



Exploring Prosodic Marking of Information Structure in Child and Adult Albanian

Enkeleida Kapia^{1,2} & Felicitas Kleber²

¹Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Tiranë & ²Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich



Speech Prosody 2024, July 2-5, Universiteit Leiden

Aim of this study

- How do L1-Albanian children acquire prosodic marking of information structure (= what's new/old)?
- Why this? Why now?
 - Response to call for action regarding research on this type of L1 acquisition in free word order languages
(Chen & Narasimhan, 2022)
- Why Albanian?
 - understudied and free word order language



L1-acquisition of prosody

Children are good early on, but ...

- Children know how to vary prosody to distinguish new from old information even at two-word stage (Chen, 2011)
- However, adult-like production does not develop cross-linguistically until children reach the age of 10 or 11 years old (Chen & Narasimhan, 2022; Chen, 2018; Kügler & Calhoun, 2021)

How do children acquire focus marking?

- acquisition of prosodic focus marking is influenced by four types of typological differences (Chen, 2018)
 - reliance on phonetic means
 - transparency of form-function mapping between phonological cues and focus
 - whether the prosodic parameters are used for lexical purposes
 - importance of prosodic means relative to non-prosodic means



rate of acquisition



route of acquisition

Prosodic and Non-Prosodic Means

- Relative importance of prosody and word order influences children's use of phonetic means
 - E.g. 4- to 5-year-olds acquiring languages using word order and prosody (e.g. Finnish) exploit prosody more extensively in marked OVS than children acquiring languages where prosody plays a primary role (e.g. German)



How do these predictions work with Albanian given that Albanian uses both prosody and word order to mark information structure?



Focus Marking in Albanian

Albanian

- branch of its own within the Indo-European family
- 6–7 million speakers
- relatively free word order



Hayden120. (2014, May 05). **Indo-European Language Family**. *World History Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/2613/indo-european-language-family/>

Syntactic Means in Focus Marking

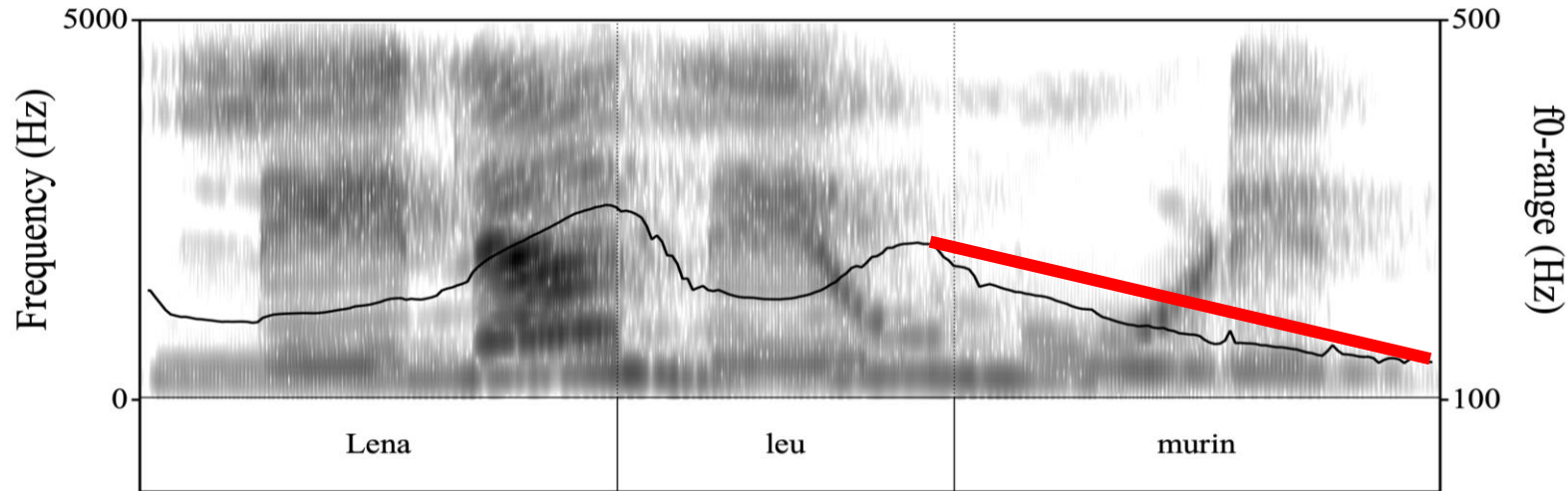
- Canonical SVO (subject, verb, object) word order
 - Location of **old information (topic)** is utterance-initial
 - Location of **new information (focus)** is utterance-final

(1) **Lena**_{Topic} leu **murin**_{Focus}. *Lena painted the wall.*

- OVS (object, verb, subject) used “when the speaker needs to highlight the object even more” (Floqi 1976)

(2) **Murin**_{Focus} leu **Lena**_{Topic}. *The wall Lena painted.*

Prosodic Means in Focus Marking in SVO



What happened?

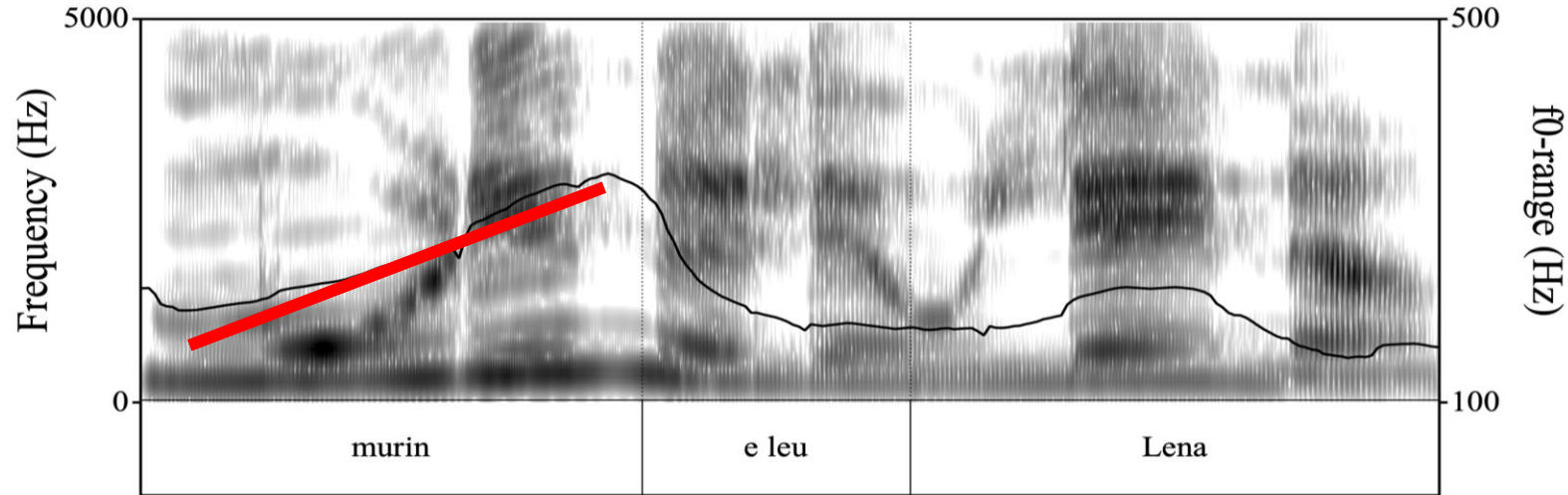
Lena painted the wall.

Lena leu murin.

L*La L%

low

Prosodic Means in Focus Marking in OVS



What happened?

The wall Lena painted.

Murin e leu Lena.

L*Ha

rise

Research Questions



Are there prosodic differences between **rheme**, i.e. new information in general **vs. kontrast**, i.e. contrastive new information (cf. Vallduvi & Vilkuna 1998)?



Do children use syntactic means, i.e. word order, to mark information structure, and, if so, how?



Do children use prosodic means to mark information structure, and if so, what do the contour patterns look like?



Current Study

Methods

- interactive dialogue task
 - participants saw picture on screen
 - experimenter asked them question to elicit 3 constructs, e.g.

Kush e leu murin?

‘Who painted the wall?’

Çfarë leu djali?

‘What did the boy paint?’

Djali leu murin apo derën?

‘Did the boy paint the wall or the door?’

*Djali e leu **murin**_{TOPIC}*

‘The boy painted the wall.’

*Djali leu **murin**_{RHEME}*

‘The boy painted the wall.’

*Djali leu **murin**_{KONTRAST}*

‘The boy painted the wall.’

- participants were free in their choice of word order
- 3 target words x 3 constructs x 4 repetitions = 36 question-answer dialogues

Methods

- Subjects in pilot study
 - Five monolingual Albanian-speaking children (mean age: 6;1, 3 girls)
 - Five monolingual Albanian-speaking adults (mean age: 34; 3 women)
- Recordings and post-processing
 - quiet rooms in Tirana using SpeechRecorder
 - automatic segmentation with MAUS
 - EMU speech database
 - prosodic annotation using AlbToBI (Kapia et al. in press)
- 20 further participants currently analyzed



Results from pilot

Word order and Prosody in Focus Marking

- OVS rarely used, only with topic!

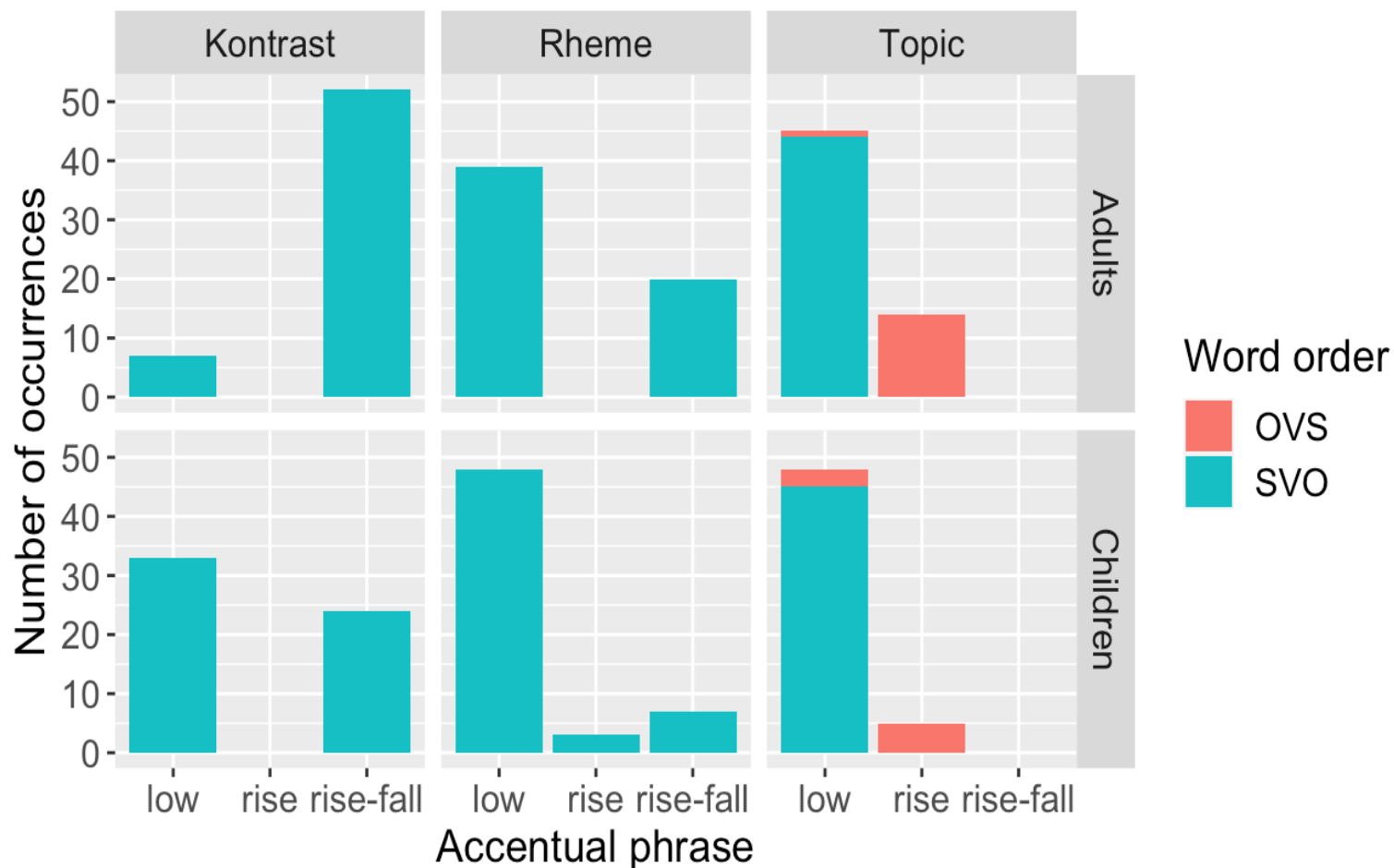
- SVO most dominant

- Adults

- topic → low
- rheme → low + rise-fall
- kontrast → rise-fall

- Children

- topic → low
- rheme → low
- kontrast → low + rise-fall





Discussion and Conclusion

Implications for Prosody and Acquisition

- prosodic means apparently used more extensively than syntactic means to mark information structure
- children almost always prefer using SVO – just as adults do
- in contrast to tendency for new-before-given word order frequently reported for child speech (Narasimhan & Dimroth 2008)
- Similar to languages like Finnish, known for their complex use of word order and prosody

Implications for Prosody and Acquisition

- Children partially acquired form-function mapping → delayed acquisition compared to children acquiring languages that use mainly prosody, e.g. English and German
- rheme and kontrast distinguished prosodically to some extent
- less transparent form-function mapping found for rheme and kontrast may delay acquisition
- ➔ route and rate of acquisition differ between languages, depending on phonological and syntactic structure

Implications for Albanian Prosody

Support for previous observations (based on adults' data)

- inventory proposed within AM framework overall confirmed
- further support for the existence of the L* La pattern
- L* La for topic and L* or L+H* for rheme

New findings

- kontrast is denoted using L+H* La, i.e. rise-fall, cf. Finnish and Northern Biskaian Basque
- adults use word order for information structure to a lesser extent than previously assumed



Contact: Enkeleida Kapia
ekapia@bu.edu

Thank you!

Many **thanks** to Rami Memushaj,
Jana Freundberger, anonymous
reviewers



All the participating subjects 

Individual Variation in Prosodic Use in SVO

