

The prosodic effects of focus in the Irish of Cois Fharráige

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This paper describes the effects of focus on f_0 and duration in the Irish of Cois Fharráige. This study is part of a larger body of work on the intonation of Irish dialects [1-2]. Our previous description of focus in Gaoth Dobhair (Ulster) Irish has shown that contrastive focus affects the pre-focal, focal, and post-focal portions of the f_0 contour, but its effects differ depending on the position of the focal element in the intonational phrase (IP) [3]. We now extend the analysis of the prosody of focus to Cois Fharráige Irish.

The focus corpus was recorded for four native speakers from Cois Fharráige in County Galway (west of Ireland, the Connaught province). The data in this study covers broad focus and contrastive focus renderings of a simple declarative in Irish shown in (1):

- (1) **Bhí Méabh** ina **luí** ar an **leaba**.
Was Méabh in her lying on the bed.
'Méabh was lying on the bed.'

These items were produced with broad focus (bf), and contrastive focus on either *Méabh*, *luí* or *leaba* (cf1, cf2 and cf3, respectively). All were elicited in a question/answer context which prompted the desired focus reading. Each focal condition was presented four times, thus giving 64 tokens in total. All prompts were randomised and interspersed with other focus prompts (not included in this study).

The analysis of the focus data includes the tune level description (captured with IViE [4]) and parallel contour-derived f_0 measurements such as the timing and scaling of the accentual peak, register level and span. Each utterance was segmented into accent groups and accented syllables in order to calculate the timing of the focal peak, and to measure the durations of the accented syllable and the accent group. All f_0 measurements were converted to semitones relative to the speaker-specific baseline (following the method proposed in [5]).

The tune level results (tonal transcriptions in Figure 1) indicate that Cois Fharráige uses H^*+L as the default nuclear accent type in broad and contrastive focus alike. Pre-focal accents are typically H^*+L , or L^* . Post-focally, deaccentuation occurs.

The contour-derived f_0 measurements reveal that contrastive focus affects the pre-focal, focal, and post-focal regions (stylised contours in Figure 1), but differences are observed depending on the position of the focused element in the IP. Thus, the focal peak is raised, and the accented syllable lengthened, in cf1 and cf2. Interestingly, cf3 largely resembles broad focus with respect to duration *and* f_0 (the H^*+L H^*+L $H^*+L\%$ contour in cf3 in Figure 1).

Finally, comparing the focus findings for Cois Fharráige to those for Gaoth Dobhair [3], it is notable that aside from the cross-dialect tune-level difference (H^*+L vs. L^*+H), both varieties use overwhelmingly similar means to convey contrastive focus.

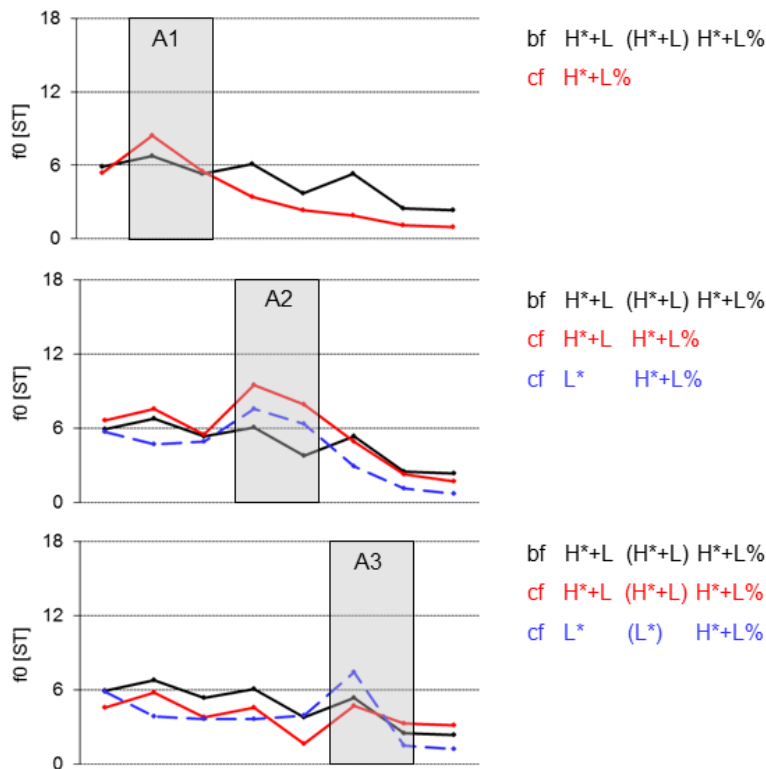


Figure 1 Mean stylised pitch contours (left column) with tonal transcriptions (right column) in the broad and contrastive focus data of Cois Fharráige Irish. Each contrastive focus (cf1, cf2, cf3) contour (red = more frequent; blue = less frequent) is plotted separately against broad focus (bf, black). The stylised pitch contours represent eight turning points: a pair of high (H) and low (L) points in each of the three accent groups, and two points at the IP edges. Grey boxes indicate the position of the focal accent (A1, A2, A3) in the phrase.

References:

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