

## **Word order, focus, and prosodic variation in Nafsan (Vanuatu)**

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In the last ten years or more, there has been an expansion of prosodic analyses of less-well studied languages (e.g. [1, 2, 3]). Compared to well researched European and Asian languages, only a handful of investigations have examined the interaction between prosody and information structure in Oceanic languages with some notable exceptions (e.g. [4] for Samoan). It is generally accepted that tonal variation in languages like English is influenced by a combination of information structure and pragmatics. However, the phonological intonational devices that languages use to contrast informational versus neutral focus are known to vary. These might include combinations of the following: manipulations of phrase-level pitch range (incorporating pitch level and pitch span after [5]), intonational and prosodic phrasing, and intonational prominence, including the use of different types of pitch accents for contrastive emphasis. Languages can also de-accent material (reducing the number of pitch accents in a phrase) and/or de-phrase non-focal material (reducing the number of intonational constituents) to promote a particular kind of discourse interpretation (after [2]).

Languages can use syntactic means to realise informational structure categories like contrastive focus. These devices include left dislocation of the constituent under focus from the rest of an utterance. This has been noted in Oceanic languages (e.g. Vera'a, [6], Nafsan, [7]). It has also been suggested that intonation plays a lesser role in the realisation of semantic focus (compared to west-Germanic languages) with patterns of prosodic variation primarily the result of positional factors. In other words, if a language promotes left dislocation as a contrastive focus-marking strategy, the resulting prosodic patterns may be because the item is in initial position in a discourse segment. By contrast, others have suggested that so-called free-word order languages also employ intonational devices (e.g. [8]) implying that there is a deliberate prosodic strategy to place a constituent in focus. Recent explorations of the complex interplay between prosody, pragmatics, and syntax in Samoan, suggest prosodically-driven syntactic fronting is an important feature of information structure realisation in this language ([4]).

In this paper the interaction between prosody and focus realisation strategies are examined in Nafsan, a Southern Oceanic language spoken by around 5,000 people on the island of Efate in Vanuatu. Nafsan has preferred SVO word order although object fronting is used in cases of topicalisation (after [7]). Our corpus consists of a series of controlled laboratory-phonology type speech experiments that were designed to explore prosodic realisation of neutral and contrastive focus on nouns that were subjects or objects in mini-dialogues where word-order was manipulated. Eight talkers (five males and three females) were recorded in a fieldwork setting. In contexts of contrastive focus, all speakers produce utterance-initial or utterance-final focal elements with a major pitch movement associated with the focused noun (subject or object). The focused noun is also realised with a wider pitch span than the same token in non-focal contexts. They are often realised in their own prosodic phrase and are often prosodically left-dislocated or right-dislocated depending on the position of the noun in the utterance. Post-focal material in Nafsan is almost always produced in a relatively compressed pitch range and there is evidence of de-phrasing of non-focal nouns suggesting prosodic phrasing patterns similar to Korean, for example. Nafsan also exhibits right edge-marking prominence patterns that are amplified in contrastive focus contexts [e.g. 9]. The implication of these findings is considered in relation to prevailing models of prosody and information structure and current models of prosodic typology for languages of the Pacific (e.g. [2,3]).

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