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Semantic Abnormality and Prosodic Prominence in Bulgarian and Dutch

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Abstract: Prosody has the universal function of signaling extra-linguistic information (e.g., speaker attitudes, Gussenhoven, 2004). Linguistic functions of prosody (e.g., focus marking), however, are regarded characteristic for Germanic languages (Vallduvi, 1991). The accentual marking of abnormality (Pan et al., 2001) and contrast (Swerts, 2007) is attested for English and Dutch but these two factors have never been studied in interaction. In addition, little is known about accentuation in Slavic languages (Andreeva et al., 2001). In two production experiments on Dutch and Bulgarian we investigated the role of prosody when linguistic and extra-linguistic information coincide or contradict. Speakers described abnormally colored fruits that were contrastively focused in various discourse relations. We found that the coincidence of contrast and abnormality enhances accentuation in both languages. Surprisingly, if both factors are in conflict, the prosodic prominence of abnormality often overruled focus accentuation in both Bulgarian and Dutch, though the languages also show marked differences.