

Variability in (the absence of) post-focal de-accentuation in South Swedish

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Swedish is well known for its binary tonal word-accent distinction (Accent 1, Accent 2) as well as its systematic dialectal variation in the realization of the two accents [1]. Moreover, dialectal variation has been described for the realization of intonational (phrase-level) prominence, primarily in connection with focus marking [1]: For instance, Stockholm Swedish marks focus by means of an additional high tone that is realized in sequence with the word accent tones (H*L or HL*), resulting in a two-peaked HLH-accent on the focused word, but not on post-focal words. In contrast, for the South Swedish dialects of Scania, focus marking has been described as a matter of a rather subtle adjustment of the consecutive accentual peaks, that is by means of a slight pitch range extension of the focused word, and a slight post-focal compression – but no de-accentuation [1]. Thus, for instance, in a phrase like *den röda bilen* ‘the red car’ (our example) both words *red* and *car* are expected to be realized with a pronounced pitch accent both when *röda* or when *bilen* is in focus. Overall, this description makes sense impressionistically, as it can often be heard that Scanian speakers produce rather prominent accents even post-focally. However, it has recently been shown that the rather subtle acoustic distinction described by Bruce and Gårding [1] may cause difficulties in identifying the focus perceptually, as even native dialect speakers make occasional mistakes when asked to mark the focused word in a perception task involving stimuli with pronounced post-focal accents [2]. This indicates that a too subtle acoustic strategy for focus marking can be disadvantageous, suggesting that larger acoustic distinctions, or at least a variety of strategies, could be expected in everyday speech. However, compared to Stockholm Swedish, Scanian dialects have been much less studied with respect to intonational contrasts in general (e.g., [3-5]), and with respect to focus marking in particular. To our knowledge, the original description by Bruce and Gårding [1], which is based on strictly controlled experimental materials from a few speakers, has not been verified with an extended dataset in a systematic manner.

The present study aims to fill this gap using a semi-spontaneous task to elicit contrastive focus in short phrases of the type ‘the ADJECTIVE NOUN’ (e.g. ‘the red car’) from a larger number of speakers. The target phrases contained a color adjective in definite form (always Accent 2) and a noun in definite form singular (Accent 1 or 2), and focus was elicited either on the noun or the adjective as follows: The participant was first confronted with two pictures of objects on a screen – either the same objects in different colors (to elicit focus on the adjective), or two different objects with the same color (focus on the noun), or two different objects with different colors (broad focus, control condition); the participant was asked to tell the experimenter which objects were seen (e.g., ‘a red car and a yellow car’); then, one of the objects was highlighted and the participant was asked to tell the experimenter which one it was (e.g., ‘the yellow car’ with an expected contrastive focus on ‘yellow’). (This task was arranged as a game aiming at instructing the experimenter to put the right objects in a suitcase; the method was developed for a data collection with young children; in the present paper, we only report data collected from adult controls). Twenty-four target phrases were collected from each participant (8 per focus condition, 3 focus conditions). So far, data from eight adult speakers (2 male) have been collected (as the data collection was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic). In our preliminary analysis, we annotated the presence of post-focal accents, which involved an auditory inspection of the recordings and a visual inspection of f_0 contours. The preliminary results provide some support for the original description, as seven of eight speakers have produced post-focal accents in at least half of the data. However, they also suggest a considerable degree of both inter- and intra-speaker variability in contrastive focus marking, with clear examples of the presence of post-focal accents (Fig. 1), but also clear examples of post-focal de-accentuation (Fig. 2). More detailed (and hopefully extended) results will be presented at the conference. One explanation for the occasional lack of post-focal de-accentuation might be the contrastivity involved in our task, possibly eliciting a rather distinct focus marking. On the other hand, it might well be the case that focus marking in South Swedish is generally not as subtle as suggested by the original description.

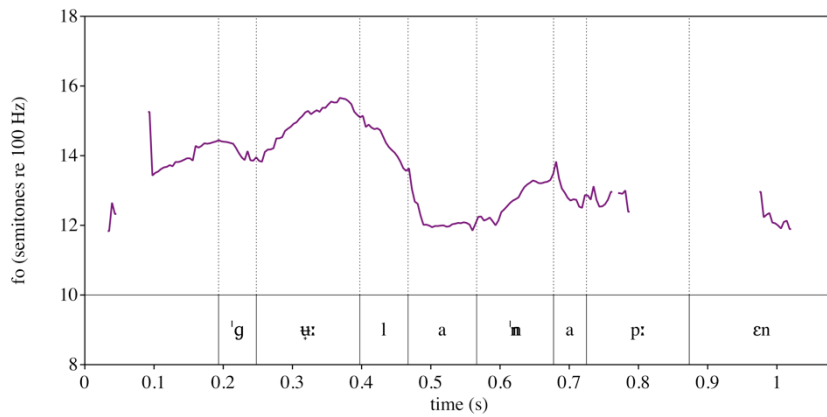


Figure 1. f_0 contour of phrase *den gula nappen* /'gʊ:la'nɐp:ɛn/ 'the yellow pacifier' uttered by female speaker LNV06 with focus on the adjective *gula*; *gula* is strongly accented (late f_0 peak, Accent 2), while *even nappen* is moderately accented (early f_0 peak, Accent 1), i.e. this example displays no post-focal de-accentuation.

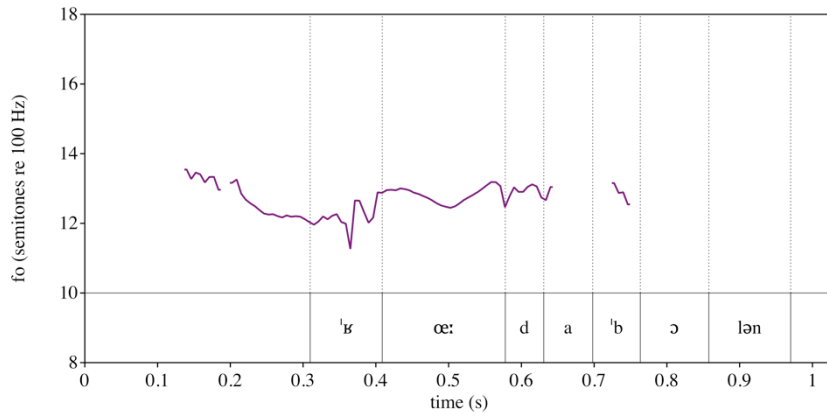


Figure 2. f_0 contour of phrase *den röda bollen* /'rø:da'bøl:ɛn/ 'the red ball' uttered by female speaker LNV06 (same speaker as in Fig. 1) with focus on the adjective *röda*; *röda* is moderately accented (late f_0 peak, Accent 2), while *bollen* (Accent 1) is de-accented, strongly reduced, and uttered with creaky voice (hence no f_0 registration in /ɔl:ɛn/), i.e. this example displays a case of post-focal de-accentuation.

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[2] Grandell, E. 2021. *Vad var det du SA? Vad var det DU sa? En kvantitativ perceptionsstudie om uppfattningen av skånsk satsbetoning hos personer med svenska som andraspråk*. (Independent thesis Basic level (degree of Bachelor) Student thesis), Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-105232>

[3] Ambrazaitis, G., & Frid, J. 2012. The prosody of contrastive topics in Southern Swedish. *Proc. FONETIK (The Swedish Phonetics Conference)*, Gothenburg, Sweden, 1-4.

[4] Ambrazaitis, G., Frid, J., & Bruce, G. 2012. Revisiting South and Central Swedish intonation from a comparative and functional perspective. In Niebuhr, O. (Ed.), *Understanding Prosody – The role of context, function, and communication*. Berlin: DeGruyter, 135-158.

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