

The Effect of Verbs on the Prosodic Marking of Information Status in German

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In intonation languages like German the marking of information status is an important linguistic function of prosody. However, there is a great deal of variation in this marking. Although recent annotation systems are able to capture fine-grained differences in an item's information status (e.g. types of accessible information), they tend to concentrate on the information status of noun phrases (NPs), based on relations between two referring expressions (usually nouns). Some systems (e.g. Nissim et. al 2004; Riester & Baumann 2013) also include verbs and verb phrases (VP) as a possible source of a referent's accessibility. Due to their non-referential character, verbs are usually not assigned an information status themselves. Reference relations between NPs have been shown to be marked by nuclear pitch accent placement (e.g. Crystal 1969; Ladd 2008) and/or type (cf. Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg; Baumann & Grice 2006; Röhr & Baumann 2010; Schumacher & Baumann 2010). However, the effect on prosody of verbs has not yet been investigated.

The present study investigates the effect of reference relations between nouns and verbs on their prosodic realization. Beside *new* information, i.e. nouns/verbs that are not derivable from the previous text, we distinguish between three different types of accessible/given information by using different types of noun-verb pairs. The verbs denote an event of intentionally creating an element (e.g. *fotografieren* 'to photograph') and the corresponding nouns either denote an *instrument* for creating a related element (e.g. *Kameras* 'cameras') or the created element itself, namely the *result* (semantic relations based on Fillmore 1976). The noun denoting the *result* was either morphologically unrelated to the verb (e.g. *fotografieren* – *Bilder* 'to photograph – pictures') or displayed the same word stem (labelled *result-stem*, e.g. *Fotografien* 'photographs'). The target nouns and verbs were part of constructed mini dialogues and occurred in consecutive sentences in both orders. 10 female and 4 male native speakers of Standard German aged between 18 and 39 years read each text out twice in randomized order.

Results show (Fig.1a) that nouns denoting a created element (independent of whether morphologically related or not) were less often marked by a nucleus than *instrument* nouns and *new* nouns. This mirrors the stronger semantic relatedness of both types of *result* nouns to the corresponding verb. For the verbs, the differences in prosodic marking are less distinct, but seem to reflect more fine-grained differences in their information status (Fig. 1b): With increasing discourse-givenness of the verb (from *new* through *instrument* and *result* to *result-stem*), the nuclear accent was placed increasingly often on the adverb, rather than the verb itself. The weak effect of verbs on the prosodic marking of information status may reflect the more transient status of events in a person's consciousness (cf. Chafe 1994). Nevertheless, differences in a verb's informativeness are expressed by some variation in nuclear accent placement, and should thus be integrated into a wider notion of information status.

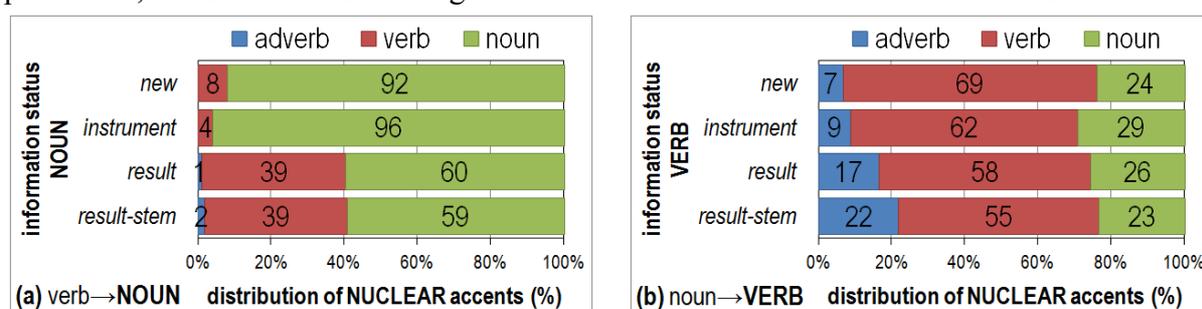


Figure 1(a)-(b). Relative distribution of nuclear accents on elements of target sentences (adverb, verb, noun) per information status; (a) verb→NOUN texts, (b) noun→VERB texts.

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