

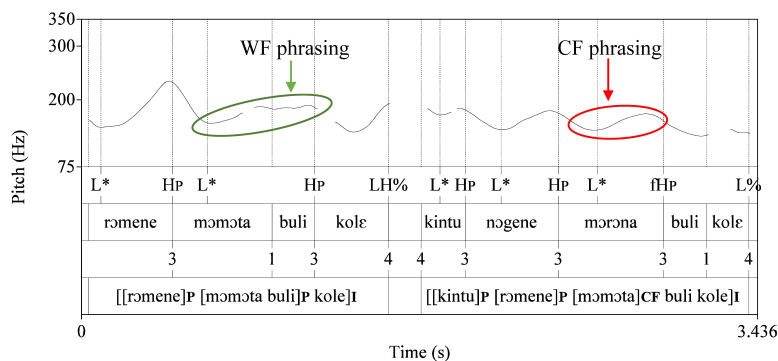
# The Phonology of Contrastive Focus in Standard Colloquial Assamese

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In this paper we discuss how Contrastive Focus (in the sense Zubizarreta (1998), Selkirk (2002) and Kratzer (2004) used the term) is realised prosodically in Standard Colloquial Assamese (SCA henceforth), which is an eastern Indo-Aryan language (Goswami, 1982).

In SCA, Contrastive Focus (CF henceforth) is obligatorily marked by prosodic phrasing and final lengthening. The post-focal constituents behave as a single dephrased prosodic constituent, which lacks a pitch accent; the F<sub>0</sub> curve drops gradually through the dephrased part until the last syllable of the Intonational Phrase (IP henceforth) due to low IP boundary tone (L%). The phrasing of the pre-focus constituents remains phonologically undisturbed. However, if CF splits a two worded P-phrase by highlighting the second word, the first word forms a separate P-phrase. The paper discusses the results of an experiment designed to investigate the phonetic and phonological cues to CF in SCA. Compound sentences containing two declarative (SOV, head final) IPs combined by the conjunction *kintu* (but) are used in the experiment. The first IP is uttered by the speaker with wide focus and the second one with focus on the object. The latter IP is then compared with the former. In our study it is found that contrastively focused constituent constitutes a Phonological phrase (P-phrase henceforth) [‘mɔmɔtə’ (proper noun)] overriding wide focus, syntactically motivated, P-phrasing [‘mɔrɔnə buli’ (that threshing)]. The phrasing is marked prosodically by a pitch accent and a phrase boundary; here L\* and H<sub>P</sub>.



**Figure 1:** In the sentence ‘rɔmene mɔmɔtə buli kole kintu nɔgene mɔrɔnə buli kole’ (Romen said Momota but Nogen said morona), ‘mɔmɔtə buli’ (that Momota) forms a P-phrase in the 1<sup>st</sup> IP (wide focus), and ‘mɔrɔnə’ forms an independent P-phrase (B) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> IP (CF)

The phrasing induced by focus also exhibits phrase internal assimilation processes like /r/ deletion internally within p-phrases. /r/ deletion is compensated with vowel lengthening in SCA. These assimilation processes are blocked by p-phrase boundary. For example:

Acoustically, phrasing is manifested in terms of increased duration  $p < 0.05$  [ $F(1, 178) = 11.70$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ] of the focused constituent. Another phonetic cue to the phrasing of a focused constituent is the significant fall of pitch values of the immediately post focal constituent [‘buli’ (complementizer) in (B)]. The F<sub>0</sub> contour starts at the same level in ‘buli’ (F<sub>0</sub>-onset,  $p > 0.05$  [ $F(1, 237) = 1.67$ ,  $p = 0.19$ ]) in both the focus conditions (wide & contrastive). However, the F<sub>0</sub>-offset of the word in wide focus condition displays a significantly higher pitch value compared to when it is the immediate post-focal constituent (F<sub>0</sub>-offset,  $p < 0.05$  [ $F(1, 237) = 174.06$ ,

p=0.00]) where the pitch drops smoothly. In the paper it is argued that in SCA, CF is phonologically marked in terms of phrasing and phrase internal deletion processes. Further, from an acoustic point of view, more than pitch increase on the focused constituent, it is the pre- and post-focal compression which is suggestive of the prominence of the focused item.

### **References:**

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