

Spellout, phrase stress and the prosodization of verbs  
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Patterns of phrase stress and pitch accenting in English and other languages are notoriously complex. The presence of contrastive focus or of discourse-given constituents within a sentence can produce a stress pattern that differs from the pattern that the sentence would show if its constituents were all-new and non-contrastive. And even all-new sentences, which display what one might call *default stress patterns*, show a complexity in the patterning of phrase stress. Puzzles concerning the circumstances under which verbs may or may not bear phrase stress suggest that verbs in certain syntactic configurations may simply fail to be organized into the constituents over which phrase stress is defined, while in other configurations they may themselves constitute such a constituent (Kahnemuyipour 2004, Kratzer and Selkirk 2004).

This paper takes the position that default phrase stress patterns are defined in terms of prosodic structure constituents that are produced in the spellout of syntactic structure, most importantly the level of phrasing referred to as major phrase or intermediate phrase. Within the major phrases defined at spellout, phonological constraints of a sort familiar from studies of word stress assure the presence of a head (main stress) and locate that head at the right or left edge of the constituent. The prosodic spellout of phrasing is in this way indirectly responsible for determining how many phrase stresses a sentence will display and where they are located. The hypothesis defended in this paper is that prosodic phrasing spellout is *selective*, and in particular that only constituents that are the highest constituent in the spellout domain of a phase (Chomsky 2000) are spelled out as phonological major phrases (cf. (Kahnemuyipour 2004, Kratzer and Selkirk 2004)). Among the consequences of this theory of the syntax-prosodic phrasing interface is the prediction that at spellout verbs will, in many configurations, fail to be parsed into major phrases and will therefore not bear major phrase stress and the pitch accenting that necessarily accompanies it. This “stray” status of verbs within the prosodic structure produced at spellout allows an account for certain of the classic phrase stress puzzles concerning verbs. It can be shown to have other desirable consequences as well, notably a cross-linguistic flexibility in the surface parsing of verbs into prosodic phrases (to the right and/or to the left) that is not displayed by other syntactic constituents, whose phrasing more closely mirrors that of the syntax.