Focus Driven Prosodic Structure in Colloquial Bengali

Abstract:

The underlying prosodic structures of syntactic elements desist from being mentioned in focus prosody of a given language. It is the ‘focus’ that dominates in formulating the intonational structure or intonational phrase in the language. The focus structure consequently leads syntax to semantic domain. Focus structure and semantic structure are interrelated. It is often a fact of argument as to whether focus structure decides information structure or semantics in particular speech content (focus-to-information), or the information structure ultimately leads in deciding focus in a speech aiming a louder audibility of the information domain (information-to-focus). Both the cases are possibly reasonable and acceptable. The fact is that both focus structure and information structure remain identical especially in terms of acoustics. Such identical acoustic structure dominates the overall default prosodic structure of a syntactic element. This information domain or focus point may in question shift its location within the given syntactic element. The focus location depends upon the intension of speaker or speech context. Intension depended information structures may cause the same syntactic element sound in more than one possible rhythm. Thus, the melody of speech or intonation we receive is focus driven. The focus driven prosodic structure does not completely change the semantics of the speech, rather refines the speech through focalization.

The present paper is aimed to investigate how focus or information structure controls the regular intonational structure in Bengali speeches. In colloquial (spoken) speeches focus remains the leading; in non-colloquial speeches or written speeches focus may be suppressed. If colloquial speech production does not embody focus structure, uncertainty in communication may be expected. In Bengali colloquial speeches, focus dominates the overall prosody of syntactic structures of the speeches. This can be more authentically proved if the concepts of speech-shortening, neutralization, focalization, repetitions, re-questioning and re-answering etc, are taken into consideration. These are the ways through which a long stretch of speech can be focally represented. The most focused constituents survive and others may be neutralized or unreleased at all. The following figure concretizes the focus structure in a Bengali speech.

X x X Focus level (morphological focus structure)
X x X x X Phrase level (syntactic focus structure)
X x X x X x X Foot level (default prosodic structure)

Σα.ρα.διν
Σα.ρα.διν κΗΘ.λε
This is, however, a representative example of focus prosody in Bengali speeches. Focus structure differs in cases preserving honor to information and contexts of speeches. Details of other speeches along with their default prosodic structures and focus prosodic structures are incorporated in the body of proposed paper.