Recursive focus and prominence

The paper focuses on the unavailability of multiple/recursive focus and wh-questions in Greek vis a vis the availability of recursive contrastive topics. The data are argued to reflect a mismatch between a system of recursive discrete semantic categories and a system of gradient phonological categories organised in terms of relative metrical strength.

The problem Mutliple/recursive foci as in (1) are unavailable in Greek (Tsimpli 1995). This is not to say that multiple accents are unavailable in Greek. Indeed, *Yanis* in (1a) may involve a prenuclear accent (L*+H), characteristic of a Contratistive Topic (CT) in Büring's (2003) sense (Baltazani 2002). What makes (1) impossible is the intention to build two equally prominent accents of the type involved in narrow focus cases like (1c) (e.g. (L+)H*).

(1) a. *o   YANIS   htipise ti
         the-NOM yanis-NOM hit-3SG the-ACC
         MARIA
         Maria
         Yanis hit Maria.
     b. *o   YANIS ipe   oti o
         the-NOM Yanis said-3SG that the-NOM
         Petros   htipise ti   MARIA
         Petros-NOM hit-3SG the-ACC Maria
         Yanis said that Petros hit Maria.
     c. o YANIS htipise ti Maria/ o Yanis htipise
         ti MARIA

The pattern extends to wh-questions. Unlike English, nuclear accent (a L*+H in this case) is invariably aligned with the wh-element in Greek direct wh-questions (2a) (modulo echo wh-questions). On a par with (1a-b), the multiple wh-questions in (2b-c) are unacceptable.

(2) a. PIOS   htipise ti   Maria?
         who-NOM hit-3SG the-ACC Maria
         Who hit Maria?
     b. *PIOS   htipise PION/pion?
         who-NOM hit-3SG who-ACC
     c. *PIOS   ipe oti o   Petros
         who-NOM said that the-NOM hit-3SG
         htipise   PION/pion?
         who-ACC

Multiple wh-questions in Greek can only be indi-

rect (3a) where there is no requirement that nuclear accent is aligned with the wh-element. (3a) has the prosodic structure of affirmative sentences with nuclear accent on the rightmost edge, on a par with (3b).

(3) a. pite   mu [FOC pios
         tell-2PL me [FOC who-NOM
         parakoluthise PION]
         followed-3SG who-ACC
     b. o   Petros   [FOC pezi
         the-NOM Petros-NOM [FOC play-3SG
         HARTIA]
         cards]
         Petros is playing cards.

The contrast between (2b) and (3a) indicates that focus and wh-items may be recursive. But answers to (3a) may *not* involve multiple focus in Greek (1a). This can partly be explained by Büring's (2003) view that answers to multiple wh-questions involve special strategies (e.g. Contrastive topic). As is well known multiple questions elicit pair list answers which, more often than not, employ topic-focus rather than focus-focus patterns (Bolinger 1978). This is also true in Greek. Answers to (3a) employ topic-focus patterns involving either a topicalised subject and a focal object or a topicalised/CLLD-ed object and a focal subject (4).

(4) ti   Maria tin parakoluthise o
     the-ACC Maria her followed-3SG the-NOM
     PETROS,   to   Yani   i
     Petros-NOM, the-ACC Yani-ACC the-NOM
     MARINA...
     Marina   ...

Büring (2003) explains the apparent mismatch between a focus-focus context set up by a mutliple wh-question and the standard (contrastive) topic-focus answers such questions receive due to a strategy of answering a set of subquestions implicitly involved in the "super-questions" denoted by multiple questions. A question like *Who followed who* involves two sets of subquestions, sorted by "followers" (*Who followed Bill/John/Peter?* and "follwed" *Who did Fred/Mary/Peter follow?*). A topic-focus pattern (4), as an answer to a multiple question reflects a choice

of one set of subquestions.

Though not typical, focus-focus patterns are not exlcuded. According to Büring (2003) focus-focus patterns are expected in strategy-less contexts like (5a), where there are no sets of subquestions.[1] But such focus-focus patterns are impossible in Greek (6b). Instead a topic-focus pattern is employed (6c).

(5) a. Q: I don't get it. Did Carl sue the company, or did the company sue Carl?
     b. A: I told you: CARL$_{Foc}$ sued the COMPANY$_{Foc}$. (Büring 2003, ex.32).

(6) a. telika pios horise pion; i M horise to Y i o Y ti M?
         In the end who divorced who? Maria divorced Yanis or Yanis Maria?
     b. *o   YANIS   horise   ti
         the-NOM yanis-NOM divorced the
         MARIA
         MARIA
     c. o Yanis horise ti MARIA

So, cases like (6b), (2b) and (2c) are genuine cases where multiple focus is blocked.

Recursive semantics vs. phonological prominence
The unavailability of recursive foci and direct wh-questions is puzzling vis a vis the availability of recursive topics (7).

(7) ta klidhia o   Petros   ipe
     the keys   the-NOM Petros-NOM said-3SG
     oti tis   Marias   tis ta   edhose
     that the-GEN Maria-GEN her them gave-3SG
     ti   DEFTERA
     the-ACC monday
     Petros said that he gave the keys to Maria on Monday.

The contrast is particularly challenging for theories where (contrastive) topics in fact involve focus values (e.g. Büring 2003; Steedman 2000).

I will argue that the unavailability of recursive focus is the result of a non-isomorphic mapping of a system of recursive (discrete) categories to a system of a gradient categories organised around the concept of prominence. In particular, I will argue that a metrical view of sentence stress (Ladd 2008) can bet-

ter account for the data. Examples like (1a) or (2b) and (2c) might create the impression that recursive "focal" accents are unavailable in Greek. This is certainly not true as indicated by (8) which allows stress on *to Yani* giving rise to a contrastive interpretation.

(8) PIOS   protine   na   stilume
     who-NOM suggested-3SG subj send-1PL
     to   YANI   stis   vrixeles (ki ohi
     the-ACC Yanis-ACC to-the Brussels (and not
     ton   Petro)?
     the-ACC Petros?
     Who suggested/proposed to send Yanis to Brussels (and not Petros)?

But despite the availability of a prosodic pattern like (8) involving a recursive pattern of accents that can be interpreted contrastively, a multiple wh-question (9) or multiple focus structure with the same prosody are exlcuded.

(9) *PIOS   protine   na   stilume
     who-NOM suggested-3SG subj send-1PL
     PION   stis   vrixeles?
     who-ACC to-the Brussels

The contrast between (8) and (9) argues against a categorical association of interpretive categories (focus,topic) and phonological categories (e.g. the distinction between A and B accents in English and their association with focus and topic respectively). The alternative, a metrical approach to stress (Ladd 2008) advocates that it is not pitch accent *per se*, but, rather, relative metrical strength that signals focus (Ladd 2008). Crucially, the implication is that there is only a single peak of prominence in relative units (phonological phrase or utterance). Multiple peaks of prominence are unavailable under this approach and, hence, multiple foci or wh. The contrast between English (5) and Greek (6b) can be accounted for by the assumption that prominence peaks operate on the utterance levels in Greek but on potentially smaller units in English (see Ladd's (2008) discussion of examples like *I didn't give hime SEVen EUros, I gave him FIVE FRANCS*).

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[1]Büring's (2003) claim that (5)[b] involves two A-accents is not uncontroversial.