

"As if grammar, discourse and prosody don't interact: Comparative study of hypothetical manner clauses in English and Dutch"

Van Praet, Wout ; Degand, Liesbeth ; Van linden, An

ABSTRACT

This study examines the production of clauses introduced by the conjunction *as if* in spoken English and its equivalent *alsof* in spoken Dutch. In both languages, *as if*- and *alsof*-clauses can have different levels of grammatical and discursive (in)dependence, e.g. (1)-(4). Our aim is to provide a comparative analysis of the prosodic profiles of these clauses and examine if their different dependency statuses are signalled prosodically. (1) *Het is alsof ik niet besta.* (CGN) 'It's as if I don't exist.' (2) *He walks around as if he owns the place.* (BNC) (3) *Alles prikt gewoon. Alsof je allemaal glaswol over je heen krijgt.* (CGN) 'Everything just stings. As if you're getting glass wool all over you.' (4) S1: *Yet another flower.* S2: *Hm as if we haven't got enough.* (BNC) The study is usage-based and grounded in analyses of spoken data randomly extracted from the 'British National Corpus' (BNC) for English and the 'Corpus Gesproken Nederlands' (CGN) for Dutch. For each language, 250 examples were coded, to arrive at sufficiently large sets of data for the various grammatical and discursive subtypes. To investigate the interplay between grammar, discourse, and prosody, three coding schemes are used. The grammatical scheme assesses the clauses' level of grammatical (in)dependence, based on: clefting, pronominal proportionality, and fronting [1]. The degree of discourse dependence is established based on discourse-oriented features like speech-functional value, modality, turn-taking, and co-referentiality [2-4]. The prosodic scheme, finally, probes for proso...

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AS IF GRAMMAR, DISCOURSE AND PROSODY DON'T INTERACT

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HYPOTHETICAL MANNER CLAUSES IN ENGLISH AND DUTCH

Wout **Van Praet**¹, Liesbeth **Degand**¹ & An **Van linden**² – UC Louvain¹ & ULiège²

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

HM clauses can appear in range of dependency configurations, allowing for both subordinate and insubordinate uses

(1) *They look at me **as if I'm stupid**.* (BNC)

(2) *Iedere stap heeft nu een duidelijke echo. Alsof haar achtervolger het niet langer nodig vindt om haar stiekem te volgen.* (CGN)

'Every step now has a clear echo. **As if her stalker no longer finds it necessary to follow her secretly.**'

(3) ***As if we haven't got enough on our plate!*** (BNC)

INTRODUCTION

Delimitation of categories of subordination and insubordination under debate → growing consensus that dependency is not binary but cline with multiple levels/degrees of dependency (e.g., Foley & Van Valin 1984; Smessaert et al. 2005; Verstraete 2007; Debaisieux 2013)

Moreover, dependency relations can be grammatical and/or discursive:

- Grammatical: Does the clause serve a grammatical role within a matrix, and how closely is it integrated with verbal predicate?
- Discursive: Does the clause make sense in isolation or only in relation to main clause?

INTRODUCTION

Grammatical dependency relation: four recognition criteria

- i. Obligatoriness: *She sounded **as if she was choking** vs. She talks to me **as if I'm stupid***
- ii. Clefting: *He walks **as if he's drunk** -> it's **as if he's drunk** that he walks
vs. The sea was very upset, **as if it can't decide to ebb or flow***
- iii. Proportionality: *He walks **as if he's drunk** -> How does he walk?*
- iv. Fronting: ***As if nothing had happened**, he walked out smilingly.*

→ Three levels of grammatical dependency:
strong dependency > weak dependency > independency

INTRODUCTION

Discourse-pragmatic relations (Royo Viñuales et al. 2023)

- Manner *You just carry on **as if nothing had happened.***
- Qualification *His movements seemed heavy, **as if he were moving underwater.***
- Cause / justification *From inside she could hear raised voices and a shrill cry, **as if someone were in pain.***
- Denial of assumption ***As if I care!***

INTRODUCTION

Assumption that **prosodic realisation** of HM clause reflects syntactic and/or discursive relations

- prosodic integration reflects syntactic integration, i.e. more closely integrated subclause more likely to be uttered on same IU as matrix (e.g. Smessaert et al. 2005; Verstraete 2007; Debaissieux 2016)
 - In what sense ‘integrated’? IU segmentation? Paratone?
- ‘denial of assumption’ often described as being ‘exclamative’, with attitudinal function → is this reflected in prosodic factors like loudness, pitch excursion, or tonal choices?

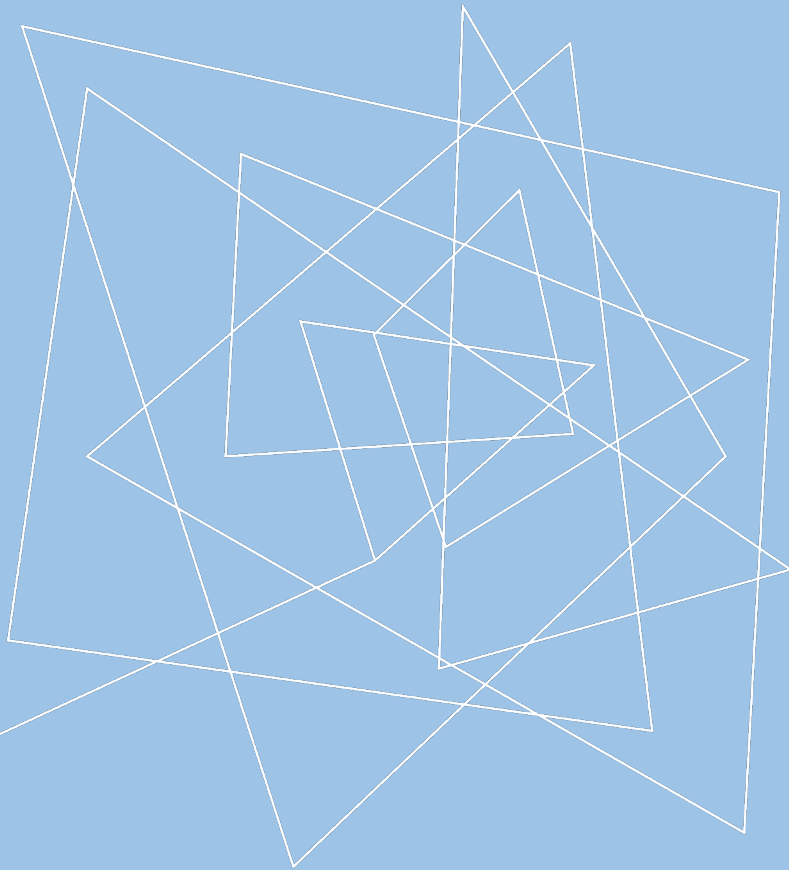
INTRODUCTION

Aim

investigate if different **syntactic** and/or **discourse-pragmatic relations** recognised for HM clauses are reflected in **prosodic realisation** in English and Dutch

Research questions

- To what extent do syntactic dependency and pragmatic function of HM clause interact?
- To what extent is each factor reflected in prosodic realisation of HM clause?
- To what extent are potential interactions language-specific or can they be generalised, and what does this tell us about role of prosody for clause-combining?



METHOD

METHOD

From spoken subsections of BNC (English) and CGN (Dutch), all hits of *as if* (n = 683) and *alsof* (n = 1,036) were extracted → **151** relevant hits for **English** and **247** for **Dutch**

Three coding schemes

- Syntactic factors
- Discourse-pragmatic function
- Prosodic factors

METHOD

From spoken subsections of BNC (English) and CGN (Dutch), all hits of *as if* (n = 683) and *alsof* (n = 1,036) were extracted → **151** relevant hits for **English** and **247** for **Dutch**

Three coding schemes

– **Syntactic factors:** level of syntactic integration with other (main) clause

- Obligatoriness
- Clefting
- Proportionality
- Fronting

→ Three levels: strong syntactic dependence > weak dependence > independence

METHOD

From spoken subsections of BNC (English) and CGN (Dutch), all hits of *as if* (n = 683) and *alsof* (n = 1,036) were extracted → **151** relevant hits for **English** and **247** for **Dutch**

Three coding schemes

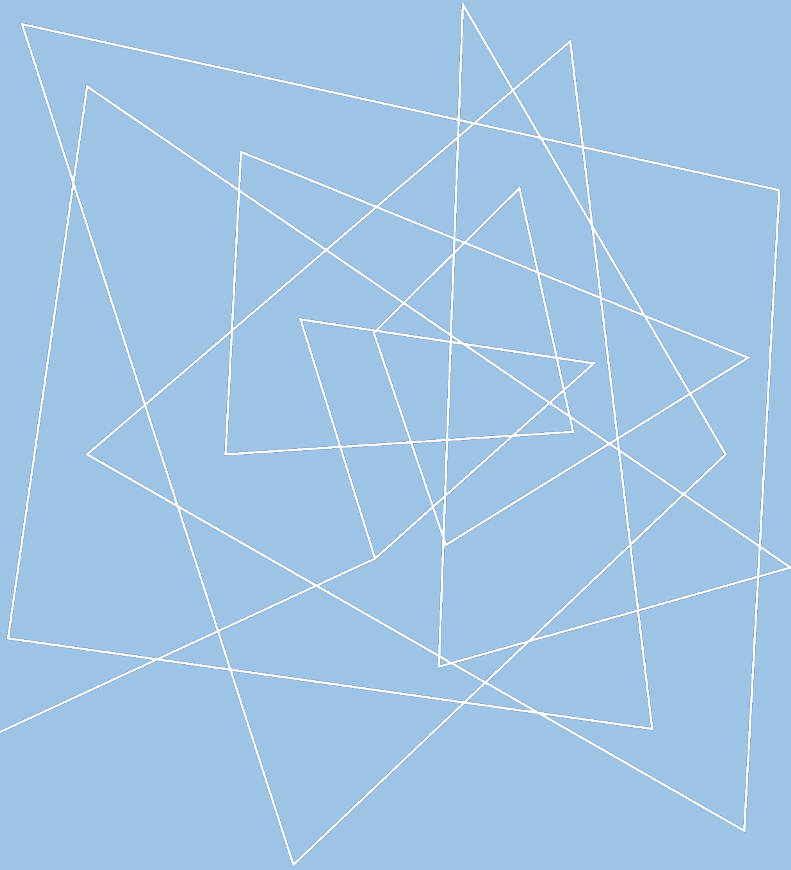
- Syntactic factors
- **Discourse-pragmatic function:** what is contextual meaning of HM clause?
 - Manner: *They looked at me as if I was stupid*
 - Qualification: *She sounded as if she was choking*
 - Cause / Justification: *I feel a bit dizzy, as if – you know – I need new glasses*
 - Denial of assumption: *Oh yeah, as if you'd know!*

METHOD

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Three coding schemes

- Syntactic factors
- Discourse-pragmatic function
- **Prosodic factors:**
 - **IU segmentation:** is HM clause uttered on same or separate IU as previous/next clause?
 - **Onset pitch level:** what is the difference in pitch height between end of previous clause and onset of HM clause (if uttered on separate IUs)?
 - **Pause length:** is HM clause preceded by pause and what is average length of pause?
 - **Pitch contour:** with which tone is HM clause uttered? (i.e. fall, rise, fall-rise, or rise-fall)



RESULTS

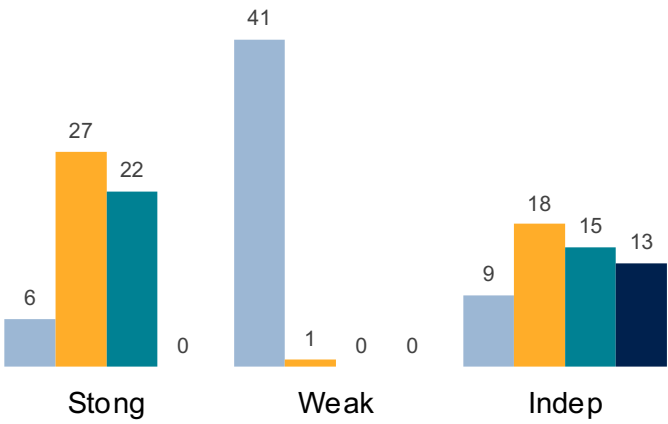
INTERACTION GRAMMAR / DISCOURSE

RESULTS: GRAMMAR / DISCOURSE

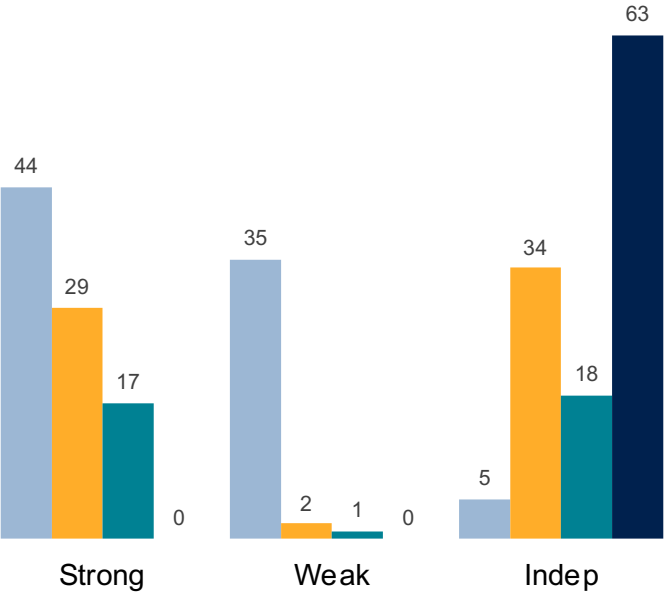
Correlation between syntactic dependency and pragmatic function in both

- **English:** $\chi^2(6) = 114.64, p < 0.001$, Cramer's V: 0.614
- **Dutch:** $\chi^2(6) = 115.21, p < 0.001$, Cramer's V: 0.559

ENGLISH



DUTCH



■ Manner ■ Qualification ■ Cause/Justification ■ Denial of Assumption

PROSODIC CORRELATES

IU SEGMENTATION

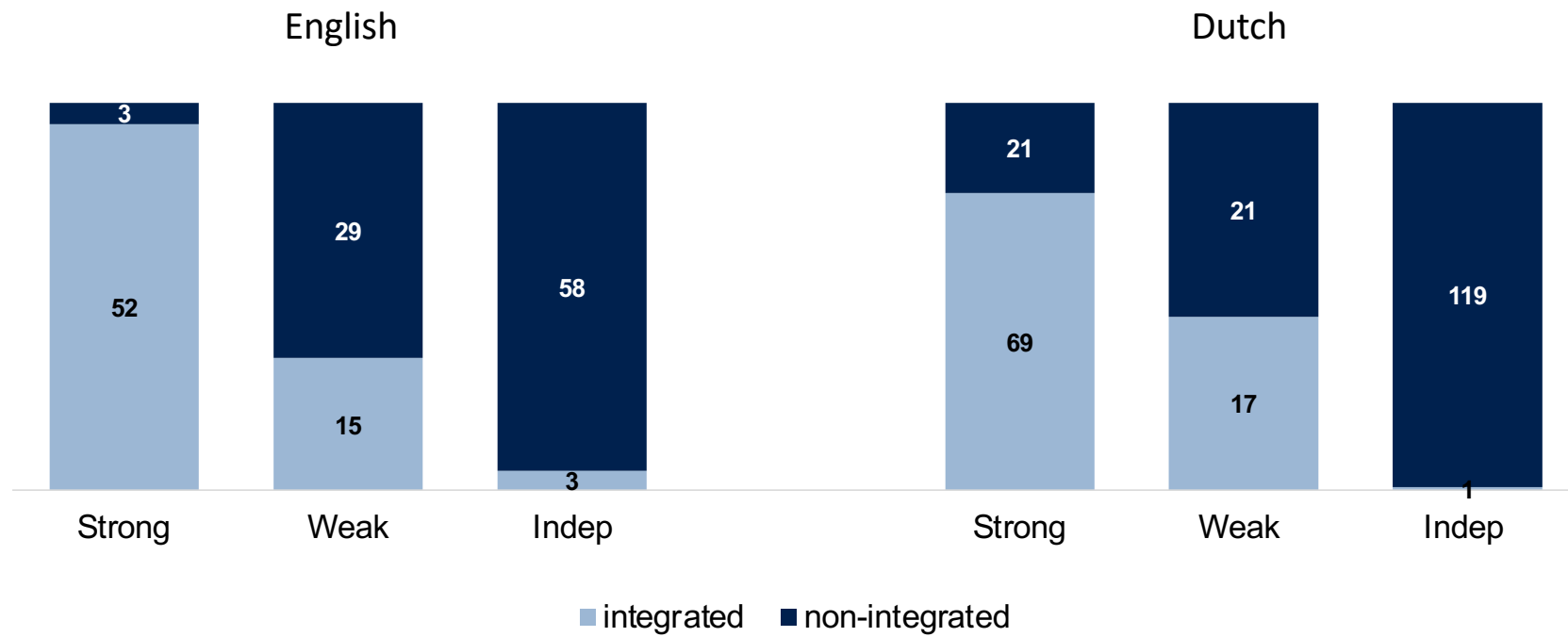
Syntactic dependency status

correlates with prosodic integration in both

- **English:** $\chi^2(2) = 89.03, p < 0.001, \text{Cramer's } V: 0.765$
- **Dutch:** $\chi^2(2) = 131.7, p < 0.001, \text{Cramer's } V: 0.729$

IU SEGMENTATION

Syntactic dependency status



IU SEGMENTATION

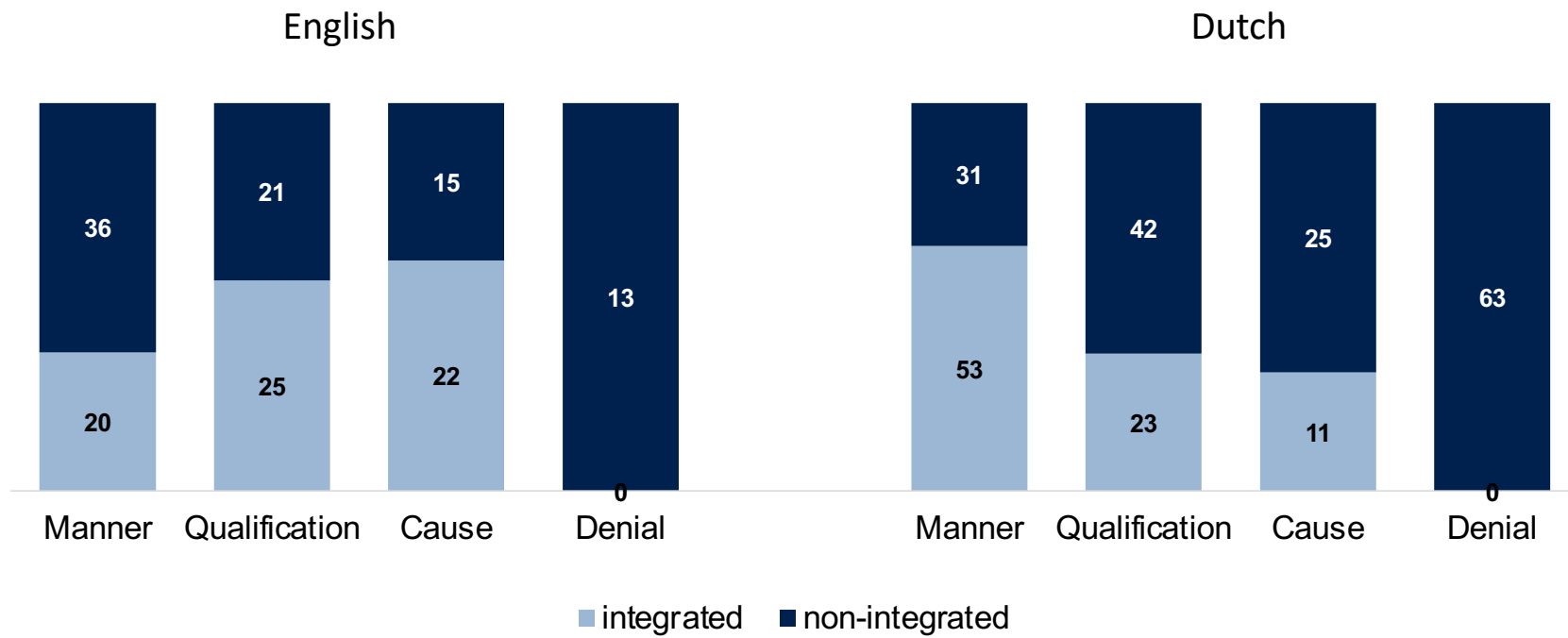
Pragmatic function

correlates with prosodic integration in both

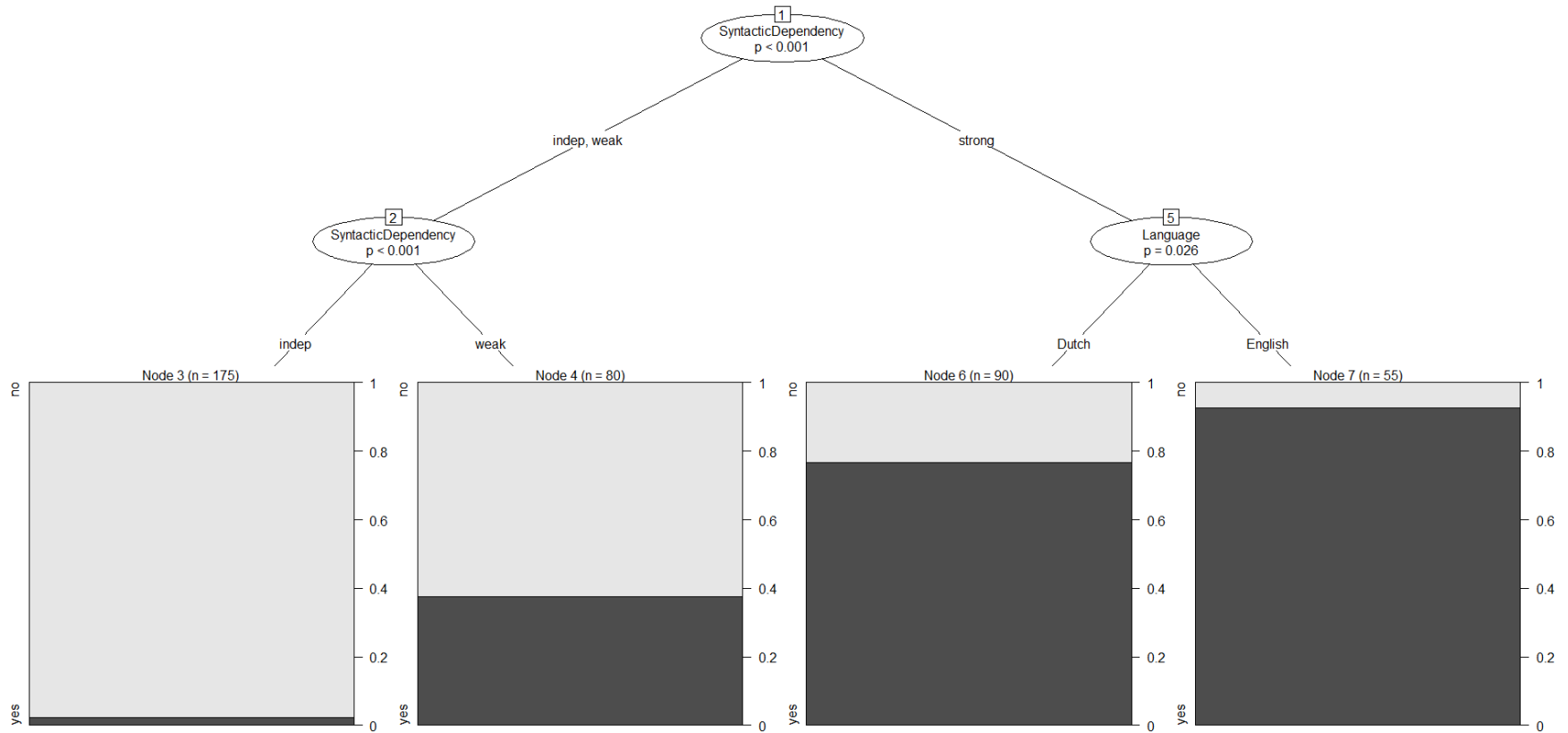
- **English:** $\chi^2(3) = 17.355, p < 0.001, \text{Cramer's V: } 0.338$
- **Dutch:** $\chi^2(3) = 63.317, p < 0.001, \text{Cramer's V: } 0.505$

IU SEGMENTATION

Pragmatic function



IU SEGMENTATION



ONSET PITCH LEVEL

Syntactic dependency status

| | English | Dutch |
|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Strong dependence | -0.40 (n = 5) | -0.51 (n = 36) |
| Weak dependence | 0.80 (n = 28) | -0.24 (n = 26) |
| Independence | 2.21 (n = 39) | 3.53 (n = 103) |
| | ($F = 1.135, p = 0.33$) | ($F = 16.68, p < 0.001$) |

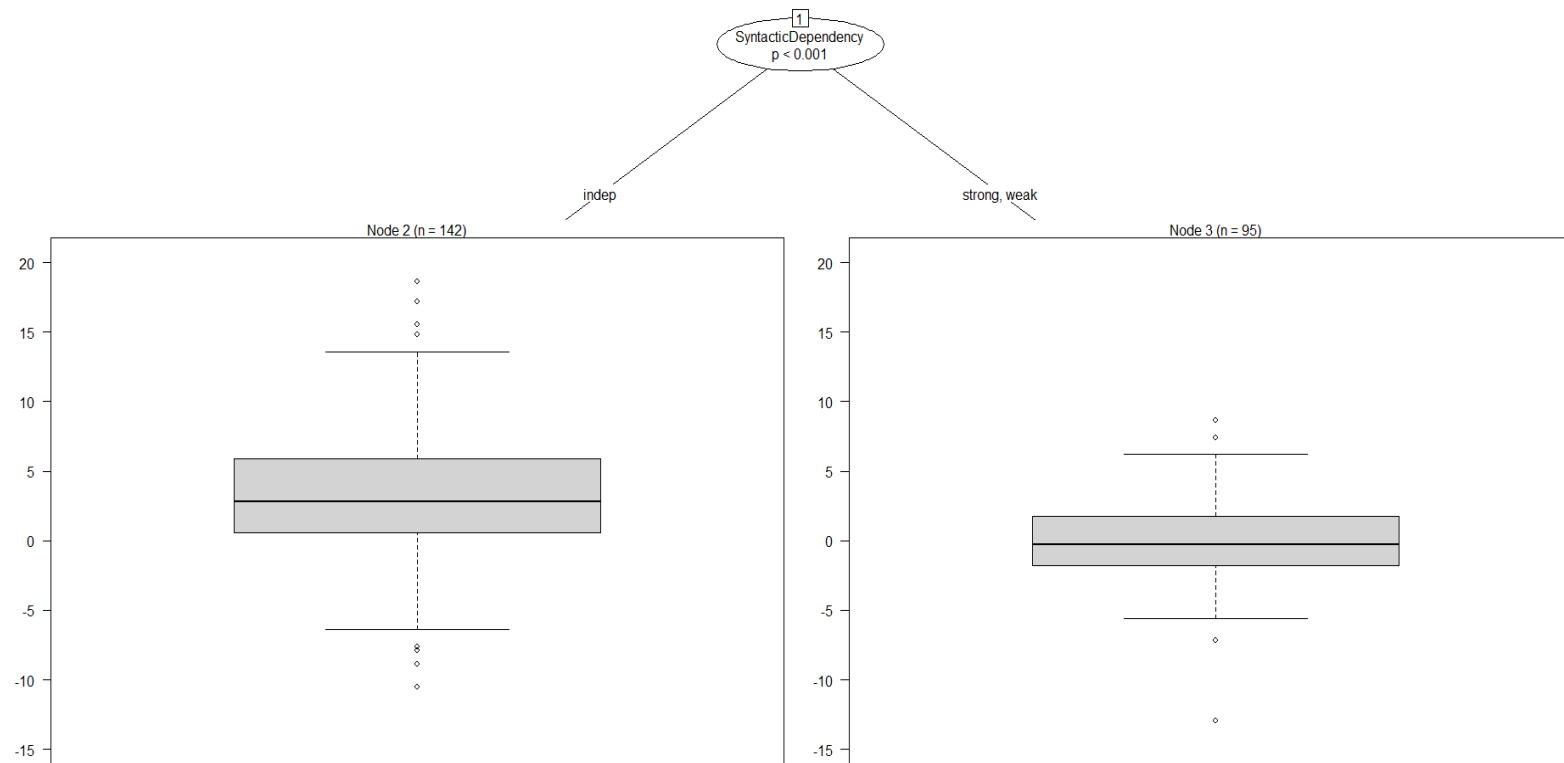
Tukey post-hoc (Dutch): $p < 0.001$ between independence vs. both strong and weak dependence
 $p = 0.97$ between strong and weak dependence

ONSET PITCH LEVEL

Pragmatic function

| | English | Dutch |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Manner | 1.11 (n = 35) | -0.22 (n = 42) |
| Qualification | 1.64 (n = 16) | 2.93 (n = 48) |
| Cause / Justification | 1.45 (n = 15) | 0.91 (n = 26) |
| Denial | 3.28 (n = 6) | 3.75 (n = 49) |
| | ($F = 0.35, p = 0.789$) | ($F = 7.473, p < 0.001$) |

ONSET PITCH LEVEL



PAUSE

Syntactic dependency status

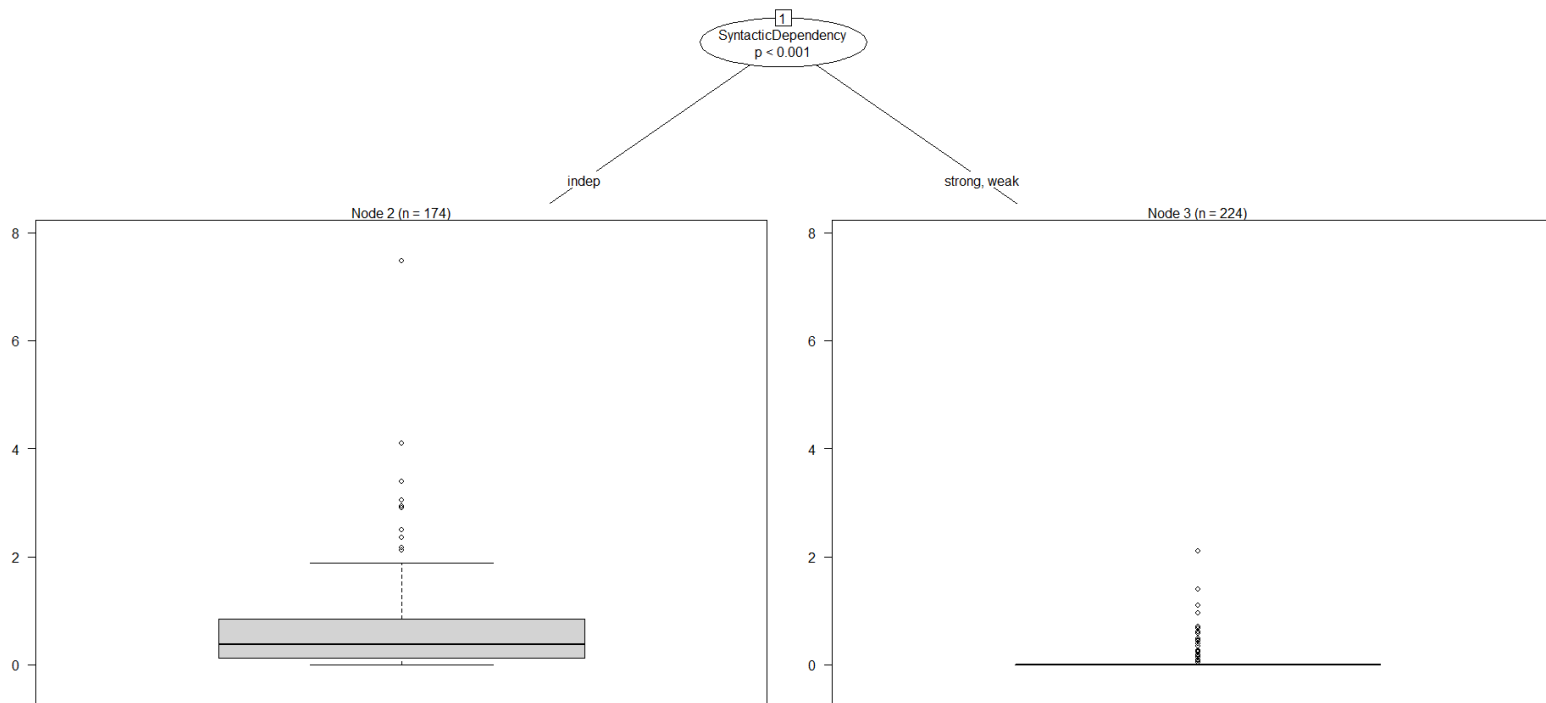
| | English | Dutch |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Strong dependence | 0.09 (n = 55) | 0.02 (n = 90) |
| Weak dependence | 0.08 (n = 41) | 0.12 (n = 38) |
| Independence | 0.74 (n = 55) | 0.60 (n = 119) |
| | ($F = 11.46, p < 0.001$) | ($F = 47.22, p < 0.001$) |

PAUSE

Pragmatic function

| | English | Dutch |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Manner | 0.10 (n = 55) | 0.07 (n = 84) |
| Qualification | 0.28 (n = 46) | 0.32 (n = 65) |
| Cause / Justification | 0.45 (n = 37) | 0.26 (n = 36) |
| Denial | 1.04 (n = 13) | 0.68 (n = 62) |
| | ($F = 4.921, p = 0.003$) | ($F = 19.62, p < 0.001$) |

PAUSE



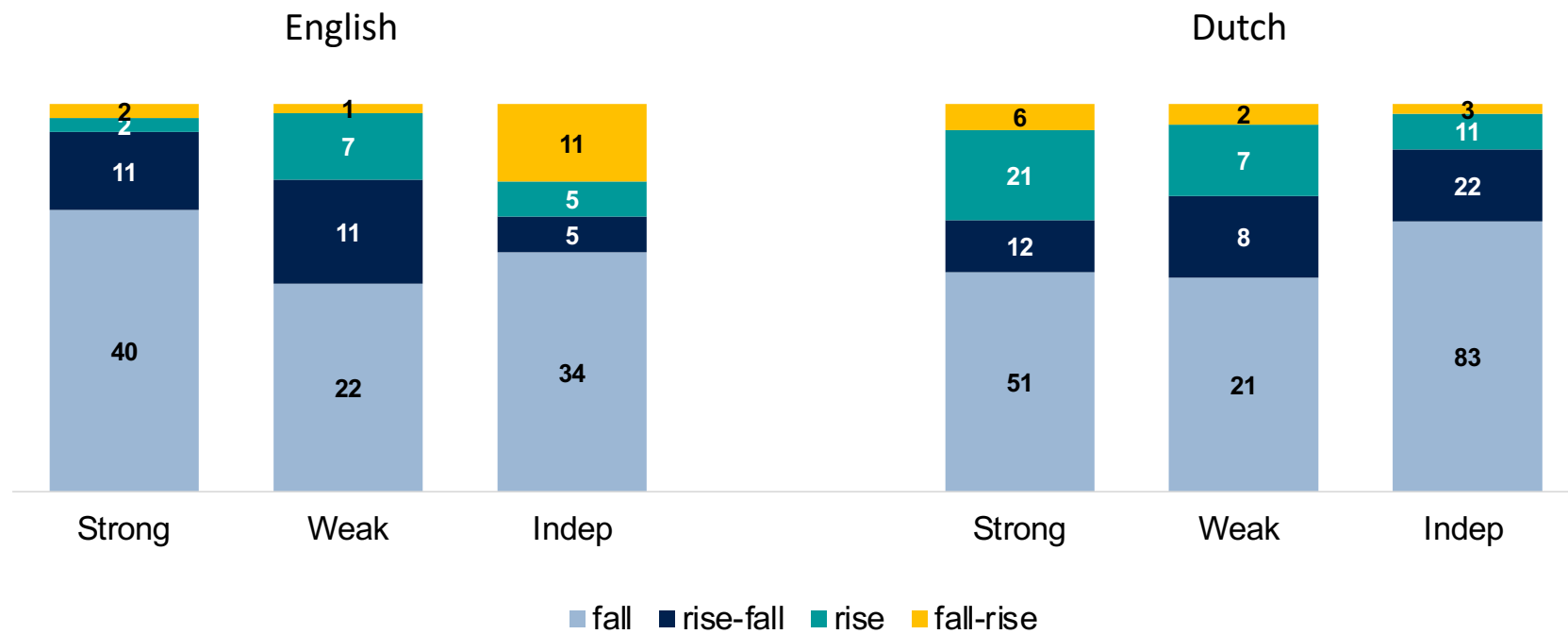
PITCH CONTOUR

Syntactic dependency status

correlates with choice of tone in **English** ($p = 0.002$, Fisher exact test), not in **Dutch** ($p = 0.05$)

PITCH CONTOUR

Syntactic dependency status



PITCH CONTOUR

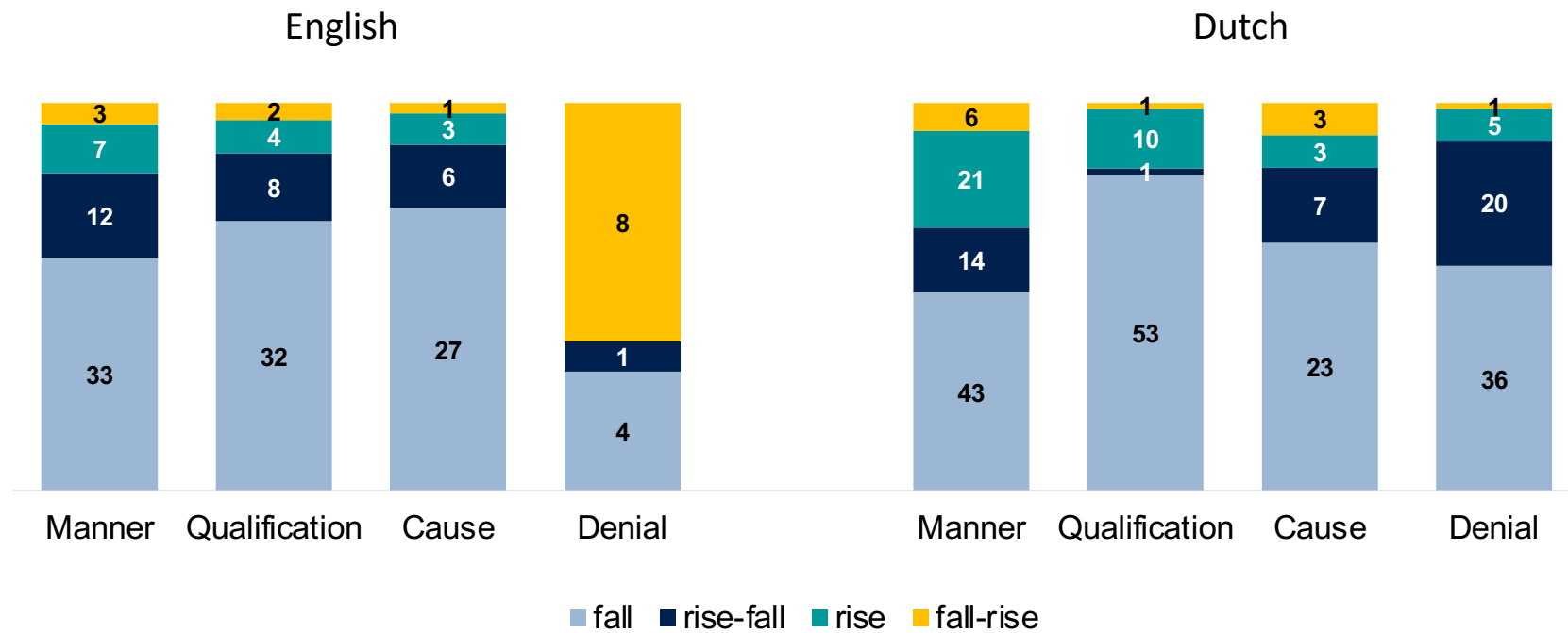
Pragmatic function

Numbers too small for reliable statistical analysis

But...

PITCH CONTOUR

Pragmatic function



PITCH CONTOUR

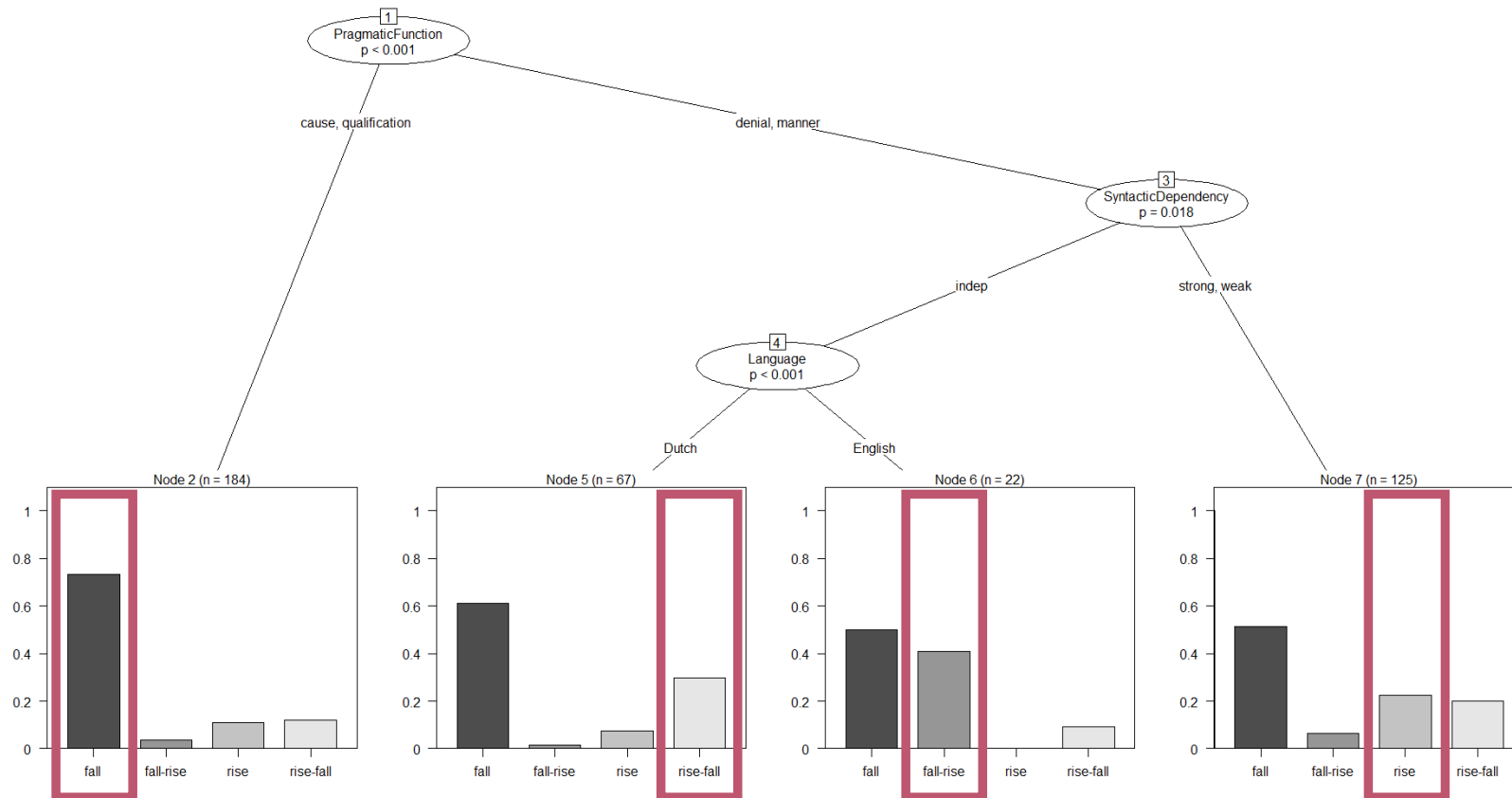
Pragmatic function

Numbers too small for reliable statistical analysis

But...

- remarkably high relative frequency of **fall-rises** with **denial** of assumption in **English**
- In **Dutch**, denial of assumption mostly uttered with fall, but also slightly higher frequency of **rise-falls**

PITCH CONTOUR





CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Prosodic realisation correlates with both syntactic dependency and pragmatic functions

- **Syntactic dependency** status best overall predictor of **prosodic integration** (i.e. IU segmentation, average onset pitch, and pausing) in both English and Dutch
 - **IU segmentation** reflects three-way level of **syntactic integration** in both languages
 - **Onset pitch** and **pause** reflect two-way distinction between independent and dependent clauses
 - signals general **discourse-level** meanings of ‘**new start**’ vs. **elaboration** on (i.e. continuation of) content in previous IU

CONCLUSIONS

Choice of **tone**, or pitch contour, accounted for by both pragmatic function (major influence) and syntactic dependency (minor)

Pragmatic function:

- In English, **denial of assumption** attracts **fall-rise** ('contradiction') ↔ in Dutch, slightly higher frequency of **rise-fall** ('irony')

Syntactic dependency:

- Slightly higher frequency of **rises** in **syntactically dependent** clauses → '**minor**' information status of subclause



THANK YOU

Wout VAN PRAET

wout.vanpraet@uclouvain.be

Liesbeth DEGAND

liesbeth.degand@uclouvain.be

An VAN LINDEN

an.vanlinden@uliege.be