

Focus at the prosody-syntax interface

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Prosodic and syntactic constraints conflict with each other. This is particularly evident in the expression of focus, where the best position for main stress does not necessarily match the best syntactic position for the focused constituent. But focus and stress must match, therefore either stress or the focused constituent must renounce their best position violating either the syntactic or the prosodic constraints responsible for them.

This study argues that human language addresses this tension in optimality theoretic terms and that different focus paradigms across different languages reflect different rankings of a shared invariant set of syntactic and prosodic constraints. In particular, only an optimality analysis can account for the focus paradigm of Italian while keeping a prosodic analysis of main stress in accord with the last two decades of phonological research.