

# Prosodic Realization of Focus in the Albanian Language

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**Abstract.** Prosodic tools have been treated as main elements for focus marking in different languages. Among them, stress is assumed to have a key role in the realization of focus. Researchers such as Selkirk (1995) assume that focus realization occurs when stress interacts with syntactic and phonological components. However, researchers such as Truckenbrodt (1999), Samek-Lodovici (2005; 2006), Féry (2013; 2016), Lee (2013), Yan et al. (2022) disagree with his hypothesis as, according to them, focus is realized through interactions between prosodic structure, syntactic structure, stress, and information structure. According to the latter, this realization of focus can be explained through three constraints: align XP, wrap XP, and stress-focus, which arose from Optimality Theory. Therefore, in order to investigate the prosodic realization of focus in the Albanian language, we will rely on these notions of limitations to see the interactions of different linguistic domains in the realization of informative and emphatic focus through emphasis in our corpus, which consists of: match commentary Albania vs Serbia (2014) and the broadcast *Pressing* (May 30, 2022). The method used in this work is based on the analysis of the Optimality Theory of sentence stress which integrates insights from the generative linguistics, through which interactions between focus prominence and phrases are highlighted. The results provide evidence that the interactions of these syntactic and prosodic constraints influence the Albanian speaker to realize the focus in different positions within the sentence.

**Keywords:** *focus, stress, information structure, align-XP, stress-focus, match Albania-Serbia (2014), broadcast "Pressing".*

**Якупі Кендреса. Просодична реалізація фокусу в албанській мові.**

**Анотація.** Просодичні засоби розглядають як головні елементи для позначення фокусу в різних мовах. Вважають, що наголос відіграє ключову роль у реалізації фокусу. Ряд дослідників, серед яких Селкірк (Selkirk, 1995), припускають, що реалізація фокусу відбувається, коли наголос взаємодіє з синтаксичними та фонологічними компонентами. Однак інші дослідники, як-от: Truckenbrodt (1999), Samek-Lodovici (2005; 2006), Féry (2013,

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2016), Lee (2013), Yan і колеги (2022) не погоджуються з його гіпотезою, оскільки, на їхню думку, фокус реалізує взаємодія між просодичною структурою, синтаксичною структурою, наголосом та інформаційною структурою. Таку реалізацію фокусу можна пояснити за допомогою трьох умов: align XP, wpar XP та наголосу-фокусу, які походять із теорії оптимальності. Тому, аби дослідити просодичну реалізацію фокусу в албанській мові, автори спираються на ці поняття обмежень, щоб побачити в обраному корпусі, який представлений коментарями матчу Албанія -- Сербія (2014 р.) та передачею Pressing (30 травня 2022 р.), взаємодію різних лінгвістичних доменів у реалізації інформативного та емпатичного фокусу за допомогою наголосу. В основі цього підходу лежить аналіз наголосу в реченні в контексті теорії оптимальності, яка інтегрує ідеї генеративної лінгвістики, за допомогою якої висвітлено взаємодію між виділеністю фокусу та слово-сполученнями. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що взаємодія цих синтаксичних і просодичних обмежень впливає на те, як носії албанської мови реалізують фокус у різних позиціях у реченні.

**Ключові слова:** фокус, наголос, інформаційна структура, align-XP, наголос-фокус, матч Албанія-Сербія (2014), передача "Pressing".

## Introduction

### Background

In linguistic literature, prosody has been treated as an element that has a key role in the encoding of information structure (IS) (Lambrecht, 1994; Selkirk, 1995; Samek-Lodovici, 2005; 2006; Lad, 2008; Büring, 2010; 2016; Féry, 2010; 2013; 2016; Lee, 2013; Kügler & Calhoun, 2020; Yan et al., 2022). The studies that have been done on prosody as a marker of focus can be divided into two main approaches that are related to each other in many ways: 1) The first line of work focuses on the relationship between prosodic features and the informational status of the constituents in the discourse (Chafe, 1976; Lambrecht, 1994; Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl, 2007). The main goal of these works is to determine whether the informational status of a referent is related to specific prosodic features, especially the presence or absence of stress. 2) The second line deals with the role of sentence stress (the so-called nuclear stress) in identifying the informative focus (Heinz & Moroni, 2018). In both approaches to the study of prosody in relation to focus, the most studied prosodic tool to mark focus is the presence of (nuclear) stress. As the focus word in an utterance is assumed to be more prosodically salient (e.g., Selkirk, 1995; Ladd; 2008; Büring, 2010; 2016; Calhoun, 2010). Phonologically, a word is the most salient in an utterance because its main stressed syllable is the head of the larger prosodic phrase of which it is a part (usually the intonational phrase,  $\iota$ ) (Ladd, 2008). The head of the phrase  $\iota$  carries a nuclear stress. If a syntagm  $\iota$  is chosen as the focus of a sentence S, the

highest stress in S will be on the syllable (or mora, as in the case of Albanian) of the syntagm  $\iota$ . This prominence-based emphasis is signaled by phonetic and phonological cues that increase the prominence of a word relative to others in the utterance. Phonetic cues include higher fundamental frequency (fo), greater fo movement, lengthening, increased intensity, and higher spectral tilt in speech. Of these, fo signs in relation to the focus are the most studied and are important from the perceptual point of view (Kügler & Calhoun, 2020).

Therefore, since stress is a prosodic feature that directly interacts with focus domains, as Samek-Lodovici (2005) also proposes for each  $XP_{\text{Foc}}$  and YP in the focus domain of  $XP_{\text{Foc}}$ ,  $XP_{\text{Foc}}$  is prosodically more salient than YP.

To further explain how stress marks focus, Selkirk (1995) proposes a Basic Rule of Focus that states that "a stressed word is marked with F(ocus)." Selkirk then proposes the following three rules of "focus projection":

1. The F-marking of the head of a phonological phrase licenses the F-marking of the phrase.
2. F-marking an internal argument of a header licenses the F-marking of the header.
3. The F-marking of an earlier trace left by NP- or wh-movement licenses the F-marking of the trace.

To analyze what Selkirk (1995) said, we take an example:

Vajza bleu ushqim Foc[për]F] [qentë]F]F]FOC.

Eng. The girl bought food Foc[for]F] [dogs]F]F]FOC.

The F-marking of the preposition *për* (eng. *for*) licenses the F-marking of the prepositional phrase, and so on. The F-marking of the direct object *ushqimin* (eng. *food*) licenses the F-marking of the verb and thus of the verb phrase. This theory of focus projection hypothesizes that the F-marking of the focus of a sentence is licensed by a chain of F-marked constituents, at the end of which is the word that carries the stress.

From these, we understand that if a verb or an object is stressed, then focus projection licenses the interpretation of the entire VP as focus. According to the Basic Rule of Focus, a stress on the verb means that the verb is marked with an F(ocus). According to rule (a), after the verb is marked with F (ocus), i.e., it acquires focus status, the entire VP is also licensed to enter the focus domain. Rule (b) ensures that the F-marking of the antonym licenses the F-marking of the verb, which, in turn, according to (a), licenses the F-marking of the VP. The F-mark of the VP, according to Selkirk, licenses the F-mark of the entire sentence through the licensing of various intervening heads. However, if the subject is stressed, focus projection to other sentence elements is blocked

because the subject is an external argument, and neither (a) nor (b) license projection from external arguments. Rule (c) aims to explain why the projection containing the subject is focused.

Thus, Selkirk's (1986) theory of syntax-based focus assumes that a maximal projection approximates a phonological phrase and a sentence approximates an intonation phrase.

However, all the work done by Selkirk (1995) was criticized because he always equated a syntactic constituent with a prosodic constituent and he failed to explain how stress affects within a syntactic constituent, how focus permeates from one syntactic constituent to another syntactic constituent, or how focus is narrowed within a syntactic component. In other words, he did not achieve the goal of explaining how the other fields also interact in the prosodic realization of the focus.

Authors such as Truckenbrodt (1999), Samek-Lodovici (2005, 2006), Fery (2013), Lee (2013), and Yan et al. (2022) hypothesize that the focus realization process occurs due to interactions between prosodic structure, syntactic structure, stress, and information structure. Therefore, according to them, this realization of the focus can be explained through three constraints: Align XP, Wrap-XP, and Stress-XP, which were born from the Theory of Optimality.

## Literature Review

### Alignment (Align XP)

Focus generally tends to be marked by aligning prosodically with the right or left edge of a prosodic domain. In the alignment of a focused constituent and a prosodic constituent, morpho-syntax is also involved, as the edges of prosodic constituents often coincide with the edges of syntactic constituents (Fery, 2013). Alignment is defined as the correspondence between the edge of a syntactic and/or phonological component and the focused part of the sentence. In principle, as stated above all languages tend to align the focus to one end of a syntagma- $\iota$ . According to Fery (2013), below are the two ways, explaining how focus is marked through alignment:

- a. ALIGN-FOCUS R,  $\iota$ -PHRASE R >> ALIGN-FOCUS R,  $\phi$ -PHRASE R
- b. ALIGN-FOCUS L,  $\iota$ -PHRASE L >> ALIGN-FOCUS L,  $\phi$ -PHRASE L

But a group of languages, such as English, Italian, but also Albanian tend to align the focus with the right end of an  $\iota$ -phrase. As Samek-Lodovici (2005) also proposes that a focused component is found at the right end of an intonational

phrase as a result of a STRESS-FOCUS constraint, since in languages that have canonical order SVO (with final stress) the stress is assigned to the end to the right of a phrase, and the focus is aligned so that the stress falls into focus. As in the tabel below.

Table 1

*Stress Is Aligned to the Right of a I Phrase So That It Falls on the Focus*

(	x	) I	
(	x	) P	Context: <i>What has Drini done?</i>
Drini [has swum] FocP			

To answer the question above “What did Drini do?” (alb. *Çfarë bëri Drini?*), the focus affects a single component in the answer, namely the one that corresponds to the whole question, i.e. the complete VP of the corresponding answer “he swam” (alb. *notoi*). Considering that this VP has the focus statute, it is aligned to the far right, to match the emphasis. This is so for the reason that the SF constraint penalizes those competitors who fail to emphasize the focus. So, the far right focus occurs because the main stress is supposed to be pushed further to the right by prosodic constraints and this in turn pulls the focus best to satisfy the STRESS-FOCUS focus constraint.

But in some languages, like the Albanian language, the focus is not always aligned to the right due to some syntactic and prosodic restrictions that can block it. According to Samek-Lodovici (2005, p. 704) there are cases when the focus cannot be perfectly aligned for syntactic reasons. So, focus cannot always precede right-shifted components. We are taking an example in the Albanian language:

//Edhe brenda ktij repi në Kosov ka [BËRLLOG]FocP artistik// (broadcast Pressing, May 30, 2022)

Eng. //Even within this rap in Kosovo there is the [RUBBISH]FocP artistic//

In this example only the NP is inserted within the focus domain, it is not aligned all the way to the right of the edge of the syntactic constituents. This happens because the syntactic rule in the Albanian language does not allow, in this case an AP cannot be before an NP, as the sentence comes out as ungrammatical. As can be seen in this case, the Align Foc, R restriction is violated, but also another Wrap-XP restriction, which we will talk about below.

## The Constraint WRAP-XP

The Align XP constraint interacts substantially with another constraint, called WRAP-XP (Truckenbrodt, 1999, p. 229). This restriction requires that:

Each XP is covered with a phonological phrase ( $\phi$ ).

By interacting with the alignment constraint, WRAP-XP conflicts with some (though not all) of the constraints required by ALIGN XP, R. Below are some of the four-syntax configurations of syntactic components it presents us with Truckenbrodt (1999), which are derived from the ALIGN-XP alignment, R, but which violate the WRAP-XP constraint:

*Reaction of WRAP-XP to structures derived by ALIGN-XP, R*

- |  |  |     |
|--|--|-----|
| <p>a. * (    )<sub>P</sub> (    )<sub>P</sub><br/>             [XP<sub>2</sub>    X<sub>1</sub>]<sub>XP<sub>1</sub></sub></p>                | <p>b. ✓ (    )<sub>P</sub><br/>             [X<sub>1</sub> XP<sub>2</sub>]<sub>XP<sub>1</sub></sub></p>                  | (1) |
| <p>c. * (    )<sub>P</sub> (    )<sub>P</sub><br/>             [X<sub>1</sub> XP<sub>2</sub>    XP<sub>3</sub>]<sub>XP<sub>1</sub></sub></p> | <p>d. ✓ (    )<sub>P</sub> (    )<sub>P</sub><br/>             [XP<sub>1</sub>    Fct XP<sub>2</sub>]<sub>FctP</sub></p> |     |

The structures of the left syntactic components in (a, c) violate the WRAP-XP limit. In the structure under a., the boundary placed to the right of XP<sub>2</sub> is favored by ALIGN-XP, R, but not by Wrap-XP, since this constraint does not cover two syntactic constituents that have dependency ratios on two phonological constituents ( $\phi$ ). While under (c) ALIGN XP, R favors the inner boundary  $\phi$  after the first complement. However, the syntagm resulting in two separate  $\phi$  syntagms conflicts with WRAP-XP, since the larger XP<sub>1</sub> projection is not wrapped/covered with an  $\phi$  syntagm in this structure.

A right-symmetric structure as in (b,) does not lead to this conflict between ALIGN-XP, R and WRAP-XP. Here a single  $\phi$  phrase allows the head and the following complement both XP<sub>1</sub> and XP<sub>2</sub> to be right linked by a  $\phi$  phrase, while XP<sub>1</sub> is covered in a single  $\phi$  phrase and XP<sub>2</sub> is covered in a single  $\phi$  phrase.

To explain the violation of Wrap-XP limitation in the Albanian language, we take an example:

E [preu]FocP mollën me thikë.

Eng. He [cut]FocP the apple with a knife.

This grammatical structure resembles the case given under (c), according to which V as a main projection is not allowed to enter within the boundaries of the same phonological phrase with its complements.

## Method

To see how the prosodic focus is realized through accent in the Albanian language, we will also analyze the interaction of three main constraints: Align-XP, Wrap-XP, Stress-Focus, which also explain the interaction of different linguistic domains. We will investigate the cases where these restrictions are violated, therefore, the examples taken mainly belong to sentences with non-canonical order in which the words that receive the stress are identified first. The stress in the Albanian language falls on the penultimate *mora*, not on the syllable (Rugova, 2019). Then, the informative focus is identified, which is analyzed in three syntactic positions, as well as the emphatic focus which can be realized in different positions and components.

Consider the following example is taken from the *broadcast Pressing* (May 30, 2022):

Si: // [Flitet] FocP për nxitje t urrejtjes //

Eng. Si: // There [is talk] FocP of incitement to hatred //

Table 2

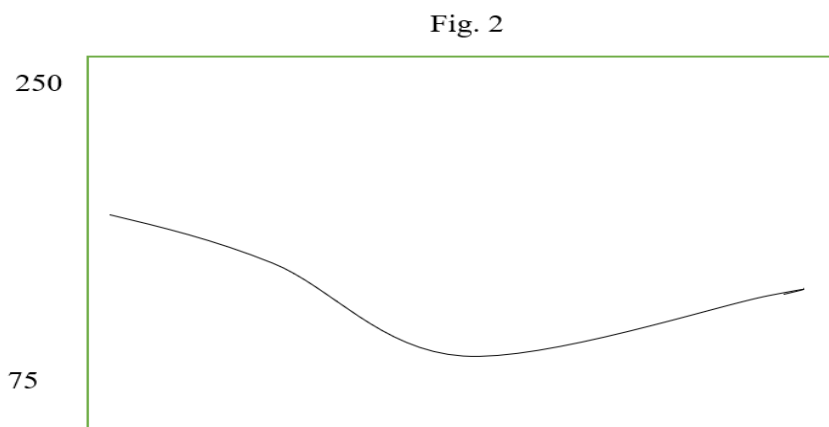
*Matching Stress-XP with the V (verb) of the Sentence*

1. fronting focus	Stress-XP, R	WRAP-XP	Align-Foc, R
(x            ) I	✓	*	✓
(x    _        ) P			
[ Vf [vp t[PP] GP]]			

As can be seen in Table 2, the WRAP-XP restriction is violated in this example, due to the syntactic structure that Albanian has within a VP sentence, we have two sentences PP and GP, one as a complement of V and the other (GP) as a determinant of complement. This V [PP] GP] VP structure corresponds to the syntactic configuration (X<sub>1</sub>, XP<sub>2</sub>, XP<sub>3</sub>) with which, according to Truckenbrodt (1999), the Wrap-XP constraint conflicts, since the Align XP, R constraint does not require internal prosodic boundaries of a lexical projection. A mismatch between their domains is accounted for by allowing ALIGN-XP, R, and WRAP-XP to jointly derive a prosodic recursive structure, phrasing it from [V [PP GP] VP as ((V)P NP) GP). Another constraint that affects here is also Stress-XP which forces V to separate intonationally from the complement.

Figure 2

*The Intonation of the Sentence S<sub>1</sub>, Which is Initially Raised Due to Stress XP, Which Affects the Separation of V from VP*



Consider the example taken from the *broadcast Pressing* (May 30, 2022):

S<sub>2</sub>: //Ato pamje i shohin [t rit] FocP //

Eng. S<sub>2</sub>: //Those views see [young people] FocP //

Table 3

*Realization of the Focus in Its Canonical Position (in-situ)*

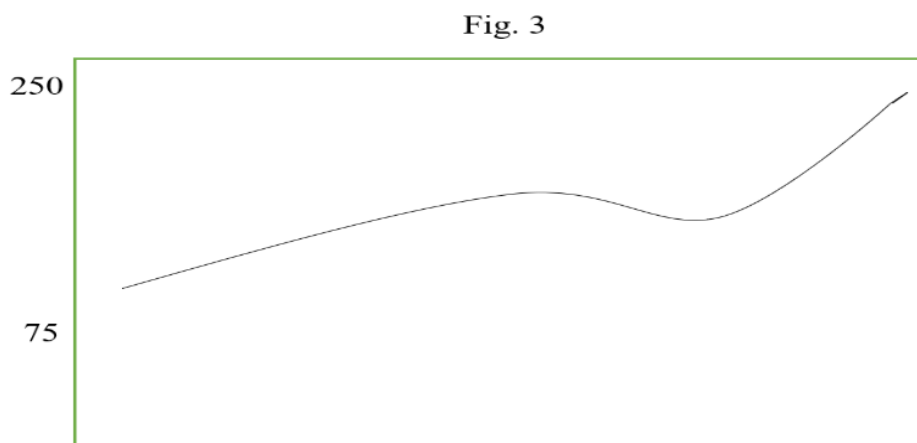
1. focus in-situ		Aling XP, R	WRAP XP	Align-Foc, R
(	x) I	✓	✓	✓
(	x) P			
[ DP	V [vp t [GPf]]			

In the given example, we see the focus on the in-situ position, which is its canonical position. When the focus is realized in its canonical position (in-situ), all the required constraints are satisfied. The Aling-XP XP constraint requires a syntagm  $\phi$  such that the right edge of XP coincides with the right edge of the syntagm  $\phi$ . Also, the Wrap-XP constraint is satisfied because each syntactic constituent is covered by a prosodic phrase, as well as Align Foc R, which requires the focus constituent [new] FOC to be aligned to the far right of the sentence, where the canonical position of emphasis. This phenomenon also fulfills what Samek-Lodovici (2005) says, according to which, since the stress is assigned to the right edge of a sentence, the focus is aligned in such a way that the stress falls on the focus.



Figure 3

*The Intonation of Sentence S<sub>2</sub>, Which Rises at the Very End Due to Stress-XP, Which Affects the Focus to Be Realized in Its Canonical Position*



Consider example 3 taken from the *broadcast Pressing* (May 30, 2022):

S<sub>3</sub>: //Rastsisht ma dërgoi videon [një mik] FocP //  
 Eng. S<sub>3</sub>: //Accidentally [a friend] FocP sent me the video //

Table 4

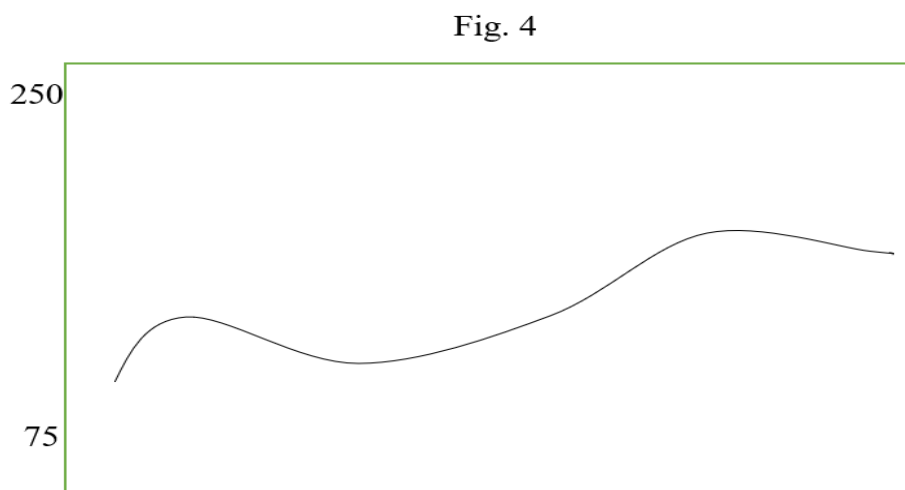
*Subject Moves from Its In-Situ Position, to Occupy the Position Within the Focus Domain*

1. right-dislocated focus	Align XP, R	WRAP XP	Align-Foc, R
( x) I	✓	✓	✓
( x) P			
[Adv CL V[vp t DP] [DPf]]			

In the third example, S [a friend] moves from its in-situ position to learn the position within the focus domain, since of all the XPs there, the last DP carries the new information. Due to the realization of this S as focus in postverbal position, this variational VOS configuration is obtained. We have this order only so that the constraint Align Foc, R is not violated. If we look at the constituent structure of this sentence we can assume that the constraint Wrap-XP is violated, since two DPs occur next to each other. But, when the connections between the components are well analyzed, we notice that DPs have different functions and different theta roles ( $\theta$ -roles). Therefore, each of them is realized separately as a syntagm  $\phi$ .

Figure 4

*The Intonation of Sentence S<sub>3</sub>, Which Experiences a Fall and Rise Due to the Movement of the Subject from Its Canonical Order*



## Results and Discussion

### Special or Emphatic Focus

Special or emphatic focus rejects the canonical position of normal focus and can appear in unpredictable positions, considering that it is idiosyncratic and intentional, i.e., it is realized depending on the specific goals of the speaker that may not be predictable from the context. Therefore, in the domain of focus, any syntactic or morphological component can be realized, depending on the situation in which the speaker finds himself. Special focus stands for emphatic emphasis. This emphasis is characterized by raising the fundamental tone of the vowel (Rugova 2019).

### Analysis

Consider the following example taken from the commentary of the *match Albania vs Serbia* (2014):

//Kjo është goditja// që i jepet me parakrah dhe për më tepër [përpara] FocP syve t Atkinson//

//This is the blow delivered with the forearm and moreover [before] FocP the eyes of Atkinson//

Table 5  
*Focus Realized in Its Non-Canonical Position*

1. emphatic focus	Aling XP, R	Align-Foc, R	WRAP-XP
( x ) I	✓	*	✓
( _ x ) P			
Pro cl V [vp t PP [PPf GP]]			

As the aforementioned example shows, the focus component is a preposition (before) which is the head of the prepositional phrase. Although the preposition together with the NP counts as a syntactic unit, the speaker focuses only on the preposition, which in this context is not a lexical head, therefore the Wrap-XP constraint is violated, which requires that every lexical head be covered with an  $\phi$  phrase. The Align-Foc R constraint is also violated, since another Stress-XP constraint forces the focus to be realized in the non-canonical position, that is, where the speaker places.

The following example is taken from the commentary of the *match Albania vs Serbia (2014)*:

//Ka goditur [jashtëëë] FocP //  
Eng. //(Has) Struck [outside] FocP //

Table 6  
*Focus Realized with the Adverb Jashtë (Outside)*

1. emphatic focus	Aling XP, R	WRAP-XP	Align-Foc, R
( x ) I	✓	*	✓
( _ x ) P			
Pro V[vp t [adv]			

In the table above, we see that the adverb is the one that carries the emphatic stress. So, because of this emphasis, it is not realized together with the VP in a syntagm  $\phi$ . Although the adverb is expected to go with the VP, this is not allowed by the Stress-XP constraint, which forcefully separates the adverb from the VP because it will stress it. The Stress-XP constraint also violates the Wrap-XP constraint which does not allow wrapping the adverb and the VP within a prosodic phrase. Semantically, it can also be explained why this adverb carries the emphatic emphasis, thus indicating that the shot was missed, so there is no goal because *the ball* went out.

Consider the example taken from the commentary of the *match Albania vs Serbia* (2014):

//Kukeli e kthen [praapa] FocP tek Mavraj//  
Eng. //Kukeli returns [back] FocP to Mavraj//

Table 7

*The Focus Realized in Its Non-Canonical Position with the Adverb Separated from the VP Phrase*

1. emphatic focus	Align XP, R	Align-Foc, R	WRAP-XP
( x ) I	✓	*	✓
( _ x ) P			
S V [vp t [adv] [PP]			

Similar to the last example, the adverb *here* is the one that carries the emphatic emphasis. So, because of this emphasis, it is not realized together with the VP in a syntagm  $\phi$ . The Stress-XP constraint conflicts with Wrap-XP and does not allow inserting it into a prosodic phrase with the verb because the strength of Stress-XP requires the adverb to carry the new information. The condition that the focus be emphasized requires that the focused constituent and the main accent coincide with each other, forcing one or the other to abandon their canonical position.

## Conclusion

The above analysis shows how focus domains, prosodic domains, sentence stress and syntax interact with each other. For example, we saw that, when the sentence order is canonical order, the focus appears in the in-situ position, which is its canonical position. In this case, the far right focus is realized because the main stress is assumed to be pushed further to the right by prosodic constraints and this in turn pulls the focus best to satisfy the STRESS-FOCUS focus constraint. Even in a variational word order configuration (VOS) the focus is realized in its canonical position, as the subject (S) [NP/DP] escapes from its in-situ position, to acquire the position within the focus domain. Whereas, when the focus is not realized in its canonical position, another constraint, Stress-XP, comes into play, which forces XP to be separated intotonally from its complement, and thus enter only the domain of focus.

Meanwhile, when dealing with an emphatic focus, the Stress-XP restriction often conflicts with the Wrap-XP and does not allow inserting  $\phi$  XP

and its complement into a syntagm, because the strength of the Stress-XP means that only one to carry what conveys the emotion.

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