

To what extent the French prosodic encoding of contrast is addressee-oriented?

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According to [1] speakers use intonation to specify a relationship between the content of a phrase and the mutual knowledge/belief of participants in the current discourse about this content. For instance, in American English, the L+H* pitch accent is used by speakers to mark a correction or a contrast. In this case, by using this pitch accent, the speaker signals that the accented item and not some alternative related item should be mutually believed, all the alternatives being shared by both the speaker and the addressee. This framework thus assumes that the speaker's prosodic encoding of contrast depends i) on the referential context itself and ii) on what the speaker and the addressee know about this context. Following this idea, lots of research has focused on the description of the prosodic forms involved in contrast encoding in different languages. However, most studies have not investigated to what extent the prosody of contrast reflects the way speakers take their addressees into account. Do prosodic choices of speakers mainly reflect the referential context from the speaker's point of view independently of his/her addressee's presence and knowledge or does the speaker prosodically encode contrast on the basis of shared knowledge to serve the addressee's needs?

To disentangle between these two possibilities, we investigated whether the French prosodic encoding of contrast is affected by the presence of an addressee. The main difference between French and American English regarding contrast encoding is that French speakers don't use pitch accent type to signal the contrastive status of a referent. Rather, they can use a large variety of strategies among which prosodic phrasing appears as one of the most commonly used strategies [2,3,4,5]. For instance, in noun-adjective pairs such as *bougies violettes* vs. *bonbons violets* 'purple candles' vs. 'purple candies', French speakers parse the noun in the 2nd fragment in a separate prosodic phrase from the following adjective when this noun contrasts with the 1st noun in the pair (e.g., *bougies violettes* followed by [*BONBONS*] [*violets*]). By contrast, they produce it in the same prosodic phrase when it refers to the same object but with a different modifier (*bonbons marron* 'brown candies' followed by [*bonbons violets*] 'purple candies').

In this study, 30 native speakers of French played an interactive game developed by [5]. During this game, participants had to indicate a given route from a departure point to an arrival point by producing noun-adjective pairs in which the noun in the 2nd noun-adjective fragment (the target noun) was either identical to the noun in the 1st fragment (e.g., *bonbons marron* 'brown candies' vs. *bonbons violets* 'purple candies') or contrasted with it (e.g., *bougies violettes* 'purple candles' vs. *BONBONS violets* 'purple candies'). We also manipulated the presence vs. absence of an addressee meaning that 15 participants performed the task with an addressee whereas the other 15 described the route while no addressee was present, and no potential addressee was mentioned in the instructions. Prosodic phrasing produced by participants was measured in terms of whether the target noun was phrased within the same Accentual Phrase as the following adjective (1-AP phrasing) or whether it was phrased in a separate AP (2-AP phrasing). Results confirmed those of Michelas et al. (2014) showing that speakers produced more 2-AP phrasing when the target noun was contrastive in the presence of an addressee (Figure 1). By contrast, in the absence of an addressee, speakers did not produce more 2-AP phrasing than 1-AP phrasing meaning they did not use prosodic phrasing to encode the contrastive status of target nouns. Our results are difficult to reconcile with the view that prosodic encoding of focus reflects the referential context independently of the presence of an addressee. Rather it appears that in a language such as French in which prosodic phrasing is the most common strategy to encode contrast, parsing choices reflect the way speakers take their interactional partner into account.

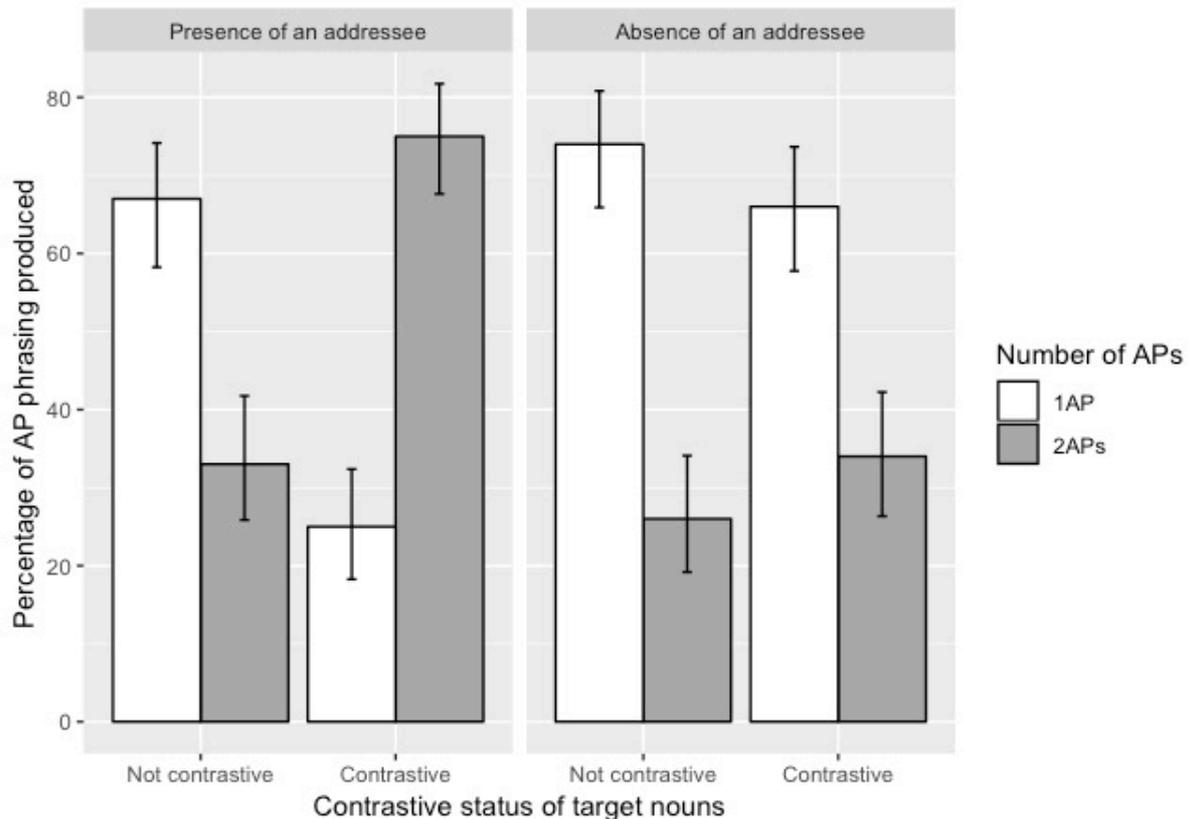


Figure 1. *Percentage of prosodic phrasing produced by participants depending on the number of APs they produced (1 AP vs. 2 APs) and the contrastive status of target nouns (not contrastive vs. contrastive). Error bars show a default 95% confidence interval.*

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