

The prosodic marking of contrastive subjects in French

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Contrastive subjects in French



Minou dort dans le fauteuil.

‘Minou is sleeping in the armchair.’

Simba chasse dans le jardin.

‘Simba is hunting in the garden.’

Different constructions to explicitly mark **contrastive subject** in French: dislocation, cleft, emphatic pronoun, topic marker, etc. (Brysbaert & Lahousse 2021)

Marking strategies in this talk

I. Contrastive adverb: *par contre* ‘on the other hand’

- (1) *Minou dort dans le fauteuil. Simba par contre chasse dans le jardin.*
‘Minou is sleeping in the armchair. **Simba on the other hand** is hunting in the garden.’

II. Prosodic marking

- (2) *Minou dort dans le fauteuil. Simba_[prosodically marked] chasse dans le jardin.*
‘Minou is sleeping in the armchair. **Simba_[prosodically marked]** is hunting in the garden.’

GOAL: show that adverb placement (I) & prosodic cues (II) mark off contrastive S in a similar way → trade-off between marking strategies

Previous research on contrastive ADVs

- Can occupy several positions

(3) *Minou dort dans le fauteuil. [Par contre] Simba [par contre] chasse [par contre] dans le jardin [par contre].*

‘Minou is sleeping in the armchair. [On the other hand] Simba [on the other hand] is hunting [on the other hand] in the garden [on the other hand].’

Previous research on contrastive ADVs

- Adverb placement used for discursive purposes (Dupont 2015, 2019; Lenker 2014; Altenberg 2006)
- Position **immediately after S**: highlight **contrastive entities** rather than the whole event

“isolate and clearly identify the entities that are being contrasted with the preceding discourse” (Dupont 2019:307)

- (4) **Minou** dort dans le fauteuil. **Simba par contre** chasse dans le jardin.
‘**Minou** is sleeping in the armchair. **Simba on the other hand** is hunting in the garden.’

However ...

- These previous studies = based on formal written language
- In spoken French: contrastive ADVs occur predominantly **before S** (86%), and almost never **immediately after S** (1%)

(Brysbaert & Lahousse 2020)

- (5) *Minou dort dans le fauteuil. [Par contre] Simba [par contre] chasse dans le jardin.*
'Minou is sleeping in the armchair. [On the other hand] Simba [on the other hand] is hunting in the garden.'



Adverb placement not exploited to mark off contrastive S in spoken French, because **prosodic cues** are used instead?

Methodology

- Prosodic corpus analysis of examples with **clause-initial *par contre*** followed by an **accentuable subject**

(6) *Par contre Simba* chasse dans le jardin.

‘On the other hand *Simba* is hunting in the garden.’

S on itself is not marked off by ADV

S can be marked off prosodically

Methodology

- Extracted from four corpora:

Corpus	Text type	Year	Size
<i>Corpus du Français Parlé Parisien des années 2000 (CFPP)</i>	interviews	2005-2019	700.000 words
<i>Corpus Oral de Français de Suisse Romande (OFROM)</i>	interviews	2012-2020	1.010.000 words
<i>Corpus de Référence du Français Parlé (CRFP)</i>	several types	1998-2004	440.000 words
<i>Corpus Valibel (VALIBEL)</i>	several types	1987-2012	5.000.000 words

Methodology

- Analysis of 51 examples in Praat, with focus on 2 acoustic measures (= 2 different prosodic cues) (<https://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>)
 1. Long silent pause
 2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S

1. Long silent pause

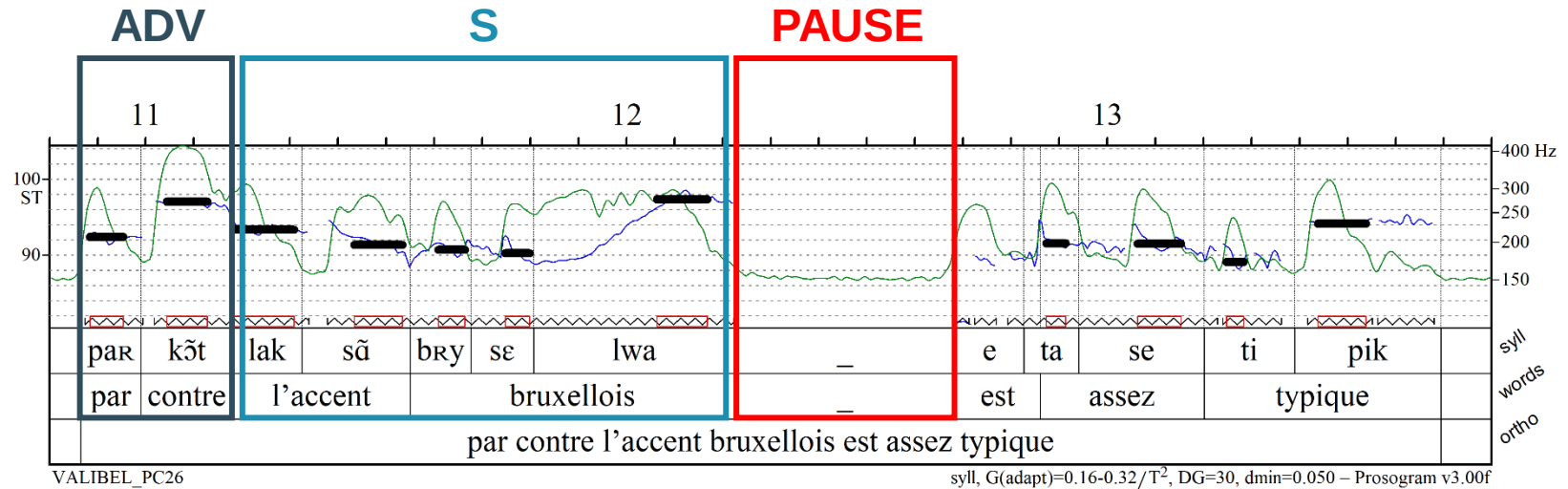
In 10 examples: S immediately followed by long silent pause (>200ms)
→ emphasis on S

(7) [CONTEXT: different accents in French]

*c'est ça je crois l'accent liégeois oui je c'est pas beau c'est pas beau
par contre l'accent bruxellois [PAUSE] est assez typique (VALIBEL)*
'that's it I think the Liège accent yes I it's not beautiful it's not beautiful
on the other hand the Brussels accent [PAUSE] is quite typical'



1. Long silent pause



1. Long silent pause

(8) [CONTEXT: language used in different professions]

*j'imagine mal **un homme politique** par exemple en campagne électorale dans sa région euh ne pas temps en temps manier l'accent local pour essayer que de s'identifier de montrer qu'il est toujours identifiable à à ses racines à ses sources hein euh*

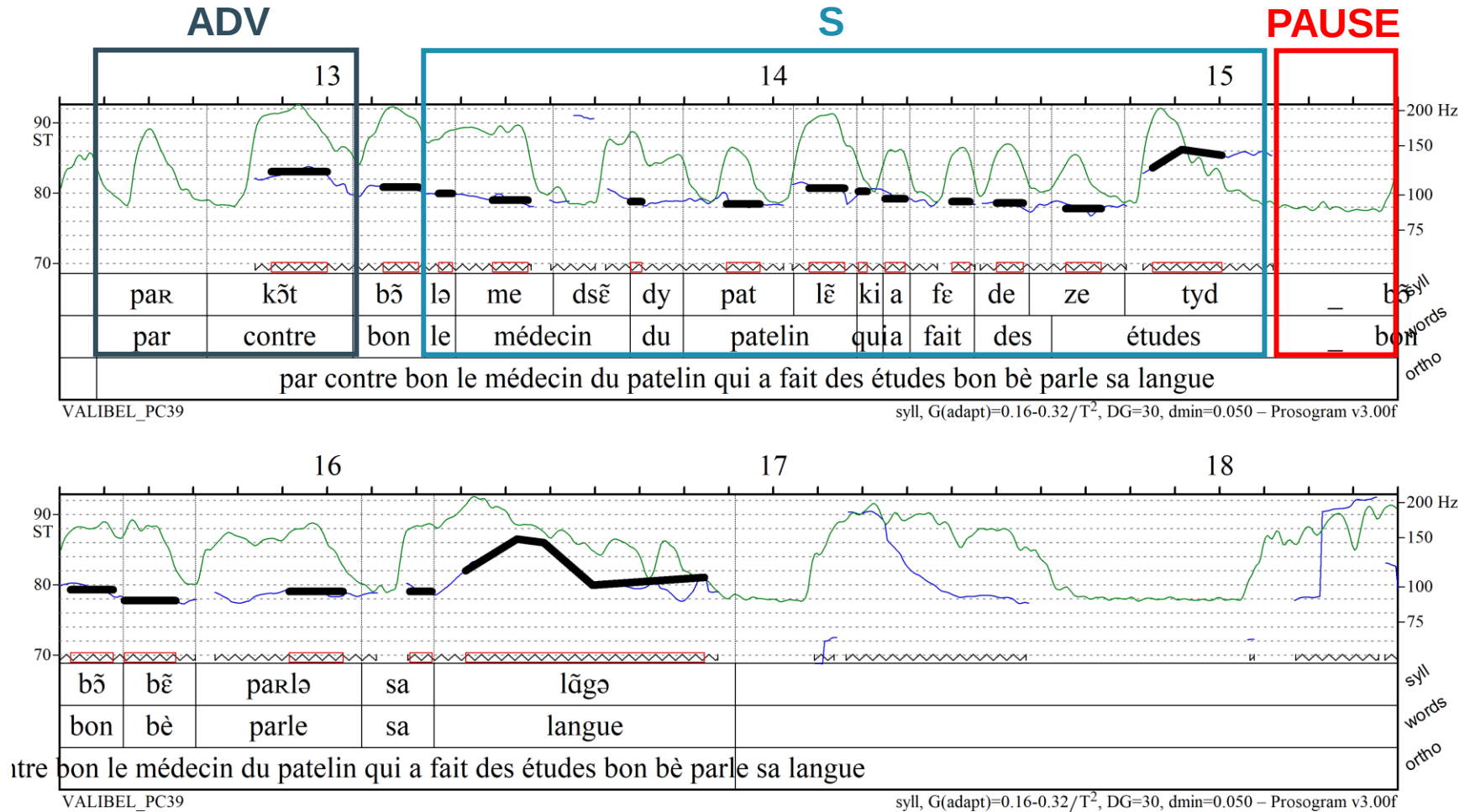
***par contre** bon **le médecin du patelin qui a fait des études** [PAUSE] bon bè parle sa langue (VALIBEL)*

*'I can't imagine **a politician** for example during an election campaign in his region uh not from time to time using the local accent to try to identify himself to show that he is always identifiable with with his roots with his sources eh uh*

***on the other hand** well **the village doctor who studied** [PAUSE] well uh speaks his language.'*



1. Long silent pause



2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S

In 12 examples: pitch on last accentuable syllable of ADV < pitch on last accentuable syllable of S

→ emphasis on S

(9) (= example 7)

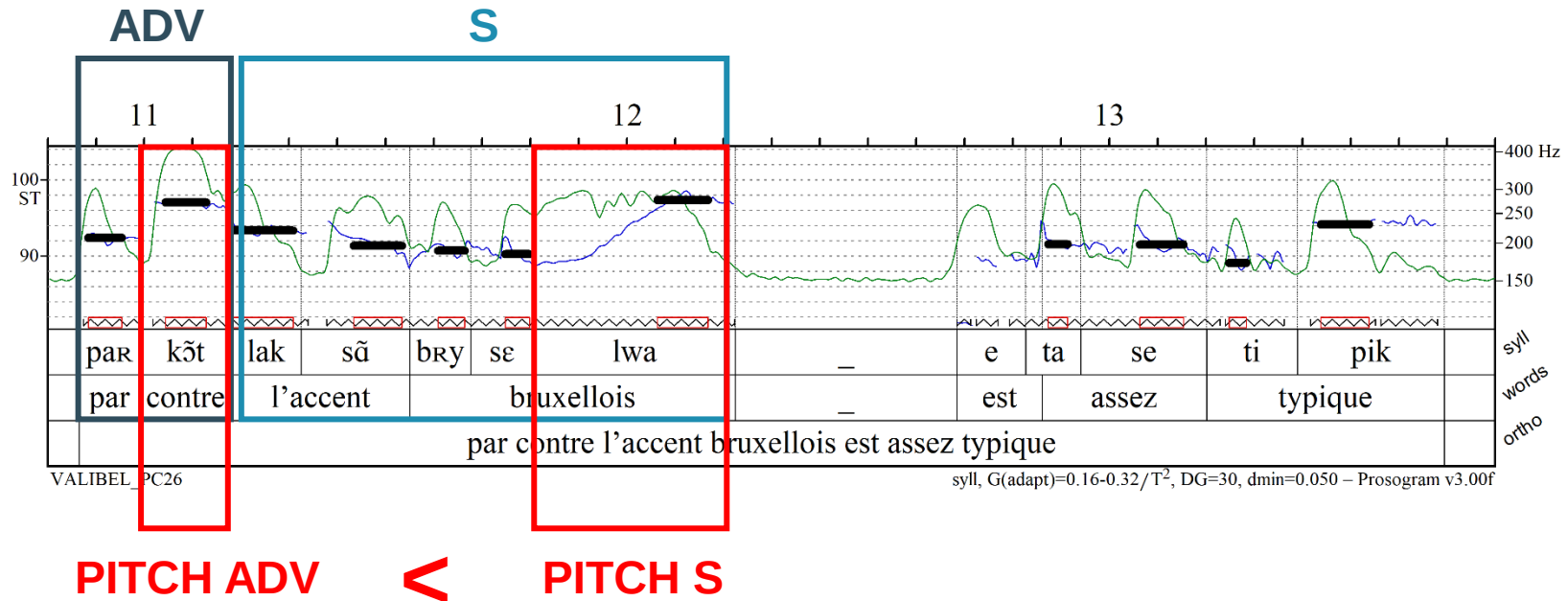
[CONTEXT: different accents in French]

*c'est ça je crois **l'accent liégeois** oui je c'est pas beau c'est pas beau
par contre **l'accent bruxellois** est assez typique (VALIBEL)*

'that's it I think **the Liège accent** yes I it's not beautiful it's not beautiful
on the other hand **the Brussels accent** is quite typical'



2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S



2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S

(10) (= example 8)

[CONTEXT: language used in different professions]

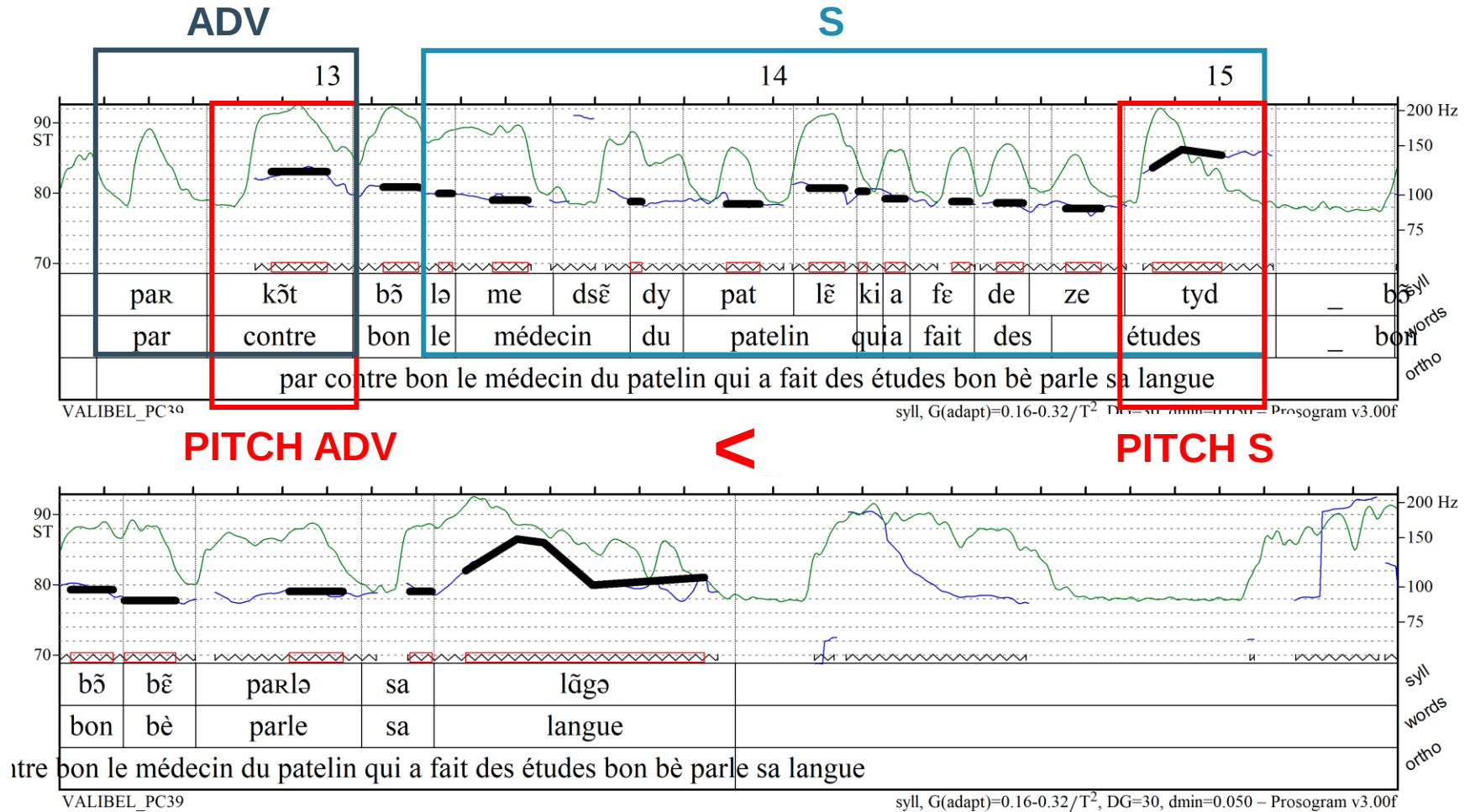
*j'imagine mal **un homme politique** par exemple en campagne électorale dans sa région euh ne pas temps en temps manier l'accent local pour essayer que de s'identifier de montrer qu'il est toujours identifiable à ses racines à ses sources hein euh*

***par contre** bon **le médecin du patelin qui a fait des études** bon bè parle sa langue (VALIBEL)*

'I can't imagine **a politician** for example during an election campaign in his region uh not from time to time using the local accent to try to identify himself to show that he is always identifiable with with his roots with his sources eh uh **on the other hand** well **the village doctor who studied** well uh speaks his language.'



2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S



2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S

(11) [CONTEXT: day care for elderly]

***six institutions** font actuellement l'expérience mais pour elles ce n'est pas rentable d'où l'importance des subsides*

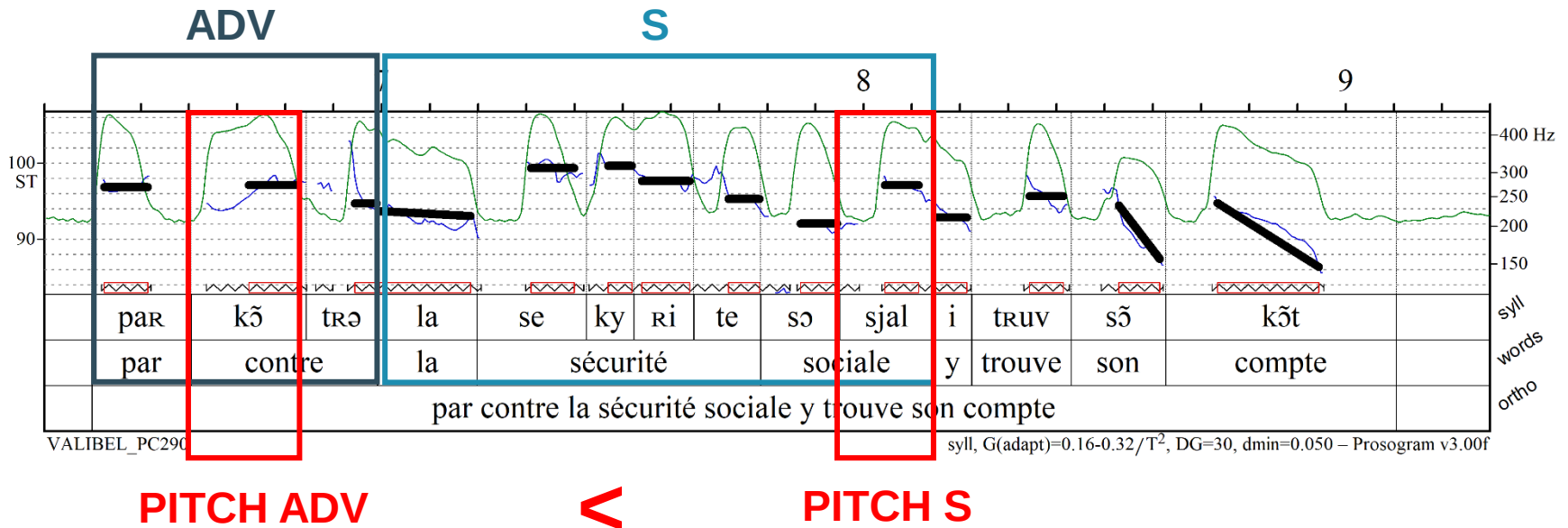
***par contre la sécurité sociale** y trouve son compte (VALIBEL)*

*'**six institutions** are currently experimenting but for them it is not profitable, hence the importance of the subsidies*

***on the other hand the social security** benefits from it'*



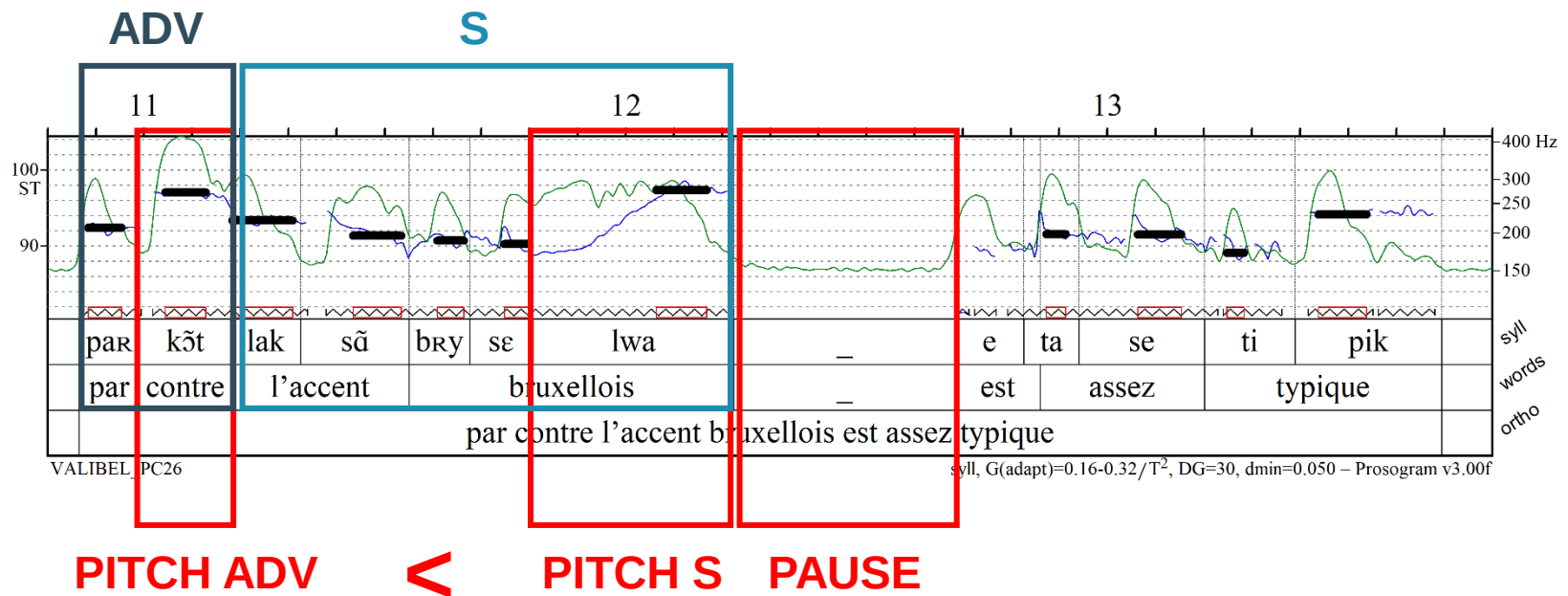
2. Pitch on ADV < pitch on S



No pause → due to genre?

avoid too many pauses in news on radio

In sum: typical prosodic profile of contrastive S



What about the other examples?

In 35 examples:

- No long silent pause immediately after S
- Pitch on last accentuable syllable of ADV > pitch on last accentuable syllable of S

What about the other examples?

Highest pitch on ADV + no long silent pause immediately after S

→ NO emphasis on S & scope of ADV = underdetermined

(12) [CONTEXT: several aspects of trip to Nepal]

ils [i.e. les voyageurs] ont euh ils ont s monté à pieds enfin ils avaient des aides pour porter leurs sacs à dos et tout ça parce que là c'est en charge complète on va pas trouver ni de magasins ni d'hôtels ni quoi que ce soit là-haut donc donc pour eux c'était beaucoup plus physique

par contre les gens [i.e. les habitants du Népal] étaient très accueillants très curieux très euh très ouverts (CRFP)

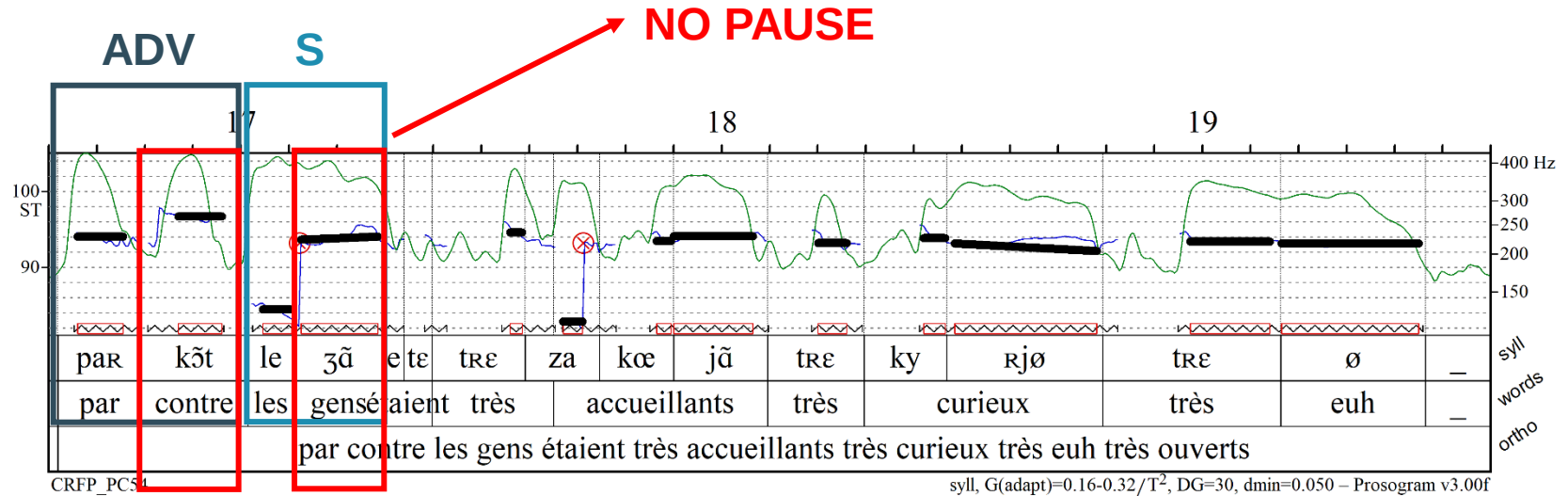
'they [i.e. the travellers] uh they climbed on foot finally they had help to carry their backpacks and all hat because there it is in full charge one will not find any stores or hotels or anything up there so for them it was much more physical

on the other hand the people [i.e. the people of Nepal] were very welcoming very curious very uh very open'

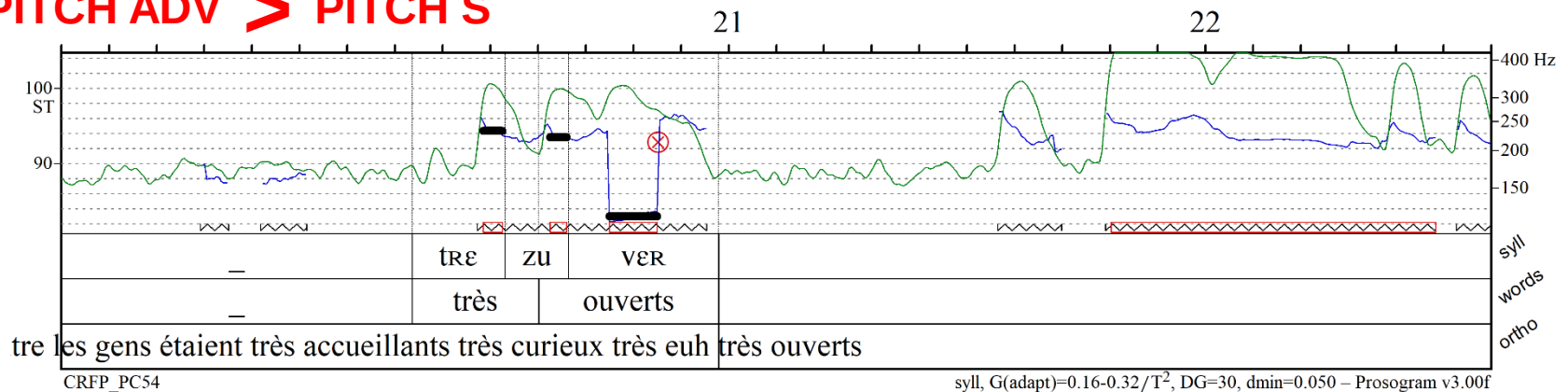


What about the other examples?

NO PAUSE



PITCH ADV > PITCH S



Conclusion

Prosodic cues in spoken French:

- can delineate the potential domain of contrast set by sentence-initial adverbs
- are used to obtain similar discursive effects as those achieved by adverb placement in formal written French

Written French:

(13) *Minou dort dans le fauteuil. **Simba par contre** chasse dans le jardin.*

‘Minou is sleeping in the armchair. **Simba on the other hand** is hunting in the garden.’

Spoken French:

(14) *Minou dort dans le fauteuil. **Par contre Simba**_[prosodically marked] chasse dans le jardin.*

‘Minou is sleeping in the armchair. **On the other hand Simba**_[prosodically marked] is hunting in the garden.’

Conclusion

- Descriptive & theoretic relevance:

Trade-off between markers of contrastivity across registers

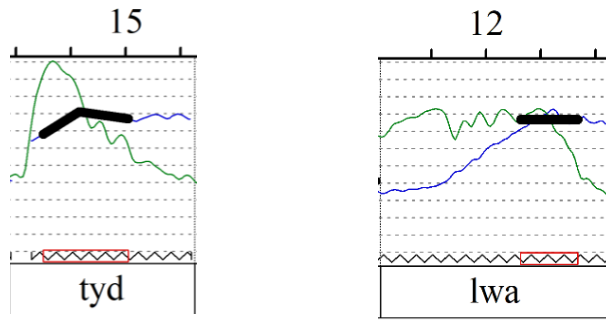
(Koplenig et al. 2017; Prieto & Roseano 2021)

- Methodological relevance:

Interesting to use authentic corpus data for prosodic analyses

Further research

- Methodologically: analyze more prosodic cues
 - Movement or not



- (Relative) duration of the last accentuable syllables
- ...

Further research

- Theoretically: in case of contrastive S ...
 - Are ADV & S prosodically grouped together?
↔ Mertens 2013: always boundary after initial ADV
 - Is boundary between ADV & S less strong? (Delais-Roussarie et al. 2015)

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THANK YOU!

Questions or suggestions?

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