Language-specific and universal patterns in narrow focus marking in Romani

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Abstract

This paper presents a first sketch of the intonation and rich focus marking devices of Komotini Romani on the basis of an autosegmental-metrical analysis of spontaneous data prosody. Contrary to the "minimality condition" that has been argued to prevail in the choice of focus strategies, Komotini Romani often uses several focus marking devices concurrently. Moreover, Komotini Romani adds stress-shift to the list of focus marking strategies available cross-linguistically.

Index Terms: focus, accentuation, prosody, Romani

1. Introduction

Cross-linguistically, focus is marked by syntactic, morphological and prosodic means: languages like Italian or Catalan utilize syntactic changes to mark narrow focus (Ladd 2008 and references therein), while Wolof (Rialland & Robert 2001), Chickasaw (Gordon 2007) and Turkish (Göksel & Özsoy 2003) rely exclusively or in part on focus particles. Perhaps the most common strategy is prosodic focus marking, which can take many forms, including changes in prosodic phrasing as in Japanese (Venditti, Maekawa & Beckman 2008) and Korean (Jun 2005), the use of accentuation as in English (see Ladd 2008 for a review), and the selection of a particular accent to indicate broad focus as in Greek (e.g. Arvaniti, Ladd & Mennen 2006).

Despite the large number of strategies available cross-linguistically, it is widely held that most languages make use of a small number of strategies and typically do not use them concurrently. Thus, languages that rely on focus particles do not appear to use accentuation to mark focus as well (e.g. Gordon 2007, Rialland & Robert 2001). On the other hand, however, languages like Italian or Catalan appear to use word order changes so that particular items that must be in focus can phonologically receive accent; in such languages, word order changes must accompany accentuation (Ladd 2008).

Here, we discuss two features used for focus expression in Romani that are particularly striking crosslinguistically, (a) the use of stress-shift under focus and (b) the combination of several focus strategies in the same utterance. These findings challenge the "minimality condition" that has recently been put forward by Skopeteas & Fanselow (in press) according to which less complex strategies are preferred to more complex ones (if both available in a given language) following a markedness scale from lightest to most structurally complex: *in situ* (prosody) < reordering < cleft.

2. Background on Romani

Romani is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Europe, Australia, and the Americas. The variety of Romani on which we report is spoken by a small Muslim community in Greece, settled in the suburbs of the city of Komotini, in the area of Thrace (see Map). Komotini Romani belongs to the Vlach Romani branch and is heavily influenced by contact with Turkish since the Ottoman times (Adamou 2010). The speakers of this variety are typically trilingual in Romani, Turkish and Greek with different degrees of competence in the three languages. They use Turkish and Greek for trade and other professional activities, and Romani mainly at home and as a community language. The majority of the Komotini Roma have received practically no formal education in any of their languages and are not literate in Romani.

Map: Thrace, Greece. The recordings took place in the city of Komotini (circled).

2.1. Prosodic and focus-related features of Romani

As mentioned, Komotini Romani is influenced by Turkish. Among other features, it has borrowed the particle *da*, which is used for both focus and topicalization, as in Turkish (Göksel & Özsoy 2003), but also as a coordinator (e.g. *te na gaˈrados da atʃiˈlas ˈmansa*, to NEG hide.3SG and stay.2SG me.INSTR "so you won't hide and stay with me"; all examples are given in broad phonological transcription).

In verb phrases, the canonical word order in this variety is VO, while OV appears to be reserved for topicalization and narrow focus marking as in other Romani dialects (Matras 2002, 2006; cf. *lel kaˈja dʒuv,* take.3SG this louse, "he takes this louse" vs. *akaˈha mi tafˈtota manˈgen*, now my identity card ask.3PL "now they ask for my IDENTITY CARD"). SV and VS are both possible in Komotini Romani, though their function is not fully understood. It appears that VS is the canonical order (e.g. *ˈdʒalas mo ˈpapo mi maˈmi an gaˈva*, "went my grandpa my grandma in villages, "my grandpa and my grandma went to the villages [to work]"), while SV indicates narrow focus (Fig. 12) or topicalization (Fig. 11). This largely agrees with observations from other Romani dialects (see e.g. Matras 1995, 2002, who argues that SV is reserved for contrastive thematic roles).

Similarly to other conservative Romani dialects (Matras 2002), Komotini Romani has final stress in the native parts of its vocabulary. Stress can also fall on the penult or antepenult in the numerous borrowings and when certain suffixes and

enclitics (such as case and TMA markers) are involved; e.g. *aste'hava* "hospital", *'apo* "pill," *'apora* "pills". Minimal pairs, however, are rare (e.g. *ƙana* "when" ~ *ka'na* "ears").

3. The study

Our data come mainly (though not exclusively) from natural dialogs between one female and one male speaker and from story telling by these speakers and an additional male speaker, all in their thirties (20 minutes of story telling with synchronized sound and annotation are available at http://lacito.vjf.cnrs.fr/archivage/languages/Romani_fr.htm via Lacito's Oral Tradition Language Documentation Program; http://idiom.ucsd.edu/~arvaniti/SP2010 lists the examples in this paper). Some additional data from female speakers from Xanthi (see Map), whose variety is very similar to Komotini Romani, are also included in our corpus.

The data were prosodically analyzed following the principles of the autosegmental-metrical framework of intonational phonology. The analysis was based on the simultaneous inspection of waveforms, spectrograms and pitch contours using PRAAT. Given that virtually nothing is known about the intonational system of Komotini Romani, we stress that our analysis is tentative at this point and requires further (and controlled) verification. For this reason, we do not provide autosegmental representations of the F0 contours in the figures, though we do briefly discuss our current analysis.

3.1. Intonation and the marking of broad focus

Our data show that in Komotini Romani pitch modulation is a phrasal property that is, intonation. Pitch is used to mark prosodic boundaries, indicate the pragmatic function of an utterance and highlight particular words in discourse. This is illustrated in Figs. 1, 2 and 3 which show the melodies of a declarative, a negative declarative and a wh-question respectively. As can be seen, the overall melodies differ, but in each one some pitch movements co-occur with stressed syllables and others with phrasal boundaries. We analyze the former as *pitch accents* and the latter as *boundary tones,* and we recognize at least one level of phrasing that is delimited by the presence of a H% or L% boundary tone (as on *'gomeno* "boyfriend" and *kar'velas* (name) in Fig. 1 respectively).

As can be seen in Fig. 1, all content words are accented; typically, in prenuclear accents F0 rises from a low point to a peak reached during the accented vowel suggesting a L+H* pitch accent. Such accents can be seen in prenuclear position on *ani'tako* "Anita's" and *'gomeno* "boyfriend" in Fig. 1, but they are also used for narrow focus marking, as on *kar'velas* (name), *naj* "is not" and *so* "what" in Figs. 1, 2 and 3 respectively. On the other hand, we tentatively analyze the nuclear pitch accent in broad focus utterances as H+L* since it starts with high pitch (typically creating a plateau with the preceding accent) and falls rapidly throughout the duration of the accented syllable; an accent of this sort can be seen on *naj* "don't have" in Fig. 10 (which also illustrates the above-mentioned plateau).

3.2. The marking of narrow focus

Our analysis shows that Romani displays an interesting and unusual array of focus marking strategies, possibly because of the influence of Greek and Turkish. Specifically, in our corpus, focus is marked by a variety of means, including the (already mentioned) use of *da*, word-order changes, accentuation, and, unusually, changes in the location of stress. All these strategies are discussed below.
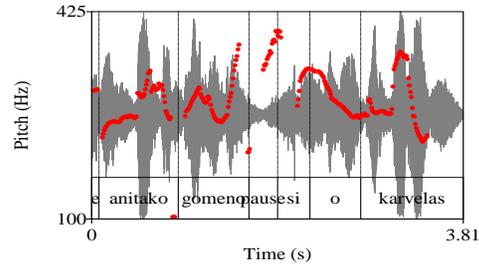

Fig. 1: Waveform and F0 contour of *e ani'tako 'gomeno | si o kar'velas*, the Anita.GEN boyfriend is the Karvelas, "Anita's boyfriend is Karvelas."

As Fig. 2 shows, Komotini Romani can mark narrow focus by prosody alone. In Fig. 2, *naj* "is not" is accented (with the accent tentatively analyzed as L+H*), while the rest of the utterance is deaccented. In our corpus, negative statements are the only instance of in situ use of prosody to mark narrow focus.
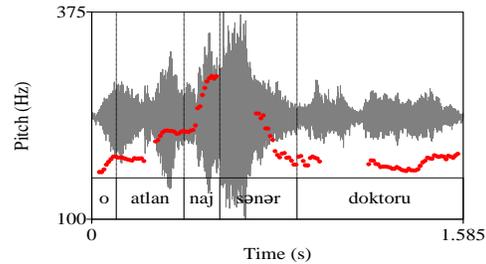

Fig. 2: Waveform and F0 contour of *o Ad'han [atlan] naj se'her dokto'ru*, the Adnan is.NEG nerve doctor "Adnan IS NOT a neurologist!"
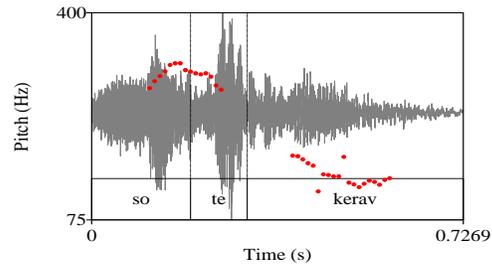

Fig. 3: Waveform and F0 contour of *so te ke'rav*, what to do.1SG "WHAT can I do?"

The most common strategy for marking narrow focus in Komotini Romani combines prosody with syntactic marking. For instance, in the wh-question in Fig. 3, the wh-word is fronted and accented while the rest of the utterance is deaccented. In Fig. 4, a change in word-order from canonical VO to OV is combined with deaccenting of the verb to mark narrow focus on *'apora* "pills" when the speaker uses this utterance to introduce a new topic. Similarly, in Fig. 12, non-canonical SV is used: the subject *Lef'teri* precedes the verb and is accented while the verb is deaccented, a combination that places the subject in narrow focus.

Further, accentuation and word order changes can be accompanied by the use of *da* to mark focus. In such cases, the word to which *da* cliticizes is accented, and the remainder of the utterance is deaccented, as illustrated in Figs. 5 and 6.
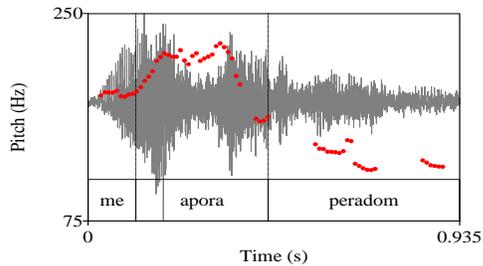
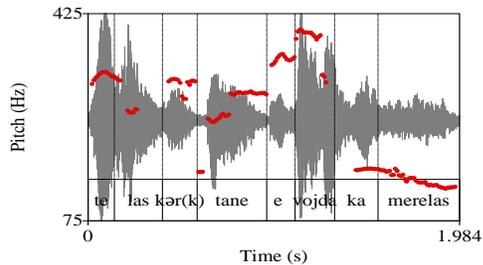**Fig. 4**: Waveform and F0 contour of *me ˈapora peraˈdom*, my pills lost.1SG, "I lost my PILLS."

Fig. 5: Waveform and F0 of *te las kər(k) taˈne e voj da ka meˈrelas*, to took.3SG forty pieces she FOC will died.3SG, "if she had taken forty pieces, eh, SHE [too] would have died."
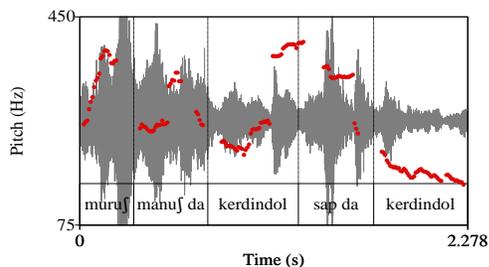

Fig. 6: Waveform and F0 of *muˈruʃ | maˈnuʃ da kerˈdindol | sap da kerˈdindol,* boy man FOC became snake FOC became, "into a boy, a MAN he turned, into a SNAKE he turned."

Finally, our data show that speakers of Komotini Romani employ an unusual strategy in combination with accentuation to mark focus, namely a non-metrically motivated stress-shift to an earlier syllable from that which is canonically stressed. Stress-shift is used for narrow focus marking as in Fig. 7, though we have also observed it in cases in which focus scope is ambiguous, as in Fig. 8. On the other hand, Figs. 9 and 10, show canonical stress placement for the words *phenav* "I say" and *erzanava* "pharmacy" respectively when these are accented but not in focus. The changes in stress placement are evident in the alignment of accents with syllables in Fig. 8 vs. Fig. 10, and in the clarity with which the two syllables of *phenav* are articulated in Fig. 7 vs. Fig. 9. To our knowledge, stress shift for focus marking is not explicitly examined in previous studies of Romani but it is mentioned in passing in Lee (2005: 7). Our data confirm that it is used in Komotini Romani.

The Romani stress shift shares similarities with a number of related phenomena found in other languages, such as the English Rhythm Rule and accent shift (Ladd 2008: 234ff.), the French "accent d'insistence" (e.g. Dahan & Bernard 1996) and a phenomenon comparable to the French one found in Greek (Arvaniti 2007). However, unlike French, Romani has lexical

stress which is shifted here, while word-initial high pitch in Greek is additional to the accent on the lexically stressed syllable and thus it likely functions delimitatively rather than culminatively. In English, on the other hand, the accent shift is used to contrast similar words within an utterance, as in Bolinger's oft-cited example "*This whisky wasn't EXported, it was DEported*" (Boligner 1961b: 83, cited in Ladd 2008: 234). Finally, the English Rhythm Rule is motivated by metrical considerations that do not apply in our data. In short, the Romani stress-shift does not share crucial characteristics with any of the above phenomena, and thus appears to be a novel strategy associated solely with focus marking.
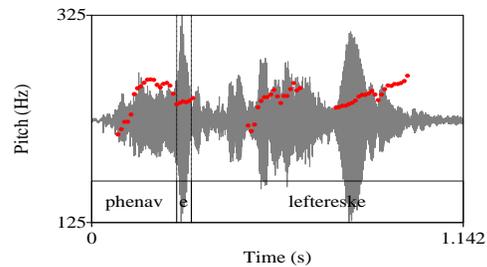

Fig. 7: Waveform and F0 contour of *ˈPHENAV e lefteˈreske*, say.1SG the.OBL Lefteri.DAT, "I SAY to Lefteri…"
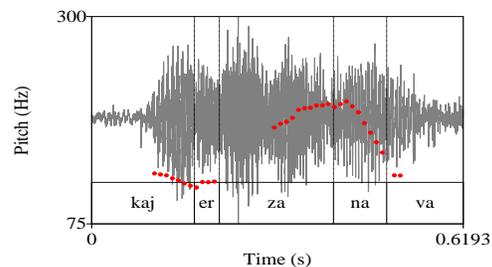

Fig. 8: Waveform and F0 contour of *kaj ERˈZANAVA* "at the PHARMACY" [answer to "where will I get my pills from?"].
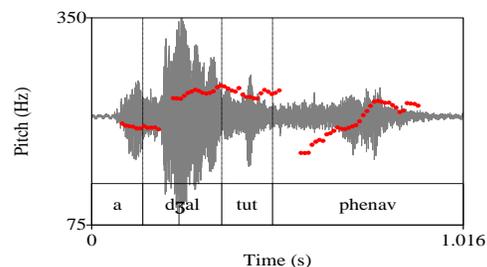

Fig. 9: Waveform and F0 contour of *a dʒal tut phenav* INTERJ, go.3SG you say.1SG, "there, go ahead, I say…"
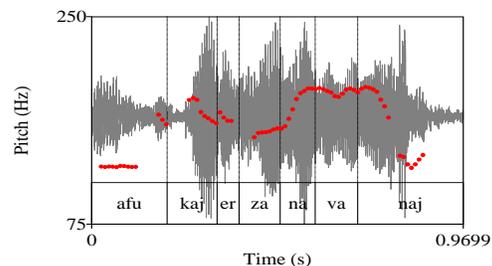

Fig. 10: Waveform and F0 contour of *aˈfu kaj erzaˈhava naj*, since at pharmacy is.NEG, "since at the pharmacy they don't have any."

3.3. Topicalization and the role of deaccenting

Our data also provide several instances of topicalization which show that both narrow focus marking and topicalization are achieved by left dislocation and accentuation of the dislocated constituent. What distinguishes narrow focus marking from topicalization is that when the dislocated constituent is focused, the remainder of the utterance is deaccented and phrased with it. In topicalization, instead, the dislocated item can form its own phrase; the rest of the utterance can be separately phrased and in any case it is not deaccented. For instance, in cases like the one illustrated in Fig. 11, non canonical SV order is used and the subject is accented, but the verb is also accented with a non-downstepped L+H* accent. The effect is that of topicalizing the subject rather than putting it in narrow focus. Fig. 1 illustrates the phrasal break (after ˈgomeno "boyfriend") that is often used in topicalization, as well as accents on *si* "is" and *karˈvelas* (name) in the following phrase. Finally Fig. 12 shows that topicalization and narrow focus may be combined: *man* "me" is topicalized and forms its own phrase, while *o leˈfteri liˈas* "Lefteri hired" forms a distinct phrase in which non-canonical SV order is used with narrow focus on the subject and deaccenting of the verb.
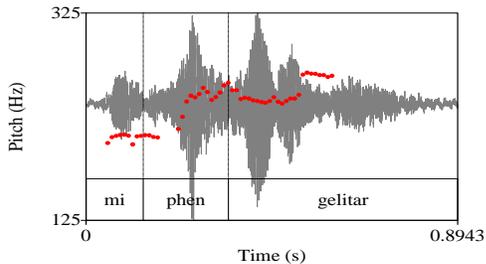

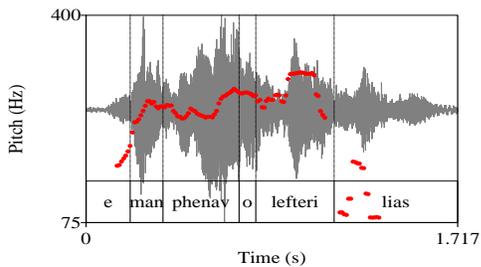**Fig. 11**: Waveform and F0 contour of *mi phen geˈlitar*, "my sister left."

Fig. 12: Waveform and F0 contour of e *man | pheˈnav | o LEˈFTERI liˈas*, eh, me, I-say, the Lefteri take.PAST.3SG; "eh, as for me, I say, it was LEFTERI who hired (me)."

4. Discussion and conclusions

The Romani data show that focus marking strategies additional to those already known may be available cross-linguistically. One such strategy is the stress-shift of Komotini Romani, which is neither metrically motivated nor used as a delimitative marker (as in French or Greek), or as a means to contrastively accent a particular morpheme in a word (as in English). In addition, Romani can be added to the small number of languages, such as Serbian (Godjevac 2004), which have a large repertoire of focus marking means and tend to use them concurrently.

The concurrent use of various focus marking strategies in Romani runs counter to the proposal of Skopeteas & Fanselow (in press) discussed in section 1. As we have shown, Romani

combines the use of various strategies for focus marking, including combinations that are rare, such as fronting the focused item which is accented and accompanied by a focus marker while the remaining material in the utterance is deaccented. We note, however, that focus markers were not included in the analysis of Skopeteas & Fanselow, so it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the relevance of their analysis for this aspect of Romani focus marking. Finally we note that our data do not show any cases of clefting either for focus or topic marking, though clefting is used in other Romani dialects (Matras 2002). The absence of clefts suggests that the Romani speakers exploit instead the possibilities for accentuation, phrasing and word order changes afforded by their language to mark both topic and focus.

In conclusion, the Romani data show both universally noted tendencies in focus marking as well as language-specific patterns, confirming the view that focus and accentuation patterns cannot be easily reduced to a limited set of universal principles. It thus remains clear that in order to fully understand the role of intonation and its interaction with syntax and pragmatics in focus marking more cross-linguistic work using both spontaneous speech and controlled data is necessary.

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