines
- Weaknesses of the method can generally be solved easily
 - Certain boundaries of the method have to be acknowledged (e.g. complete dialogues, fully controlled scripted speech,...)
- Prosody research strongly benefits from the insights gained from this method
- The DCT is a method with many advantages, e.g.
 - ecologically valid data, but at the same time control of both the context (pragmatic and politeness factors) and the target sentence (stress pattern, sentence type and segmental and syntactic structure)
 - Can be used for many subfields (interfaces, L2 acquisition, language contact...)
 - Involvement on the part of the interviewer, but otherwise little recording equipment etc. is needed

Take home message of today's presentation

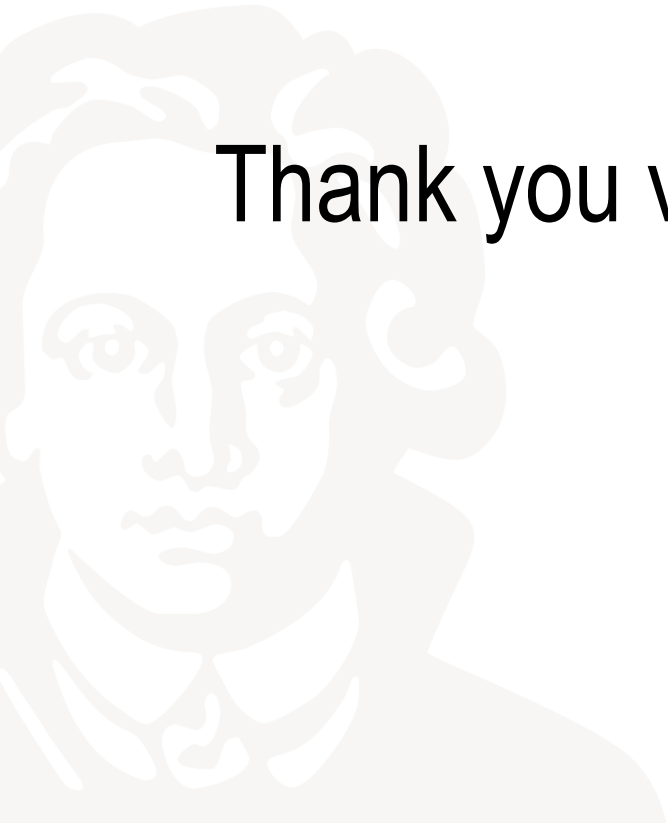
- Focus realization in a given language:
Our study suggests that dialectal variation must be taken into account as a decisive factor involved in the variation of focus realization strategies
- A methodological approach has to be chosen wisely and it is possible to improve a method and to combine it with other methods



You just gave a presentation at Ghent University and you want to thank the audience for their attention.

What do you say?

Thank you very much for your attention!



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(See Vanrell, Feldhausen & Astruc, 2018, for a full list of references)