

Prosodic prominence variation in English adjective-noun constructions: An overview of relevant factors

Abstract

Prosody variation in general and in English in particular can have different reasons. Complex constructions of the latter language have been hotly and intensively debated in this respect in recent years. Unfortunately, the primary focus has so far laid on combinations that consist of two nouns. Other construction types, such as nominal constructions that are made up of an adjective and a noun, have been studied less. The present article aims at approaching this topic and at providing an overview of factors that have an influence on the prosodic prominence pattern of English adjective-noun constructions. That is, the state of the art is discussed in order to, first, see how far we are and, second, pave the way to further research that is still needed. It is well known that complex constructions in the aforementioned language can carry either initial (e.g., *blackboard*) or non-initial prominence (e.g., *black board*). The distinction between items with and those without initial prominence has long been assumed to reflect the compound-phrase differentiation or, at least, the difference between lexicalized and non-lexicalized constructions. That is, for instance, while *blackboard* has been considered to be a compound or a lexicalized construction and, therefore, bears initial prominence, *black board* often functions as a typical example of a phrase or non-lexicalized combination with non-initial prominence. The current contribution shows that this picture is clearly oversimplified as it neglects a great number of relevant factors that contribute to the assignment of prosodic prominence in English adjective-noun combinations and must therefore be taken into consideration. By categorizing the factors in several sections, the paper intends to provide an overview of how the distribution of prosodic prominence is determined in order to, first, shed more light on this rather complicated issue and, second, initiate further research on English adjective-noun combinations that tackles open questions in the field. For this purpose, the article first defines the above-named notions of “initial prominence” and “non-initial prominence” and then discusses the following factor categories: (a) The influence of the environment in which a construction appears, (b) factors that relate to a construction as a whole, (c) factors that relate to individual construction constituents, and (d) speaker- or hearer-related factors.

1 Introduction

The prosodic prominence pattern of constructions in English represents a topic that is controversially examined in the literature. Specifically, it is often investigated why certain complex items are stressed in one particular way and why others behave differently. Constructions that consist of two free morphemes, e.g., nominal items that are made up of an adjective and a noun, represent a classic example in this context. For instance, while *brownstone*, which does not refer to any stone that is brown but, instead, to a specific kind of stone, bears its major prominence on the adjective, *brown stone*, which can refer to any stone of brown color in turn, does not carry the main prominence on *brown*. In this case, the reason for the prosodic distinction might be argued to reflect the semantic-functional difference between *brownstone* and *brown stone*: Only the complex item that names a kind of something takes initial prominence. Although the phenomenon is attested in several so-called stress minimal pairs, it has to be acknowledged that counterexamples exist as well. *Red light*, for example, does not carry its main prosodic prominence on the adjective, independently of whether it refers to a specific kind of light, namely the red traffic signal, or whether it designates any light of red color. These counterexamples show that there must be other factors that also play a role and have an influence on the question whether a specific construction takes initial prominence or not. The present contribution aims at reflecting upon these factors and providing an overview of the state of the art in order to facilitate our understanding of how prosodic prominence is distributed in English adjective-noun (AN) combinations and in order to initiate further research in the field, which is definitely still necessary. This is a crucial step because, unfortunately, research on prosodic characteristics of adjective-noun constructions in the English language is still in the early stages of development, as opposed to noun-noun (NN) constructions, which have been extensively studied over the last years and for which comprehensive overviews exist already (see, e.g., Bauer, Lieber & Plag 2013; Bell & Plag 2012, 2013; Plag 2006, 2010; Plag, Kunter & Lappe 2007; Plag, Kunter, Lappe & Braun 2008).

In order to achieve this goal, the current article is structured as follows. Section 2 carefully defines the notions of initial and non-initial prominence, which represent the two key terms of the present contribution. Section 3 reflects upon potential explanations for prominence variation in complex nominal combinations in the English language that are composed of an adjective and a noun. This section presents, on the one hand, direct evidence from AN combinations and, on the other hand, looks at results found in studies investigating NN constructions and analyzes whether and how these insights can be transferred to AN items. The section is subdivided into four subsections. The first subsection focuses on the impact the environment in which a construction occurs has on its prominence pattern. Then, the second one concentrates on factors that relate to the entire complex construction and can trigger a specific prosodic structure. In subsection three, the influence of the individual constituents is discussed, before subsection four reflects upon speaker-/hearer-related factors and their role in the assignment of prosodic prominence. Section 4 finally summarizes the findings and concludes the present paper.

2 A phonological definition of initial and non-initial prominence

The terms “initial prominence” and “non-initial prominence” are used repeatedly in this essay and must therefore be adequately defined at this point. Two crucial notions in the context of prosodic prominence in general and in the context of prosodic prominence of complex AN constructions in English in particular are the terms “stress” and “accent”. It can be roughly assumed that the former refers to prominence at the word level, while the latter is applied to

describe prominence patterns above the word level, i.e., at the phrase level. Using this point of departure, Gussenhoven (2004: 19) argues that compound prominence means that only the adjective carries a pitch-accent in an item such as *brownstone*, because the entire construction is treated as a single unit. In contrast, *brown stone* bears an accent on both the adjective and the noun and is treated as two separate elements. Overall, *brownstone* and *brown stone* are similar in terms of stress because both the adjective and the noun are stressed in the two versions of the minimal pair. However, the two AN combinations differ with regard to accentuation as the noun carries an accent only in *brown stone* but not in *brownstone*. The prosodic prominence of items that have two accents therefore seems to be distributed more equally across the adjective and the noun. Strictly speaking, this was already recognized in Bloomfield's (1933/1935: 228) seminal work *Language*. Nonetheless, one must admit that an alternative, and simpler, differentiation between the two prosodic prominence patterns of English AN combinations exists. In Chomsky & Halle (1968: 94), Giegerich (1992: 253-257), and others, accentuation is not taken into consideration and it is claimed that items such as *brownstone* and *brown stone* simply differ in their stress, not accentuation, pattern: While the former is stressed on the adjective, the latter is stressed on the noun. In the present paper, the two alternative approaches are not further discussed, criticized, or supported. Instead, it is assumed throughout this article that "initial prominence" means that the greatest prosodic prominence of an AN combination lays on the adjective. That is, it is theoretically compatible with both approaches described above, i.e., with both the point of view defended by Gussenhoven and with the one outlined by Chomsky & Halle. "Non-initial prominence", in turn, means that the greatest prosodic prominence does not lay on the adjective. Again, this assumption does not depend on a specific theoretical background as it can mean that the greatest prosodic prominence is placed on the noun, as argued for by Chomsky & Halle, or it can mean that the adjective and the noun are approximately equally prominent.

3 Possible causes for prominence variation in English AN constructions

Having presented and defined the two potential prominence patterns of English AN combinations, one can now ask which factors have an influence on whether a specific item is pronounced in one or the other way. Generally speaking, it can be assumed that the standard, normal, or default pattern of English AN constructions is non-initial prominence (see, e.g., Giegerich 1992: 252; Liberman & Sproat 1992: 134; Zwicky 1986: 51). That is, the following items have a usual descriptive function and are uttered with non-initial prominence in a neutral condition: A *small chair* refers to any chair that is small, a *white car* represents any car that is white, and a *blue couch* refers to any couch of blue color. The question that arises now is why prominence deviations exist, i.e., why initial prominence is used at all and why items with non-initial prominence can also take initial prominence.

3.1 Environment

The present subsection of the paper discusses how the environment in which an English AN combination occurs can have an influence on its prosodic prominence pattern.

3.1.1 Sentence type and position

First of all, syntactic characteristics of an expression and the environment in which it occurs can have an influence on its prosodic prominence pattern. Specifically, the two factors sentence type and sentence position, which interact to a great extent, play a crucial role in this context (see Farnetani, Torsello & Cosi 1988; Morrill 2012). Morrill (2012) investigated the

physical, i.e., the acoustic nature of English AN compounds such as *blackboard*, which carry initial prominence, and their phrasal counterparts, which take non-initial prominence, as the example *black board* shows. Crucially, the author examined the prominence pattern of the AN combinations in different sentence types and positions. That is, in the first condition, the target items, i.e., the AN constructions, were placed in subject position in declarative sentences where they typically receive a pitch-accent. In the second case, all items appeared in clause-final position of a declarative sentence where they are exposed to a continuation rise intonation. In the third scenario, the target items occurred at the end of a declarative sentence where the intonation is lowered. Finally, in the fourth condition, the AN combinations were inserted into an environment of rising intonation, i.e., at the end of a yes-no question. Morrill (2012) examined three possible acoustic correlates of prominence, namely fundamental frequency (F0), duration, and intensity and showed in her study that the prominence pattern of English AN compounds and phrases can vary and depend on the syntactic characteristics of the environment in which they occur. For instance, some of the F0 and intensity results indicate that compounds do not carry initial prominence if they are placed in question-final position, i.e., in an environment of rising intonation.

3.1.2 Information structure

Apart from syntactic aspects, the prosody of AN constructions can also be adjusted or modified in order to structure the information of an utterance in a way that facilitates the comprehension of the message (see, e.g., Chen 2012; Krifka & Musan 2012; Ladd 1984). Generally speaking, information structure refers to the following:

[...] [W]ith the term information structure we understand aspects of natural language that help speakers to take into consideration the addressee's current information state, and hence to facilitate the flow of communication. The view behind this is that communication can be seen as continuous change of the *common ground*, i.e., of the information that is mutually known to be shared in communication; speakers plan their contributions with respect to the common ground. (Krifka & Musan 2012: 1)

The modification, specifically the expansion, of the common ground can change the prosodic structure of English AN constructions. The example in (1) illustrates this phenomenon (see also Schlechtweg 2018: 66, 2018a: 121).

- (1) *Speaker A: James went shopping yesterday.*
Speaker B: Do you know what he bought?
Speaker A: Yes, he got a RED hat.
Speaker B: Cool, he didn't get another BLACK one.

For the present purpose, it is assumed that both speaker A and speaker B knew at the start of their conversation that James loves hats of black color. Crucially, however, only speaker A knew at the beginning that James decided this time to buy a hat of red color. Speaker A informs speaker B about this fact by making the decisive part of the utterance, i.e., the color red, prominent. That is, the expansion of the common ground is highlighted by prosodic means and a construction such as *red hat*, which would not carry initial prominence under neutral circumstances, receives initial prominence in this particular case.

Strictly speaking, the example in (1) also points to a second cause of prosodic modifications rooted in information structure. The two color adjectives, *red* and *black*, are contrasted. The contrast, in turn, is expressed and emphasized by producing both *red hat* and

black one with initial, rather than the neutral non-initial prominence pattern. That is, “the presence of alternatives [such as *black*] that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions” (Krifka & Musan 2012: 7) is signaled by means of prosody.

In the context of information structure, the distinction between given and new information represents a further reason to modify the prosodic prominence pattern of English AN constructions. Given information, “something that is present in the immediate linguistic context” (Krifka & Musan 2012: 22), is usually deaccented, while new information, something that “has not been present in the immediate linguistic context before” (Krifka & Musan 2012: 22), is often accented (see Ladd 1984). Example (2) illustrates this phenomenon.

(2) *They really love animals and were happy to see a BLUEbird and a blueJAY.*

The two AN combinations *bluebird* and *bluejay* normally carry initial prominence. In (2), however, one might imagine that only the construction that is mentioned first, namely *bluebird*, maintains its default pattern and that the second item, i.e., *bluejay*, takes non-initial prominence in this particular environment. The reason for this prosodic shift lays in the distinction between given and new information: Since *blue* is present in the linguistic context already, *jay* is accented.

3.2 Factors that relate to constructions as a whole

This subsection reflects upon factors that refer to English AN combinations as a whole and have an influence on the prosodic prominence pattern of a particular item.

3.2.1 Lexicalization

Initial prominence has been claimed to signal storage in the lexicon, i.e., lexicalization of complex combinations in English (see, e.g., Bauer 2004: 19; Giegerich 2004, 2005; Plag et al. 2008). There are many examples that are compatible with this idea. A *green room* does not carry initial prominence if it refers to any room of green color but it does bear initial prominence if it is lexicalized as the room in a theater where actors can relax. The same explanation holds for many other examples that take initial prominence only if they are lexicalized (e.g., *blackboard*, *greenhouse*, *bluebird*) but not if they are non-lexicalized (e.g., *black board*, *green house*, *blue bird*). Although these examples suggest that the distinction between lexicalization and non-lexicalization is mirrored in the distinction between initial and non-initial prominence, lexicalization is a rather complicated phenomenon. First of all, it has to be admitted that it is a gradual, rather than an absolute, notion (see, e.g., Zelinsky-Wibbelt 2012: 228). That is, an AN construction can be more or less lexicalized, depending on how common it is in a certain speech community or for an individual language user. As a consequence, one obvious question remains at this point: Even if one assumes that highly lexicalized items carry initial and non-lexicalized items non-initial prominence, which prosodic prominence pattern do intermediate cases prefer, i.e., e.g., items that seem to be stored but are not very common? A second problem in the context of lexicalization is the question of how one measures it. Plag et al. (2007) as well as Plag et al. (2008) use frequency and orthography as correlates of lexicalization. That is, on the one hand, increasing frequency represents increasing lexicalization and, on the other hand, solid orthography signals a higher degree of lexicalization than spaced orthography. For instance, imagining that the item *blue stool* becomes lexicalized with the novel meaning ‘a stool used for therapies in the water’, one might analyze its orthography as a mirror of its lexicalization status: *bluestool* would be

interpreted as an item with a higher degree of lexicalization than *blue stool* (see also Schlechtweg 2018a). With regard to orthography, both Plag et al. (2007) and Plag et al. (2008) show that solid orthography increases the probability of initial prominence in English NN compounds. Further, with respect to frequency, only Plag et al. (2008) found some evidence in favor of the idea that higher frequency increases the likelihood of initial stress. Their analysis focused on NN compounds. Looking at AN constructions, however, we also see that the picture is mixed because frequency is certainly not always a reliable indicator of the prosodic prominence pattern. For instance, while the item *green room* carries initial stress according to the online version of the Cambridge Dictionary¹, the item *green tea* bears non-initial stress. However, while *green room* occurs 0.130 times per one million words in the corpora of the corpus interface IntelliText (Hartley, Sharoff, Stephenson, Wilson, Babych & Thomas 2011), *green tea* appears 0.773 times per one million words. That is, the item with the lower frequency carries initial prominence and the construction with the higher frequency bears non-initial prominence. Overall, systematic analyses of the influence of frequency and orthography are available for NN constructions in English but it is still unclear whether these findings can be confirmed for AN combinations.

Having discussed the notion of lexicalization to a certain extent, one has to emphasize at this point that the factor lexicalization is often confounded with another factor, namely semantic non-compositionality. *Greenhouse*, for instance, is not only lexicalized but also semantically non-compositional and, therefore, it is unclear whether the initial prominence pattern arose to indicate that the item has been stored in the lexicon or to signal that the item has non-compositional semantics. This is basically a problem of several studies that have investigated lexicalized and non-compositional AN combinations in English. McCauley, Hestvik & Vogel (2012) used a lexical-decision paradigm and found that lexicalized/non-compositional items such as *greenhouse* were reacted to more correctly if they were presented with initial prominence in comparison to the same items/lexicalized/non-compositional meanings with non-initial prominence. Further, Hall & Moore (1997) showed that the probability that adults select a lexicalized/non-compositional interpretation increases if AN items carry initial (e.g., *blackfly*) rather than non-initial prominence (e.g., *black fly*). Overall, these findings indicate that initial prominence is somehow connected to lexicalization and/or semantic non-compositionality. In order to separate the two factors lexicalization and semantic non-compositionality, however, one has to investigate *non-lexicalized* AN combinations and see whether non-compositionality still triggers initial prominence. We will come back to this point in the next subsection.

3.2.2 Semantic-functional aspects

In the introduction of this section, units such as *small chair*, *white car*, or *blue couch* were mentioned. From a functional perspective, they are descriptive, rather than naming, units, i.e., no new subcategory of the head constituent is established. From a semantic perspective, the items are compositional, i.e., their meaning can be simply derived from the adjectival and nominal meanings – a *small chair* is a chair that is small, a *white car* is a car that is white, and so on. Generally speaking, descriptive AN constructions typically bear non-initial prominence. The idea is linked to Giegerich's (2004) observation that NN attribute-head combinations, which share some semantic similarities with descriptive AN constructions, often prefer non-initial prominence. On the other side, one frequently encounters semantically non-compositional AN units in the English language, i.e., their overall meaning implies a hidden aspect that is not directly given in the AN construction (see, e.g., Zwitserlood 1994:

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/green-room> (Accessed on October 4, 2017).

366). For instance, a *greenhouse* is not a house that is green but a house made of glass used to grow and protect plants, a *blueprint* is not a print that is blue but a plan or draft of something, and so on and so forth. Non-compositional AN items can carry initial prominence in English. The connection between initial prominence and semantic non-compositionality is supported with data on NN and with data on AN constructions (see also Schlechtweg 2018, 2018a). First of all, it is well known that combinations of two nouns are semantically non-compositional because the semantic relation that connects the two elements is not directly or overtly given and must be known or inferred from the context. Interestingly, NN constructions are not only non-compositional but also carry initial prominence in most cases. Several authors have presented corpus data that suggest that 67 percent (Plag & Kunter 2010: 357), 75 percent (Lieberman & Sproat 1992: 134), 90 percent (Plag & Kunter 2010: 357; Plag et al. 2007: 207-208), or even 94 percent (Berg 2012: 11; Plag & Kunter 2010: 357) of English NN constructions take initial prominence. That is, one finds general evidence for the idea that initial prominence is connected to semantic non-compositionality. Furthermore, the findings of recent studies show that the relation between the two not only holds for NN but also for AN combinations. In Schlechtweg (2018), it was found that non-lexicalized and non-compositional AN combinations with initial prominence were processed more efficiently in a lexical-decision study than the same items with non-initial prominence (for related findings, see also Schlechtweg & Härtl 2016). Furthermore, Schlechtweg (2018a) presents evidence from a new production study. The author analyzed the three conditions given in Table 1:

Table 1. The three conditions of the study

Condition	Example
Implied compositional semantics	<i>Thomas took a black tram again, which has a color he likes.</i>
Implied non-compositional semantics	<i>Thomas took a black tram again, which is a tram that runs only during the night.</i>
Explicitly marked non-compositional semantics	<i>Thomas took a black tram again, which is called so because it is a tram that runs only during the night.</i>

The objective of the study was to examine, first, whether non-compositional semantics, in contrast to compositional semantics, trigger initial prominence and, second, whether initial prominence is still used if the non-compositional semantics are already introduced on the segmental level. That is, while the non-compositional meaning was introduced without additional means in the second condition listed in Table 1, it was explicitly introduced through the marker *called so because it is* in the third condition. Native speakers of North American English were asked to silently read sentences as those in Table 1 first, answered a comprehension question and, finally, read the sentences aloud. Several potentially confounding variables such as sentence type and position, information structure, lexicalization, analogy, informativity, the phonetic environment, between- and within-speaker variation were controlled for. The analysis of the dependent variables F0 and duration revealed that the language users pronounced the items with compositional semantics with non-initial prominence and the constructions with implied non-compositional semantics with initial prominence. Interestingly, if the non-compositional meaning was explicitly marked by the immediate context, i.e., by *called so because it is*, subjects produced non-initial prominence again. It is argued that initial prominence serves to mark non-compositional semantics; however, if non-compositional semantics are introduced at the segmental level,

i.e., e.g., by words or phrases such as *called so because it is*, initial prominence might be no longer necessary.

3.2.3 Semantic relations between constituents

Evidence exists that indicates that specific semantic relations between constituents are more or less compatible with prominence patterns in English NN constructions. For instance, a locative relation often attracts non-initial prominence (Bell & Plag 2012; Plag et al. 2008; see also, e.g., Levi 1978; Olsen 2000). As Schlücker (2016) points out, however, the semantic relations operating between the two nouns of NN constructions fundamentally differ from those found in AN combinations. Therefore, specific evidence for AN items is necessary in order to evaluate whether constructions with, e.g., a direct modification relation as in *red wine* are more likely to favor a specific prominence structure than, e.g., constructions as *fast food*, in which the adjective functions as an adverb of a hidden verbal element (see also Schlücker 2016).

3.2.4 Construction length

Bell & Plag (2012: 507) present evidence that construction length has an influence on the prominence pattern of English NN constructions. They found, for instance, that non-initial prominence becomes more likely if the number of syllables after the syllable with primary stress in the first constituent increases. There does not seem to be an obvious reason why AN constructions should behave differently in this respect (see also Ladd 2008).

3.3 Factors that relate to the constituents of constructions

In this part, the focus lays on the constituents of complex constructions and their influence on the prosodic prominence pattern of the whole constructions in English. The studies that are cited below investigated NN constructions in English but it is assumed that the data contribute to the understanding of prominence assignment in AN combinations as well.

3.3.1 Analogy

It is uncontroversial that existing items can have a certain influence on new items. One example of such influence is the transfer of the prosodic prominence pattern from an existing construction to a novel one. That is, for instance, a specific English AN combination is newly created with adjective *x*. Assuming that *x* appears in many existing AN constructions which bear initial prominence but in no construction with non-initial prominence, it is likely that the newly created item with *x* receives initial prominence as well. In short, analogical models suggest that prior knowledge plays a crucial role and that the constituents of complex constructions have an influence on the prosodic prominence structure of new items (see, e.g., Plag 2006; Plag et al. 2007). However, analogical models cannot account for the prominence pattern of constructions if their constituents occur (equally often) in both items with initial and items with non-initial prominence.

3.3.2 Informativity

The informativity of the constituents of complex constructions plays a further role in the assignment of prosodic structure. Bell & Plag (2012, 2013) present empirical evidence that shows how this factor contributes to prosody assignment in English. Roughly speaking, one

way to define informativity is to state that a constituent is more informative than another one if the semantics of the former are more specific than the meaning of the latter. The authors found, for instance, that initial prominence becomes more likely if the informativity of the second constituent decreases. The prosodic contrast between *Oxford Street*, with initial prominence, and *Madison Avenue*, with non-initial prominence, confirms their result. Since *Avenue* is more informative, specific, or precise than *Street*, it is more likely to be accented (see Ladd 1984: 260; Zwicky 1986: 59). Although informativity explains a good amount of the data, it is clear that this factor has certain limitations. If, for example, constituents are of an equal degree of informativity, one cannot tell on the basis of this factor alone which prominence pattern is likely to be assigned to a complex construction.

3.4 Speaker-/hearer-related factors

3.4.1 Dialectal aspects

Dialectal aspects also play a role in the context of the prosodic prominence structure of constructions in English. Trudgill & Hannah (2017: 57) claim that “[a] number of compound words have acquired stress on the first element of [...] [North American English] but retain stress on the second element in [...] [British English]. The compounds include *weekend*, *hotdog*, *New Year*, *ice cream*”. Fabb (2001: 80) comes to the same conclusion and states that “the initial/final stress issue is in some cases a matter of dialectal difference; compare the British English *ice-cr eam* and *hot d og* with American English *ice-cream* and *h ot dog*”. Apart from claims that refer to the broad distinction between American and British English, further issues have been observed in smaller varieties. Duckert (1986: 141) presents some compounds that take non-initial, rather than initial, prominence in rural New England English. Nagi & Roberts (2008: 62), however, comment on this and emphasize that the extent of this phenomenon is not clear. Santa Ana & Bayley (2008: 229) list several compounds that take the opposite prosodic prominence pattern, i.e., either initial or non-initial prominence, in Chicano English as the same compounds in Standard American English. Apart from these observations, some remarks have been made on non-native varieties of English. Gut (2008: 48) gives *firewood* as an example of a compound that bears non-initial prominence in Nigerian English but initial prominence in the standard native varieties of English. She admits, however, that a lot of prominence variation exists. Wee (2008: 274) states that in Singapore English *white house* and AN constructions in general carry non-initial prominence, independently of whether they are descriptive units, i.e., e.g., refer to any house of white color, or naming units, i.e., e.g., refer to the building where the president of the United States of America lives. In sum, although several dialectal phenomena have been observed, more systematic studies are needed to shed more light on the question whether and how varieties of English differ with respect to the pronunciation of complex constructions, specifically AN combinations.

3.4.2 Variability between and within language users

Apart from pure dialectal reasons for prominence variation between different speakers, there are two general types of variation: First, one and the same complex construction can be pronounced with or perceived as having initial prominence by one language user but not by another individual (between-speaker/hearer variation), and, second, even one and the same speaker/hearer can produce or perceive a complex construction as an instance of initial prominence at one moment in time but as an example of non-initial prominence at another point (within-speaker/hearer variation) (see Kunter 2011: 174-201; see also Bell & Plag 2012:

499-500; Plag et al. 2008: 787). The precise extent of this phenomenon is, however, still unclear and in need of further research.

4 Summary and conclusion

The present article has reflected upon the prosodic prominence pattern of English AN combinations. Having defined the terms “initial prominence” and “non-initial prominence”, I presented several reasons for prominence variation in English. First of all, factors relating to the environment in which a construction occurs were discussed. It was shown that syntactic aspects such as sentence type and position as well as information structure have an influence on the concrete prosodic realization of complex constructions. Second, the paper outlined how the prosodic structure depends on the characteristics of entire constructions, such as lexicalization status and the semantic built-up. It was shown that lexicalization and semantic non-compositionality have to be kept apart and, then, explain initial prominence to a certain extent, although counterexamples exist. Further, semantic relations and construction length were mentioned and it was stated that the influence of specific semantic relations between the constituents of AN combinations on prosodic prominence needs to be investigated as it might reveal, similar to NN constructions, crucial insights. Third, the constituents were analyzed and the factors analogy and informativity were introduced with respect to their influence on the prosodic structure of English combinations. Again, these factors operate but, as other factors, cannot stand alone as an explanation for prosody assignment in English. Fourth, and finally, the contribution introduced speaker-/hearer-related observations and stated that the same items are pronounced or perceived differently in different varieties of English, between different, or even within the same speaker(s)/hearer(s). However, more systematic evidence is still necessary in this context. In sum, it should be clear by now that there is no single factor that decides whether complex AN constructions are initially prominent or not. Instead, a good number of factors are at work and interact. The present paper aimed at giving an overview of these factors. In this sense, the article is supposed to initiate further research in the domain of AN combinations, which have not yet been studied as extensively as NN constructions of English.

5 References

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