

Intonational Means to Mark Verum Focus in German and French

German and French differ in a number of aspects. Regarding the prosody-pragmatics interface, German is said to have a direct focus-to-accent mapping, which is largely absent in French – owing to strong structural constraints. We used a semi-spontaneous dialogue setting to investigate the intonational marking of Verum Focus, a focus on the polarity of an utterance in the two languages (e.g., *the child IS tearing the banknote* as an opposite claim to *the child is not tearing the banknote*). When Verum Focus applies to auxiliaries, pragmatic aspects (i.e., highlighting the contrast) directly compete with structural constraints (e.g., avoiding an accent on phonologically weak elements such as monosyllabic function words). Intonational analyses showed that auxiliaries were predominantly accented in German, as expected. Interestingly, we found a high number of (as yet undocumented) focal accents on phrase-initial auxiliaries in French Verum Focus contexts. When accent types were equally distributed across information structural contexts, relative prominence (in terms of peak height) between initial and final accents was shifted towards initial accents in Verum Focus compared to non-Verum Focus contexts. Our data hence suggest that French also may mark Verum Focus by focal accents but that this tendency is partly overridden by strong structural constraints.