

Clause combining at the grammar-discourse interface: Hypothetical manner clauses as a case in point

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Introduction



Introduction

How does clause combining at grammatical level map onto relationship types between units established at discourse level?

- Focus on hypothetical manner clauses in Dutch, English, French, and Spanish
investigate interaction between **syntactic integration** and **discourse dependence**



Introduction

Need to differentiate between grammar-oriented and discourse-oriented approaches is evidenced by cases of **mismatch between grammar and discourse**

(1) *Zola va devoir partir parce que peut-être a-t-il été trop franc*

‘Zola is going to have to leave because has he maybe been too frank’

(2) Maar als u goed kijkt, en u hebt er misschien overheen gekeken, ziet u rechtsonder op het plaatje iets liggen. Als je even je mouw ervoor vandaan wil houden, Sjef! SJEF, JE MOUW!!!
(DutchTenTen)

‘But if you look closely, and you may have overlooked it, you will see something in the bottom right-hand corner of the picture. If you could just hold your sleeve away from it, Sjef! SJEF, YOUR SLEEVE!!!



Introduction

Delimitation of categories of subordination, coordination, and insubordination under debate

- Growing consensus that subordination and coordination are on **cline** expressing different **degrees** of **dependency** (e.g., Foley & Van Valin 1984; Smessaert et al. 2005; Verstraete 2007; Debaisieux 2013)
- How dependence is attested, measured, and expressed cross-linguistically remain questions of debate

Some valuable proposals offer fine-grained analyses of distributional features indicative of dependency cline (e.g., Smessaert et al. 2005; Verstraete 2007; Debaisieux 2013)

But whether features are grammatical, discursive, or combination hardly ever made explicit

Yet, mapping between grammar and discourse is crucial to tease out discourse-related vs. sentence-related (grammatical) aspects of clause-combining

Or alternatively put, what impact choice of syntactic clause-combinations has on discourse structure



Introduction

Project at the basis of this presentation aims to bring together grammar-oriented and discourse-oriented approaches to clause-combining in different languages (Dutch, English, French, Spanish)

- **Grammar-oriented** work has focused mainly on getting grip on grammatical distinctions between different types of clause-combining (Smessaert et al. 2005; Dixon & Aikhenvald 2011; Gast & Diessel 2012)
 - ↔ How clause-combining configurations are used in discourse of lesser concern
- **Discourse-oriented** work on discourse relations and discourse coherence tends to ‘forget’ that different types of discourse relations are embedded in grammatical constructions that come with grammatical affordances
- Investigate interaction between grammar and discourse cross-linguistically to examine:
 - how clause-combining at grammatical (sentence) level maps onto relationship types established at discourse level
 - generalisable vs. language-specific mechanisms of clause-linkage at the grammar-discourse interface (comparative approach)



Introduction

Outline of the presentation

- Hypothetical manner clauses: introduction and state of the art
- Case study 1: Dutch *alsof* and English *as if*
- Case study 2: French *comme si* and Spanish *como si*
- Conclusion: bringing together findings + future research



Hypothetical manner clauses



Hypothetical manner

Hypothetical manner (HM) clauses

can appear in range of dependency configurations, allowing for both subordinate and insubordinate uses

- (1) Me miran como si fuera un extraterrestre. (SpTenTen)
- (2) Lorsque vous achetez sur le site c'est comme si vous veniez à la pharmacie. (FrTenTen)
- (3) Iedere stap heeft nu een duidelijke echo. Alsof haar achtervolger het niet langer nodig vindt om haar stiekem te volgen. (CGN)
'Every step now has a clear echo. As if her stalker no longer finds it necessary to follow her secretly.'
- (4) As if we haven't got enough on our plate! (BNC)



Hypothetical manner

> **subordinate** clauses are **dependent** on a main clause (element)



syntactically: anchored to a main clause
pragmatically: illocutionary force borrowed from main clause
discursively: surrounding discourse is needed for semantic-pragmatic interpretation

(1) French

Il reprend-s la parole comme si de rien n' ét-ait.
he take.back-PRS.3SG the word as if of nothing NEG be-PST.3SG
'He starts speaking again AS IF nothing had happened.'

> **in subordinate** clauses are formally subordinate (Evans 2007), but **independent**



(2) Spanish

A: *Me gust-a mi soltería.*
REFL like.PRS.3SG my single.life
'I like being single.'

B: *Como si tuv-ieras otra opción jajaja*
as if have-SBJV.PST.2SG other option [laugh]
'AS IF you had the choice hahaha!'

syntactically: no main clause
pragmatically: illocutionary force of their own (e.g., exclamative)
discursively: meaningful in isolation (D'Hertefelt 2018)



Hypothetical manner

→ syntactic dependency unfolds in a **continuum** (Smessaert et al. 2005)

from highly **dependent**...

> complement clauses (**obligatoriness** + **non-preposability**)

(3) French

Et puis elle fai-t comme si de rien n' étai-t.
and then she do-3SG as if of nothing not be-PST.3SG
'And then she acts AS IF nothing happened.'

> bound subordinate clauses, cf. Verstraete 2007 (**non-obligatoriness** + **non-preposability**)

(4) Spanish

Trabaj-a como si no hub-iese un mañana.
work-3SG as if not be-PST.SBJV.3SG a.M tomorrow
'S/he works like(AS IF) there is no tomorrow.'

> free subordinate clauses, cf. Verstraete 2007 (**non-obligatoriness** + **preposability**)

(5) French

Comme si le froid ne suffis-ait pas, la météo annonc-e un nouveau cyclone.
as if the cold NEG be.enough-PST.3SG NEG the weather announce-3SG a new storm
'AS IF the cold wasn't enough, the forecast announces a new storm.'

...to fully **independent**

> dependency shift (D'Hertefelt 2018)

> insubordination (Evans 2007)



Hypothetical manner

In **prior research** (Royo-Viñuales et al. 2022), we identified **six functional behaviours** of hypothetical manner clauses:

- i. hypothetical **manner**: manner of *doing*, counterfactual epistemics
- ii. hypothetical **qualification**: manner of *being*, counterfactual epistemics
- iii. hypothetical **cause**: manner of *doing/being*, potential epistemics
- iv. **denial** of an assumption: underlying manner of *saying*, speaker attitude → denial
- v. **nuanced agreement**: underlying manner of *being*, speaker epistemic attitude
- vi. **scalar evaluation**: underlying manner of *being*, evaluation → indifference



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Hypothetical manner

(i) **Hypothetical manner**

(1) They look at me as if I'm stupid. (BNC)

(ii) **Hypothetical qualification**

(2) Met uw nieuwe kunstgebit praat u in het begin wat onwennig. [...] Bepaalde klanken klinken anders dan u gewend was. Het is alsof u met een volle mond praat. (CGN)

'With your new dentures, you'll talk about uncomfortably at first. [...] Certain sounds will sound different from what you were used to. It's as if you're talking with your mouth full.'

(2') Met uw nieuwe kunstgebit praat u in het begin wat onwennig. [...] Bepaalde klanken klinken anders dan u gewend was. Alsof u met een volle mond praat.

'With your new dentures, you'll talk about uncomfortably at first. [...] Certain sounds will sound different from what you were used to. As if you're talking with your mouth full.'



Hypothetical manner

(iii) **Hypothetical cause**

- (3) Phineas made a jaunty pirouette, as if to tell the onlookers that, though bent, he was not yet broken.

(iv) **Denial of assumption**

- (4) Sa mère lui dit, tu finiras par oublier. Sûrement pas. Comme si Cerise pouvait oublier ce qui s'est passé ce soir-là.

'His mother told him, you'll end up forgetting. Certainly not. As if Cerise could forget what happened that night.'



Hypothetical manner

(v) **Nuanced agreement**

(5) A. Oye, que estoy yo, eh. No quiero asistir a una ruptura matrimonial.
Hey, I don't want to witness a marital breakdown.'

B. No estamos casados.
'We are not married.'

A. Como si lo est-uvierais.
as if it be-SUBJ.PRS.2PL
'As if you were.'



Hypothetical manner

(vi) **Scalar evaluation**

- (6) A. Australia no registra un solo contagio por segundo día.
'Australia does not register any contamination for the second day running.'
- B. Con esas pedazo de arañas, como si est-án siete año-s sin caso-s
with those chunk of spiders, as if be-IND.PRS.3PL seven year-PL without case-PL
'Considering the presence of such big spiders, they could have no more [Covid] cases in seven years for all I care.'



Case study 1. English vs. Dutch



Case study 1. English vs. Dutch

investigate if different **syntactic** and/or **semantic-pragmatic relations** recognised for HM clauses are reflected in **prosodic realisation** in English and Dutch

Research questions

- To what extent do syntactic dependency and semantic-pragmatic function of HM clause interact?
- To what extent is each factor reflected in prosodic realisation of HM clause?
- To what extent are potential interactions language-specific or can they be generalised, and what does this tell us about role of prosody for clause-combining?



Method

From spoken subsections of BNC (English) and CGN (Dutch), all hits of *as if* (n = 683) and *alsof* (n = 1,036) were extracted → **156** relevant and useful hits for **English** and **247** for **Dutch**

Three coding schemes

- Syntactic integration
- Semantic-pragmatic function
- Prosodic factors



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Three coding schemes

- **Syntactic factors:** level of syntactic integration with other (main) clause
 - Obligatoriness
 - Preposability
 - Clefting
 - Proportionality (cf. *wh*-questioning)
 - Three levels: strong dependence > weak dependence > independence



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Three coding schemes

- Syntactic factors
- **Semantic-pragmatic function:** what is contextual meaning of HM clause?
 - Manner: *They looked at me as if I was stupid*
 - Qualification: *She sounded as if she was choking*
 - Cause : *I feel a bit dizzy, as if – you know – I need new glasses*
 - Denial of assumption: *Oh yeah, as if you'd know!*



Method

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Three coding schemes

- Syntactic factors
- Discourse-pragmatic function
- **Prosodic factors** (using Praat):
 - **IU segmentation:** is HM clause uttered on same or separate IU as previous/next clause?
 - **Onset pitch level:** what is the difference in pitch height between end of previous clause and onset of HM clause (if uttered on separate IUs)?
 - **Pause length:** is HM clause preceded by pause and what is average length of pause?
 - **Pitch contour:** with which tone is HM clause uttered? (e.g., fall, rise, fall-rise, rise-fall, delayed fall)

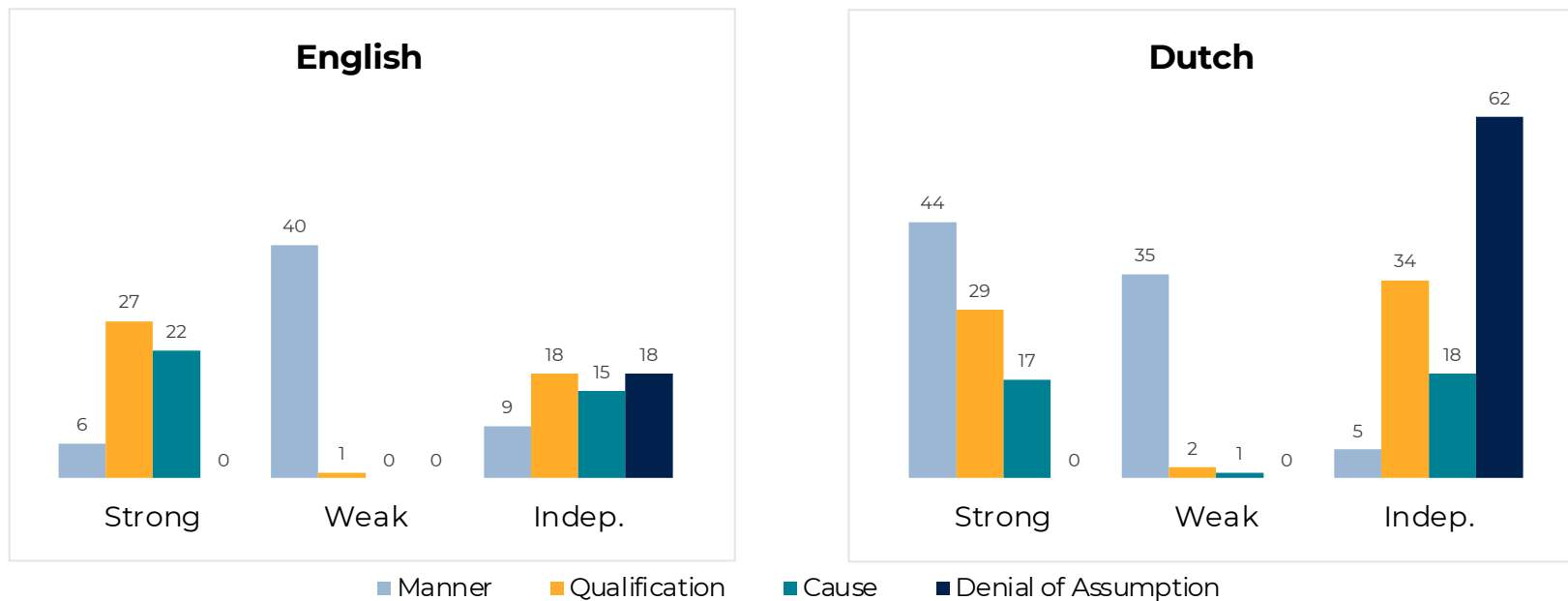


Interaction grammar / discourse



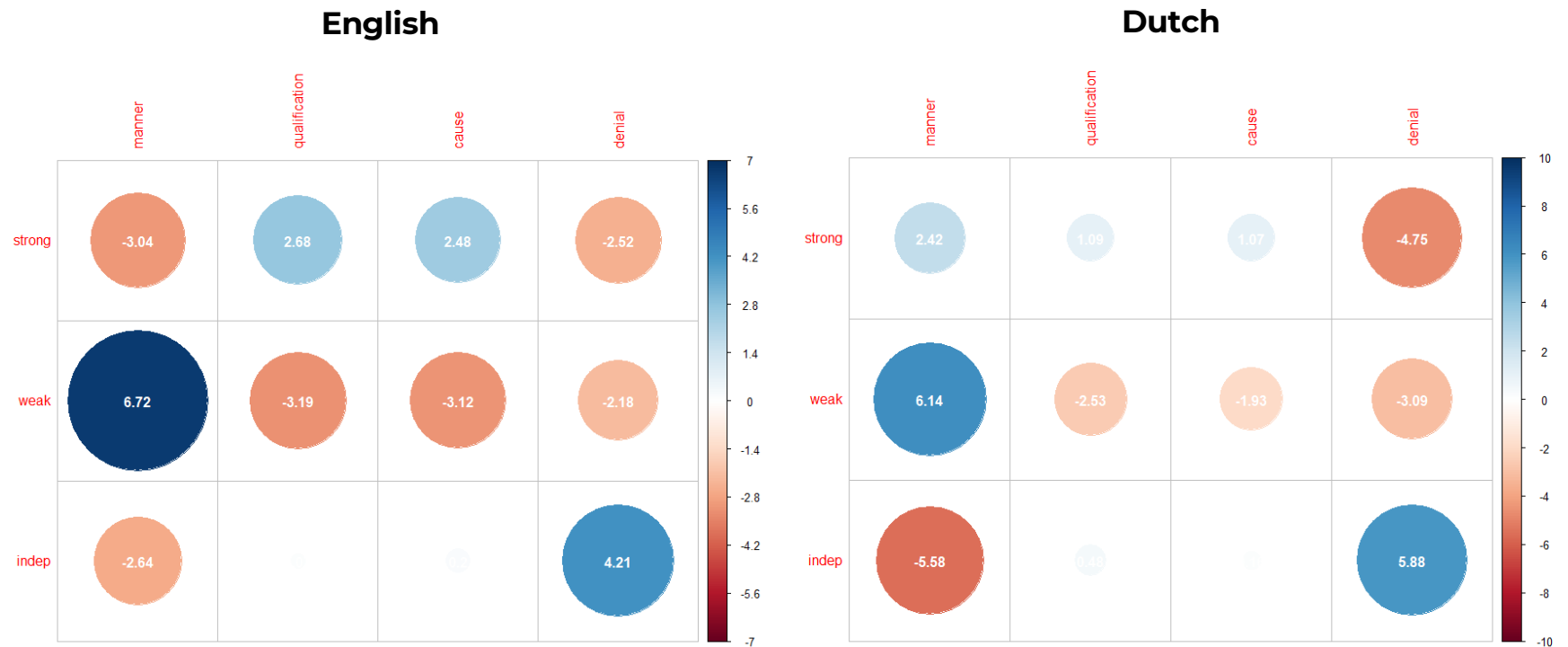
Interaction grammar – discourse

Correlation between syntactic dependency and pragmatic function in both **English** ($\chi^2(6, N=156)=123.43, p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.629) and **Dutch** ($\chi^2(6, N=247)=154.07, p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.558)



Interaction grammar – discourse

Standardized residuals



Interaction grammar – discourse

Commonalities

- Strong association between ‘manner’ and weak syntactic integration
 - (1) Spreken mensen u nog aan alsof u de burgemeester bent, meneer Michel? (CGN)
‘Do people still address you as if you’re the mayor, mister Michel?’
- Strong association between ‘denial’ and syntactic independence
 - (2) Alsof mij dat wat uitmaakt. (CGN)
‘As if it matters to me.’



Interaction grammar – discourse

Discrepancies

- Strong association between ‘manner’ and strong syntactic dependence in Dutch ($r = 2.42$) vs. dissociation in English ($r = -3.04$)
due to Dutch collocate *doen alsof* (lit. ‘do as if’ = ‘act as if’, ‘pretend’)
 - (1) Nou doet ie weer net alsof ie alsof ie alles kan. (CGN)
‘Now, he’s acting again just as if he as if he can do everything.’
 - (2) We act as if we belong to Jesus Christ. (BNC)
- Greater frequency of ‘denial’ in Dutch (62 out of 247 instances = 25%) vs. English (18 out of 156 instances = 12%)

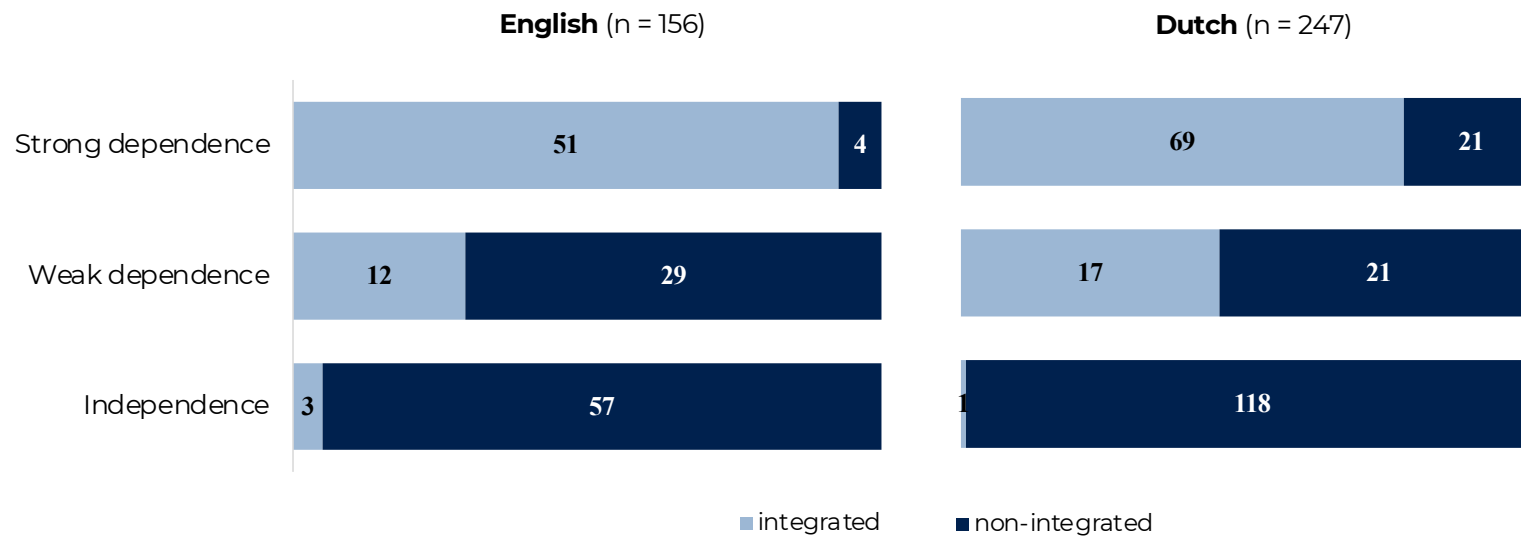


Prosodic correlates



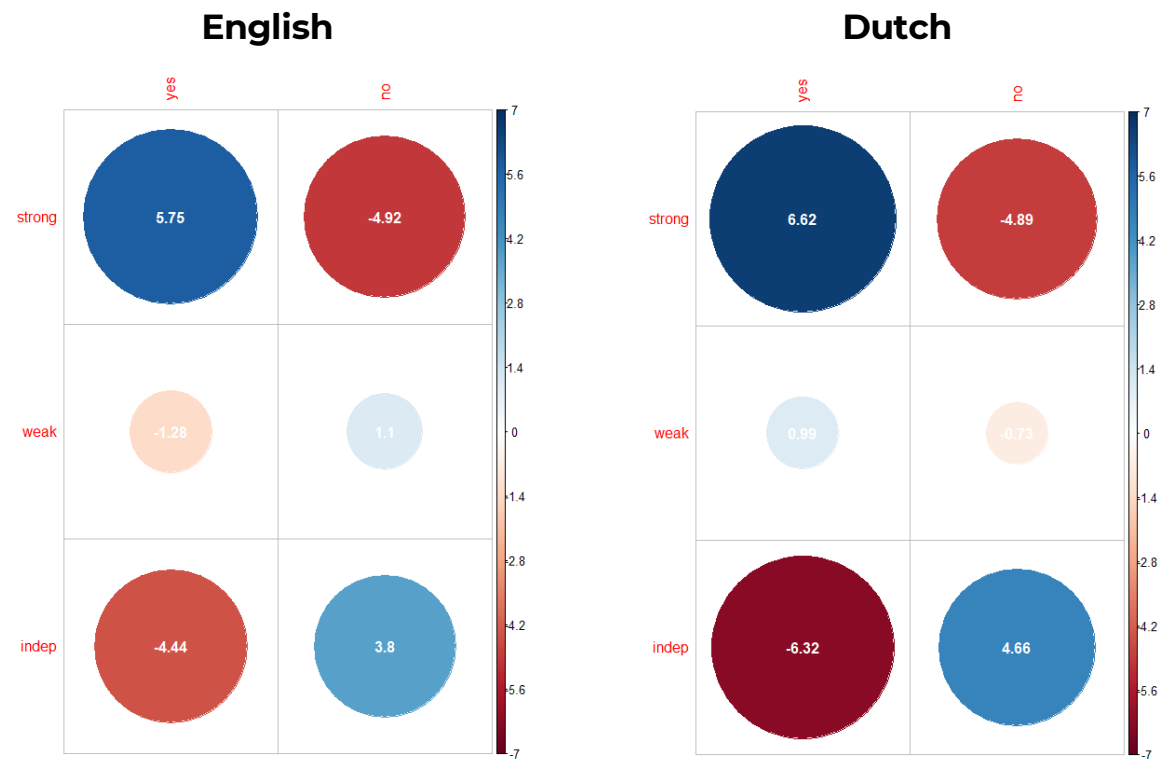
Prosodic integration

Significant differences in prosodic integration between syntactic statuses in both **English** ($\chi^2(2, N=156)=94.353, p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.778) and **Dutch** ($\chi^2(2, N=247)=130.91, p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.728)



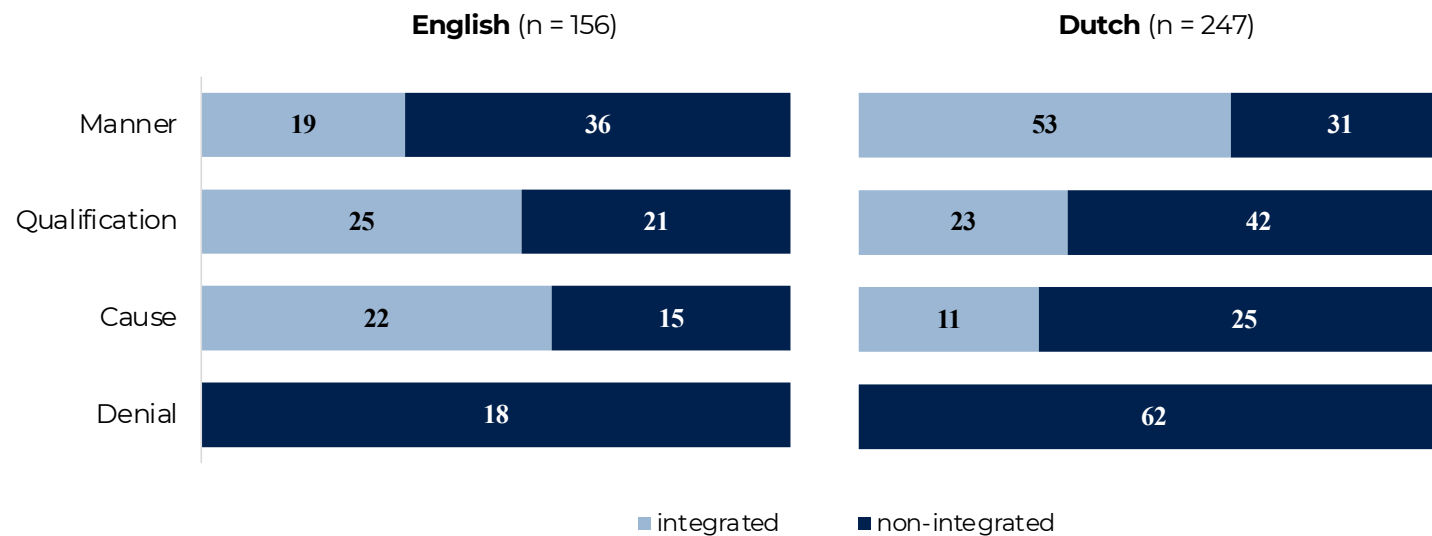
Prosodic integration

Standardized residuals:



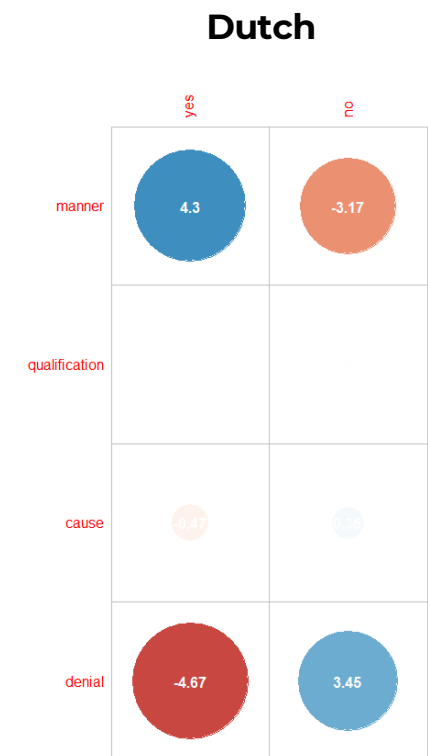
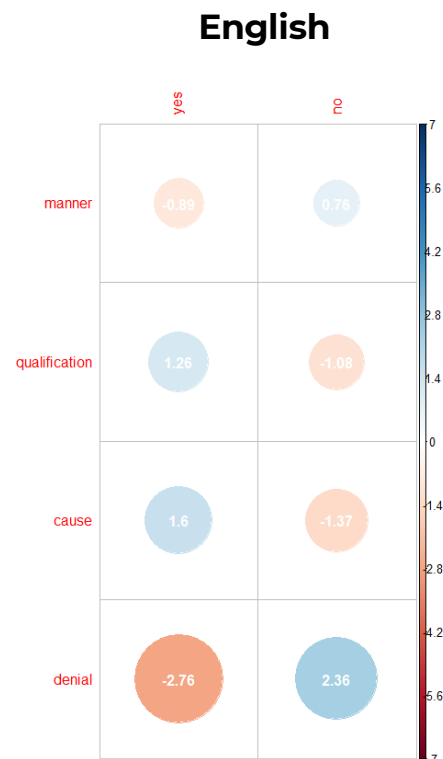
Prosodic integration

Significant differences in prosodic integration between semantic-pragmatic functions in both **English** ($\chi^2(3, N=156)=21.749$, $p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.373) and **Dutch** ($\chi^2(3, N=247)=62.658$, $p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.504)



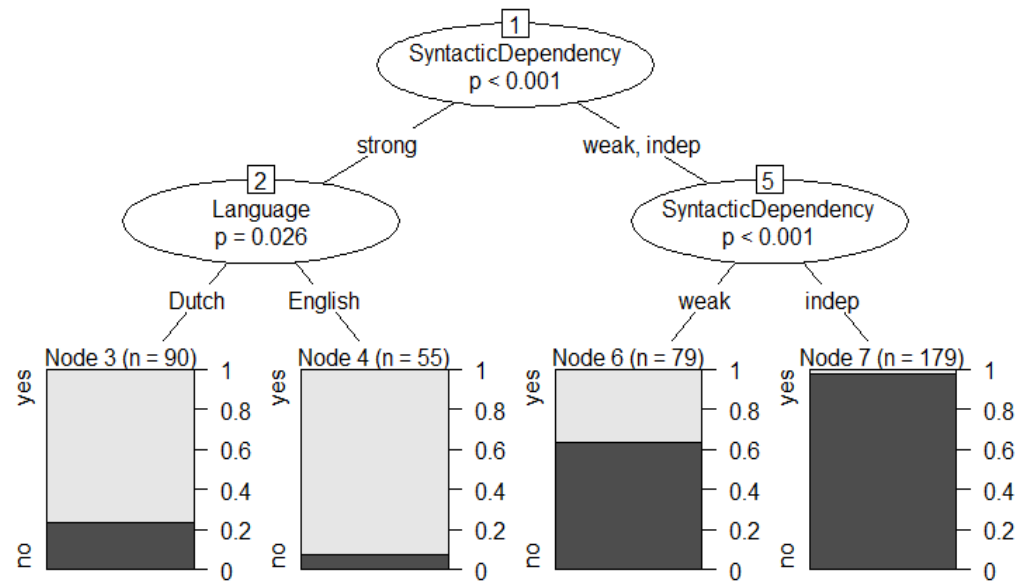
Prosodic integration

Standardized residuals:



Prosodic integration

Conditional inference tree for interaction of **prosodic integration** ~ syntactic status + semantic-pragmatic function + language



Prosodic integration

Conditional inference tree

- confirms importance of **syntactic status** over semantic-pragmatic function
 - strongly dependent clauses uttered in same IU as matrix
 - independent clauses uttered on separate IU
 - weakly dependent clauses allow for ‘free’ choice between integration vs. Separation
 - (1) They look at me as if I’m stupid. (BNC) 🔊
 - (2) You make commitments for next year <pause> as if <pause> money had gonna be no object. (BNC) 🔊
- interaction between prosodic integration and syntactic status holds **across two languages**



Onset pitch level (in semitones)

Syntactic status

	English (n=75)	Dutch (n=165)
Strong dependence	-0.40 (sd=3.16, n=5)	-0.51 (sd=3.07, n=36)
Weak dependence	0.80 (sd=3.08, n=28)	-0.24 (sd=3.89, n=26)
Independence	2.41 (sd=5.63, n=42)	3.53 (sd=4.64, n=103)
	$F(2, 72) = 1.481, p = 0.234$	$F(2, 162) = 16.45, p < 0.001$

Tukey post-hoc (Dutch): $p < 0.001$ between independence vs. both strong and weak dependence
 $p = 0.97$ between strong and weak dependence



Onset pitch level (in semitones)

Semantic-pragmatic function

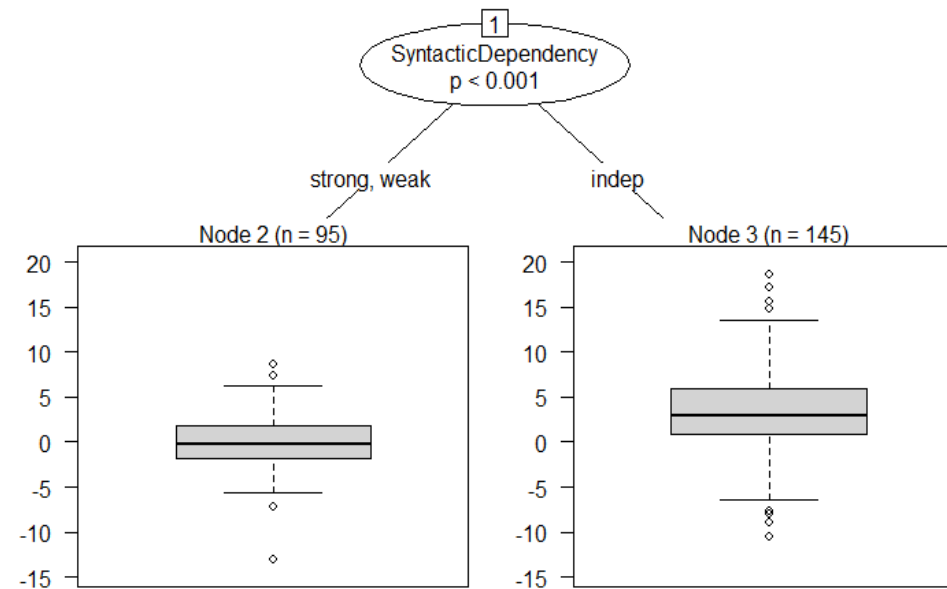
	English (n=75)	Dutch (n=165)
Manner	1.11 (sd=3.36, n=35)	-0.22 (sd=4.54, n=42)
Qualification	1.64 (sd=4.97, n=16)	2.93 (sd=4.45, n=48)
Cause	1.45 (sd=6.95, n=15)	0.91 (sd=3.38, n=26)
Denial of Assumption	3.86 (sd=4.65, n=9)	3.75 (sd=4.59, n=49)
	$F(3, 71)=0.804, p=0.496$	$F(3, 161)=7.473, p < 0.001$

Tukey post-hoc (Dutch): manner vs. qualification ($p = 0.005$) and manner vs. denial ($p < 0.001$)



Onset pitch level (in semitones)

Conditional inference tree for interaction of **onset pitch level** ~ syntactic status + semantic-pragmatic function + language



Pausing (in ms)

Syntactic status

	English (n = 156)	Dutch (n = 247)
Strong dependence	88.56 (sd=354, n=55)	18.42 (sd=80, n=90)
Weak dependence	76.82 (sd=235, n=41)	121.84 (sd=230, n=38)
Independence	720.30 (sd=1,227, n=60)	603.86 (sd=633, n=119)
	$F(2, 153) = 11.72, p < 0.001$	$F(2, 244) = 47.22, p < 0.001$

Tukey post-hoc tests set independence apart from both strong and weak dependence in both languages ($p < 0.001$ in all cases)



Pausing (in ms)

Syntactic status

	English (n = 156)	Dutch (n = 247)
Manner	97.47 (sd=271, n=55)	69.83 (sd=173, n=84)
Qualification	281.68 (sd=568, n=46)	316.30 (sd=513, n=65)
Cause	451.36 (sd=1,285, n=37)	263.43 (sd=430, n=36)
Denial	901.13 (sd=1,220, n=18)	681.26 (sd=699, n=62)
	$F(3, 152)=4.661, p=0.004$	$F(3, 243)=19.02, p < 0.001$

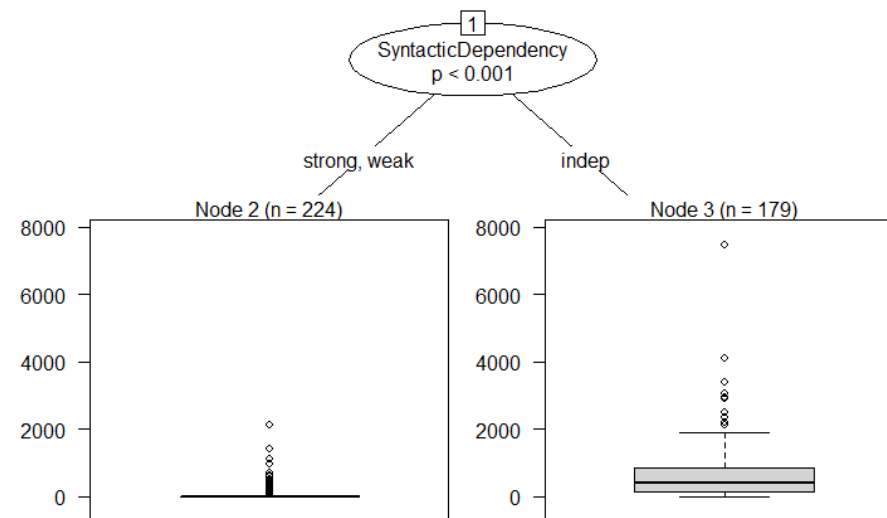
Tukey post-hoc tests

- English: ‘denial’ vs. ‘manner’ ($p = 0.002$) and ‘denial’ vs. ‘qualification’ ($p = 0.038$)
- Dutch: ‘denial’ vs. all other functions ($p < 0.001$), and ‘qualification’ vs. ‘manner’ ($p = 0.01$).



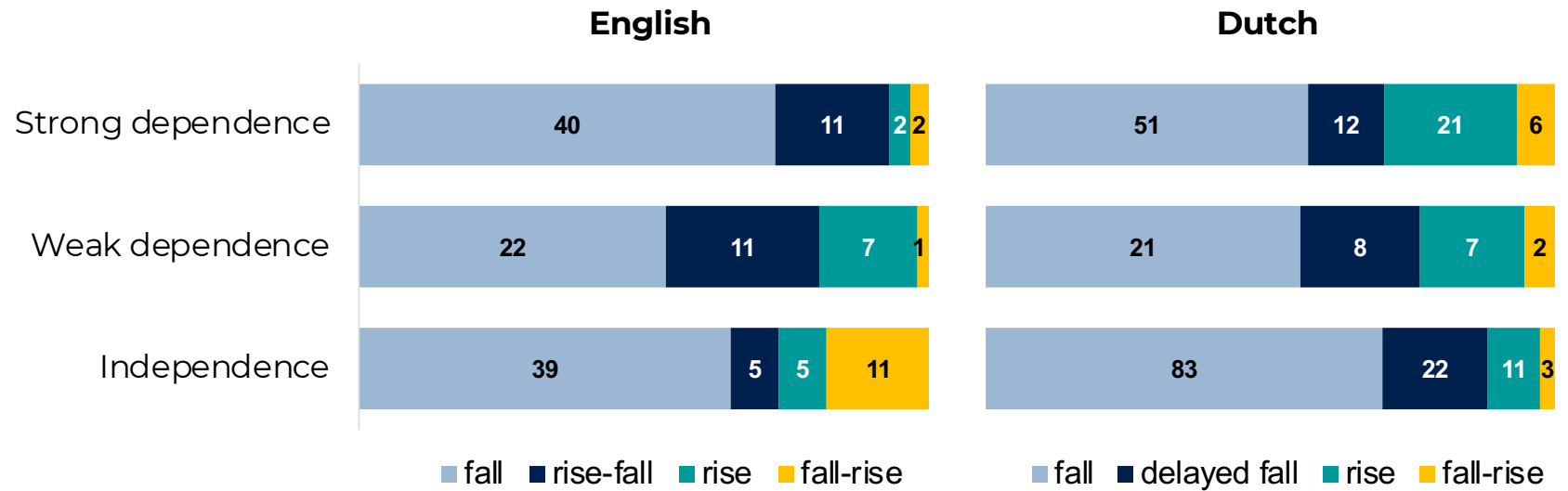
Pausing (in ms)

Conditional inference tree for interaction of **pausing** ~ syntactic status + semantic-pragmatic function + language



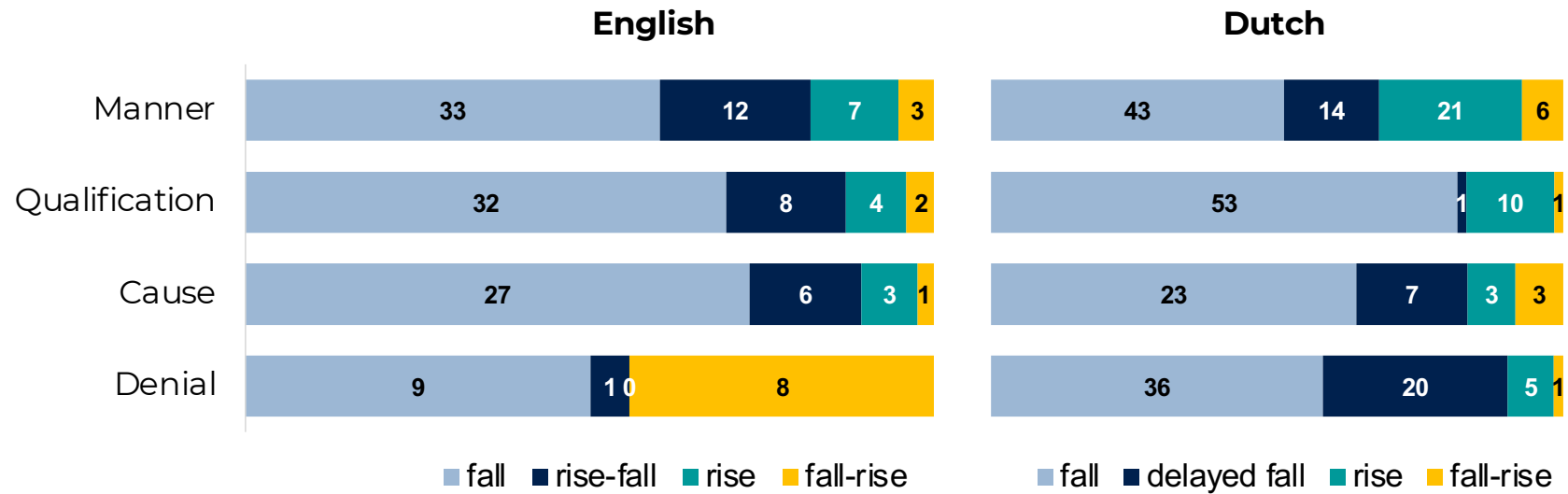
Pitch contour

Tone with which HM clause is uttered ~ syntactic status in English ($p = 0.002$) and Dutch ($p = 0.05$)



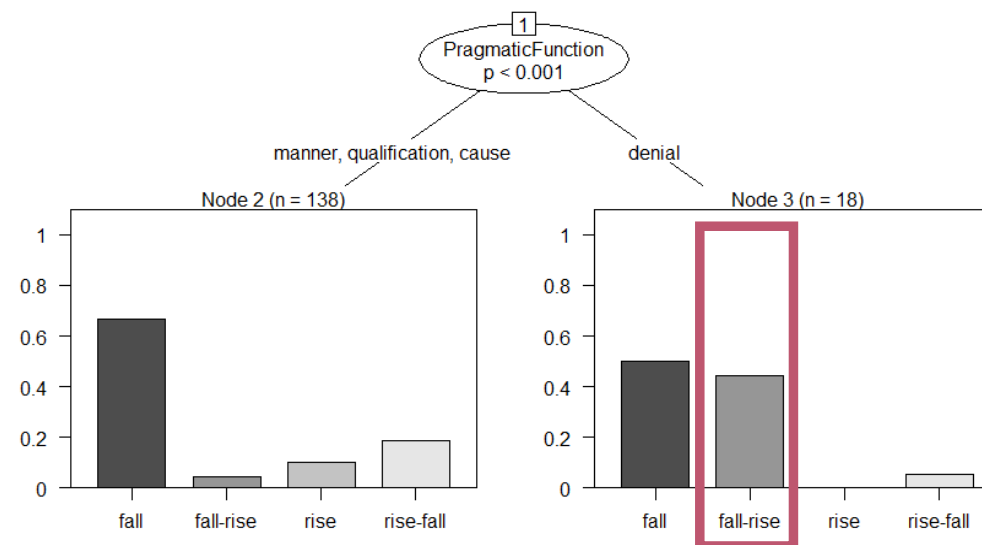
Pitch contour

Tone with which HM clause is uttered ~ semantic-pragmatic function



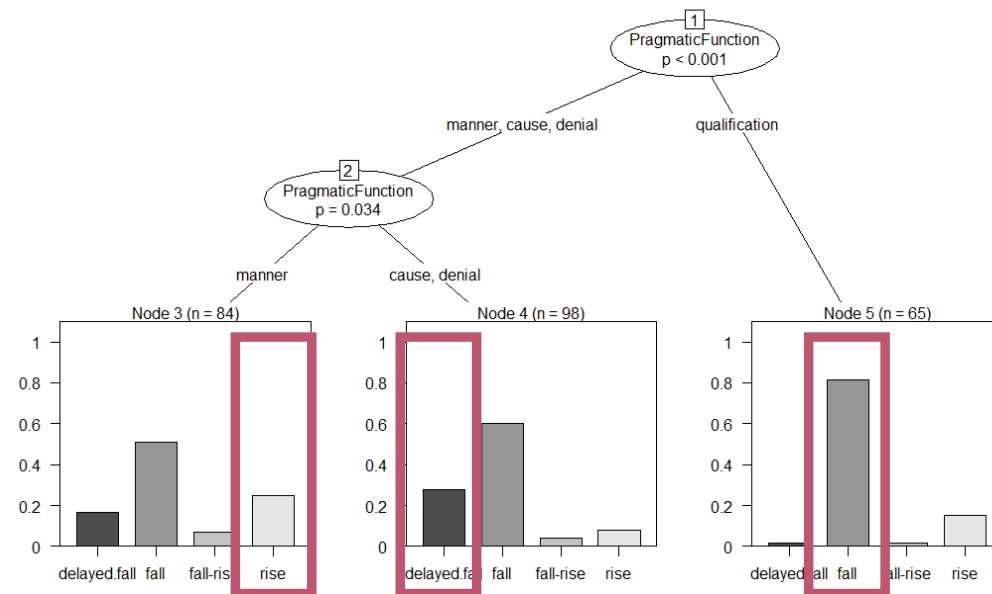
Pitch contour

Conditional inference tree for the interaction of **tone** ~ syntactic status + semantic-pragmatic function in **English**



Pitch contour

Conditional inference tree for the interaction of **tone** ~ syntactic status + semantic-pragmatic function in **Dutch**



Interim conclusions



Interim conclusions

RQ1. *To what extent do syntactic dependency and pragmatic function of HM clause interact?*

- Strong correlation syntactic status and semantic-pragmatic function: ‘manner’ associated with weak grammatical dependency; ‘denial’ with independency
- ‘Denial’ much more frequent in Dutch than in English

RQ2. *To what extent is each factor reflected in prosodic realisation of HM clause?*

- Prosodic factors like integration, onset pitch level, and pausing reflect syntactic status best
- Prosodic integration points to three-level distinction (i.e. strong vs. weak vs. independence)
- Onset pitch level and pausing reflect two-way distinction (i.e. dependence vs. independence)
 - Pitch and pausing signal start of new “paratone” with independent clauses (e.g., Wichmann 2000; Tench 2011)
 - group together series of multiple IUs as forming “extended sentence” (Tench 2011)



Interim conclusions

RQ2. *To what extent is each factor reflected in prosodic realisation of HM clause?* (continued)

- Weaker association between semantic-pragmatic function and pitch contour
 - Falls as default option in both languages
 - Attraction between ‘denial’ and fall-rises in English (cf. contradiction, appeal to reconsider [Collins & Mees 2003])
 - In Dutch, much more variation, though mild attraction between ‘denial’ and delayed fall

RQ3. *To what extent are interactions language-specific or generalisable?*

- Few differences between Dutch and English, apart from choices of pitch contour
- Interaction between syntactic status and semantic-pragmatic function in both languages, with overall similar tendencies
- Similar interactions between most prosodic factors and syntactic status



Case study 2. French vs. Spanish



Case study 2. French vs. Spanish

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Conclusion



Conclusion

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References

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