
Prosodic prominence within noun phrases in Finno-Ugric languages

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This comparative study investigates the prosodic marking of focus in noun phrases in Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian. Sharing word prosodic properties, these languages differ at their sentence-level prosodic marking of focus (e.g., Arnhold, 2016, Ots, 2017, Langer & Kügler, 2022). In a production study, focus was varied within sentence-initial complex noun phrases (focus on first, or second adjective, on the noun, or the entire NP). 20 speakers per language read ten different items in four different contexts (20 x 10 x 4 = 800 sentences per language). For each word, ten equidistant f₀ points and duration were extracted in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2023). Measurements were modelled with Generalized Additive Mixed Models (GAMM; Wood 2017).

Initial analysis indicates striking similarities in the phrasal prosody of these three languages. Specifically, all languages exhibit a consistent NP-initial f₀-peak across focus conditions, and in second adjective or noun focus conditions, a downstep pattern across the entire NP including a focal f₀-peak. Hence, focal prominence within the NP shows a distinct f₀-peak that is however reduced compared to the NP-initial f₀-peak. The languages differ in their post-focal region with post-focal compression in Finnish and post-focal deaccentuation in Estonian and Hungarian. The results add information on highlighting focus within the NP, suggesting that in Finno-Ugric languages, focus marking within NPs differs from sentential focus marking. In contrast, Germanic languages show focal f₀-raising on the focused word, while Romance languages show accentuation of all words within an NP (Krahmer & Swerts, 2001), which is identical to sentential focus marking in these languages. The findings suggest the need to revise and expand the focus typology. The similarities in focus marking within the NP in Finno-Ugric languages join the similarities at the word-prosodic level (Karpinski et al. 2020) and may therefore be interpreted as areal feature of the Eastern European languages.

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