

AFFORDANCE AND ABILITY. HOW DO PARTICIPANTS REPLICATE LINGUISTIC CHOICES IN THE LAB? *

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Abstract.

This paper addresses epistemological issues raised by the use of elicited data in linguistic analyses. A common suspicion raised by experimental settings is this: participants in the lab do not replicate their everyday use of language, due to the artificiality of the tasks and of the contexts involved, so that elicited speech should not constitute a reliable source of data. I set out the experimental settings and results of four empirical studies — two studies investigating the pragmatic value of prosodic focalization through the controversial use of elicited data, one study on dative alternations based on a corpus and on a rating task, and one study on the contextual determinants of intonational contours based on a production task — to dispel this methodological suspicion: the artificiality of elicitation protocols does not prevent participants from using language as they do in spontaneous interactions. Careful examination reveals that the biases observed in the first two studies arise because subjects are not provided with sufficient cues concerning the context. I borrow the Gibsonian notion of affordance to characterise the state in which a context provides optimal resources to enable the production of the targeted construction, and argue that elicited data are reliable only when contexts optimise affordances.

Introduction

There are three sources of data that can be tapped for linguistic analysis: Speakers' grammatical intuitions, corpora of texts or recorded speech and data elicited via some experimental protocol. Here, I focus on elicited data and I address the controversial issue of their use in the study of the pragmatic value of prosodic constructions. The use of elicited data commonly raises two suspicions. The first is fairly general: it contrasts the naturalness of the everyday use of language and the artificiality of the tasks used to elicit data. Experimental settings and language games are globally suspected of yielding artificial data that cannot help explain how language is used spontaneously in everyday interactions. The second suspicion is less radical: it stresses the fact that experiments cannot provide a firm basis for explanation because they lack or change the contextual parameters that are crucial to explain the use of targeted constructions. I present several studies involving different types of experimental

tasks in order to adduce arguments dismissing the first suspicion and to gain a deeper understanding of the role of context in elicitation protocols.

In the first part, I present an illustrative case study. It is a heuristic production experiment devoted to the prosodic rendition of the narrow information focus in French (Beyssade, Hemforth, Marandin & Portes 2011). The elicitation protocol and the linguistic assumptions that guide elicitation all belong to current common practice. Its output, though, resists explanation because the whole procedure does not give one a handle on what has been produced by the participants. This particular study is not a stand-alone exception, as the same types of qualms have been reported about data obtained with the same technique by Ito & Speer (2006), who study focus marking in Japanese and Basque. Scholars have trouble reaching an explanation for what they observe because the output is under suspicion of being biased by the elicitation protocol itself.

In the second part, I present the results of two completely different series of studies focusing on the lessons we can draw about the relevance of elicited data. Both series in their own way have to do with the core issue raised by the elicitation process: how do participants in an eliciting experiment make a choice in a context where they can choose among several alternatives? The first is a sentence-rating task, focusing on syntax (Bresnan 2007, Bresnan *et al.* 2007, Bresnan & Ford 2010); the second, which is a production task, is a pilot study focusing on prosody (Laurens, Marandin, Patin & Yoo 2011). Both show that speakers in the lab replicate speakers' choices in natural settings either in a meta-linguistic task or in a production task. They do so provided they have access to contextual resources that make the use of targeted constructions possible. I resort to Gibson's notion of affordance to capture that aspect (Gibson 1979). The elicitation process should provide participants with contexts that guarantee optimal affordance for the targeted constructions. Such affordance is specific to the targeted construction and it should be carefully controlled in the design of elicitation experiments.

Finally, I come back to the case study presented in the first part to analyze what makes the explanation difficult: the questioning-answering game has been ill-analyzed. Answering a question is not just resolving it; answering involves a complex trade-off between the information requested by the questioner and that contributed by the answerer. From that perspective, the design used in the heuristic experiments does not provide enough affordance for the choice of one means of focalization over the others.

1. A case study: information focus in French and cross-linguistically

First, I present the output of a heuristic production experiment designed to study the prosodic rendition of narrow information focus in French. The elicitation

protocol belongs to the script-based family. The participants in the lab read a line while playing a role in a mini scenario presented as the context the participants have to imagine they are in. Then, I show that the problem in accounting for the data has also been encountered by other scholars using the same technique to study the prosodic rendition of focus in other languages. Finally, I present Ito & Speer's (2006) arguments for dismissing the relevance of the data yielded by script-based protocols.

1.1. The elicitation protocol

The targeted construction is the prosodic rendition of information focus.¹ Information focus may be defined as that part of the content contributing the update brought about by an utterance. It is usually equated with *that which resolves a question*. It is common practice to study narrow focus contrastively with broad focus in question-answer pairs. The elicitation protocol is a direct implementation of the criterion used by linguists to identify the information focus in utterances (see for example Kadmon 2001). Thus, the prosodic renditions of the same sentence (e.g. (1)) may be compared when it answers a partial (2a) or a broad question (2b).

- (1) J'ai élargi le gilet avec le velours noir
I let out the vest with the black velvet
- (2) a. Finalement, qu'as-tu repris avec le velours noir ?
In the end, what did you let out with the black velvet?
b. Finalement, comment tu t'y es prise ?
In the end, how did you go about it?

Such a comparison may be directly carried over into an elicitation task where participants are asked to reply to a question such as in (2) with an answer such as (1). This is in essence the design adopted in Beyssade *et al.*'s (2011) production experiment: short texts, involving a description of the context such as (3) below and a question such as in (2) above were presented to the participants visually as well as auditorily. The participants' task was to read aloud answers such as (1) as if they were actually participating in a dialogue.² This procedure closely resembles the prototype of the script-based elicitation technique: "script reading with role-play, where speakers imagine a conversational setting and produce utterances accordingly, is the primary method used to elicit intonational contours that convey pragmatic contrasts" (Ito & Speer 2006: 240).

- (3) Martin ne rentre plus dans son costume préféré : la veste et le gilet ne lui vont plus. Sa grand-mère a pris ses mesures en vue de les rajuster.

Martin no longer fits in his favorite suit: the jacket and the vest are too tight. His grandmother took his measurements in order to adjust them.

Assuming that French has two means of focalization³ — (a) the displacement of the nuclear pitch accent (*NPA*) from the rightmost phrase of the utterance to a phrase to the left; and (b) the realization of an emphatic initial rise (*IR*) on the left edge of a prosodic phrase — the output of the elicitation experiment is amenable to the following generalizations.

- (4) a. Both focalizing markers occur in the answers to a partial question and in those answering a global question;
- b. There is a difference between the two sets of answers: the direct object NP more frequently hosts the NPA – on its right edge – and/or anchors an emphatic IR – on its left edge – in answers to partial questions than in answers to broad questions.

More precisely, direct object NPs are set off by one or both means of focalization in 83,6% of the answers to a partial question and in 50% of the answers to a broad question. If one factors out the two focalizing markers, the difference in frequency is observed with both, as is shown in the two figures below.

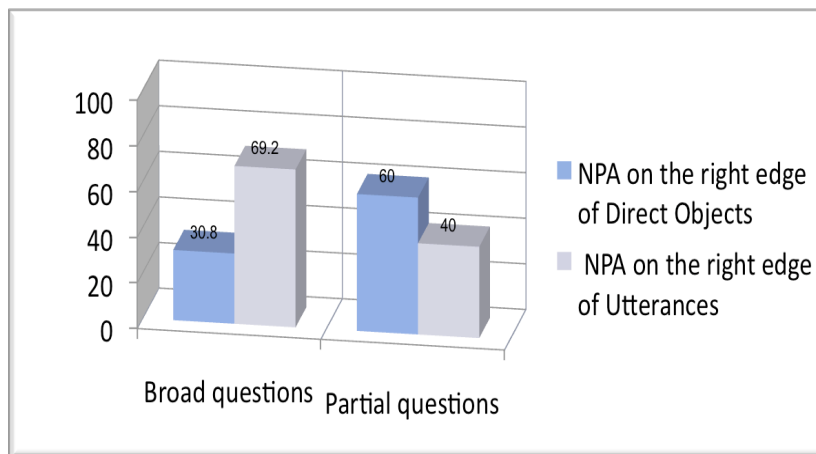


Fig 1. Placement of NPA

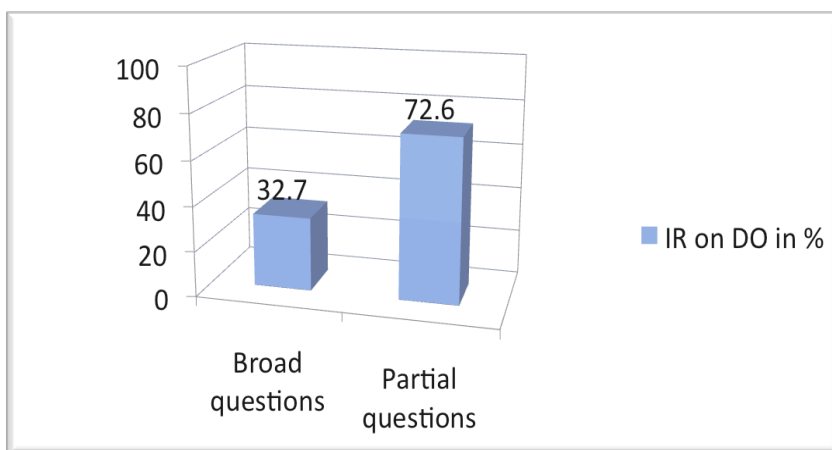


Fig 2: Occurrence of emphatic IRs

Taken at face value, these results do not support the claim – common in the theoretical literature – that focalization marks or reflects the extent of focus when focus is equated with that part of the content that resolves a question. On the other hand, they are not completely unexpected when considered from a more descriptivist point of view: they are in line with the experimental data presented in Féry (2001) and with informal observations made by Di Cristo (1999). From that vantage point, we may be inclined to consider them to be sound data for an analysis of the relationships between focus and focalization.

Now, two facts require explanation. Firstly, in half of the answers to a broad question, the direct object NPs (*DO*) are set off.⁴ Secondly, there are two focalizing markers and three ways of focalizing a phrase: using the placement of NPA, realizing an emphatic IR, or both. Since we cannot assume that focalization is directly linked to the resolution of the question that is carried by the interrogative to which the utterance replies – and thereby to the focus status – two questions arise over the use of focalization in answers.

- (5)
 - a. Why are so many DOs in answers to broad questions associated with the prosody used to set off DOs that resolve a partial question?
 - b. What is the rationale behind the use of the three different ways of setting off a phrase?

Question (5a) is all the more relevant because, in a perception experiment, Beyssade *et al.* (2011: 116ff) show that participants rate utterances with DOs set off by the placement of NPA or the realization of an emphatic initial rise as more appropriate when these answer a partial question rather than a broad one. As for (5b), the question of whether we have different focalizing constructions with different conditions of use or semantic imports can no longer be set aside,

as the claim that they are mere allomorphic realizations of a single status of focus is no longer tenable.

It is here that we face the limitations of the procedure: it does not give us enough of a handle to answer the questions in (5). Yet, the alternative is simple if we cannot answer the questions in (5) and make sense of the distribution shown in Fig 1 and 2: we have to conclude either that focalization in French is quite unconstrained or that the data yielded by the experiment are not relevant for studying it. Ito & Speer (2006), who report analogous results with analogous data, choose the second alternative, which amounts to disputing the relevance of data elicited via a script-based protocol.

1.2. Suspicion

Ito faces analogous difficulties with an experiment devoted to the comparison of information focus in Tokyo Japanese and Bermeo Basque.⁵ She obtains prosodic renditions of information focus that are unexpected and which cannot be explained on the basis the analysis of the data provided by the elicitation task. Consequently, Ito & Speer (2006) question the relevance of the output for studying focus and focalization by evoking the potential biases that the elicitation technique itself may introduce. They put forward three possible sources of bias.

- (6) a. The prosody used in reading is different from that used in talking;
- b. Participants are aware of the task they are performing;
- c. Pretending is not behaving naturally.

Several studies have indeed shown that speakers do not use the same prosody when reading and when talking in everyday interactions (e.g. Howell & Kadi-Hanifi 1991). In experiments, participants are often conscious of the task they are performing, which may induce over-marking or conformity to stereotypes (see e.g. Warren, Grabe & Nolan 1995). Finally, participants are pretending, which brings about a relation to the utterance context different from that which obtains when they behave spontaneously. Based on those arguments – which are undoubtedly to the point – Ito & Speer conclude:

Investigators must keep questioning to what extent findings with scripted laboratory speech account for phonetic phenomena during natural, unmonitored speech acts. We also need to remain cautious upon making claims about observed prosodic patterns and pragmatics, as the script-reading task may induce particular prosodic patterns that may not be observed frequently in natural conversations (*ibid.*: 244).

R D 24/8/11 19:32

Commentaire: & Speer (2006) ??

Jean-Marie Marandin 6/9/11 20:26

Commentaire:

non, c'est l'expé de Ito seule

Hence, the very relevance of the output is called into question as the whole procedure is under suspicion. There is a suspicion that the features of the renditions might just be artifacts of the elicitation design with a more or less loose connection with the grammar of the language as it is reflected in actual language use. Ito & Speer go on to advocate other designs relying on interactive tasks with a confederate: this way, the output would be more spontaneous and the production of the targeted construction would be embedded in an extra-linguistic activity. Although the use of interactive games is certainly on the right track – the Map Task design is the front runner for such designs (Brown, Anderson, Yule, & Shillcock 1983) – the question remains as to what determines or constrains the linguistic choices of participants in an artificial setting: is it the global features of the extra-linguistic situation or more fine-grained features that may be activated across situations and in particular in the experimental setting itself, which is after all a situation among others?

2. Participants' choices in the lab

In this section, I make a detour through experiments that more or less directly address the issue of the relevance of elicited data for the study of linguistic constructions. The first one is a rating task that is devoted to the study of the dative alternation in English (Bresnan 2007, Bresnan *et al.* 2007); the other one is a production task devoted to the study of intonation contours (Laurens, Marandin, Patin & Yoo 2011). I leave aside the details of the targeted constructions – I refer the reader to the papers – and proceed to highlight the arguments we can draw upon to address the issue at hand here: are participants' choices in experimental settings different from speakers' choices in everyday interactions because the settings in which speakers and participants use their language are different? The main result is that participants' choices align with speakers' choices. From that, I draw the conclusion that the problems encountered by Beyssade and colleagues (2011) or by Ito are not fully explained by the general flaws that characterize the script-based designs (see (6)). Script-based designs are not to be dismissed as such; rather, their efficiency and their relevance depend on a very precise understanding of the context of use of the targeted constructions.

2.1. Lexico-syntactic choices in a metalinguistic task

Bresnan and colleagues (2007) study the so-called dative alternation: the recipient role may be realized as a PP (7a) or a direct NP (7b) in English.

- (7) a. He gave the pony [to my children]_{Recipient}
b. He gave [my children]_{Recipient} the pony

The question is what are the factors that affect preference for one alternative over the other.

2.1.1. A probabilistic model of choice. Several factors have been identified in the literature that may affect the preference for an alternative: the semantics of the verb, the relative length of the phrases, pronominality, animacy, activation status of the referents. “The probability of a construction [viz. 7b], all else being equal, is increased when the first phrase following the verb is a pronoun, is definite, refers to a highly accessible referent, refers to a human, or is short” (Bresnan & Ford, 2010: 170). Also important are the priming effect of a previous occurrence in a parallel structure (e.g. Bock 1986; Szmrecsányi 2005) and the lexical bias of the verb toward one of the constructions (e.g. Lapata 1999; Hemforth *et al.*, *in prep.*). Based on a large corpus of spontaneous conversations and texts, Bresnan and colleagues (2007) arrived at a probabilistic model of choice. The question, then, is: what is the status of such a model? Does it model an invisible hand phenomenon or does it reflect the individual knowledge and behavior of each and every speaker?⁶ Indeed, such a model may very well capture the behavior of a population of subjects, and say nothing about individual speakers’ uses in everyday interactions.

2.1.2. Choices in context. In order to establish the nature of the probabilistic model, Bresnan and colleagues (2007) designed meta-linguistic experiments to tap the individual knowledge of participants. In particular, they proposed a rating experiment designed to capture speakers’ knowledge about their choice of one of the two ways of mentioning the beneficiary. Participants had to choose between the two types of constructions illustrated in (7) given a context (an excerpt of the corpus used for modeling the overall distribution of the choices). In the reported experiment, they had to choose which one of the two continuations (such as in (8)) was the “most natural” in the context of (9).

- (8) a. because he brought the pony to my children
b. because he brought my children the pony
- (9) About twenty-five, twenty-six years ago, my brother-in-law showed up in my front yard pulling a trailer. And in this trailer he had a pony, which I didn’t know he was bringing. And so over the weekend, I had to go and find some wood and put up some kind of a structure to house that pony,

The plain result is that the participants give ratings that are in line with the corpus model probabilities. They tend to pick out the same choices made by the original speakers.

2.1.3. Generalizing. This particular experiment shows that participants' choices in a meta-linguistic rating task agree with the model of the distribution of the constructions in the corpus. In other words, participants agree with speakers' choices in actual world situations. In particular, participants are uncertain in the same cases that the model is uncertain. This result is further supported by data from Bresnan & Ford (2010) showing that American and Australian participants differ in their respective preferences and anticipations regarding the prepositional dative in comprehension and production and this corresponds to different patterns of usage of the prepositional dative in the two varieties of English.

The interest of such a line of inquiry is to show that lexico-syntactic choices of rating participants correspond to those predicted from the probabilistic model for speakers in natural settings. In other words, the differences between natural settings and artificial settings do not alter the factors that constrain the choice of lexico-syntactic constructions, even though the choice is sensitive to parameters of the ongoing interaction (for example, the activation state of the discourse referents). This brings considerable support to the idea that participants do not use different linguistic knowledge when they speak in everyday interactions and when they perform a task in the lab.

It is clear, however, that the experimental setting should provide adequate contextual resources to ensure that participants have access to the relevant features that govern the choice of one alternative over the other. In the case of the sentence rating experiment reported by Bresnan, the results crucially depend on the extension of the context available to the participants (such as that in (9)) when they rate the naturalness of the continuations. The observation seems to go without saying, but it turns out to be crucial. Moreover, there is still a gap to bridge between a rating task and a production task. To this, I now turn.

2.2. Choice of intonation contour

Bresnan's results pertain to metalinguistic knowledge and to syntax. I now present a result that pertains to performance and prosody, which takes us closer to the illustrative case presented in section 1. Marandin and colleagues (2011) studied the choice of a particular contour labeled "rising of list" (RL) by Portes, Bertrand & Espesser (2007). RLs occur on the right edge of Intermediate or Intonation Phrases, and on the right edge of phrases of any syntactic category or level (clausal and below the clause). They frequently occur in coordinated structures (both syndetic and asyndetic), but they are not at all restricted to them.⁷ They can be described by the cluster of features in (10); an illustrative F0 profile is given in figure 3.

- (10) a. The syllable anchoring the F0 maximum shows significant lengthening;
 b. Pitch tends to remain constant during the realization of the lengthened syllable, resulting in plateau patterns most of the time;
 c. The pitch is situated in the mid or upper range of the speaker's register;
 d. It is produced with modal voice.

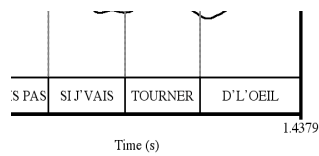


Figure 3. Prototypical rising of list

2.2.1. The elicitation protocol. RLs are studied using a design – Rep Task – precisely designed to study the distance between spontaneous speech and speech in the lab. The task of the participants is to reenact a previously recorded dialogue. They are given a script and they are asked to behave as if they were the actual participants in the dialogue.⁸ Thus, Rep Task resorts to the same sort of design as that used to study narrow focus; it is script-based and involves role-play. In the case at hand, RLs have been studied via the reenacting of a casual chat between two young men making small talk, continually changing topics: from fathers attending child delivery to the preparation of the room for the newborn, the choice of first and last names, anecdotes about the length of names, etc.⁹ Three renditions of the dialogue were recorded: the first one without prior reading, the second and third ones after the participants read and discussed the dialogue freely (the experimenters were not in the room). The three renditions were then compared with the original one.

2.2.2. Replication. The original 12-minute dialogue features 13 occurrences of RL. Participants tended to use RL in the same contexts as in the original. In particular, they used it in 10 contexts at least in one reenactment. There are three contexts where they used it across the three reenactments (see (11) below). Moreover, participants used RL in 4 contexts where the original speakers did not. Such a distribution by itself is a cue to determine the contextual factors that prompt the use of the targeted contour.¹⁰

A generalization holds across the contexts where the participants replicated RL 3 times and where they added it. They are contexts where a relation of exemplification holds between the utterance hosting the RL and the preceding one. In (11a), the nurse washing the nose of the newborn exemplifies how jolly good the situation is. In (11b), the reported question “why he did not choose my [last name]” exemplifies the type of trouble caused by the discovery that a child has not chosen one of his or her parents’ name, while in (11c) the reported comment “you’ll see when you have to fill in the papers” exemplifies the trouble caused by the choice of the last name of both parents. In (11) below, the phrases hosting RLs are between brackets; the words anchoring them are underlined.

- (11) a. <G> Ah ouais *Ah yeah*
 <M> Et là, c’est bonnard quoi quand tu l’as. T’as une meuf qui le prend, qui lui lave le nez
Then it’s cool when you get him [the newborn]. There is a gal who takes him, who washes his nose
- b. <G> et puis tu vois pour les parents ça peut être un choc si tu veux.
And then you see for the parents that [the choice of the last name of one of the two parents] may cause a shock you know
 <M> Ouais ouais c’est ça. (Pourquoi il a pas pris le mien).
Yeah, yeah, that’s it. Why didn’t he take mine [my name]
- c. <M> Ouais ouais c’est ça. Pourquoi il a pas pris le mien.
 <G> Ben ouais alors ça crée peut-être des merdes. Bon enfin, j’en sais rien. Je sais pas encore. Et puis non par contre c’est vrai Isabelle me disait par exemple « Tain t’emmerde pas avec deux noms ça va être. Tu vas voir après quand tu vas avoir les papiers.
Yeah it can cause all sorts of shit. Well, I don’t know. I don’t know yet. But no that’s true, Isabelle told me for example “shit don’t bother with two names, it’s gonna be. You’ll see when you have to [fill in] the papers

The contexts in which RL was added by the participants and replicated 3 times are also significant. Here, I take only one example: in context (11a), participants added RL on the first relative clause (RC) *qui le prend* (12). The utterance features an *avoir*-presentative construction roughly paraphrasable as ‘there is an NP that Vs’. In the original, the RC *qui le prend* modifies *meuf*; in the reenactments, participants treated it as the first member of an asyndetic

coordination of predicative RCs making the phrasal construction: *qui le prend, qui lui lave le nez*.

- (12) Et là, c'est bonnard quoi quand tu l'as. T'as une meuf <qui le prend>, <qui lui lave le nez>

The other contexts where participants added a RL contour resemble (12): they are asyndetic coordinations. Hence, one observes that exemplification and asyndetic coordinations are the contexts favoring the use of RL.¹¹

2.2.3. Replicability. The first conclusion we draw from this pilot experiment is that the Rep Task protocol – although it involves script reading and role-play – did not prevent the participants from behaving as speakers do in ordinary conversations. Such an observation is all the more important as it pertains to intonation contour use: participants are able to replicate a contour in contexts where other speakers have used it – or could have used it – felicitously. Now, we have to analyze the relation between the contexts where participants felt driven to use RL and the semantics/pragmatics of the contour itself.

Exemplification and asyndetic coordination appear to be the contexts that most favor the replication of RL. Yet, RL cannot be analyzed as a marker of the discourse relation Exemplification or a marker of (non exhaustive) coordination. From this, I conclude that exemplification and coordination make up a favorable niche for the use of RL and I conjecture that it is because they are compatible with the semantic import of RL, assuming an analysis in line with that proposed in Laurens *et al.* (2011).

- (13) a. RL triggers the presupposition that there are other alternatives than that denoted by the phrase hosting it;
b. The alternatives are tokens of a type that may be an individual, a property or a situation.

Claim (13) predicts that RL should be infelicitous in contexts which block the accommodation of the presupposition and those that block the type/token interpretation. This is borne out by (14). In (14a), the context explicitly states that there is only one question under debate; in (14b), the context states that the questions are to be taken at face value, not as tokens of a type. In both contexts, RL is not felicitous despite the coordinate structure. The symbol # in (14) indicates that RL is inappropriate.

- (14) a. # Il lui pose toujours la même question: pourquoi t'as pas pris mon nom?

Jean-Marie Marandin 6/9/11 20:29
Commentaire: ok pour la suppression

Philippe De Brabanter 22/8/11 12:18
Supprimé: which leaves no room for a relation of exemplification

He keeps asking the same question: why haven't you chosen my name?

b. # Il lui a posé des questions très précises: pourquoi t'as pas pris mon nom? pourquoi t'as changé ton prénom ?

He asked very precise questions: why haven't you chosen my name? why have you changed your first name?

Conversely, contexts allowing the accommodation that there may be other ways of describing an individual, a property or a situation are contexts in which the use of RL is appropriate. Contexts that explicitly introduce – or more or less strongly implicate – alternatives and that present them as other tokens of an individual, property or situation are contexts in which RL is even more appropriate. This is the basis for the second conclusion we draw: contexts are more or less good at inducing the use of a targeted construction. Furthermore, when the conditions of use of the targeted construction are primarily semantic – as in the case of RL – the choice of contexts does not crucially depend on considerations of dialogue genre or activity type. This last observation is important when designing protocols as it indicates that it is not enough to merely design settings that induce more spontaneous speech.

3. Affordance of context and abilities of participants

The artificiality of the task does not prevent participants from using their language as they do in everyday interactions, even as regards the details of their utterances. This is the case for syntax, as shown in Bresnan's (2007) study of the dative alternation; this is most probably the case for prosody, as we have just seen. From this, we conclude that script-based production experiments should not be dismissed on the basis of general arguments such as those in (6) above. By the same token, we have to take another tack to analyze why the experiments reported in section 1 are inconclusive. We now turn to the task itself – answering a question – in the light of the study of the RL contour. For a given construction, say an intonation contour, there are features of the shared background – the representation of the ongoing dialogue shared by the dialogue participants – that make its use possible and appropriate. In fact, this aspect of construction usage has not been much discussed to date in pragmatics. Roughly speaking, there are felicity conditions at the level of constructions. I find it useful to resort to the interactionist notions of *affordance* and *ability* to capture that aspect of the elicitation process as these do not prejudge the semantic analysis to be given of the constructions themselves.

| **3.1. Affordance and abilities.** Gibson (1979) proposes the notions of affordance and ability to characterize the interactions between situations and active or cognitive agents in those situations.

In any interaction involving an agent with some other system, conditions that enable that interaction include some properties of the agent along with some properties of the system. [...] The term *affordance* refers to whatever it is about the environment that contributes to the kind of interaction that occurs. One also needs a term that refers to whatever it is about the agent that contributes to the kind of interaction that occurs. I prefer the term *ability* [...]. (Greeno 1994: 338)

For example, “when the objects we want to refer to are in the situation, their presence is an affordance for ostensive reference, for example, by pointing and saying, “That one”” (*ibid.*: 339). Though the presence of an object affords speakers the opportunity to point to it, it does not compel them to do so unless they have a reason to do so. In the case of RL, the discourse relation of exemplification or the asyndetic coordinated structure allow for the use of RL especially when there are cues that the explicit content is not exhaustive. It does not compel speakers to use it. “The presence in a situation of a system that provides an affordance for some activity does not imply that the activity will occur, although *it contributes to the possibility of that activity* [emphasis added]. Additional conditions include aspects of the activity of the agent in the situation, having to do with motivation and perception” (*ibid.*: 340). This gives in a nutshell the constraints on the designing of elicitation procedures: they must make possible the production of what is under study and the participants should be attuned to those affordances (arguably a part of their competence as speakers) and ready to engage in that production.

3.2. Back to the information focus experiments

A first remark is in order concerning the linguistic design of those experiments. It should be stressed that information focus is identified as the part of the utterance resolving the question only in answers that are congruent, i.e. answers whose content strictly contributes the information required by the question. For example, (15Bi), (15Bii) are the congruent answers to (15A).¹²

- (15) A.: Did someone call?
B.: i. Yes.
ii. Someone called.

As is obvious from (15), congruent answers are more often than not the kind of answers that are not offered in real world interactions by conversationalists.

Conversationalists are more inclined to contribute non-congruent answers as they reply according to the demands of the ongoing dialogue. Now, in the reported experiments, the participants were not asked to offer congruent answers, but rather to answer as if they were actually participating in the dialogue. Thus, they were allowed – actually even *expected* – to produce non-congruent answers. If one grants that participants played the game – in other words, that they behaved as speakers do when they answer questions in everyday interactions – the elicitation process yielded its share of non-congruent answers. In those answers, indeed, we have no idea of the relation between the informational status of parts of the answers and focalization.

Speakers offer congruent as well as non-congruent answers in the same way: choice crucially depends on their appreciation of the reasons they attribute to the questioner and the contribution they are willing to make to the ongoing conversation.¹³ Let us consider some examples of non-congruent answers. In (16), the French equivalent of (15), B answers as she would do to the partial question ‘who called you?’ which is implicated by the implicit affirmative congruent answer ‘yes, someone called you’. In (17), A’s wh-question remains unresolved; nevertheless B contributes relevant information since her negative answer restricts the possible answers to the explicit question.

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| (16) | A.: Est-ce que quelqu’un a appelé?
B.: Bernadette m’a appelé | <i>Did someone call you?</i>
<i>Bernadette called me</i> |
| (17) | A.: Qui t’a appelé?
B.: Bernadette ne m’a pas appelé | <i>Who called you?</i>
<i>Bernadette didn’t call me</i> |

Typically, *Bernadette* in (16B) would be focalized and any of the three focalizing means observed in the production experiment reported in the first section would be appropriate. This is not the case for *Bernadette* in (17B): it may not anchor the nuclear pitch accent (especially if B attributes to A the belief that Bernadette called) and it is not necessarily set off. The realization of an emphatic initial rise is expected somewhere in the answer: either with *Bernadette* or the negation *pas* or the past participle *appelé* (Marandin *et al.* 20021). This is crucial: the choice of what is focalized and how it is focalized is not determined by the question, but rather by how the speaker goes about answering. Answering questions does not merely amount to resolving questions and this holds when speakers give answers in everyday conversations as well as in experimental settings.

3.3. Eliciting focalization. Questions allow parts of answers to be focalized, but do not determine what is focalized and how. What is focalized and how depends on the speaker’s choice.¹⁴ This aspect of answering was not taken into account

Philippe De Brabanter 27/8/11 14:53
Commentaire: Je continue à m’y perdre... Ne pourrait-on pas, sans perte de clarté, supprimer toute la proposition relative ?

Jean-Marie Marandin 6/9/11 20:33
Commentaire: Si j’explicite la réponse, n’est-ce pas plus clair ?

Jean-Marie Marandin 6/9/11 20:34
Commentaire: C’est l’emploi de partial qui « messes up » .. je corrige avec une autre étiquette .. ; Il s’agit bien de la question et pas de la réponse !!

Philippe De Brabanter 22/8/11 12:21
Supprimé: answer

in the design of the experiment reported in section 1. That is why the experiment did not help to answer the questions in (5) repeated in (18) below:

- (18) a. Why are so many DOs in answers to broad questions associated with the prosody used to set off DOs that resolve a partial question?
b. What is the rationale behind the use of the three different ways of setting off a phrase?

3.3.1. Beyond the question-answer pair. The contexts provided to the participants (e.g. (3) above) contained just enough information for the participants to imagine the role they were asked to play according to the elicitation protocol. In a design based on the more realistic conception of answering we have just presented, the answer to be produced should be inserted in a sequence of dialogical moves in such a way that participants may get an idea of why the questioner asks the question and what kind or amount of information is called for in the ongoing dialogue. Now, we can turn to the questions in (18). As the discussion of the possible intonation for (16B) or (17B) above suggests, it is not true that anything goes in the use of the focalizing constructions. Hence, the practical issue we face when studying focalization in French is how to set up distinct dialogical contexts that afford each way of focalizing parts of the answer. I give a brief outline below.

3.3.2. Setting up different dialogue courses. Let us assume Beyssade *et al.*'s (2011) claim (19) about the pragmatics of focalizing constructions.

- (19) a. Emphatic initial rises are polyvalent markers of highlighting. They are used in answers to center the current or projected dialogue onto subparts or aspects of the issue under discussion.
b. NPA placement is manipulated to bring some part of the content of the answer under the scope of the illocutionary operator.¹⁵ It is used in answers to delimit the part of content that is specifically asserted in the move.

The endeavor then is to set up different dialogue courses. In order to manipulate – and control – the use of emphatic IRs, the dialogue should afford the centering of parts of the answer. Dialogues that tackle an issue or topic by distinguishing its different aspects or subparts provide a promising context to explore.¹⁶ On the other hand, in order to manipulate and control the placement of NPA, the dialogue should afford giving differential statuses to part of the answers with regard to the assertion. Dialogues that induce participants to take a stand on the content of their moves should provide one with the right type of context.

3.4. More interactive tasks with a confederate. The linguistic make-up of the settings used for the elicitation we arrive at is close to that advocated by Ito & Speer 2006: interactive dialogues supporting a concrete activity (e.g. decorating a Christmas tree) and involving a confederate that channels the course of the dialogue. Ito & Speer advocate such designs to guarantee the elicitation of spontaneous forms of speech. I have argued in favor of such designs because they provide one with the opportunity to maximize the affordance of contexts for targeted constructions. Moreover, they may be more engaging for participants to perform the task.

4. Conclusion

We have presented arguments to dispel the suspicions raised by the use of script-based elicitation protocols for the study of the pragmatics of prosodic constructions. Obviously, one should not play down the sources of bias summarized in (5) above. Equally, one should not underestimate the fact that participants bring to the lab and to the experiments their skills as speakers and conversationalists. Participants in the lab are bona fide speakers. They can be good replicants, talking “in a way in which [they] believe the other would talk if he or she were in [their] place.” (Keller, 1994: 99)

Elicitation protocols should be carefully tailored so that they set up contexts that provide affordances for the targeted constructions. As for focalizing constructions, participants should be provided with information on which they can base their strategy for answering. This requires that the simple question-answer adjacency-pair should be abandoned in favor of more naturalistic dialogical contexts. Indeed, these provide the frame that can be manipulated to optimize affordances for the distinct focalizing constructions.

The analysis of the semantics/pragmatics of prosodic constructions is still lingering behind that of syntactic or lexical constructions. Resorting to the speakers’ intuitions via the type of informal experiments currently used in syntax or semantics (Sprouse & Almeida 2010) is notoriously difficult. Hence, the necessity to tap experimentally into linguistic knowledge and performance: heuristic experiments may help us “to learn the lay of the land” and to secure more stable data. The good news is that the suspicions against such experiments may be dispelled: those experiments may provide us with the right sort of access to relevant data.

Notes

* I have greatly benefited from numerous discussions with my co-workers, colleagues and students, in the designing, running and exploiting of the two series of experiments

that constitute the empirical substance of this paper: C. Beyssade, B. Hemforth, C. Portes (information focus); F. Laurens, C. Patin, H. Yoo (Rep Task). I am grateful to F. Mouret & B. Hemforth who discussed a first version of this paper in great detail and helped me a lot to reach this version. I also thank C. Plancq for assistance with experiment implementation. All errors or misconceptions in this paper are mine.

¹ In order to resist metonymic ambiguity plaguing the literature on Information Structure, I use *focalization* to refer to constructions distinguishing phrases prosodically and *focus* to refer to parts of the content of utterances that are so set off.

² All partial questions are questions about the direct object.

³ Such an assumption is mainly based on – and argued for – in Astesano (2001) and Di Cristo (1999); it is also in line with Rossi (1999).

⁴ Other constituents are set off as well (VPs, PPs), but much less frequently.

⁵ Reported in Ito & Speer (2006).

⁶ An “invisible hand” phenomenon results from the accumulation of individual choices: the global and the individual belong to different scales and have different rationales. As an illustration, Keller (1994: 63) uses “the traffic jam out of nowhere”: “the traffic jam from vehicle *s* onwards has in some way been ‘made’ by the drivers of the vehicles *a* [the one who braked in the first place for some reason] to *s*. They have produced it through their actions, without each individual having the intention of doing so. Each one of them has only reacted appropriately to the actions of the one in front [...] and so, without intending it or even knowing it, created a highly dangerous situation.”

⁷ Contrary to what might be implied by the original label *rising of list*.

⁸ The script is an edited transcript of the original recorded conversation where disfluencies are removed and punctuation marks are added whenever their absence would impede readability. Participants were instructed not to bother with their own disfluencies and allowed to bring minor changes to the text whenever they felt more comfortable to do so.

⁹ The original dialogue was extracted from a longer conversation in the CID corpus (Bertrand *et al.* 2008). This dialogue is part of the corpus used by Portes *et al.* to give a formal definition of RL. An informal survey shows that the RLs produced by the participants have the same formal features as those that are observed in the larger corpus.

¹⁰ The interested reader will find the complete distribution in Laurens *et al.* (2011: 243).

¹¹ That exemplification and juxtaposition are the two contextual features that are linked to the replication of RL should be made more objective by replicating the experiment with other participants and measuring the rate of replication per context. Here, I infer the role of exemplification and juxtaposition on the basis of an informal rating performed by the authors of Laurens *et al.* (2011) and one author of Portes *et al.* (2007).

¹² Kadmon (2001: 262) speaks of a “truly direct answer”.

¹³ Ginzburg (1997) proposes to model answering with two questions: “the (conventional) content question *u* [...] and the goals question [...] ‘what goals did [Speaker] A have in making *u*?’”. It is only if [Speaker] B believes that she knows the answers to both content and goals questions that she can proceed to [answer]” (1997:

148). Focalization – what is focalized and how – depends on the answers to both questions.

¹⁴ In Büring's (2003) parlance, it depends on the speaker's strategy.

¹⁵ This analysis is based on a reinterpretation of the notion of focus given by Jacobs (1984) and Beyssade *et al.* (2004).

¹⁶ Note that the descriptions of context in the Beyssade *et al.* (2011) experiment included alternatives (e. g. “the jacket and the cardigan” in (3) above) – which is due to the external fact that the experimenters used the same set of context-answers to study the prosody of the constituent modified by French restrictive adverb *seulement* (Beyssade *et al.* 2008). This may be the answer to question (18a) assuming (19a). Typically, answers – be they answers to a partial or a broad question – centered the dialogue on one alternative, hence the high frequency of initial emphatic rises across answers.

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