

Prosodic compression in a pitch accent language: Post-focal creaky voice in Stockholm Swedish

According to the Lund model of Stockholm Swedish intonation, focus is marked by adding a floating high tone to the lexical accent of a word, and by downstepping post-focal lexical accents^{1,2}. In this way, the Swedish parallel to the post-focal de-accentuation described in languages like English or Dutch^{3,4,5} involves going from the higher (lexical accent + prominence marking H tone) prosodic level to the lower one (lexical accent only), while preserving the prominence provided by the lexical accents. In an on-going study of the acquisition of prosodic focus marking in Dutch and Swedish, we were struck by the extensive use of creaky voice observable in our Swedish data, as compared to the relatively limited use of creaky voice used by our Dutch speakers. Furthermore, the Swedish speakers seemed particularly prone to use creaky voice on post-focal stretches. Against this background we set out to explore the relationship between focus and creaky voice in Stockholm Swedish.

Semi-spontaneous sentence productions were obtained from four groups of Stockholm Swedish speakers: adults, eleven-year-olds, eight-year-olds, and five-year-olds. The sentences were elicited by means of a picture-matching game, where question-answer mini dialogues rendered SVO sentences with focus on the initial, medial or final constituent⁵. Presence versus absence of non-modal voice quality was manually coded for medial and final target words, and compared across broadly focal, narrowly focal and post-focal conditions.

Preliminary results suggest that there is indeed a consistent relationship between post-focalness and creaky voice in adult Swedish, when broad focus is used as a baseline. We are currently looking into the use of creaky voice in the children's productions, to investigate how the use of post-focal creak is developing from younger to older children. Our results will be discussed in more detail, with special attention to how the use of voice quality might be seen as a means to reduce the prosodic salience of a word while still maintaining an audibly distinguishable tonal contrast.

References

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