

Two types of Right Dislocation – How differences in information structure affect their prosodic realisation

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Background and Motivation: In a variety of languages, two distinct constructions at the right sentence periphery can be identified that resemble each other at first glance: Afterthought (AT) and Right Dislocation (RD). Although there are superficial similarities in the orthographic marking of these structures, they differ substantially with respect to their (information structural) function as well as their intonation. As to AT, there is a consensus about which properties define it including its prosody. In fact, the AT referent is generally discourse-old but newly established as a topic, and is commonly produced as a separate intonation phrase (IP) carrying a strong prominence [1]. The construction of RD, to the contrary, is a more disputed issue. [2] suggested two possible prosodic realisations for RD: either the dislocated element is deaccented and prosodically integrated into the IP of the matrix sentence [cf. 4], or it carries the nuclear accent in a prosodically independent IP. Also with regard to its function, there are different approaches: [1] claims that RD opens a new discourse topic, while [3] assumes that RD with its comment-topic structure often closes a current topic. We suppose that the reason for these diverging approaches lies in a difference in information structure that has, to our knowledge, not been regarded by previous research: while one version of RD can only be used if the referent is discourse-old and maintained as a topic (its prototypical use according to [4], hence *RD_proto*), the other type of RD is used in a stylized manner and operates on referents that are both discourse-new and newly established as a topic (since the new topic is presented, we will refer to this type as *RD_pres*). In our study, we aim at providing a more fine-grained understanding of RD and AT in terms of prosody, by defining and subdividing RD in terms of information structure, thus avoiding a circular argumentation.

Method: In our corpus study, we investigated German RDs and ATs in the database Fokus-DB [5], which contains 53 ATs and 155 RDs. We further subdivided RDs by their information structure (i.e. discourse- and topic-newness), resulting in 56 observations of *RD_pres* and 99 observations of *RD_proto* (see examples (1)-(3)). The data was annotated by three trained phoneticians for phrasing and perceived prominence following the DIMA-approach [6].

Results: Our results display a high variability in the choice of boundary type for AT as well as for *RD_proto* (Fig.1). Still, these constructions differ clearly with respect to the observed phrasing pattern: AT favours a two-IP-realisation in 73.5 % of the items, whereas *RD_proto* favours a single-IP-realisation in 82.9 % of the cases. These results coincide with the findings of previous research [7]. *RD_pres*, however, is realized with much less variation and is virtually restricted to one phrasal pattern, as 98.3 % of the investigated items are produced as two separate IPs. In terms of their phrasal structure, *RD_pres* thus resembles AT more closely than *RD_proto*. A corresponding pattern is found in the perceived prominence of dislocated elements (Fig.2): here, the amount of variability decreases from *RD_proto* through *RD_pres* to AT, but again *RD_pres* rather resembles AT than *RD_proto*, in that 75 % of the data were produced with a strong rather than a weak prominence on the dislocated element.

Conclusions: Our data show that, although both types of RD are syntactically identical, their prosodic realisations crucially differ, due to differences in information structure. It became evident that *RD_pres* resembles AT much more closely than *RD_proto*, presumably since the former two add new information to the discourse while the latter does not. This finding has extensive implications for future research: Conflating the different subtypes of RD on the sole basis of syntax may not only lead to diverging assumptions concerning the function of RD, but also to a blurred picture of its prosodic realisation. If we want to achieve a better understanding of the features that constitute RD and AT, as well as the aspects that separate them, we need to take information structure into account.

Examples

(1) RD_proto (discourse-old referent as maintained topic, [5])

B: Hast du den neuen Romeo und Julia gesehen? – A: Nein. Ich geh in keine Filme mit Leonardo di Caprio [...] – B: **Der** ist geil **der Film!**

(2) RD_pres (discourse-new referent as newly established topic, [5])

S: Die BBC hat ihn zum Newcomer des Jahres 2012 gekürt, obschon das Jahr gerade erst angefangen hat. und obwohl **es** noch nicht mal erschienen ist, **das Album dieses jungen aus Uganda stammenden Engländers** [...]

(3) AT (discourse-old referent as newly established topic, [5])

S: Felix jetzt mit der sechsten Kiste. Thomas sitzt auf der zehnten. [...] Noch vierundreißig Sekunden. Also das wär natürlich der Oberknaller, wenn **er** hier zu lange gewartet hätte. **Der Thomas.**

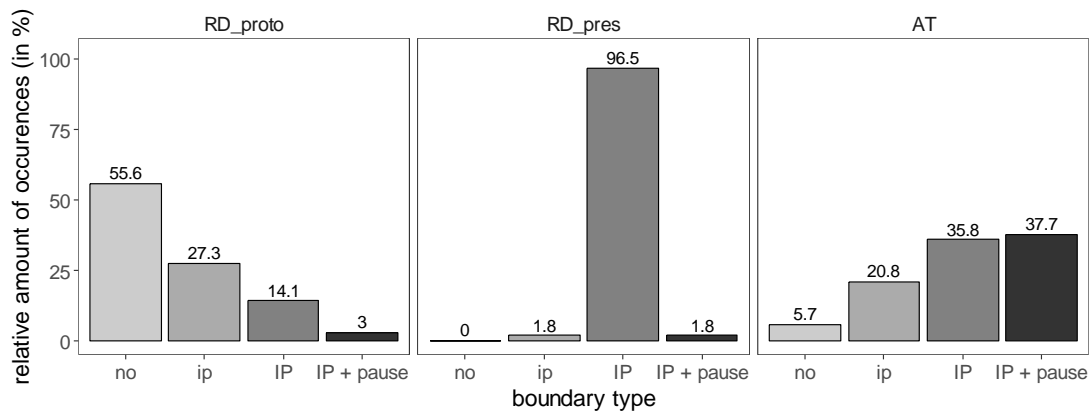


Figure 1: Distribution of boundary types as a function of information structure. Perceptual strength of boundary types increases from left (no) to right (IP + pause).

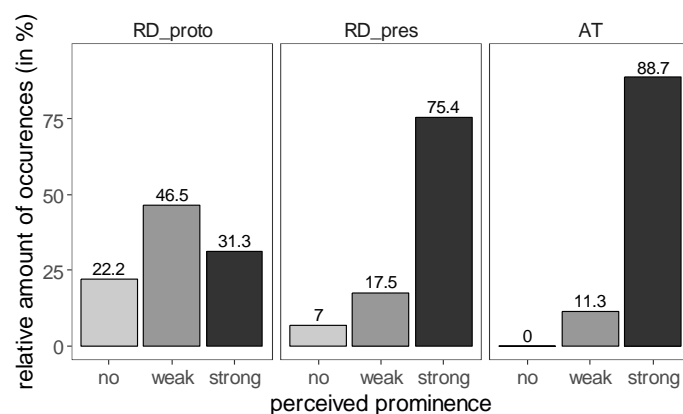


Figure 2: Distribution of prosodic prominence on the dislocated element as a function of information structure.

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