

The complementizer phrase CP and its effect on prosodic phrasing in Catalan

This paper shows a clear effect of the syntactic projection CP on the shape of the prosodic phrasing in Catalan SVO structures and proposes an analysis in the framework of stochastic Optimality Theory (Boersma & Hayes 2001) for the different possible prosodic groupings. Catalan is known to be a language sensitive to eurhythmic constraints. Prieto (2005) and D’Imperio et al. (2005) show that the most common phrasing pattern in simple SVO structures is (S)(VO), as in (1a). However, (SV)(O) is possible when the DP object consists of two or more prosodic words (ω), i.e. if it is prosodically heavy, as in (1b). In addition, Feldhausen (2010) shows that the number of (SV)(O) phrasings increases when the object is not only prosodically heavy but also sentential, as in (2).

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|-----|----|---|--|
| | | $(\quad S \quad) (\quad V \quad O \quad)$
$\omega \quad \omega \quad \omega$ | <= Prosodic Structure
<= Prosodic Words |
| (1) | a. | L’Àguila robà el ratolí
‘The eagle stole the mouse.’ | |
| | | $(\quad S \quad V \quad) (\quad \quad O \quad \quad)$
$\omega \quad \omega \quad \omega \quad \omega \quad \omega$ | |
| | b. | L’ànguila robà el ratolí del meu germà
‘The eagle stole my brother’s mouse.’ | |
| (2) | | $(\quad S \quad V \quad) (q \quad S \quad) (\quad V \quad O \quad)$
$\omega \quad \omega \quad \omega \quad \omega \quad \omega$ | |
| | | [La Bàrbara suposa [que l’ànguila robà el ratolí] _{CP2}] _{CP1}
‘Barbara assumes that the eagle stole the mouse.’ | |

Up to now the exact motivation for the (SV) grouping in (2) remains unclear. Is it the prosodic weight of the sentential object (consisting of three ω) or is it the syntactic status as a sentence (i.e. CP)? The crucial structure for answering this question includes a sentential object consisting of only one prosodic word, as in (3). If prosodic weight is the decisive factor, (3) should phrase as (1a): (S)(VO), since the object is light. If the syntactic status is decisive, (3) should phrase as (1b): (SV)(O), since the object represents a CP.

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|-----|--|---|-------------------|
| | | $(\quad S \quad) (\quad V \quad \quad O \quad)$
$\omega \quad \omega \quad \omega$ | <= pattern (1a) |
| | | $(\quad S \quad V \quad) (\quad \quad O \quad)$
$\omega \quad \omega \quad \omega$ | <= pattern (1b) |
| (3) | | $(\quad S \quad V \quad) (q \quad S \quad) (\quad V \quad O \quad)$
$\omega \quad \omega \quad \omega \quad \omega \quad \omega$ | <= Prosodic Words |
| | | [La Maria suposa [que <i>pro</i> dorm] _{CP2}] _{CP1}
‘Mary assumes that (Peter) sleeps.’ | |

Based on data of a production experiment, in which three native speakers of Central Catalan uttered 108 sentences of the structure given in (3), it is shown that (SV)(O) is the predominant phrasing pattern (48,1%), followed by (S)(V)(O), 31,5%, and by (S)(VO), 20,4%. Thus, although there is no difference in the prosodic weight between (1a) and (3), the prosodic grouping of (3) strongly corresponds to the grouping of simple sentences with a prosodically heavy object, as in (1b). This suggests that the effect of the syntactic CP strongly influences the prosodic structure – irrespective of its actual prosodic weight. To account for the findings the constraint hierarchy MAX-BIN-END >> ALIGN-CP,L >> MIN-N-PHRASES >> ALIGN-XP,R is proposed, in which the last three constraints overlap to guarantee a reverse ranking in order to account for the variation found in the data. Only ALIGN-CP,L is new (for the other three constraints cf. Prieto 2005). This constraint aligns the left edge of a CP with the left edge of a prosodic phrase and thus accounts for the fact that the sentential object is in general prosodically separated from the subject and the verb – as is a heavy DP object.

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