Against FocusP: Arguments from Zulu

It is well known, since the pioneering work by Hyman (1979) and Watters (1979) on Aghem, that certain focused elements must occur in the Immediately After the Verb (IAV) position in many Bantu languages. In this paper, based on syntactic and prosodic data in Zulu, we argue that the IAV position can NOT be captured by a focus position in the left-periphery (either high or low focus). We propose that focused constituents in Zulu remain in-situ. The IAV effect arises from the interaction of prosodic and interpretive components.

Basic data   In Zulu, both a *wh*-phrase questioning a verb complement (1a) and the answer to such a *wh*-question (1b) must occur in IAV position. Notice in (1a) and (1b) that a focused element in IAV is systematically followed by a prosodic phrase break (indicated by parentheses). Neither the wh-phrase nor the focused phrase in (1b) can be placed elsewhere in the sentence.

(1) a.   Q: (Ú-si:pho ú-yí-phékéla   ba:ni) ín-ku:khu)?
              1-Sipho 1-9OM-cook.for   who   9-chicken
              'Who is Sipho cooking the chicken for?'
     b.   A: (Ú-sípho ú-yí-phékél'   ízí-vakâ:sh') ín-ku:khu).
              1-Sipho 1-9OM-cook.for   8-visitors   9-chicken
              'Sipho is cooking the chicken for the visitors.'

It is a matter of current controversy whether the IAV position is best analyzed as a focus projection – see, e.g., Aboh (2007), Ndayiragije (1999), van der Wal (2006) – or as in situ focus – see e.g., Buell (2007), Hyman & Polinsky (2007), Polinsky (2007). In this talk we first present new arguments from Zulu against a focus projection analysis and then show that in situ IAV focus can be accounted for by requiring a focused (prominent) element to be licensed by the highest phrase in its spell out domain (vP) (cf. Kratzer & Selkirk 2007).

Arguments against high focus There are empirical arguments against a high focus analysis of IAV. In order to accommodate the verbal prefix sequence, a high focus position necessarily entails remnant movement of the IP. This is problematic for the licensing of negative polarity items, which are in IAV position (as in (2); cf Samek-Lodovici 2006):

(2) (ú-Síph' áká-**m**-nik-áng-a   lú:th')   ú-The:mba).
     1-Sipho   Neg.1.SM-OM1-give-Neg-FV anything 1-Themba
     'Sipho didn't give anything to Themba.'

Further, a remnant movement analysis would wrongly predict that a VP adverb could intervene between the verb and the focus element which must occur in IAV position.

Arguments against low focus   There are both syntactic and prosodic arguments in Zulu against a low focus analysis. As shown in (1), the IAV element is systematically followed by a prosodic phrase break. As Cheng & Downing (2007) show, prosodic phrase breaks in Zulu are generally conditioned by the right edge of CP:

(3)   AlignR(CP, Intonation Phrase):
         Align the right edge of CP with the right edge of an Intonation Phrase.

For the prosodic break after IAV to be consistent with the general prosodic phrasing algorithm, IAV must fall at the right edge of CP. Any low focus proposal would then require a collaborative dislocation movement of the focused element to the focus projection *and* of the non-focused verbal complements to a position outside of CP, to make the element in the low focus projection CP-final. This type of collaborative efforts does not have any syntactic, prosodic or semantic motivation.

In situ focus analysis   We propose, instead, that focus elements are in IAV position because they remain in situ, while non-focused elements are 'marginalized' as adjuncts to CP. That focus elements remain in-situ is supported by the fact that focus elements do not simply cross-over a non-focused element to be close to the verb. The motivation for excluding non-focused material in the postverbal domain comes from the interaction of the following constraints, ranked below the independently-motivated constraint in (3), above:

(4)   AlignR(Highest Phrase, Intonation Phrase):
        Align the right edge of the Highest Phrase with the right edge of an Intonation Phrase.
(5)   Focus [prominence] is only licensed by the Highest Phrase in the first spell-out domain.

Following Kratzer & Selkirk (2007), we define the highest phrase relevant for licensing prominence [i.e., focus] as the phrase immediately adjacent to the verb within VP. Constraints (3) and (4) are both satisfied if non-prominent/non-focused elements are outside of CP, as both are satisfied if the focused element is in the Highest Phrase AND at the right edge of CP. Adjoining non-focused elements to CP so that only the focused element remains in vP, in IAV position, gives this configuration.

   We show that our proposal is superior to previous analyses on (IAV) "in-situ" focus (cf. Hyman & Polinsky and Polinsky for Aghem, Buell (2007) for Zulu; Samek-Lodovici 2005, 2006 for Italian). We show that these alternatives are not workable for Zulu and/or do not provide comparable motivation for the syntactic marginalization of non-focused elements.

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