How prominence shift and phrasing combine to mark focus in French

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In French, prosodic marking of information structure (IS) is often assumed to be quite different than in flexible accent languages like English or German, where focus is marked by a shift of the main prosodic prominence of the utterance, and givenness is signaled by deaccenting [1]. For instance, [2] proposed that phrasing plays a major role in signaling focus, assuming that French is a boundary language where initial and final rises are boundary tones. In this view, focus constituents are phrased alone and only constituents which are not syntactically embedded, and which are at least the size of the phonological phrase (Φ) can be compressed as a correlate of givenness like in example (8) below where "à Milan" (*at Milan*) can be compressed but not "la bio" (*biology*).

(8) ((Marionω)Φ (enseigneω (la bioω)Φ)Φ (à Milanω)Φ)ι   Φ: phonological phrase
      Marion teaches biology in Milan.   ω: prosodic word

This claim is supported by [3] who found no compression on post-focal adjectives in noun+adjectives (N+Adj) segments, and by [4] who found compression on adjuncts but not on arguments in verb+complement segments. Conversely, [5] found that prominence shift is possible in French in "corrective" focus, but not possible in either "contrastive" focus or "parallelism", explaining this finding by the fact that, in French, syntactic scope of the focus operator ~ is minimally the clause.

This study aims at showing how prominence shift is compatible with French phrasing constraints, thanks to the specifics of the intonational structure of French, explaining and discussing both [2, 3, 4] and [5]. It relies on the extensive analysis of a 45 min radio debate, which has been entirely annotated for IS and prosody, independently of one another. For IS, we used an annotation procedure that retrieves the implicit question under discussion (QUD) for each utterance, and defines its focus, focus domain(s), as well as its potential contrastive topic(s), topic(s) and non-at-issue content [6]. For prosody, we used the French ToBI framework [7].

Our data show that both compression on post-focal adjectives in N+Adj segments (against [3], Fig. 1) and prominence shift in contrast and parallelism (against [5], Fig. 2) are regularly used by French speakers to mark givenness and focus respectively. Fig. 2 also shows that focus constituents (here: *toute* and *rien*) are not necessarily phrased alone but can come with post-focal material (against [2]). This is made possible by the intonational structure of French, where the first level of prosodic phrasing, the accentual phrase (AP), is defined as the domain of a compulsory final accent (FA), and an optional initial rise (IR) [8]. The IR has been shown to be often recruited for focusing [9], and the FA, while usually rising, can be realized as a low pitch accent L* [7]. The falling pattern thus formed (Fig. 1 & 2) explains how what [5] have called an "accent shift" is possible in French: enhancing IR and lowering FA, while preserving French prosodic phrasing as required by the phrasing hypothesis [2, 3, 4]. Our data also show how this LHi L* falling pattern is used in building long "accentual arches" [10] that are typically used to signal large focused constituents.

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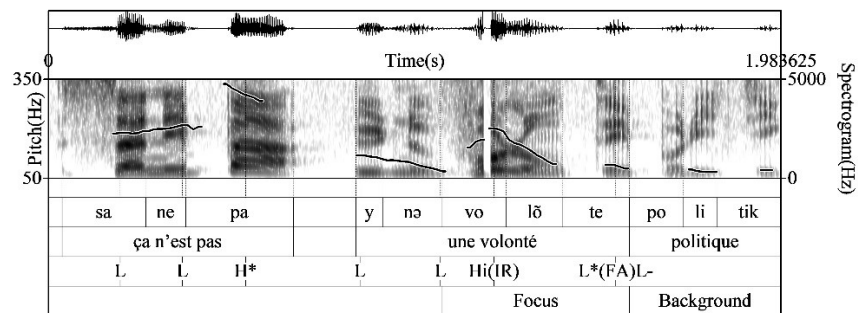
Fig. 1. *The N+Adj segment "volonté politique" (political will) with post-focal compression on the given Adj "politique", realized by means of a low FA L*, followed by the spreading of the phrasal accent L-. Answer to QUD: {Politically, what is the extension of the Union?}*
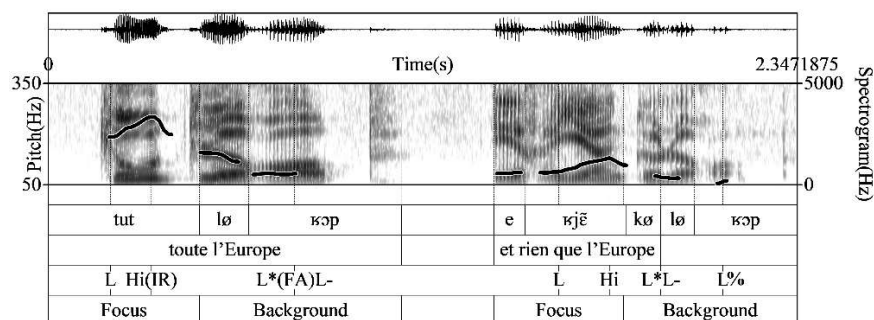

Fig. 2. *The parallelism 'all of Europe, and nothing else than Europe' realized by means of two prominence shifts from the word "Europe" to the words "toute" on the left and "rien que" on the right realized within one AP by means of a low FA L* after a high focused IR Hi. Answer to QUD: {Which parts of Europe should be integrated into the EU?}*
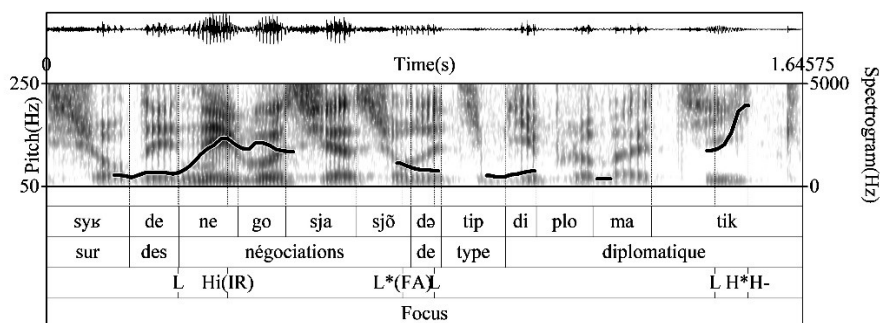

Fig. 3. *The focused DP 'negotiations of a diplomatic kind' realized by means of an "accentual arch". This arch is made of the falling pattern LHiL* on "négociations" plus a rising pattern LLH*H- on "diplomatique". Answer to QUD: {What should we stop founding Europe on?}*