Information structure in Kalaallisut: Overview and outlook

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The language of Kalaallisut

I. North Greenlandic
   Inuktun/Avanersuarmiutut

II. West Greenlandic
    Kitaamiusut

III. East Greenlandic
     Tunumiusut

Standard language based on Central West Greenlandic

I. North Greenlandic
II. West Greenlandic
   a. Upernavik
   b. Northwest Greenlandic
   c. Central West Greenlandic
   d. Paamiut
   e. Southwest Greenlandic
   f. Nunap Isua /
      Cape Farewell
III. East Greenlandic

Earlier
Northeast
Greenlandic
Population

The Greenlandic Dialects
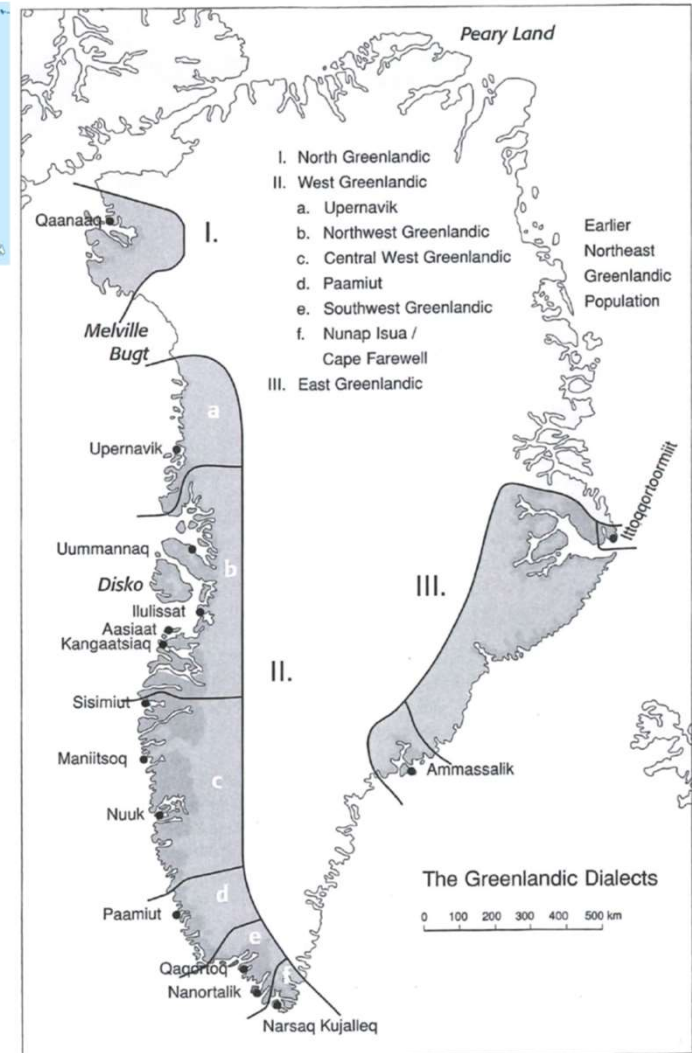
0 100 200 300 400 500 km

Fig. 2. Distribution of Greenlandic dialects. Narsarmijit was previously called Narsaq Kujalleq. (Based on Fortescue 1986:414).

Information structure

Who spotted a swan?

- My mother spotted a swan. ☹
- A swan was spotted by my mother. ☹
- My MOTHER spotted a swan. ✓
- My mother spotted a SWAN. ☹

Focus   **Background**

X *spotted a swan*

X = *my mother*
(not *my father, my sister, I...*)

What did your mother spot?

- My mother spotted a swan. ☹
- A swan was spotted by my mother. ☹
- My MOTHER spotted a swan. ☹
- My mother spotted a SWAN. ✓

Background   **Focus**

My mother spotted X   X = *a swan*
(not *a duck, a sparrow, a raven...*)

Information structure: Topic

Topic = what the sentence is about (cf. Reinhart, 1981)

A: I spotted an eagle yesterday.

B: Cool! What did it look like?

A: **It** was all brown, without the white head. I think **it** was a young one.

B: And what about your mother, what did she see on your walk?

A: **My mother** saw a swan.

Background   **Focus**

Syntax & information structure

Ergative system

Angut   iser-poq
man.ABS   enter-IND.3SG
'The man enters.'

Aaggaali-p   spandi   tigu-aa
Aaggaali-ERG.SG   bucket.ABS.SG take-IND.3SG>3SG
'Aaggaali takes the bucket.'   Patient is direct object

Nakorsa-p Piili   iisartagaq-nik tuni-vaa
Doctor-ERG.SG Pele.ABS.SG pill-INS.PL   give-IND.3SG>3SG
'The doctor gave Pele some pills.'   Recipient is direct object/patient is in instrumental

Ambitransitive verbs – Ø marked antipassive

- Agentive types

Aanap kaagi nerivaa

Aana-p   kaagi   neri-vaa

grandmother.ERG.SG   cake.ABS.SG   eat-IND.3SG>3SG

'Grandmother eats the cake'

Aanaa kaagimik nerivoq

Aanaa   kaagi-mik   neri-voq

Aanaa.ABS.SG   cake-INS.SG   eat-IND.3SG

'Grandmother eats a cake'

Ambitransitive verbs – Non-agentive

- Non-agentive types - direct object becomes subject of the verb, no trace of the agent.

Miitip aqerluusaq napivaa

Miiti-p   aqerluusaq   napi-vaa

Mette-ERG.SG   pencil.ABS.SG   break-IND.3SG>3SG

'Mette breaks the pencil.'

Aqerluusaq napivoq

Aqerluusaq   napi-voq

pencil.ABS.SG   break-IND.3SG

'The pencil broke.'

Antipassive overt marked

-si, (ss)i

  -si after *t*-final stems and vowel stems

  -(ss)i after *r*-final and *g*-final stems

-nnig (specific verbs and after vowel stems *-gi+nnig*)

-ller (only few verbs as *ujarler-* 'search for', *aaller-* 'search for', *avoqqaarler-* 'blame, criticize')

antipassive overt marked -i

Aanip (..) illu tamaat asappaa

Aani-p (..)   illu   tamaat   asag-paa

Ane.ERG.SG   house.ABS.SG   whole.ABS.SG   wash-IND.3SG>3SG

'Ane washed/cleaned the whole house.'

*Maliit (..) illup iluanik asa**a**voq*

Maliit (..)   illu-p   ilu-anik   asag-**i**-voq

Malene.ABS.SG house.ERG.SG inside-POSS.INS.3SG/SG wash-**APASS**-IND.3SG

'Malene cleaned the house.'

Antipassive - no object

Error-paa 's(he) washes it'
wash-IND.3SG>3SG

*Bertramilu marluullutik error**sip**put*
Bertram=ilu   marlu-u-llutik   error-**sip**-put
Bertram.ABS.SG=and   two-be-CONT.4PL   wash-**APASS**-IND.3PL
'Bertram and he, being two of them, washed clothes.'

*Erru**i**vunga ulapputeqarnanga*
Erru-**i**-vunga   ulappute-qar-nanga
wash-**APASS**-IND.1SG   be.busy.with-have-NEG.CONT.1SG
'I washed dishes without hurry.'

Antipassives and information structure

- Traditional analysis: Objects of transitives are definite, objects of antipassives indefinite (Kleinschmidt, 1851; Bergsland, 1955; Woodbury, 1975; Fortescue, 1984; Sadock, 1984,)

- Objects of transitives are **given**, objects of antipassives **new** (Kalmár 1979, Bittner 1987)

- Berge (2011) and Johns & Kučerová (2017): Objects of transitives are aboutness **topics**

Passive

Passivizing affixes

Dynamic passive	*-neqar* (*-neq +qar* 'abstract participle + have')
Pseudo/quasi-passive	*-tit* (intransitive of the transitivizer *-tit* 'reflexive meaning')
Stative passive	*-saa, -gaa, -taa* (*saq, gaq, taq + u* 'stative participle + be')
Impersonal passive	*-soqar* (*soq+qar* 'active participle + have')

Dynamic passive -*neqar*

Meeqqap **ujarak** *tiguaa*   *(MO)*

Meeraq-p   ujarak   tigu-aa

child-ERG.SG   stone.ABS.SG   take-IND.3SG>3SG

'The child takes the/a stone.'

Ujarak *meeqqamit tiguneqarpoq*   *(MO)*

Ujarak   meeqqa-mit   tigu-neqar-poq

stone.SG.ABS   child-SG.ALL   take-PASS-IND.3SG

'The stone is taken by the child.'

Stative passive *-gaa, -taa, -saa*

I-69-imi arsaqataasoq qimappaat.

I-69-imi arsa-qata-a-soq   qimap-paat

I-69-LOC.SG play.football-fellow-be-PART.ABS.SG left-IND.3SPL>3SG

'They left a football player from I-69 behind.'

*I-69-imi arsaqataasoq qima**taa**voq.*

I-69-imi arsa-qata-a-soq   qima-**taa**-voq

I-69-LOC.SG play.football-fellow-be-PART.ABS.SG left-**SPASS**-IND.3SG

'A football player from I-69 was left behind.'

Passive and information structure

- Patient becomes subject
- Marks patient/theme as **topic**
- ➢ Cf. Berge (2011), Johns & Kučerová (2017): Absolutive marks topics

Word order and information structure

	Word order	Example	Translation
a.	SOV	Piniartup puisi pisaraa. hunter-ERG seal.ABS catch-IND.3SG>3SG	'The hunter caught the seal.'
b.	OSV	Puisi piniartup pisaraa.	'The seal, the hunter caught it.'
c.	SVO	Piniartup pisaraa puisi.	'The hunter caught the seal (not the walrus).'
d.	OVS	Puisi pisaraa piniartup.	'It was the hunter that caught the seal.'

(adapted from Fortescue, 1984, p. 181)

Word orders – the modifier after verb and before verb

a. *Aputsiaq piniartuuvoq **tusaamasarsuaq***

Aputsiaq   piniartu-u-voq   tusaamasar-suaq

Aputsiaq.ABS.SG   hunter-be-IND.3SG   famous-big

'Aputsiaq is a rather famous hunter.'

b. *(Aputsiaq)* ***tusaamasarsuaq*** *piniartuuvoq* (my construction)

'The famous (Aputisaq) one is a hunter.'

Word order template (Fortescue 1993)

(Frame) **(PI)** (S)-(O)-(X)-V **(P0)** (Tail)

- Frame: Optional 'framing' or 'staging' material
- **PI: Given topic**
- (S)-(O)-(X)-V: Core predication
- **P0: New information / (emphatic) focus**
- Tail: afterthought/clarification/elaboration

"In answers to Q-questions the material is almost never repeated, so marked word order is not involved." (Fortescue 1993:272-273)

Word order and incorporation

Taamanikkut qulaaluanik **qimme**qarpunga ***angisuuinnarsuarnik***.

Taamanikkut   qulaalua-nik   **qimme**-qar-punga **angisuu-innar-suar-nik**

Back.then.VIA nine-INS.PL   **dog**-have-IND.1SG **big-only-big-INS.PL**

'Back then I had nine dogs, all of them big.'

➢Incorporated object is backgrounded

➢Focus is postponed

Enclitics and contrastive focus

- "The typical means for expressing selective or identifying contrastive focus is in a cleft construction" (Fortescue 1993:272)

Piita-m=una arfeq toqukk-aa.
P.-ERG=this   whale kill-IND.3SG>3SG
'It was **Piita** who killed the whale.'

Prosody & information structure

Prosody

Prosody = Melody and rhythm of speech
- Pitch
- Length/duration
- Loudness

Kalaallisut prosody

N.	older.sister-OBL. POSS3RSGSG-ALL	doll-OBL. UNPOSS-INS	make-IND.INTR.3SG	M.—and	younger.sibling-OBL.POSS 3RSGSG-ALL	ball-OBL. UNPOSS-INS	repair-INTR-IND.INTR.3SG
Nanna	angajuminut	inuusamik	sanavoq.	Maalia=lu	nukaminut	arsamik	iluarsaassivoq
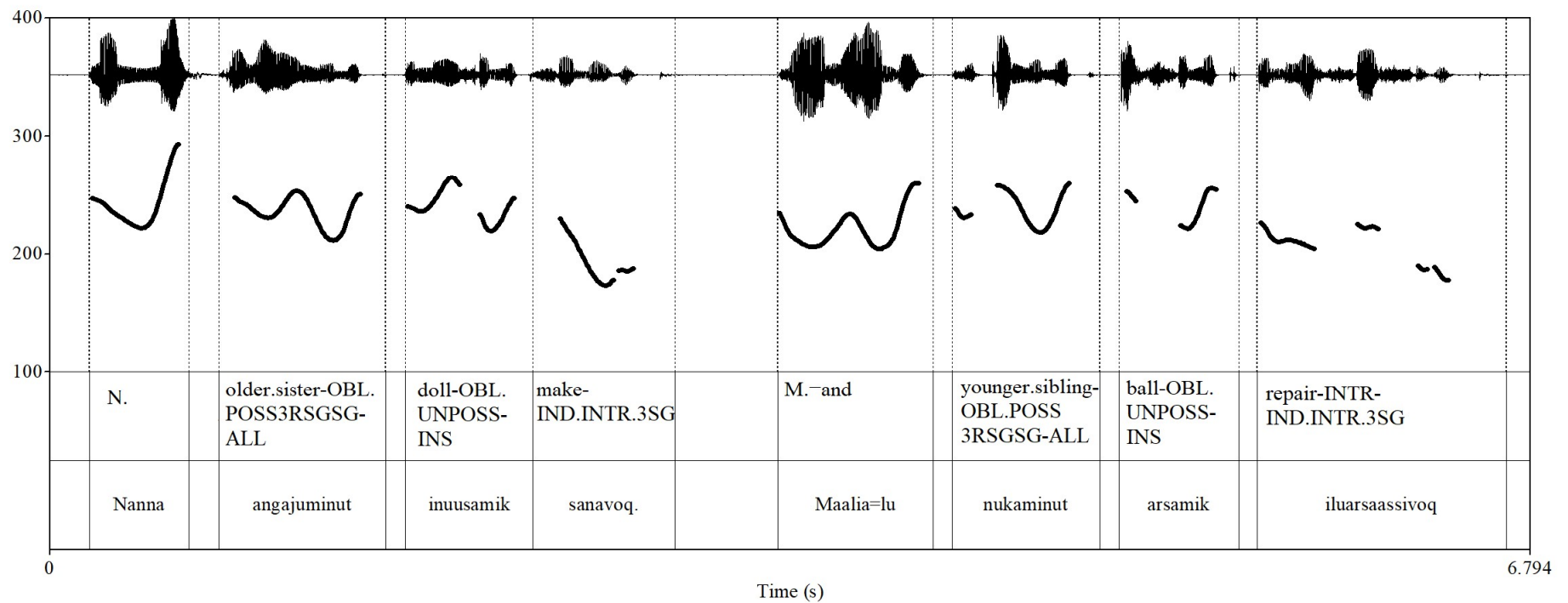
'Nanna makes a doll for her older sister. And Maalia repairs a ball for her younger sister.'

Kalaallisut prosody
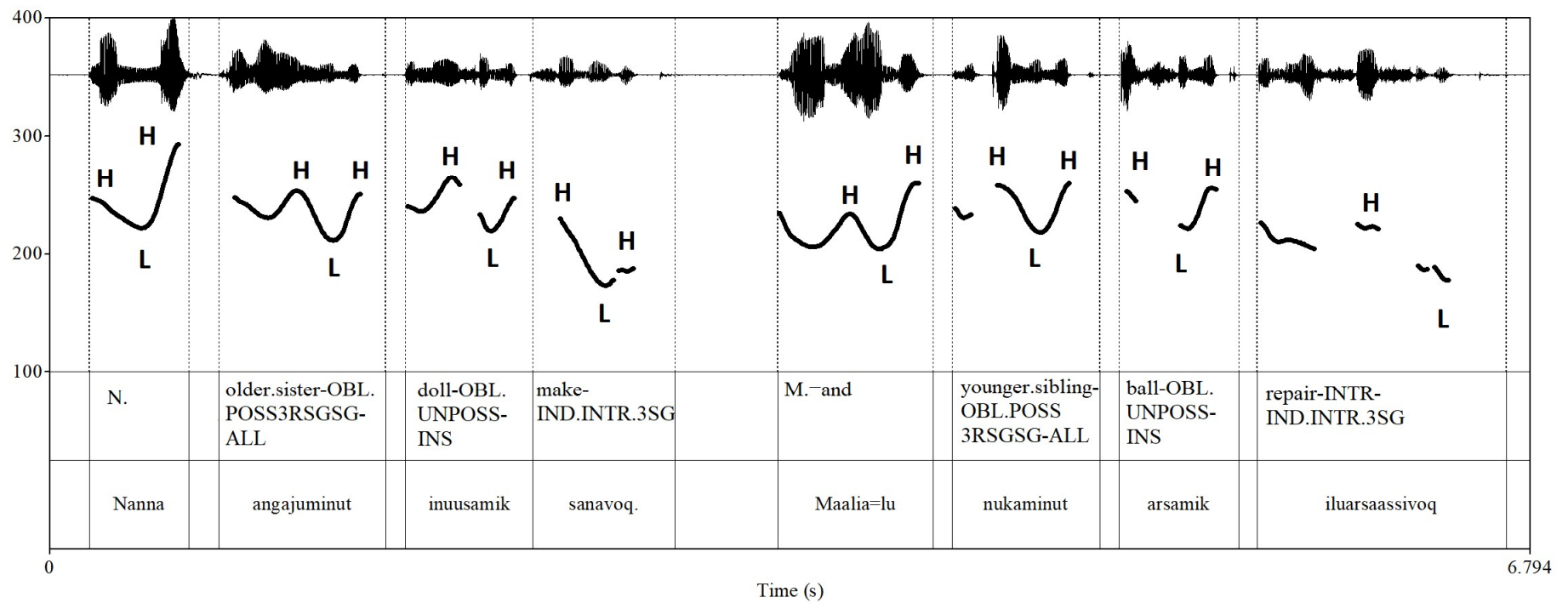
'Nanna makes a doll for her older sister. And Maalia repairs a ball for her younger sister.'

No stress, no tone, no accent

- No native speaker agreement on where stress would be (Rischel 1976:91)

- What listeners perceive as stress is the of word-final tonal contour and/or heavy syllables (Rischel 1976, Fortescue 1984, Nagano-Madsen 1993, Jacobsen 1999)

- In isolation, all words receive the same contour

➢Kalaallisut is a phrase language in the sense of Féry (2011, 2017; see Arnhold 2014, 2019)

Prosodic phrasing
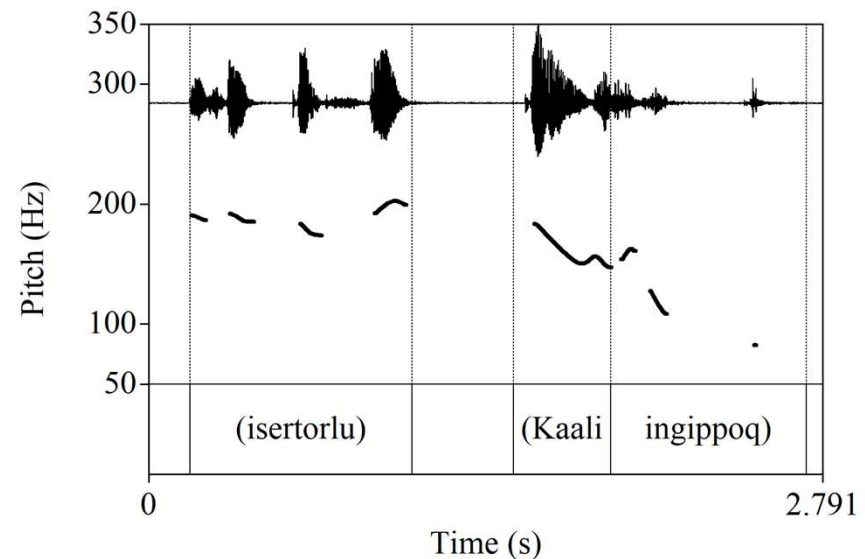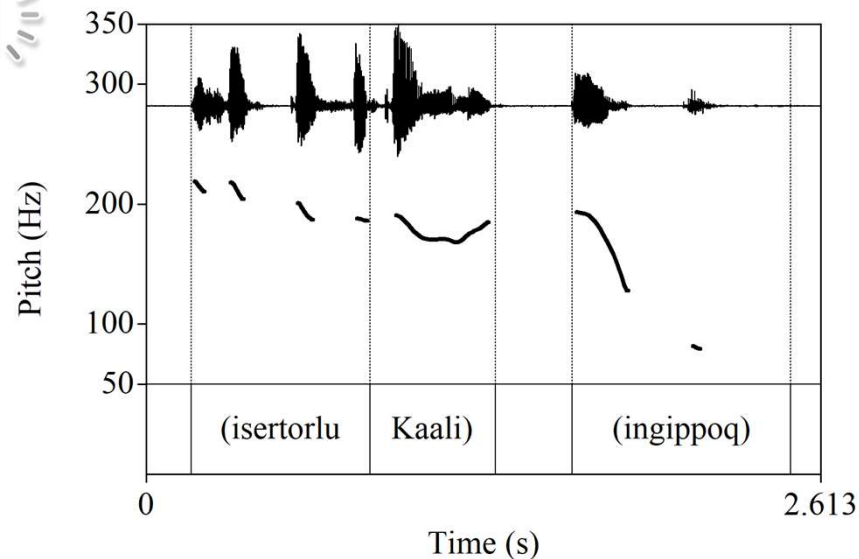
Iser-tor=lu   Kaali   ingip-poq
enter-PCTP=and   K.   sit.down-IND.3SG
'Before Karl came in, he sat down / Before he came in, Karl sat down.'

Prosodic phrasing
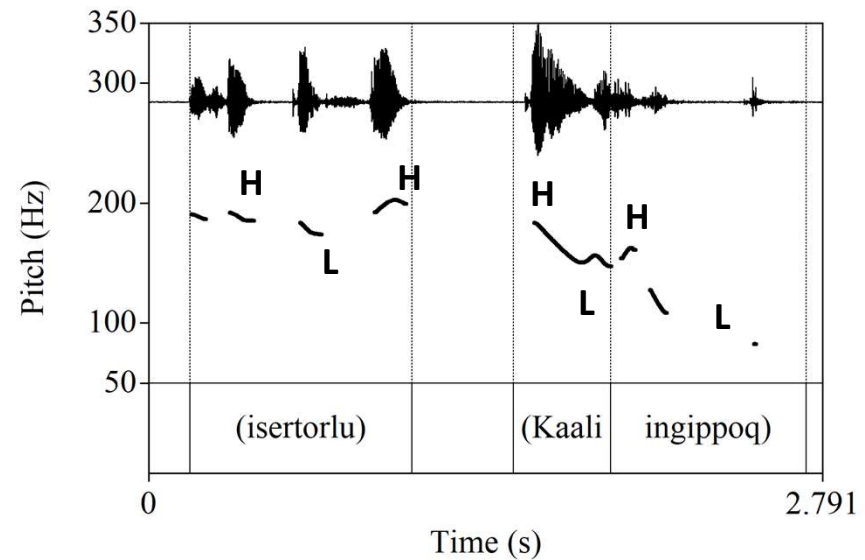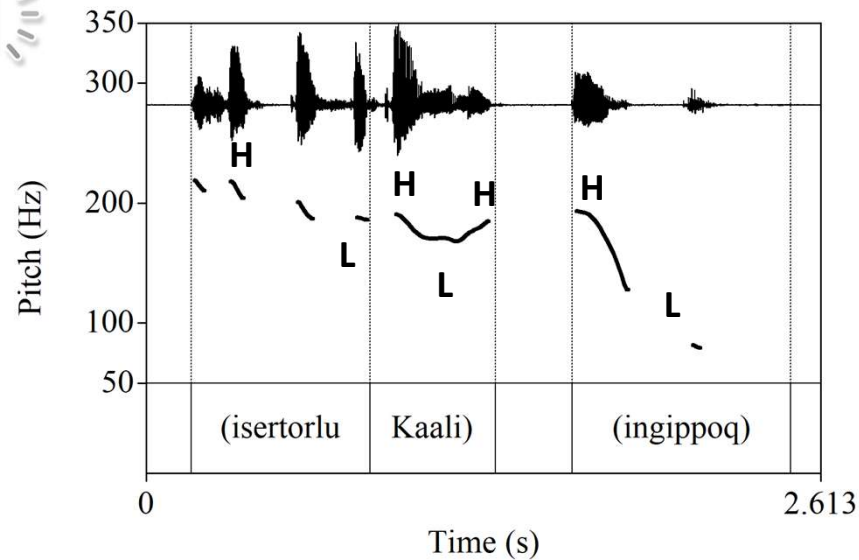
Iser-tor=lu   Kaali   ingip-poq
enter-PCTP=and   K.   sit.down-IND.3SG
'Before Karl came in, he sat down / Before he came in, Karl sat down.'

Focus marking in Kalaallisut

- 4 female speakers

- 321 sentences (about 80 per speaker)

- Standard (SOV) word order

- Recorded in question-answer pairs inducing different information structures

(Arnhold, 2007, 2014)

Recorded sentences

Nanna_S angaju-minut_{IO}   inuusa-mik_{DO}   sana-voq_V
N.ABS   older.sister-ALL   doll-INSTR   make-INTR.3SG
'Nanna makes a doll for her older sister.'
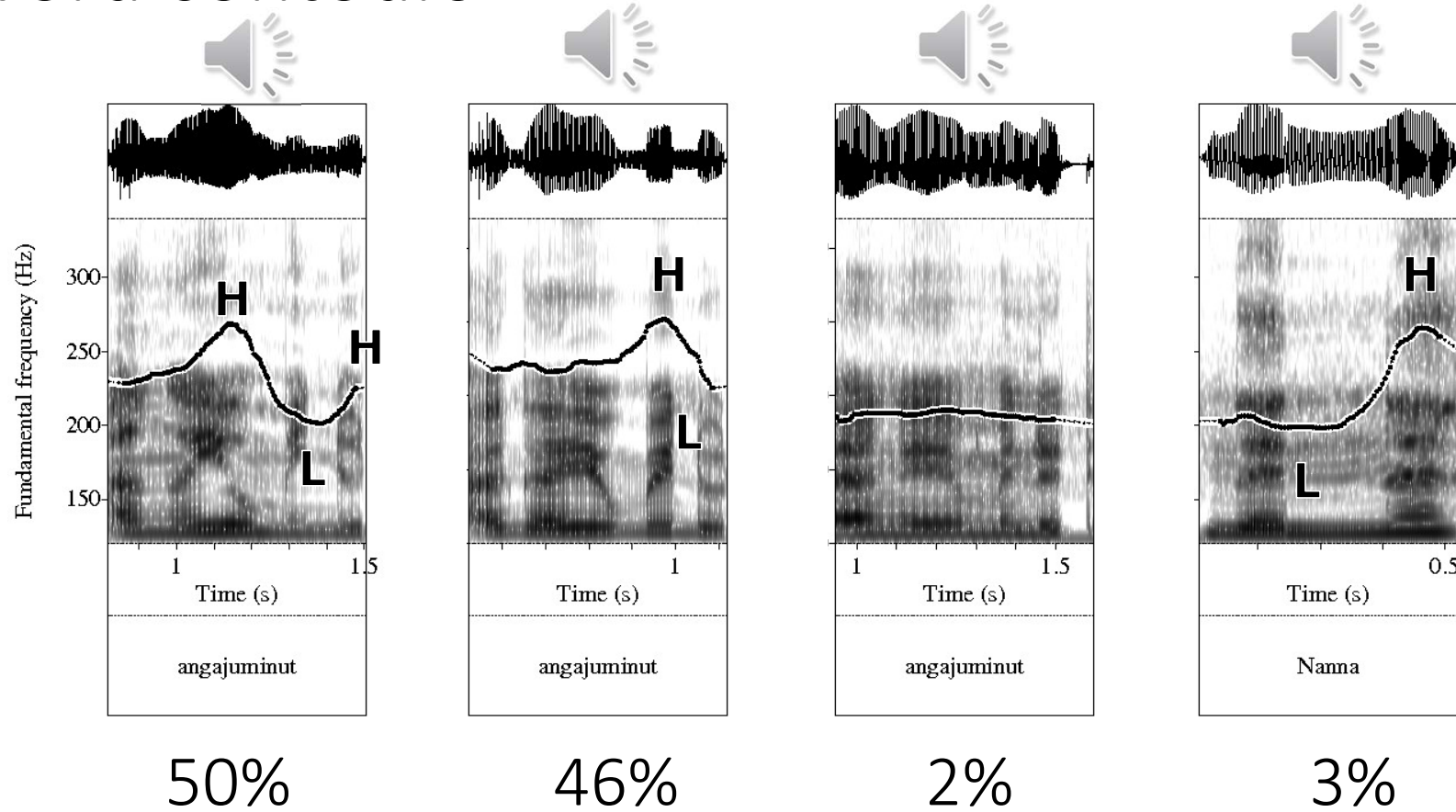

Aana-ga_S   Aviaja-mut_{IO}   ulim-mik_{DO}   nuersaa-voq_V
Grandmother-my.ABS A.-ALL   shawl-INSTR knit-INTR.3SG
'My grandmother knits a shawl for Aviaja.'

Anaana-ga_S   angaan-nut_{IO}   nataarna-mik_{DO}   iga-voq_V
mother-my.ABS   uncle-my.ALL   halibut-INSTR   cook-INTR.3SG
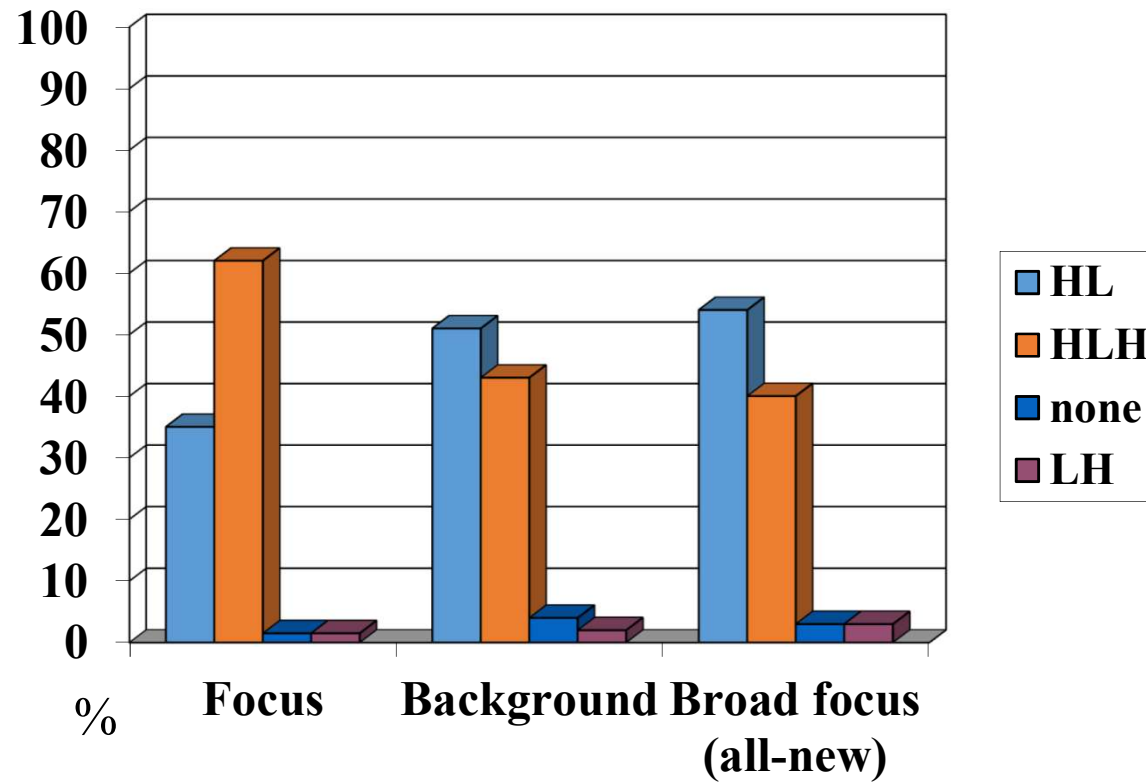'My mother cooks a halibut for my uncle.'

Pitch range: example

Word contours

50%   46%   2%   3%
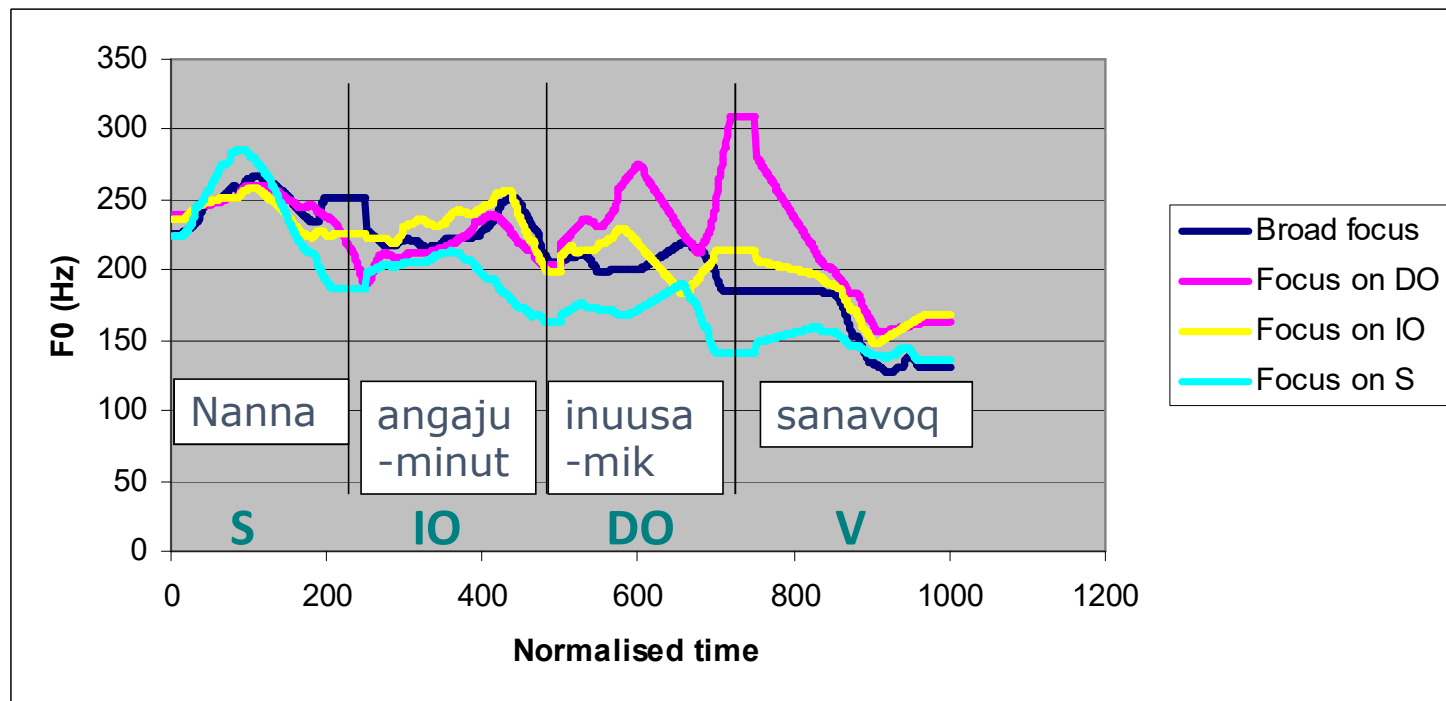
Focus and word contours

Prosodic focus marking in Kalaallisut

- Always same tones (HLH), but more or less complete realisation
- Adjustments of pitch range and reset
- However, the study only had...
  - a small number of speakers and items
  - read speech
  - antipassives and noun incorporation in standard word order (morpho-syntactic variation, including ellipsis, not allowed)

Future plans

...and some preliminary findings

Future plans

- Aim: See how syntax & prosody work together
  - What means do speakers use when they have free choice?
  - And if they do not?
  - Are there trade-offs between syntactic and prosodic information structure marking?
- ➢SSHRC IG project 'Linguistic complexity in the marking of new information'

SSHRC IG project 'Linguistic complexity in the marking of new information'

- Will compare Kalaallisut to English and Mandarin
- Similar experiments in all three languages
  - Experiment 1 (production): Manipulate information structure, manipulate availability of prosodic marking
  - Experiment 2 (production): Manipulate information structure, manipulate availability of morpho-syntactic marking
  - Experiment 3 (perception): Manipulate prosodic and morpho-syntactic marking, ask participants about information structure
- Details to be adjusted for each language

# SSHRC IG project 'Linguistic complexity in the marking of new information'

- 5-year project

- Onu Didriksen, MA student at Ilisimatusarfik, will visit UofA in the fall of 2024, then complete his thesis in Kalaallit Nunaat

- If you know Inuit interested in getting involved, or anyone who might want to do an MA on the English part, let us know

Some preliminary findings: Aphasia project
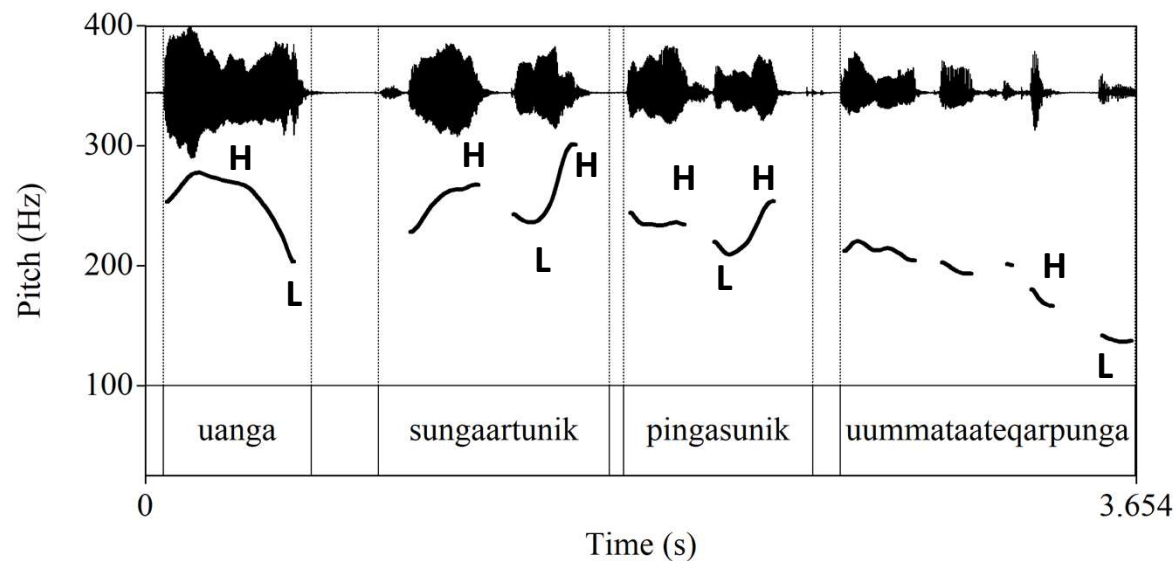
Uanga sungaartu-nik   pingasu-nik uummata-ate-qar-punga.
1SG   yellow-INS.PL   three-INS.PL heart-owned-have-IND.1SG
'I have three yellow hearts.'

Some preliminary findings: Aphasia project
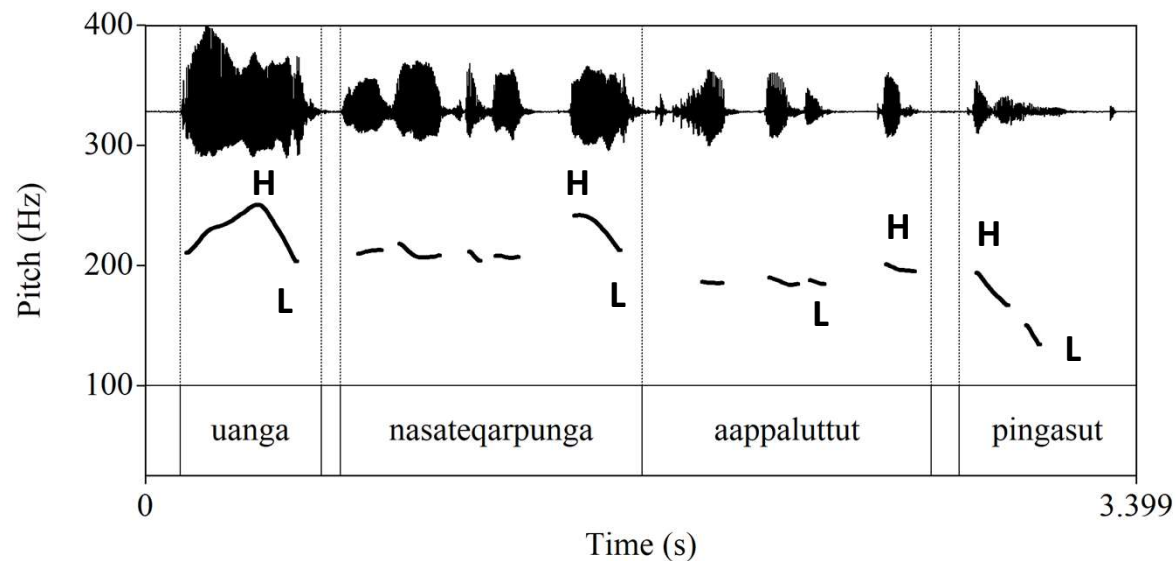
Uanga nasa-ate-qar-punga   aappaluttut pinga-sut.
1SG   toque-owned-have-IND.1SG   red.PL   three-PL
'I have three red toques.'

Qujanaq!

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