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Contrastive analysis of interlanguage prosody of English as an L2:

the case of L1-Spanish and L1-French learners



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Introduction

The present is an **exploratory** study dealing with the **phonetic** realization (*f0*, *dur*) of focused lexical elements produced by native speakers of English and learners of English whose L1 is Chilean Spanish or French.

Objectives

- **Describing** the f0 movements in focused elements produced by the three groups of speakers
- **Comparing** the duration and f0 movement differences between speakers of different groups
- Determining if differences and similarities in f0 and duration depend on the speakers' L1

Hypotheses

- H₁ Speakers belonging to different L1 groups will perform focus in different ways at a f0 and duration level
- H₂ Differences originate from influence of the speakers' L1

Results

- Analyses show that speakers of different L1 groups favor **different types of pitch contours** to express focus: **rise-falls** are most common among native English speakers, whereas **risers** are frequently observed in L1-French speakers and **fall-rises** are fairly common among Spanish speakers.
- **Pitch range** (max f0 - min f0) values vary by group of speakers: overall, L1-Spanish speakers perform larger pitch movements than L1-French and native speakers.
- Learners perform **final rises** in questions with focused elements more often than native speakers.

Methodology

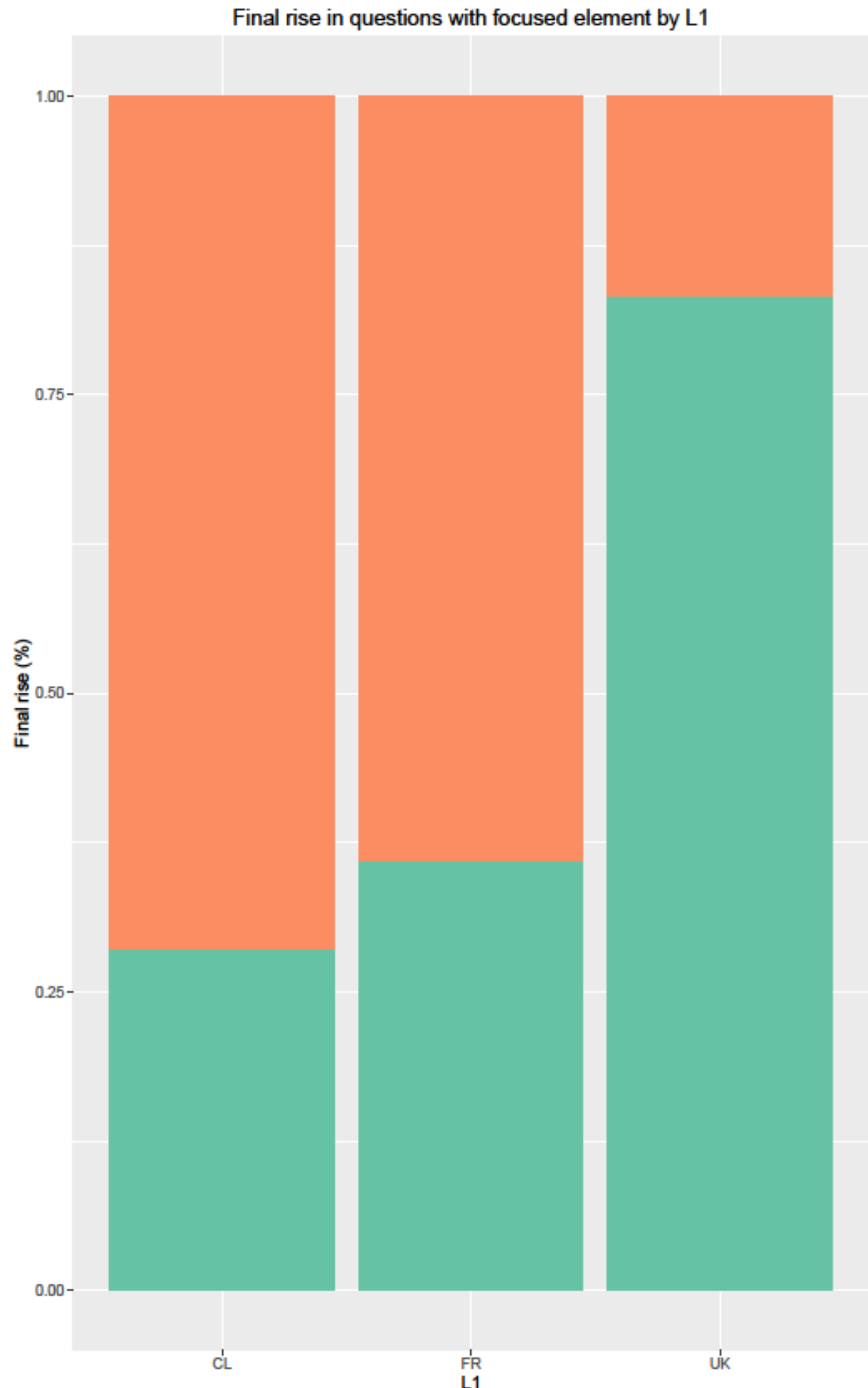
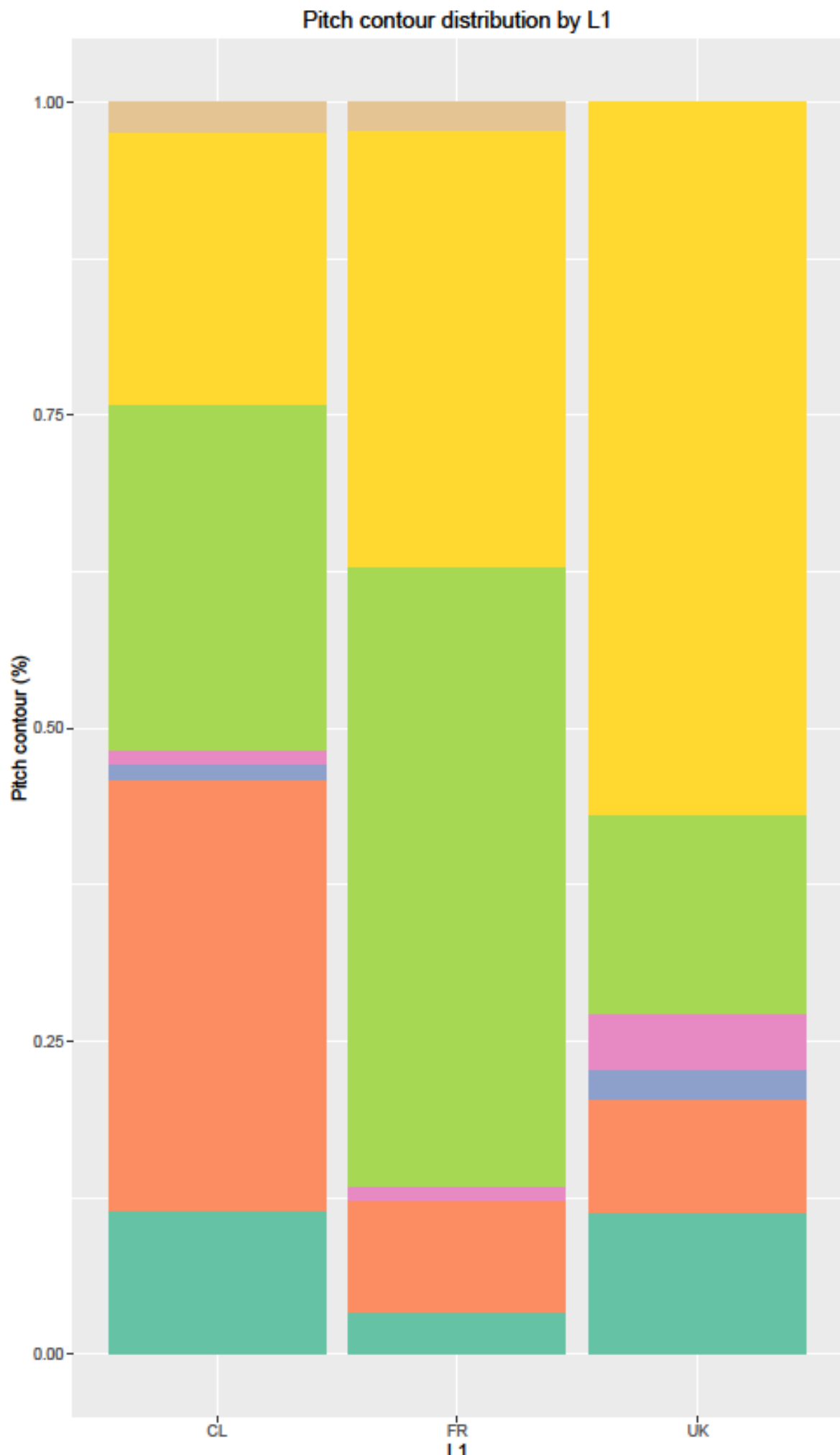
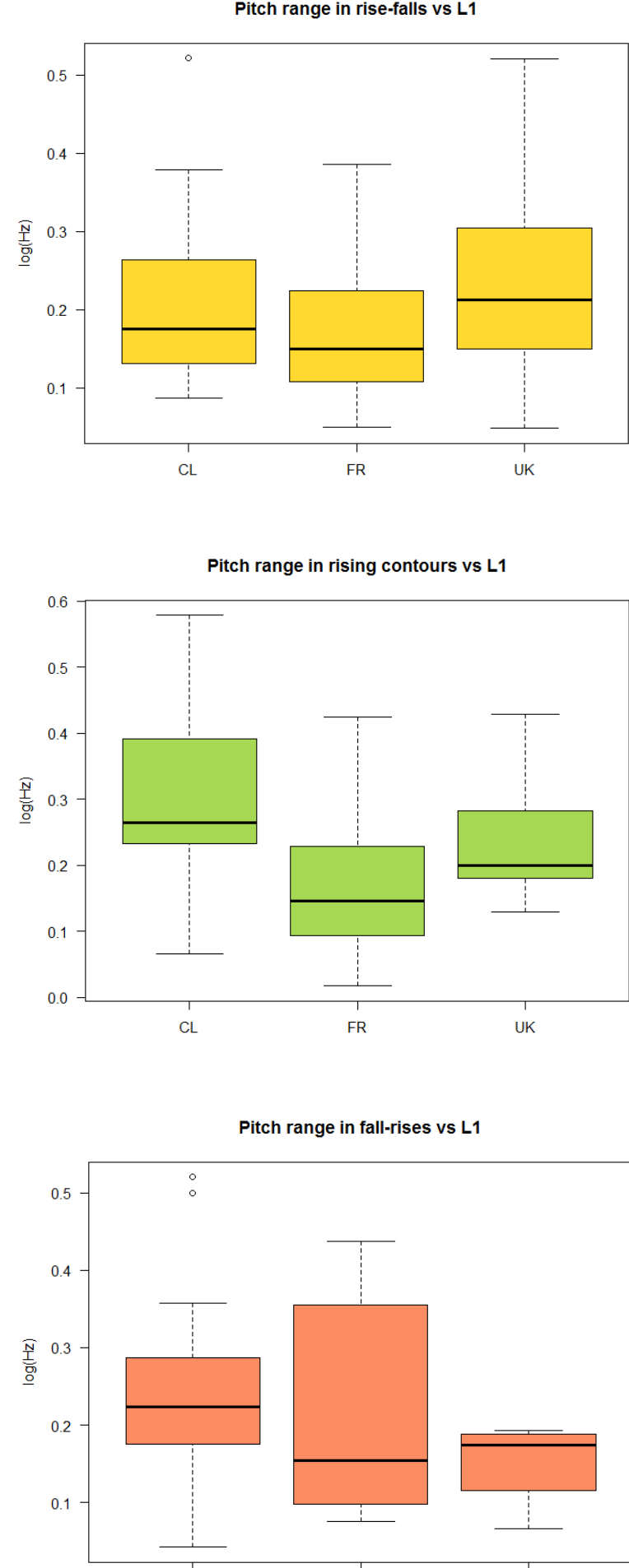
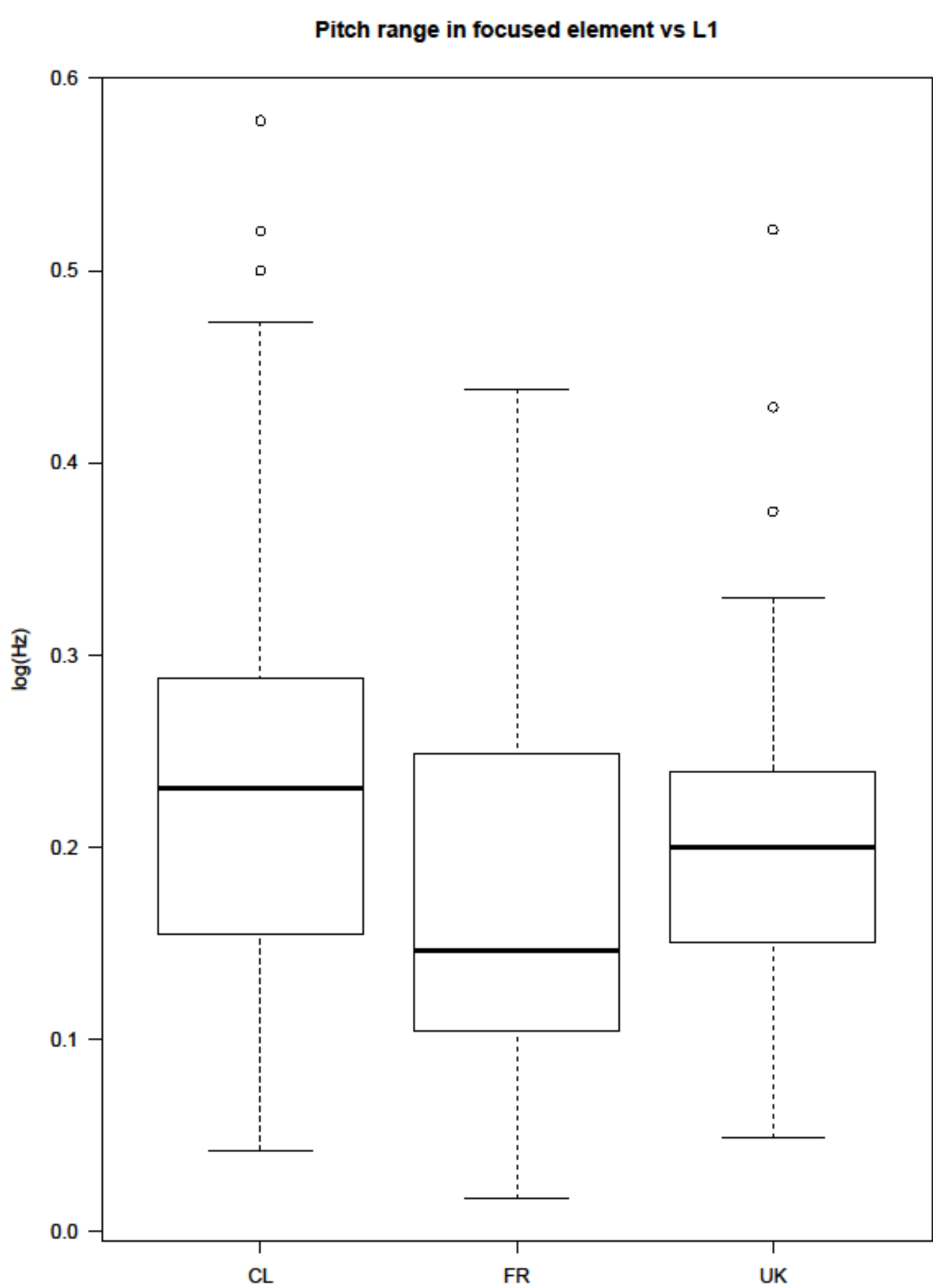
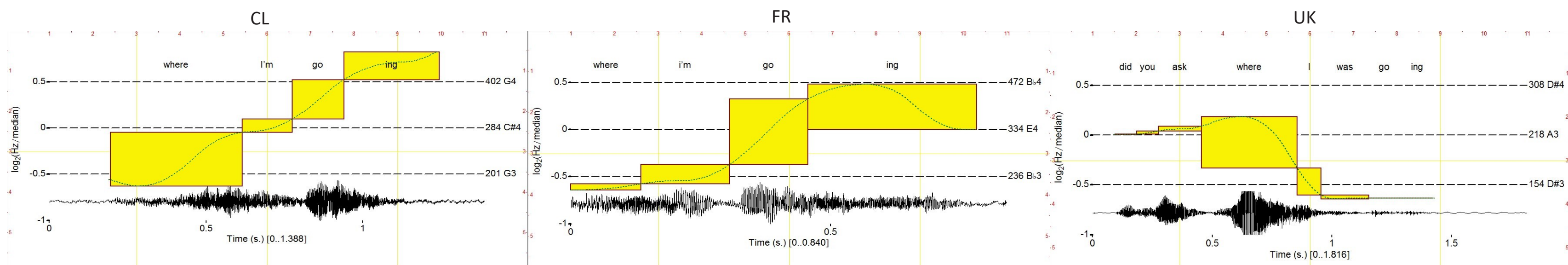
Elicitation tests (Prieto et al., 2010) were applied to learners (10 L1-Spanish and 10 L1-French) and native speakers (5 speakers of Southern British English), in order to obtain samples of semi-spontaneous speech.

Recordings of 9 types of utterances containing focused elements were selected (contrastive focus, contradiction statement, statement of the obvious, neutral echo-questions and counterexpectational echo-questions), totalling a corpus of 225 utterances.

Utterances were transcribed and syllabified, then modeled with the Momel algorithm (Hirst & Espesser, 1993) and Prosomarker script (Origlia & Alfano, 2012), as well as visually represented in order to identify the general prosodic features of speakers.

F0 start, end, minimum and maximum values were obtained for the focused element on each utterance. Pitch movements were categorized, duration values were registered, and stressed syllables and final rises at the end of questions were recorded.

Exploratory graphic representations were generated to obtain a general view of the distribution of the aforementioned variables.



Conclusion, discussion and further research

These results provide a first glance at the prosody of English learners. Marked differences are observed regarding pitch contour choice and range in focused lexical elements among speakers of different L1s.

However, these data remain exploratory due to the size of the sample and the variation of the syntax and lexical elements elicited by a semi-spontaneous speech task. Confirmation is needed through the analysis of a larger corpus of learner oral production, and through the use of tasks that allow the control of variables such as lexical content.

Contextualized reading out loud tasks of short sentences presenting focus can be used in order to obtain more detailed and reliable data which could be used to establish a link between the pitch contours chosen by learners, the way they perform them and the prosody of their L1.

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