

Say it with *par contre*:
Marking strategies for contrastive subjects
at the syntax-prosody-lexicon interface

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Postdoctoral fellow of the
Fund for Scientific Research (F.R.S.-FNRS)
& UCLouvain

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Register variation in the expression of
contrastive subjects in French

A corpus-based study

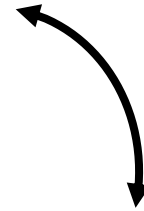


Jorina Brylsbaert

Supervisor: Karen Lahousse

Co-supervisors: Anne-Catherine Simon & Benedikt Szendrői

Contrast



Contrastive subjects



Le café procure un coup de fouet rapide.

'**Coffee** gives a quick boost.'

Le thé offre une stimulation plus prolongée.

'**Tea** provides a longer-lasting stimulation.'

A subject is contrastive if a set of **alternatives** is explicitly given or implicitly recoverable from the discourse

~ contrastive topics (Büning 2003, 2016; Lee 2008, 2017; Wagner 2012)

Contrastive subjects



Le café procure un coup de fouet rapide.

'**Coffee** gives a quick boost.'

Le thé offre une stimulation plus prolongée.

'**Tea** provides a longer-lasting stimulation.'

EXPLICIT MARKING?

Lexical marking strategies for contrastive subjects

Le café procure un coup de fouet rapide.

'Coffee gives a quick boost.'



1. CONTRASTIVE ADVERB (C-ADV)

*Le thé, **par contre**, offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

'Tea, **on the other hand**, provides a longer-lasting stimulation.'

2. EMPHATIC PRONOUN (E-PRO)

*Le thé, **lui**, offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

'Tea, **him**, provides a longer-lasting stimulation.' (lit.)

3. QUANT À + EMPHATIC PRONOUN (QUANT À E-PRO)

*Le thé, **quant à lui**, offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

'Tea, **as for him**, provides a longer-lasting stimulation.' (lit.)



Research goals of PhD thesis

1. ALTERNATION

Le thé $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{lui} \\ \textit{quant à lui} \\ \textit{par contre} \end{array} \right\}$ *offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

2. SYNTACTIC POSITION

$\left\{ \textit{Par contre} \right\}$ *le thé* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{lui} \\ \textit{quant à lui} \\ \textit{par contre} \end{array} \right\}$ *offre* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{lui} \\ \textit{quant à lui} \\ \textit{par contre} \end{array} \right\}$ *une stimulation [...]* $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{lui} \\ \textit{quant à lui.} \\ \textit{par contre} \end{array} \right\}$

3. INTERACTION WITH PROSODIC MARKING

(case study)

Par contre le thé | *offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

PROSODIC BOUNDARY STRENGTH

CORPUS-BASED RESEARCH IN DIFFERENT 'REGISTERS'

Focus of this talk

1. ALTERNATION

Le thé { *lui*
quant à lui
par contre } *offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

2. SYNTACTIC POSITION

{ *Par contre* } *le thé* { *lui*
quant à lui
par contre } *offre* { *lui*
quant à lui
par contre } *une stimulation [...]* { *lui*
quant à lui.
par contre }

3. INTERACTION WITH PROSODIC MARKING

(case study)

Par contre le thé | *offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

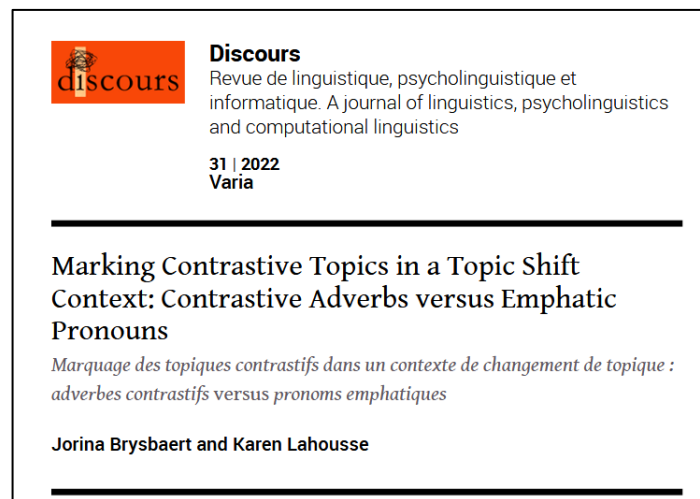
PROSODIC BOUNDARY STRENGTH

4. POST-DOCTORAL PROJECT (ON PROSODIC MARKING, CORPUS & EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH)

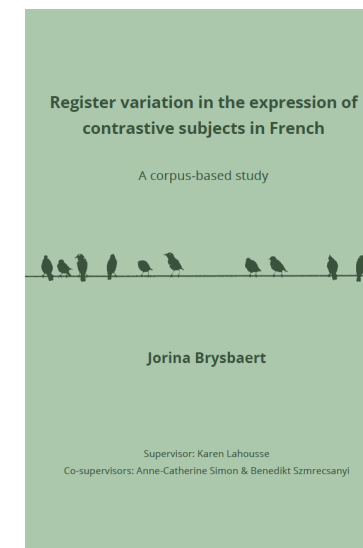
1. Alternation

Which factors influence the alternation between
C-Advs, E-Pros & *quant à* E-Pros?

Le thé $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{lui} \\ \textit{quant à lui} \\ \textit{par contre} \end{array} \right\}$ offre une stimulation plus prolongée.



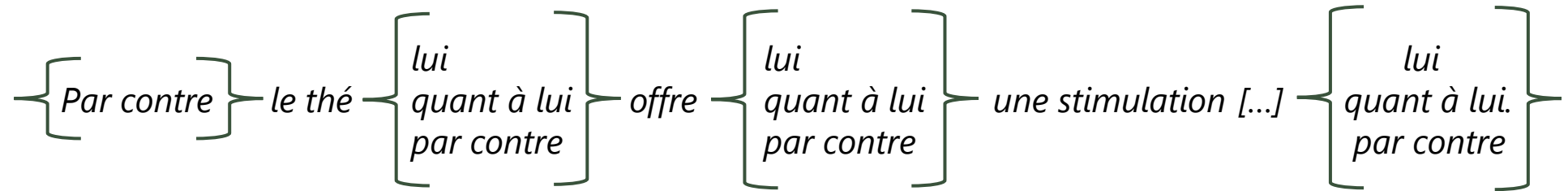
Brysbaert & Lahousse (2022)



Chapters 2 and 3

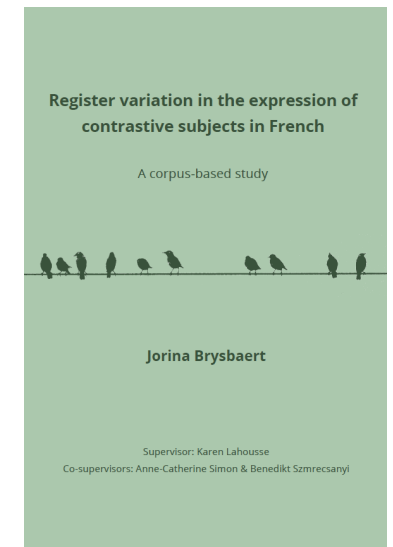
2. Syntactic position

Which factors influence the syntactic position of
C-Adv, E-Pros & *quant à* E-Pros?



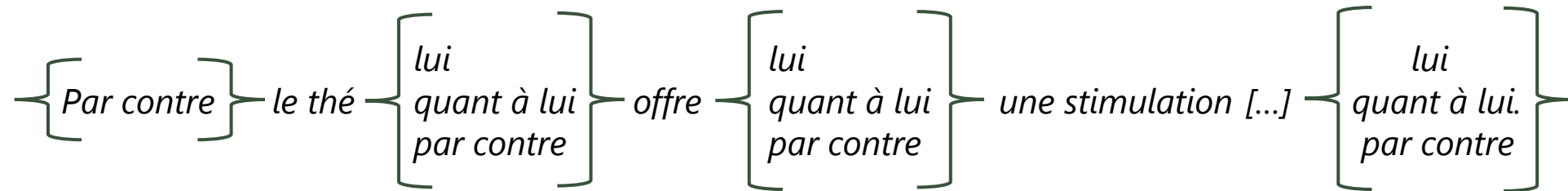
Syntactic position of contrast markers in different registers of French
Author(s): Jorina Brysbaert¹  and Karen Lahousse² 
[+ View Affiliations](#)
Source: International Journal of Corpus Linguistics
Available online: 16 January 2025
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.22082.bry>
Received: 12 Aug 2022 **Accepted:** 12 Jun 2023 **Version of Record published:** 16 Jan 2025

Brysbaert & Lahousse (2025)



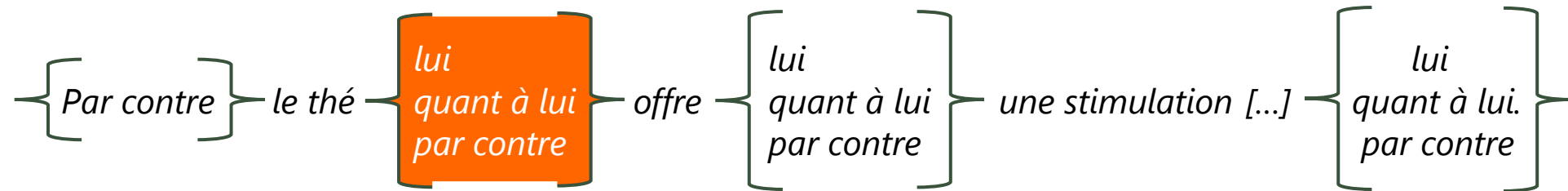
Chapter 4

Different syntactic positions

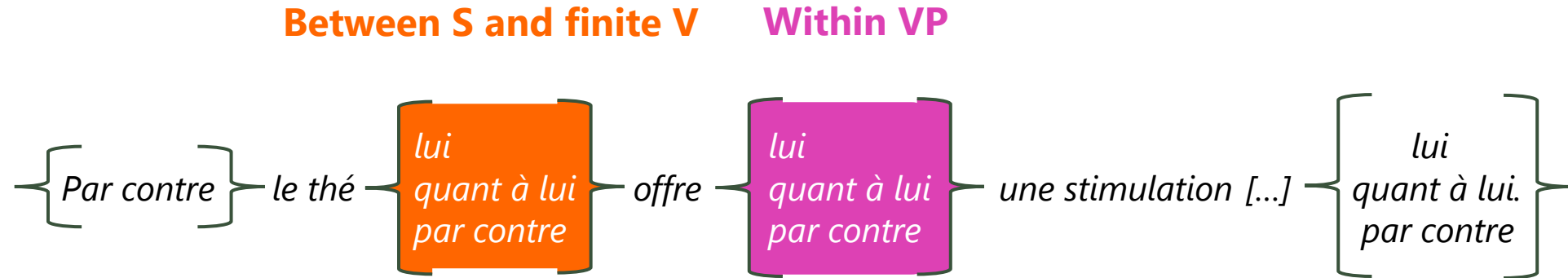


Different syntactic positions

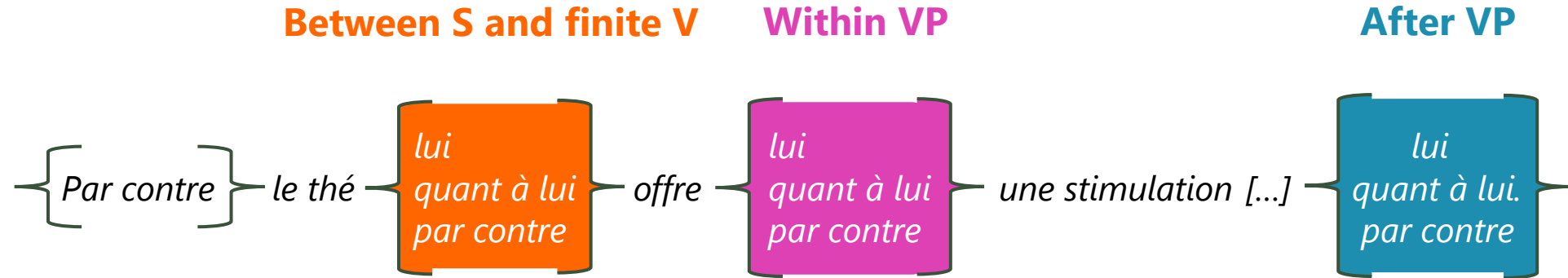
Between S and finite V



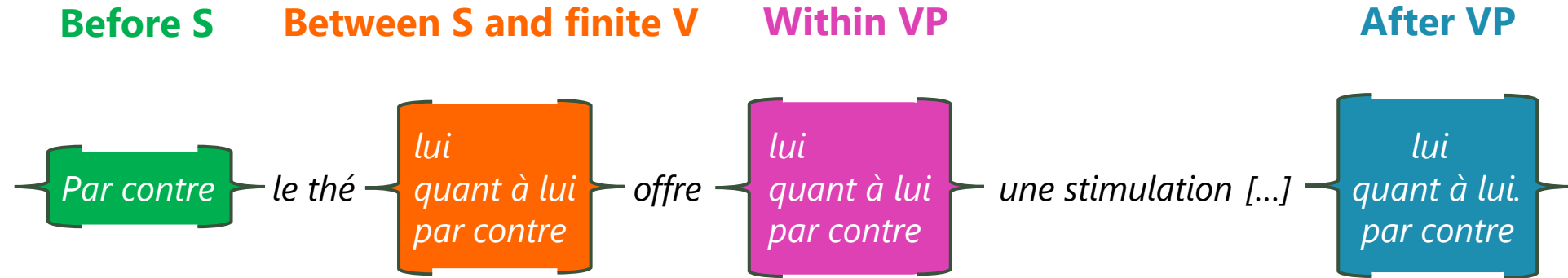
Different syntactic positions



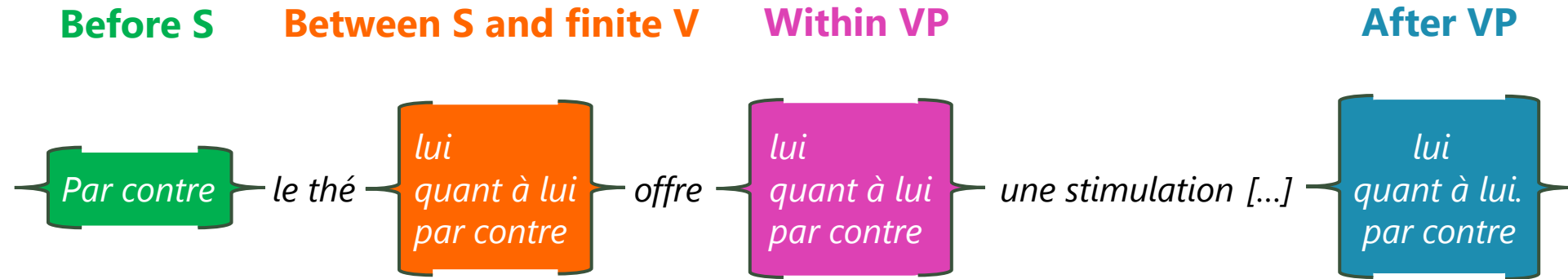
Different syntactic positions



Different syntactic positions



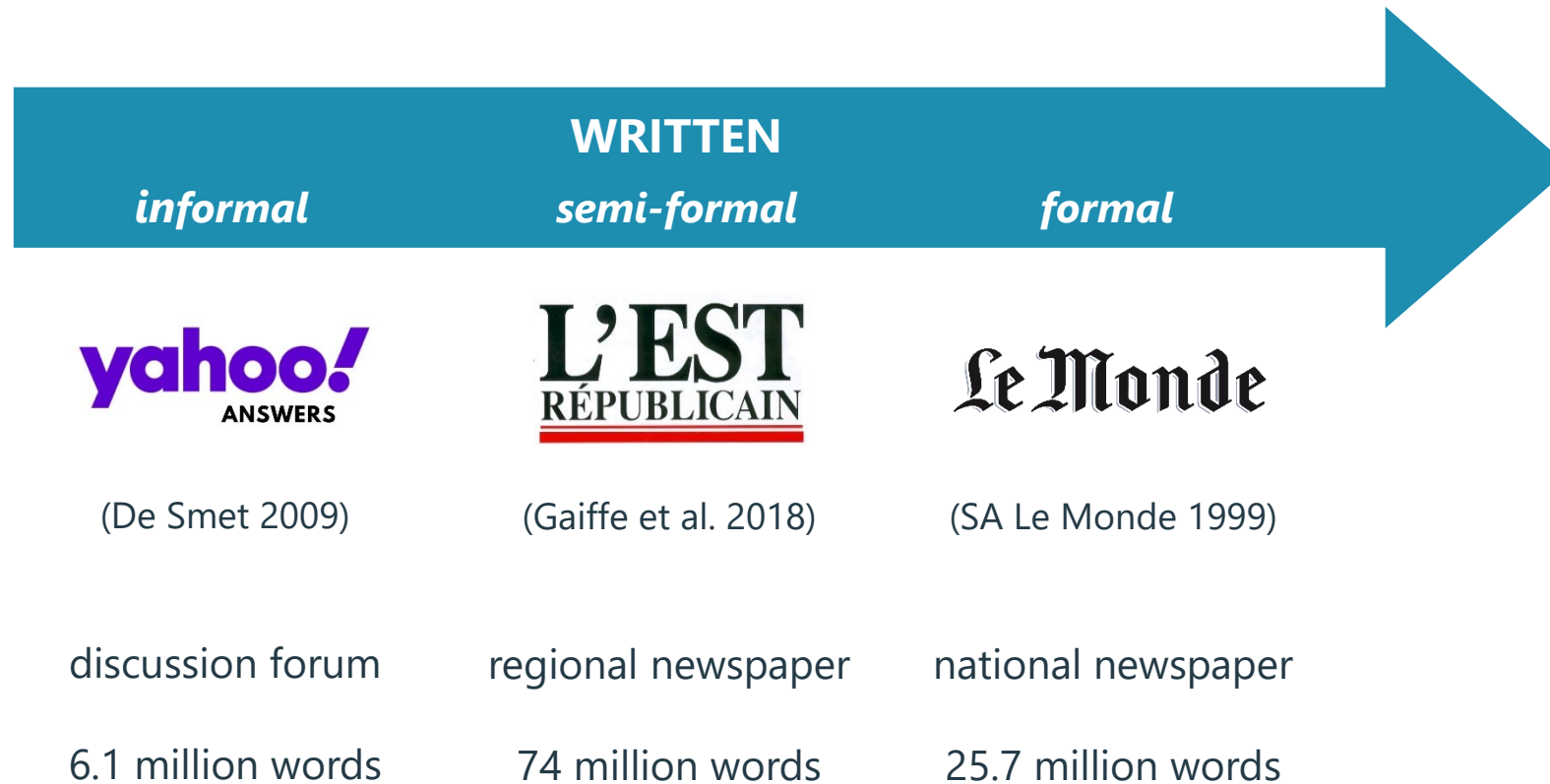
Different syntactic positions



Previous studies: Caddéo 2004; Dupont 2019, 2020
→ no comparison between contrast markers

Methodology

Quantitative analysis of 10028 C-Advs, 4965 E-Pros and 1804 *quant à* E-Pros in different corpora → different registers



Methodology

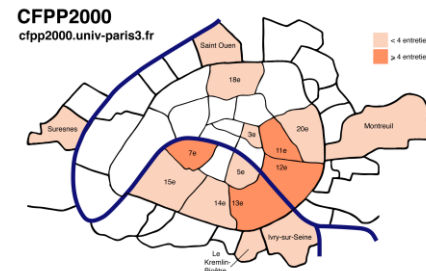
SPOKEN
semi-formal



(Avanzi et al. 2012-2020)

interviews

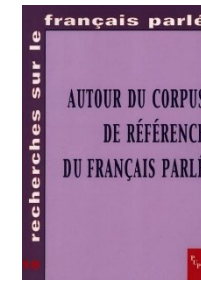
1.01 million words



(Branca-Rosoff et al. 2012)

interviews

0.7 million words



(Équipe DELIC 2004)

interviews + public speech

0.44 million words

Results

1. Language-internal point of view

What is the preferred syntactic position of C-Adv_s, E-Pros & *quant à* E-Pros?

2. Language-external point of view

What is the influence of register on the syntactic position of C-Adv_s, E-Pros & *quant à* E-Pros?

Results

1. Language-internal point of view

What is the preferred syntactic position of C-Advs, E-Pros & *quant* à E-Pros?

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Contrastive adverbs

Most frequent position
= before S (except for LM)

~ discourse function:
linking devices
(e.g. Altenberg 2006; Lenker 2010)

	LM	ER	YCC	SPOKEN
Before S	22% (580)	67% (3.304)	89% (1.626)	84% (495)
Between S & fin-V	14% (365)	6% (276)	3% (47)	1% (8)
Within VP	63% (1.683)	27% (1.356)	6% (113)	5% (29)
After VP	1% (23)	1% (26)	2% (38)	10% (59)
Total	100% (2.651)	100% (4.962)	100% (1.824)	100% (591)

(1) *Non le regelement de fédération de tennis internationale interdit de commencer le tennis à l'age de 13 ans, je suis désolé. **Par contre** la pratique du jokari est autorisée à partir de 13 ans!*

'No the rules of the international tennis federation prohibit starting tennis at the age of 13, I'm sorry.
On the other hand the practice of jokari is authorized from the age of 13!' (YCC)

Emphatic pronouns

Most frequent position
= between S & fin-V

~ discourse form & function:
anaphorically refer to
antecedent (= S) & mark
its contrastive nature
(Caddéo 2004; Cappeau 1999;
Nølke 1997; Rocquet 2014)

	LM	ER	YCC	SPOKEN
Before S				
Between S & fin-V	61% (1.093)	54% (1.519)	83% (235)	82% (67)
Within VP	39% (690)	45% (1.275)	12% (34)	15% (12)
After VP	0,3% (6)	1% (18)	5% (13)	4% (3)
Total	100% (1.789)	100% (2.812)	100% (282)	100% (82)

(2) *Martine est repartie dès le lendemain matin. Jean-Luc, **lui**, a assisté à la deuxième journée d'enregistrement aux Buttes-Chaumont.*

'Martine has left the next morning. Jean-Luc, **him**, has attended the second day of recording at Buttes-Chaumont.' (ER)

Quant à + emphatic pronoun

Most frequent position
= within VP (except for YCC)

~ form:
'heavier' syntactic weight
(Cappeau 1999)

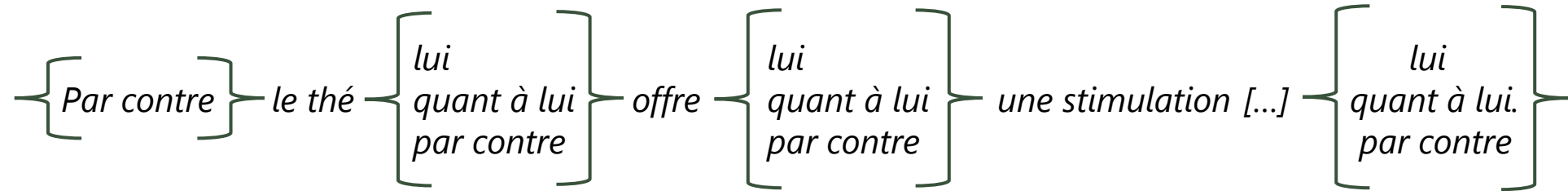
	LM	ER	YCC	SPOKEN
Before S				
Between S & fin-V	25% (82)	28% (401)	56% (18)	0% (0)
Within VP	74% (241)	71% (1.026)	44% (14)	0% (0)
After VP	1% (3)	1% (19)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Total	100% (326)	100% (1.446)	100% (32)	100% (0)

(3) *Sur le parcours identique à la saison dernière, Arnaud Chivot a décroché la seconde place. Antoine Serrière a, **quant à lui**, attrapé le 16e rang.*

'On the same course as last season, Arnaud Chivot has taken the second place. Antoine Serrière has, **as for him**, grabbed the 16th place.' (ER)

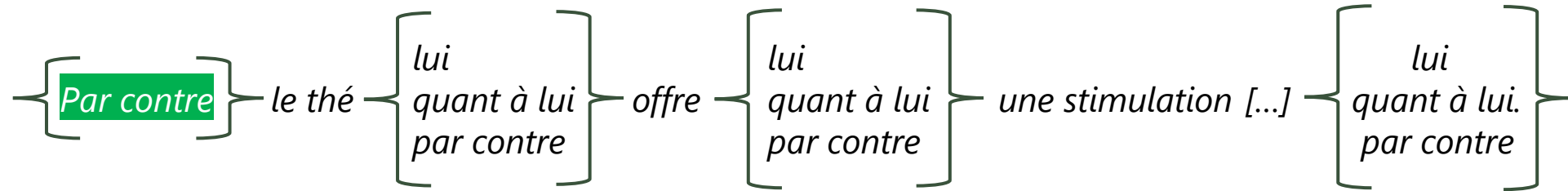
Interim summary

Different preferred syntactic position ~ discourse function & form



Interim summary

Different preferred syntactic position ~ discourse function & form

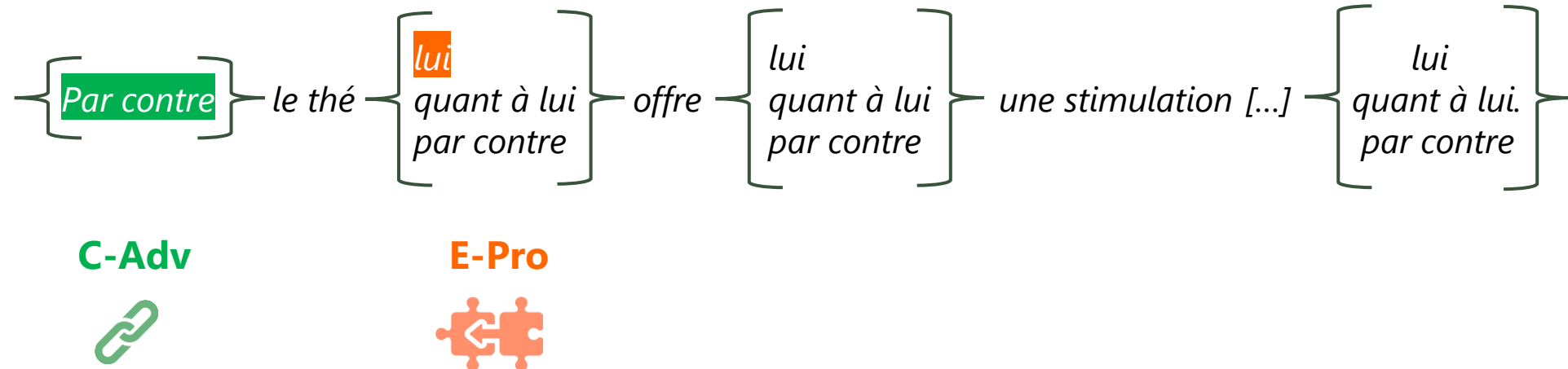


C-Adv



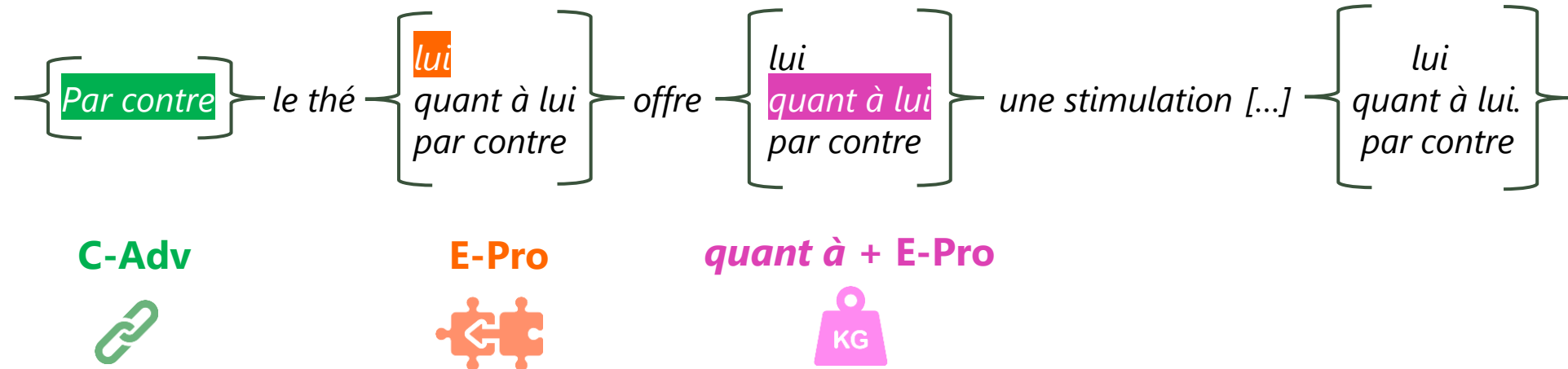
Interim summary

Different preferred syntactic position ~ discourse function & form



Interim summary

Different preferred syntactic position ~ discourse function & form



Results

1. Language-internal point of view

What is the preferred syntactic position of C-Adv_s, E-Pros & quant à E-Pros?

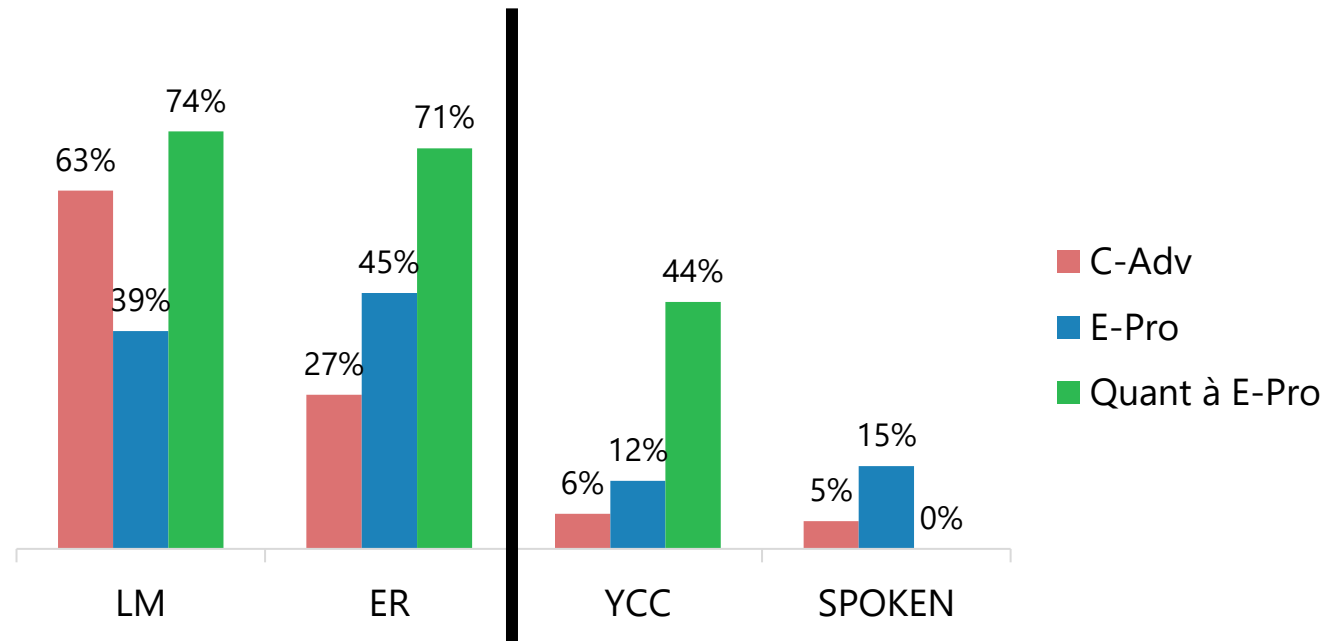
2. Language-external point of view

What is the influence of register on the syntactic position of C-Adv_s, E-Pros & *quant à* E-Pros?

Influence of register

Position within VP:

written formal (LM & ER) > written informal (YCC) & spoken



(C-Adv: $\chi^2 = 980.77$, $N = 10028$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.31$; E-Pros: $\chi^2 = 126.57$, $N = 4965$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.16$; *quant à* E-Pros: $\chi^2 = 11.76$, $N = 1804$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.08$)

Influence of register

The **influence of discourse function & form** on the syntactic position is **register-dependent**:

- (semi-)formal written French: influence of discourse function & form is neutralized in favor of the standard French word order S + fin-V + other elements
- informal written & spoken French: influence of discourse function & form is more important
~ discourse-configurationality of informal/spoken French
(e.g. De Cat 2007; É. Kiss 1995, 2015; Karssenbergh 2017; Leonetti 2017; Surányi 2016; Wolfe 2021)

Conclusion

Syntactic position of contrast markers

→ combination of language-internal & -external factors



Register variation is pervasive in French

(e.g. Armstrong 2001, 2002; Ashby 1981; Barra-Jover 2004; Cappeau 1999a, 2008; Coveney 1996, 2000; Gadet 1996; Massot 2008, 2010; Rowlett 2007, 2013; Wolfe 2021; Zribi-Hertz 2011)

Example of another factor: complexity of the subject

M. Périssol, ministre du logement de 1995 à 1997



MINISTÈRE
CHARGÉ DU
LOGEMENT

*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*

1995-1997



higher chance of position within VP

complex, post-modified subject

- (4) *M. Dériot fait équipe avec le sortant centriste Bernard Barraux. M. Périssol, ministre du logement de 1995 à 1997, joue, **quant à lui**, sur ce passé récent et sur sa réputation d'élus de dossiers.* (LM)

'Mr. Dériot teams up with outgoing centrist Bernard Barraux. Mr. Périssol, housing minister from 1995 to 1997, is playing, **as for him**, on this recent past and on his reputation as an elected official.'

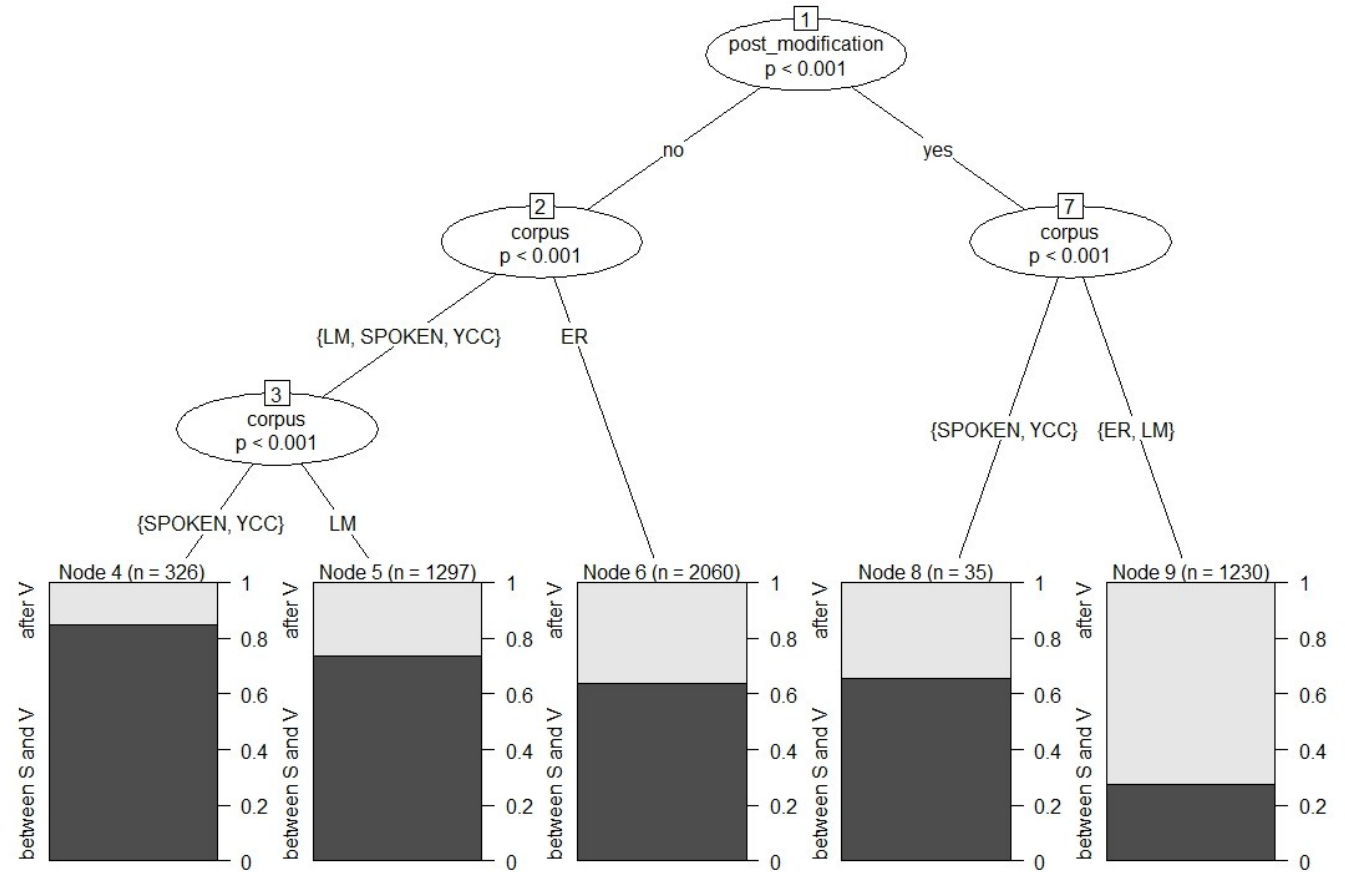
Register variation in the expression of contrastive subjects in French

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3. Interaction with prosodic marking (case study)

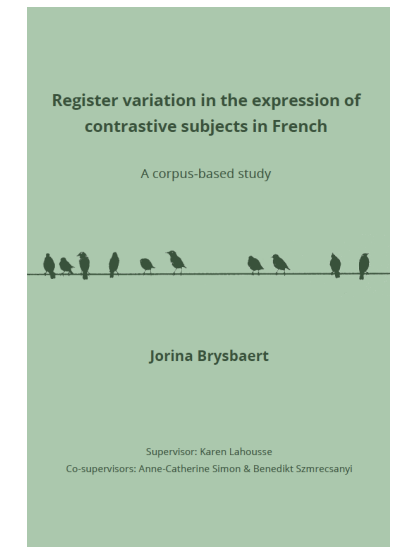
How do the C-AdvS interact with prosodic marking?

Par contre le thé | offre une stimulation plus prolongée.

PROSODIC BOUNDARY STRENGTH



Brysbaert & Simon (2025)



Chapter 5

Starting point: observation from previous study

C-Adv occurs very often before the S in spoken French

(5) *Le café procure un coup de fouet rapide.*

Par contre, *le thé offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

'Coffee gives a quick boost. **On the other hand**, tea provides a longer-lasting stimulation.'

→ In this position, the C-Adv easily expresses a broad contrast between two clauses, without emphasizing e.g. the subject

→ But prosodic cues might indicate the scope of the C-Adv

	SPOKEN
Before S	84% (495)
Between S & fin-V	1% (8)
Within VP	5% (29)
After VP	10% (59)
Total	100% (591)

Par contre le thé | *offre une stimulation plus prolongée.*

PROSODIC BOUNDARY STRENGTH

Case study on clause-initial *par contre* + preverbal accentuable S

Hypothesis: prosodic boundary at the right edge of the S will be stronger when the S is contrastive (6) than when this is not the case (7)

- (6) *Knoops a un accent à couper au couteau mais pour moi ce n'est pas un accent typique de la région de Charleroi **par contre** Van Cauwenberghe* |^{STRONG} *n'a pas d'accent et je ne sais pas dire sa provenance* (VALIBEL)

'Knoops has a really thick accent, but for me it's not a typical accent from the Charleroi region **on the other hand** Van Cauwenberghe |^{STRONG} has no accent, and I can't tell where he's from.'

- (7) *C'est vrai que on disait que on avait l'impression quand même que les gens lisaient moins par exemple **par contre** le le livre* |^{WEAK} *est toujours euh est toujours un cadeau* (CFPP)

'It's true that we used to say we had the impression that people were reading less, for example, **on the other hand** books |^{WEAK} are still, um, still a common gift'

Methodology

+ data from extra spoken corpus

Discours
VALIBEL
Variation

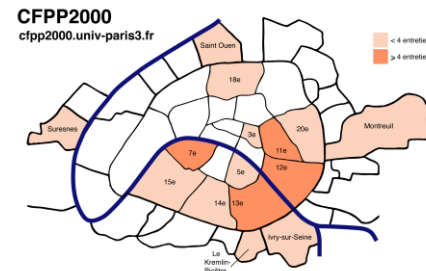
SPOKEN *semi-formal*



(Avanzi et al. 2012-2020)

interviews

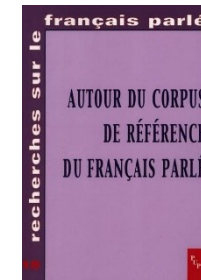
1.01 million words



(Branca-Rosoff et al. 2012)

interviews

0.7 million words



(Équipe DELIC 2004)

interviews + public speech

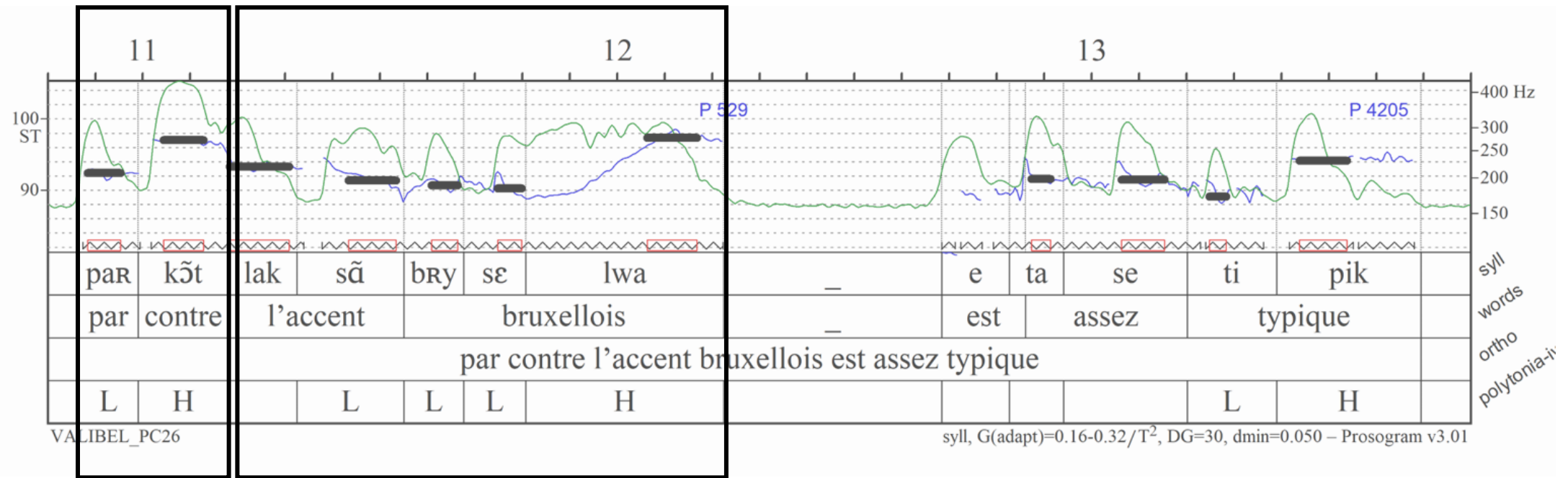
0.44 million words

Methodology

Analysis of **51 examples** in Praat, with focus on combination of **3 acoustic measures** as a proxy for the prosodic boundary strength (e.g. Brunetti, Avanzi & Gendrot 2012; D'Imperio & Michelas 2014; Simon & Christodoulides 2016)

1. Presence/absence of long silent pause after S
2. Relative duration of last accentuable syllable of C-Adv ↔ relative duration of last accentuable syllable of S
3. Maximum pitch on last accentuable syllable of C-Adv ↔ maximum pitch on last accentuable syllable of S

Methodology: example



C-Adv

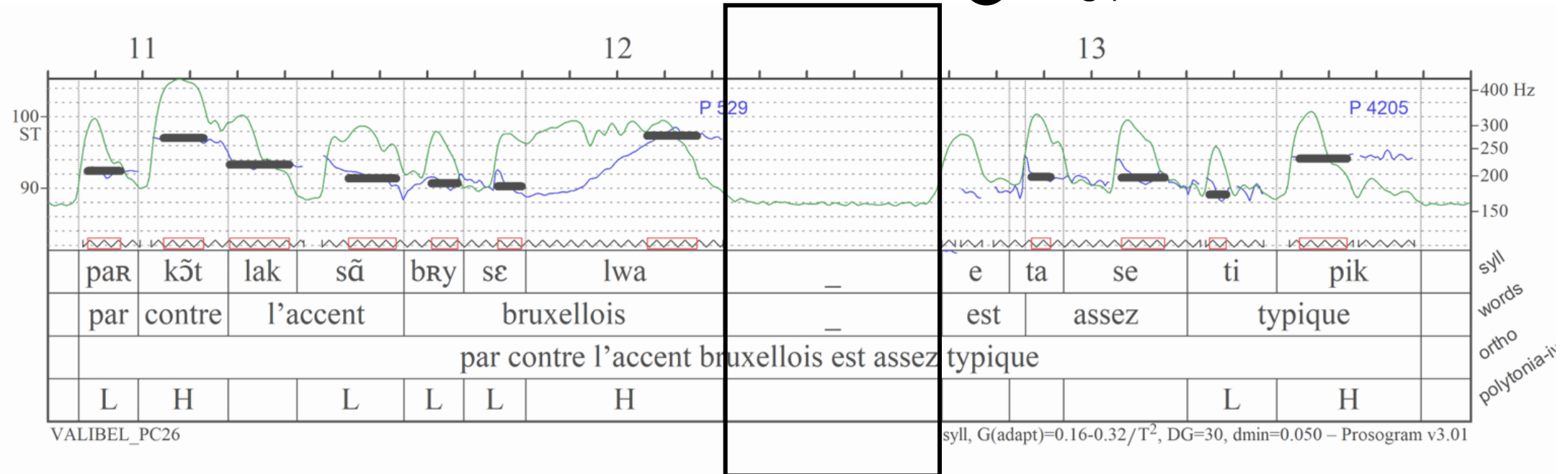
Preverbal accentuable S

'on the other hand the Brussels accent is quite typical'

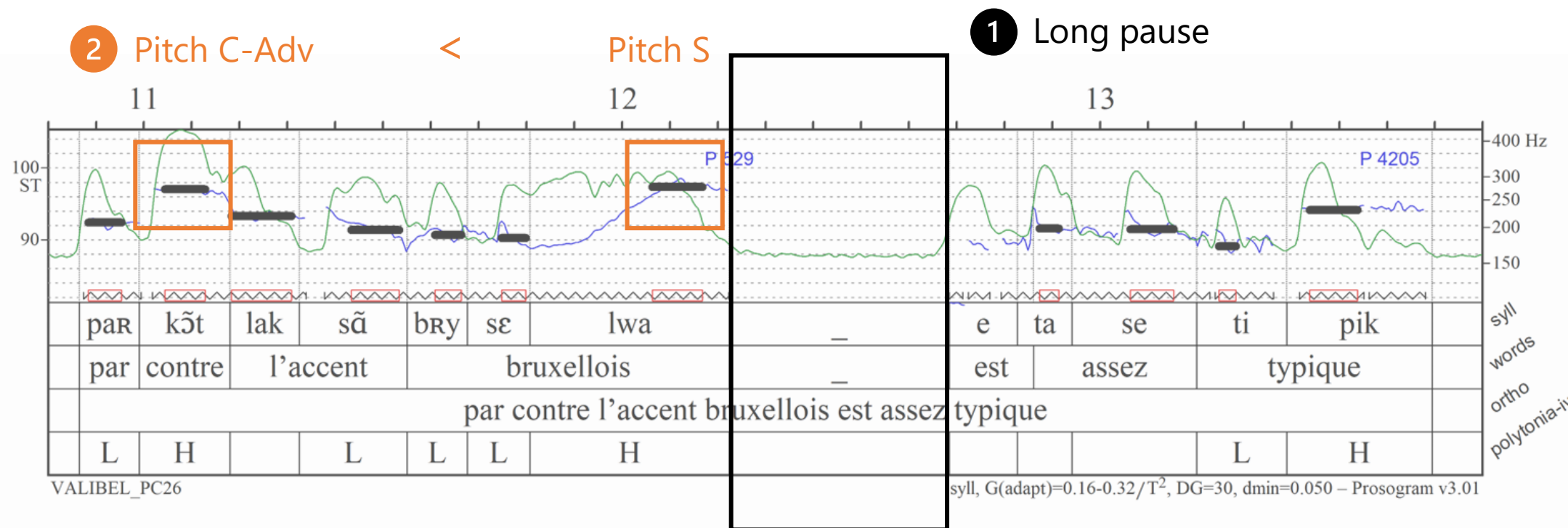
Methodology: example



1 Long pause

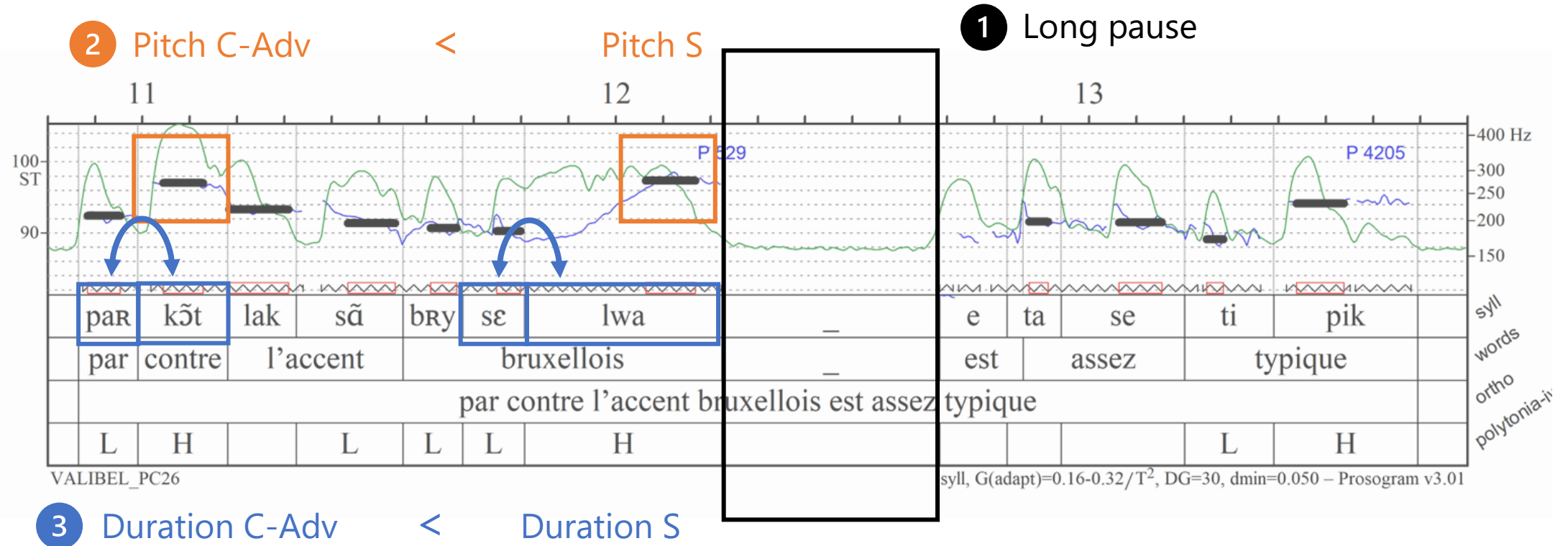


Methodology: example





Methodology: example



Results

Quantitative overview:

Acoustic parameters indicating a strong prosodic boundary	Number of examples
3 parameters	7 (14%)
2 parameters	4 (8%)
1 parameter	21 (41%)
0 parameters	19 (37%)
Total	51 (100 %)



3 realized parameters (7/51 examples)

In all these cases, **the subject** is contrastive (i.e. there is an explicit **alternative** in the discourse context)

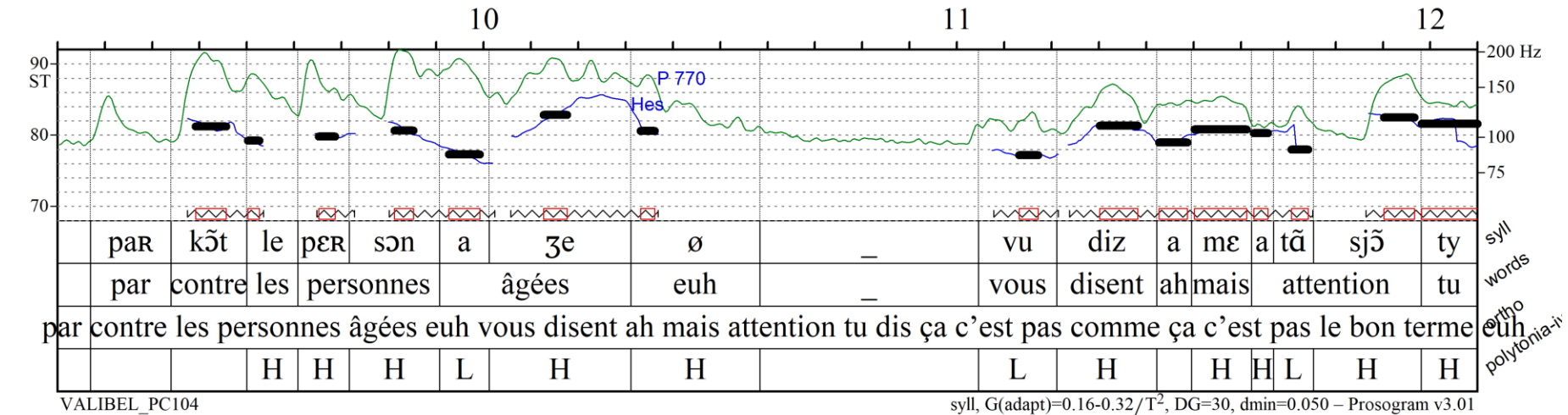
(8) [CONTEXT: knowledge of Walloon dialect]

***les jeunes** parlaient un peu wallon j'ai pu me rendre compte par la suite qu'ils le parlaient pas bien [...] euh **par contre les personnes âgées** euh vous disent ah mais attention tu dis ça c'est pas comme ça c'est pas le bon terme (VALIBEL)*

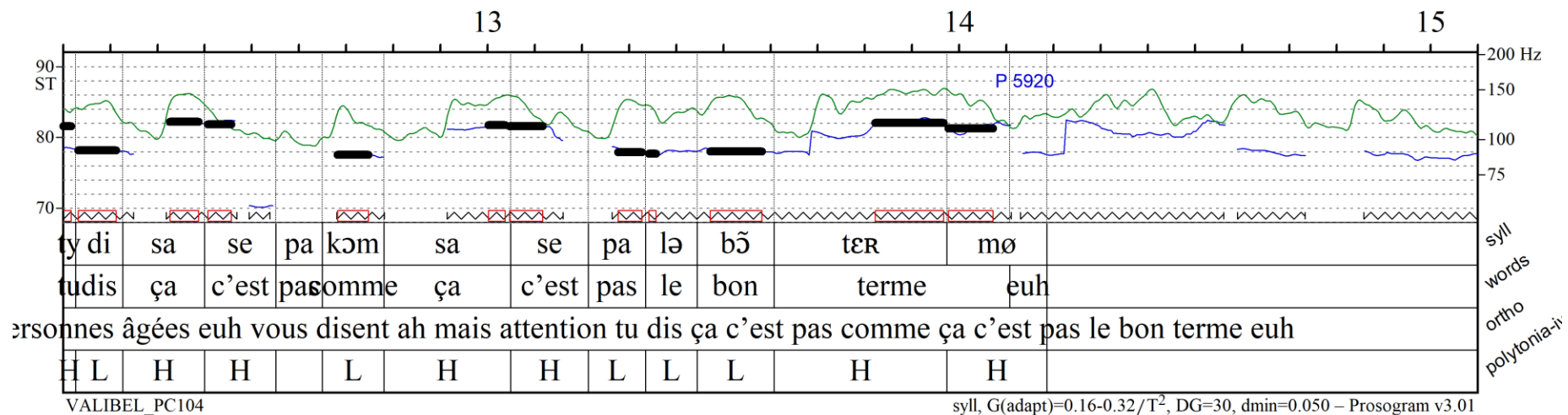
- Long silent pause after S: 461 ms
- Relative duration [ʒe] > relative duration [kɔ̃t]: 2,9 > 1
- Max. pitch on [ʒe] > max. pitch on [kɔ̃t]: difference of 3,2 st



3 realized parameters (7/51 examples)



BUT:
hesitation after S



2 realized parameters (4/51 examples)

- In all these cases, the subject is contrastive
- Quantitative overview:

2 realized acoustic parameters	Number of examples
Pause + duration of syllable	2
Pause + pitch difference	1
Pitch difference + duration of syllable	1
Total	4

→ For these 4 cases, there could be a valid reason why one of the parameters is not realized

2 realized parameters (4/51 examples)

For example: no pitch difference, because of length (due to complex contrastive relation)?

Spoken versus written French + France versus Belgium

- (9) *mais la presse française ça dépend quelle presse mais euh évidemment Le-Monde euh la le Le-Figaro et cetera cette presse écrite-là euh s'exprime très bien par écrit m moi je parlais surtout du français oral [...] non je ne fais pas tellement de de différence **sur le français oral** en tout cas **par contre sur le français écrit les médias français et les journaux français** ont beaucoup plus de style que **les journaux belges*** (VALIBEL)

1 realized parameter (21/51 examples)

- Contrastive subject (9 examples)

(10) *les Liégeois trouvent que j'ai un accent euh les Parisiens aussi euh **par contre** les Français du Nord Pas-de-Calais trouvent que je n'ai pas d'accent* (VALIBEL)

- Non-contrastive subject (12 examples)

(11) *il y a la Fête des voisins [mm] que je pense pas qu'ils l'aient fait cette année euh ici là où j'étais avant ils le faisaient pas **par contre** l'année dernière les voisins avaient enfin les voisins l'immeuble avait organisé un une petite fête entre Noël et nouvel an* (CFPP)

1 realized parameter (21/51 examples)

Quantitative overview:

1 realized acoustic parameter	Number of examples
Pause	1
Pitch difference	3
Duration of syllable	17
Total	21

→ It's possible that the duration parameter is present "by default" to mark the end of an accentual phrase (e.g. Simon & Christodoulides 2016)

0 realized parameters (19/21 examples)

- Contrastive subject (9 examples)

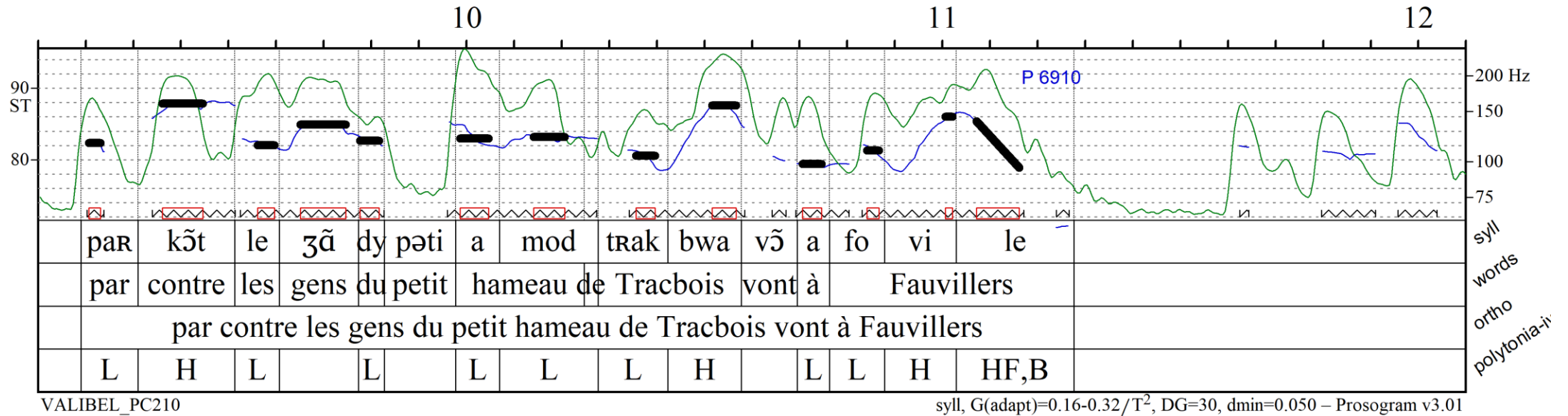
(12) *les gens de Bodange allaient à la messe en allemand à Wisenbach qui est le troisième village plus loin et qui habitait qui est aussi de Fauvillers **par contre les gens du petit hameau de Tracbois** vont à Fauvillers en français* (VALIBEL)

- Non-contrastive subject (10 examples)

(13) *on a vu tiens voilà ça aussi arriver ces codes de portes qu'on aurait jamais pensé j'avais vu ça à New York en soixante-quatre jamais j'aurais pensé qu'à Paris on aurait des codes [...] tiens voilà ça c'est une chose de ville jamais je n'a- **par contre la ville** est devenue très très belle* (CFPP)



0 realized parameters (19/21 examples)



- No long silent pause after S
- Relative duration [bwa] < relative duration [kōt]: 1 < 1,8
- Max. pitch on [bwa] < max. pitch on [kōt]: difference of 0,4 st

Conclusion

- Only when the subject is contrastive, speakers can insert a strong prosodic boundary after the subject (11 examples with 2 or 3 parameters realized)
 - Prosodic phrasing in French:
 - can be used to delineate the scope of the contrast introduced by a clause-initial C-Adv
 - can be used to obtain similar discursive effects as those achieved by adverb placement in formal written French
 - However, most cases in our corpus show few or no acoustic parameters indicating a strong prosodic boundary
- Experimental research needed to test robustness of the findings

4. Post- doctoral project

Focus on spoken French

Case studies on prosodic marking (in interaction with
lexical/syntactic marking)

Corpus and experimental research

Current research stay

Set up a production experiment, in collaboration with Lisa Brunetti, to test:

- the prosodic marking of the scope of a C-Adv in a more systematic way

Condition with
contrastive subject

Contexte :

Tu discutes avec une amie sur de beaux sites panoramiques à photographier.
Elle hésite entre les châteaux et les moulins.

Qu'est-ce qui est plus joli selon toi,
les châteaux ou les moulins ?



Ton amie

Les châteaux bloquent
souvent la vue sur l'horizon.
**Par contre, les moulins
créent un beau décor.**



Toi

Current research stay

Set up a production experiment, in collaboration with Lisa Brunetti, to test:

- the prosodic marking of the scope of a C-Adv in a more systematic way

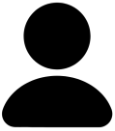
Contexte :

Tu discutes avec une amie sur la modernisation à la campagne. Elle semble nostalgique de l'époque où on utilisait encore les moulins.



Est-ce que les moulins servent encore à quelque chose aujourd'hui ?

Ton amie



On les utilise de moins en moins pour moudre.
Par contre, les moulins créent un beau décor.

Toi

*Condition without
contrastive subject*

Current research stay

Set up a production experiment, in collaboration with Lisa Brunetti, to test:

- the prosodic marking of in situ contrastive subjects (that are not lexically or syntactically marked)

Condition with
contrastive subject

Contexte :

Tu discutes avec une amie sur de beaux sites panoramiques à photographier.
Elle hésite entre les châteaux et les moulins.

Qu'est-ce qui est plus joli selon toi,
les châteaux ou les moulins ?



Ton amie

Les châteaux bloquent
souvent la vue sur l'horizon.
**Les moulins créent un beau
décor.**

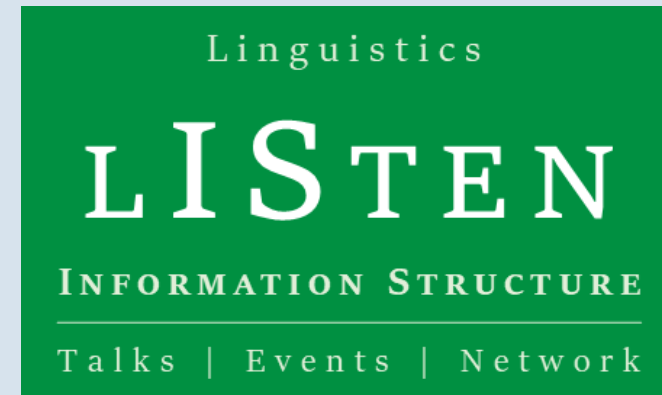


Toi

MERCI !

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