Abschlussbericht

Focus identification in Argentinian Spanish

The experiment's goal was to answer the following two questions:
1) Do information focus and contrastive focus differ with respect to focus identification?
2) Do focused subjects and objects differ with respect to focus identification?

The experimental design consisted of two independent variables. A. Focus type in stimulus: contrastive vs. information; B. Focused constituent in stimulus: subject vs. direct object. This yields four experimental conditions: subject-cf, dO-cf, subject-if, dO-if; each condition is presented with 10 different items. Thus, the total number of stimuli amounts to 40. All participants saw all stimuli. The independent variable is the choice of the most natural preceding context, and the four options are subject-cf, dO-cf, subject-if, dO-if (cf. (1)).

(1)   auditory stimulus: [John]$_F$ bought the car.
    o   Peter bought a car, right?
    o   John bought a bike, right?
    o   Who bought a car?
    o   What did John buy?

The experimental method was a forced choice experiment using auditory stimuli and written choices. The participants listen to the auditory stimulus and then had to indicate which sentence sounds most natural as the preceding context. Participants were instructed to conduct the experiment on a desktop computer using head phones. The stimuli are presented to the participants using the online tool Limesurvey. The auditory stimuli are Spanish SVO-sentences which were produced in a context for narrow focus on either the subject or the direct object (cf. (1)). The stimuli stem from the HaCASpa (PID: http://hdl.handle.net/11022/0000-0000-5F0B-B), compiled by the co-author Prof. Christoph Gabriel (University of Mainz). 50 native speakers of Peninsular Spanish were recruited via Prolific to participate in the experiment.

The results of the experiment show that both independent variables have an impact of focus identification:
Contrastive foci are more often correctly identified than information foci, and subject foci are more often correctly identified than object foci. However, the impact of the syntactic function of the focus seems to be stronger than the focus type. Based on the correspondence between the focus in the stimulus and the focus itendified by the participants, the four conditions are ranked as follows: subject-cf > subject-if > dO-cf > dO-if.