

## Contrast and accent in Dutch and Romanian

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Various studies report that semantic contrast relations can determine whether or not a speaker chooses to accent a word in a given utterance. The details, however, of the impact of such relations on accent distribution are still unclear, partly because there is considerable terminological confusion regarding the definition of contrast, but also because contrast relations can exist at various levels. The literature suggests that there are at least 3 factors that are potentially important for the connection between contrast and accent, namely (1) whether the contrast relation holds within a sentence or across sentence boundaries, (2) whether a certain word is in contrast with a word which follows or rather precedes the current one, and (3) whether that word occupies a prenuclear or nuclear position in a phrase. Additionally, there are major differences between languages, where it has for instance been shown that Romance languages under certain syntactic conditions resist deaccentuation much more in contrastive settings than Germanic languages.

To tackle issues presented above, we recorded semi-spontaneous speech data (monologues) from 10 native speakers of Dutch, and 10 of Romanian, using the same elicitation paradigm. Subjects were shown consecutive scenes on a computer screen with differently coloured geometrical figures (a square, a circle, a triangle and a star). They saw how a particular figure moved to another one, touched that other figure and moved back to its original position. One scene consisted of 3 such actions, after which a scene with 4 new figures was introduced. The subjects' task was to describe these different actions, simply by producing the Dutch or Romanian equivalent of sentences like: "the blue square touches the green triangle." Romanian and Dutch utterances always have an SVO-order, but inside NPs, the adjective precedes the noun in Dutch, and follows it in Romanian. One target NP always occurred in the third sentence of a scene, either in subject or object position. The materials were constructed such that either the adjective or the noun would be in contrast with a preceding or following word, and the contrast could be inside or across a sentence boundary. The following cases are examples where "blue" is in contrast with a preceding word "red" inside a sentence (1) or across sentence boundaries (2).

(1) the red square touches the **blue square**

(2) the yellow circle touches the red square

the yellow circle touches the **blue square**

One particular condition contained a case of a conflict, where the contrast inside the sentence would be on the adjective (e.g. blue), and a contrast across sentence boundaries on the noun (e.g. square), and vice versa.

The Dutch data reveal that contrast relations indeed determine whether or not a speaker chooses to accent a word. The likelihood of deaccentuation as a result of a contrast is higher (1) when the contrasting item is preceding rather than following the current word, (2) when the contrast relation holds within a sentence rather than across sentence boundaries and (3) when the word is in nuclear rather than prenuclear position. The Romanian data did not give much evidence for the effect of contrast relations at any level on accent distribution. Rather, in our Romanian data, accentuation seems to serve a demarcative role, as the word in final position, at the extreme right edge of the speech unit, always receives an accent, irrespective of discourse context.