Abstract: This paper investigates the realisation of focus in English and Greek. After providing a definition of focus and distinguishing between its two kinds, namely information and contrastive focus, I argue that, in both English and Greek, prosody accommodates information focus, while both syntax and prosody are responsible for contrastive focus. There is, however, an important difference in the syntactic device employed for the realisation of contrastive focus in each language. In Greek contrastive focus is realised via movement to [Spec, FocP], while English has to take recourse to it-clefts. An explanation is offered for this dissimilarity on the basis of the typological difference that exists between English and Greek.

Keywords: English, Greek, information focus, contrastive focus, word order, focus movement, it-clefts

1. Introduction

This paper is a preliminary attempt to compare and contrast the realisation of focus in English and Greek. In particular, I direct my attention to examples such as the following:

(1) John ate the cake
(2) It is THE CAKE that John ate (not the baklava).
(3) o janis efaje tin turta
   the Janis-NOM ate-3SG the cake-ACC
   'John ate the cake.'
(4) TIN TURTA efaje o janis (oxi to baklava)
   the cake-ACC ate-3SG the Janis-NOM not the baklava-ACC
   'It is the cake that John ate (not the baklava).'

My aim is to examine if English and Greek differ with respect to focusing and to check which linguistic levels are involved in the realisation of focus in each language. More specifically, it will be argued that although information focus is realised in a similar manner in English and Greek, the realisation of contrastive focus differs between the two languages. This dissimilarity will be attributed to the fact that English and Greek differ with respect to the freedom in the order of their sentential constituents –English being a fixed word order language, while Greek a relatively free one.

The present paper is organised as follows: First, the notion of focus is defined and the different types of focus, i.e. information and contrastive focus, are presented (section 2). In the next section (section 3), I investigate the realisation of information focus in Greek and English. Section 4 deals with the realisation of contrastive focus in the languages under discussion. Subsequently, in section 5, I provide a potential explanation for the differences in the realisation of focus between English and Greek. Finally, there is a concluding section (section 6) summarising the discussion.

1 Underlining denotes information focus, while capitalisation signifies contrastive focus.
2. The notion of focus
Successful communication requires a balanced presentation of old and new information. Every utterance typically connects to the previously established context and, at the same time, adds a new piece of information (Swart & Hoop 1995). New information has been traditionally associated with the notion of focus. Languages use a variety of devices to designate focused constituents within the utterance, namely intonation, morphological marking, word order, special focus constructions, or some combination thereof (Dik 1980; van Valin & La Polla 1997; Georgiafentis 2005).

Before moving to the discussion of the realisation of focus in English and Greek, we need to define the notion of focus and to distinguish between its two types.

Focus has been described as a complex phenomenon that consists in the introduction of new information in the discourse. The focused item is accompanied by a particular intonation contour. According to Ladd (1996), what is particularly important, in this respect, is the connection between the prominent word and a change of pitch of the speaker’s voice, which occurs because of the pitch accent. In essence, focus constitutes a phenomenon which has been related to the highlighting of information for communicative purposes. It has been typically connected to words in an utterance that are perceived by hearers as stressed or emphasised by speakers. In a recent account, Erteschik-Shir (1997) defines focus as follows:

(5) The focus of a sentence S = the constituent c of S which the speaker intends to direct the attention of his/her hearer to, by uttering S (Erteschik-Shir 1997: 11).

Focus allows for two versions. It may simply convey new information, as in (6b), or express identification/contrast by selecting the member of a subset that makes the assertion of the sentence true, as in (7b):

(6a) What did Mary buy?
(6b) Mary bought a house.
(7a) So, is it a house that Mary bought?
(7b) No, it’s a CAR that Mary bought.

The utterance in (6b) is a typical example of the first type of focus, where the prominent element is the information conveyed by the answer to the corresponding question, (6a) (Hermann 1880, cited in Cohan 2000; see also Zubizarreta 1994 and Brunetti 2003, among others). Consider (8), which is the corresponding example from Greek:

(8a) ti efaje o janis?
    what ate-3SG the Janis-NOM
    ‘What did John eat?’
(8b) o janis efaje tin turta
    the Janis-NOM ate-3SG the cake-ACC
    ‘John ate the cake.’

In (7b), on the other hand, the focused element is the member of a set of alternatives, which has been selected (see Kiss 1998; Cohan 2000, among others). In other words,

2 The claim that there is a strong affinity between intonation and information structure is by no means new. A well-established tradition of linguists has followed this line of reasoning. See Chomsky (1972), Jackendoff (1972), Selkirk (1984, 1995), among others.
the speaker specifies that there is a set of things that Mary could buy, and, out of this set, the item car has been selected as the one that makes the assertion of the sentence true.

This distinction between the two types of focus has been present in linguistic literature for a long time (see Halliday 1967; Chomsky 1972; Guéron 1980; Rooth 1985; Rochemont 1986; Cohan 2000; Georgiafentis 2004, among others), although the interpretations and the names attributed to the two focus notions have not been exactly the same. Roughly speaking, it appears that the distinction that holds is between ‘normal’/‘noncontrastive’/‘logical’/‘neutral’/‘presentational’/‘information’ focus, on the one hand, and ‘contrastive’/‘phonological’/‘identificational’ focus, on the other. In the present paper, to make things easier, I shall use the terms ‘information’ vs. ‘contrastive’ focus to refer to these two kinds of focus (6b/8b and 7b, respectively), unless there is a particular reason which calls for a further distinction.

3. Information focus in Greek and English
Let us consider first (9) = (3), which is an instance of the Greek information focus pattern:

(9) o janis efaje tin turta
    the Janis-NOM ate-3SG the cake-ACC
    ‘John ate the cake.’

The sentence in (9) has the following representation:

(10) MP
    DP-subject            MP
    o janisj     M           …
    TP
    T’
    V-ν-T         vP
    efajei     proj
    ti             VP
    V’
    t_i       DP-object
            tin turta

In (10), the DP-object tin turta occupies its original VP internal position. In such configuration, the DP-object constitutes the lowest element in the c-command ordering and can thus receive main prominence via a revised version of the Nuclear Stress Rule...
(NSR), namely the Constituent-driven NSR (C-NSR), which –according to Zubizarreta (1998)– goes as follows:

(11) Constituent-driven NSR (C-NSR)
Given two sister categories \( C_i \) and \( C_j \), the one lower in the asymmetric c-command ordering is more prominent (Zubizarreta 1998: 19).

This outcome is in agreement with the outcome of the Focus Prominence Rule (FPR), according to which the \([+\text{Foc}]\) element must be more prominent.

(12) Focus Prominence Rule (FPR)
Given two sister categories \( C_i \) (marked \([+\text{Foc}]\)) and \( C_j \) (marked \([-\text{Foc}]\)), \( C_i \) is more prominent than \( C_j \) (Zubizarreta 1998: 21).

In view of the above, it appears that information focus in Greek is the result of the interplay between the FPR and the NSR.

With respect to English, it has been observed that focus is encoded via stress, too (see Chomsky 1972; Selkirk 1984, 1995; Ladd 1996, among others). Thus, for the utterance in (13) = (1), a similar account with Greek can be provided:

(13) John ate the cake.

Consider the relevant representation in (14):

(14) \[
\begin{array}{c}
TP \\
| \downarrow \\
\text{DP-subject} \\
| \downarrow \\
\text{John}_j \\
| \downarrow \\
[past] \\
| \downarrow \\
\text{t}_j \\
\downarrow \\
\text{ate}_i \\
\downarrow \\
\text{VP} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{V'} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{t}_i \\
\downarrow \\
\text{DP-object} \\
\text{the cake}
\end{array}
\]

In (14) the C-NSR applies and the nuclear stress falls on the DP-object \textit{the cake}. Such an outcome is in accordance with the outcome of the FPR. Thus, information focus in English is also realised in terms of the interplay of the FPR and the NSR.

4. Contrastive focus in Greek and English
For Greek, different accounts have been put forward with respect to focusing. In particular, Agouraki (1990) and –mainly– Tsimpi (1990, 1995) argue for the existence of a FocP in the left periphery. More recently, Φιλιππάκη-Warburton (2001) and Georgiafentis (2001) have explored the possibility of deriving certain intonation
patterns of the VOS order via p-movement and at the same time, both of them claim that there is a FocP in the contrastive focus case. In the light of these approaches, Georgiadjou (2004) argues that contrastive focus is licensed in the following way. Consider (15) = (4):

\[(15) \quad \text{TIN TURTA efaje o janis} \]
\[\quad \text{the cake-ACC ate-3SG the Janis-NOM} \]
\[\quad \text{‘It is the cake that John ate.’} \]

It is assumed that (15) involves movement of the focused constituent to the left periphery. In particular, Georgiadjou (2004) proposes that such movement constitutes an instance of indirect feature-driven movement (IFM) of the A' type, as described in Chomsky (2000), which is triggered by the P-feature [Foc] of the head Foc.

Given that in Derivation by Phase (DBP), the Spec-head relation is largely replaced by the relation between a probe that seeks satisfaction of a certain feature and a goal that remains ‘active’ in the derivation and can satisfy the feature of the probe, movement of the goal to the Spec of the probe is not triggered by any specific Spec-head requirement, but by the presence of an EPP feature on the probe.

Thus, if we suppose that Foc contains an uninterpretable [Foc] feature (ufoc) that needs to be eliminated by Spell-Out and has an EPP feature as well, then it can probe for a phrase that contains an interpretable [Foc] feature. Such a feature is to be found in a focused phrase like the DP-object \text{tin turta} in (15). By long distance Agree, the [Foc] feature of the probe is satisfied and subsequently the focused phrase \text{tin turta} becomes a Spec of the probing head, namely [Spec, FocP], because of the EPP feature, as in (16). Finally, the DP-object \text{tin turta} receives emphatic/contrastive stress via the Emphatic/Contrastive Stress Rule (ESR/CSR) and (15) is generated.

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3 For a detailed comparison of all these accounts see Georgiadjou (2004).

4 Within DBP (Chomsky 2000, 2001), the EPP feature is considered to be the mechanism that drives movement. In fact, Chomsky (2001) suggests that the EPP feature is optionally assigned to v, C at the strong phase level if it is to induce movement that will provide the sentence with a further semantic interpretation. In the current proposal, I make the following additional assumption, namely that Foc – being part of the C domain – bears an EPP feature.

5 Note that there is no T to Foc movement involved in such a pattern. This issue is elaborated in Georgiadjou (2004).
Let us now consider the corresponding English example, namely (17) = (2):

(17) It is THE CAKE that John ate.

The sentence in (17) is a cleft, whose function is to ‘specify’ the member of a set that makes the assertion of the sentence true. According to Gussenhoven (2007), it is a syntactic device available in English, the meaning of which is to exhaustively identify a constituent in the sense of Szabolcsi (1981) and Kiss (1998).

The claim that a cleft constituent with a pitch accent expresses exhaustive identification in English can be confirmed by the following test devised by Szabolcsi (1981). It involves a pair of sentences in which the first sentence contains a focused element consisting of two coordinate DPs and the second sentence differs from the first one in that one of the coordinate DPs has been dropped. If the second sentence is not among the logical consequences of the first one, then the focus expresses exhaustive identification. Compare (18) with (19):

(18a) It was A HAT AND A COAT that Mary picked for herself.
(18b) It was A HAT that Mary picked for herself.
(19a) Mary picked a hat and a coat for herself.
(19b) Mary picked a hat for herself.

The sentence in (18b) is not a logical consequence of (18a); in fact, (18b) contradicts (18a), since it entails that Mary bought nothing but a hat. On the other hand, (19b) is a

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6 It appears that there are different kinds of *it*-clefts (see Prince 1978; Declerck 1984; Collins 1991; Hedberg 2000; Huber 2006, among others for a presentation of these various types). In this paper I am interested in the ‘prototypical’ kind of clefts, whose function is contrastive/‘specificational’ (see Huber 2006).
logical consequence of (19a); the hat may be one of the items that were bought by Mary. Let us now perform the same test on Greek data. Consider (20) and (21):

(20a) TI MARIA KE TI NIKI filise o janis.
   the Maria-ACC and the Niki-ACC kissed-3SG the Janis-NOM
   ‘It was Mary and Nicky that John kissed.’
(20b) TI MARIA filise o janis.
   the Maria-ACC kissed-3SG the Janis-NOM
   ‘It was Mary that John kissed.’
(21a) o janis filise ti maria ke ti niki.
   the Janis-NOM kissed-3SG the Maria-ACC and the Niki-ACC
   ‘John kissed Mary and Nicky.’
(21b) o janis filise ti maria.
   the Janis-NOM kissed-3SG the Maria-ACC
   ‘John kissed Mary.’

The sentence in (20b) is not a logical consequence of (20a); on the contrary, (21b) is a logical consequence of (21a). Therefore, according to Szabolcsi’s (1981) test, the focus involved in (20) is identificational, while that in (21) is information.

In the light of these examples, one could argue that in English, the equivalent fronting of the focused item to [Spec, FocP] that exists in Greek is implemented through clefting. Kiss (1998) and Huber (2006) come up with a similar analysis for it-clefts such as the following:

(22) It was TO JOHN that I spoke.
(23) It is JOHN that Mary loves.

They both argue that in these examples the cleft constituent occupies the [Spec, FocP], as can be seen in (24) and (25), respectively:

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7 See Kiss (1998) for Hungarian.
8 This claim has been also advanced by Kiss (1998) for Hungarian and by Motapanyane (1998) for Romanian.
9 It is worth noting here that the syntactic analysis of it-clefts remains controversial (see Akmajian 1970; Chomsky 1977; Emonds 1976; Meinunger 1997, among others; for Cypriot Greek clefts, see Grohmann et al. 2006; Grohmann 2007 and Gryllia & Lekakou 2007). It is not my goal here to endorse or favour a particular syntactic analysis; rather, my aim is to compare and contrast focusing mechanisms in English and Greek.
In view of the above, one could argue that contrastive focus is realised uniformly in Greek and English, since the focused constituent occupies [Spec, FocP] in both languages. The question that arises, though, is why each of these languages employs a different mechanism in the realisation of focus, namely movement (Greek) vs. clefting (English). I shall provide a potential answer to this question in the next section.
5. Differences in the realisation of focus between English and Greek

To recapitulate, we have seen so far that in Greek, information focus is prosodically manifested since it is realised via the interplay of the NSR and the FPR, while contrastive focus is primarily syntactic in nature since it involves elimination of the [Foc] feature of Foc via long distance Agree with the focused phrase, movement of the focused constituent to the left periphery to satisfy the EPP feature of Foc, and subsequent application of the ESR/CSR. In essence, this means that information focus is a matter of prosody, while contrastive focus is primarily syntactic in nature. Thus, in Greek both prosodic and syntactic focus-marking strategies exist.

As for English, a similar picture seems to arise, i.e. information focus is prosodically accommodated, while contrastive focus primarily involves a syntactic mechanism. The only difference is that in the contrastive focus case there is no direct movement of the focused constituent to [Spec, FocP]; rather a different syntactic mechanism is implemented, namely *it*-clefts.

I would like to suggest that this dissimilarity stems from the typological difference between English and Greek with respect to the freedom in the order of their sentential constituents. English is a fixed word order language, and thus movement of the DP-object cannot take place to [Spec, FocP]; on the other hand, in Greek, which is a relatively free word order language, such a movement is readily available.

Finally, this conclusion can be also supported by the fact that in Greek there are neither focus interrogatives (in Dik’s 1980 terms) nor *it*-clefts. Compare the following examples from English (26a-b, 27a-b) and Greek (28a-b, 29a-b):

(26a) What did John eat?  
(26b) John ate the cake.  

(27a) What is it that John ate?  
(27b) It is THE CAKE that John ate.

(28a) ti efaje o janis?  
what ate-3SG the Janis-NOM  
‘What did John eat?’

(28b) o janis efaje tin turta  
the Janis-NOM ate-3SG the cake-ACC  
‘John ate the cake.’

(29a) *ti ine pu efaje o janis?  
what is that ate-3SG the Janis-NOM

(29b) *ine TIN TURTA pu efaje o janis  
is the cake-ACC that ate-3SG the Janis-NOM

6. Conclusion

In the present paper I investigated the differences in the realisation of focus between English and Greek. After providing a definition of focus and distinguishing between its two kinds, namely information and contrastive focus, I directed my attention to the realisation of these two types in both English and Greek. It appeared that prosody accommodates information focus in both English and Greek, while syntax –primarily– and prosody –secondarily– (application of ESR/CSR) accommodate contrastive focus in the two languages. There is nevertheless an important difference in the syntactic device employed in each language for the realisation of contrastive focus. Thus, in Greek
contrastive focus is realised via movement to [Spec, FocP], while English has to take recourse to other means to encode contrastive focus, namely constructions such as it-clefts. An explanation for this dissimilarity between English and Greek is offered on the basis of the typological difference that exists between English and Greek.

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