LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION & CONSERVATION

Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 2008), pp. 244-274
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/

Prosodic Description: An Introduction for Fieldworkers

Nikolaus P. Himmelmann
WestfälischeWilhelms-Universität Münster

D. Robert Ladd
The University of Edinburgh

This article provides an introductory tutorial on prosodic features such as tone and accent for researchers working on little-known languages. It specifically addresses the needs of non-specialists and thus does not presuppose knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of prosodic features. Instead, it intends to introduce the uninitiated reader to a field often shied away from because of its (in part real, but in part also just imagined) complexities. It consists of a concise overview of the basic phonetic phenomena (section 2) and the major categories and problems of their functional and phonological analysis (sections 3 and 4). Section 5 gives practical advice for documenting and analyzing prosodic features in the field.

1. INTRODUCTION. When beginning fieldwork on a little-known language, many linguists have a general idea of what kinds of things they will be looking for with regard to segmental phonology and morphosyntax. There is a lot of basic agreement about how segmental phonology and morphosyntax work, and for many categories and subsystems elaborate typologies exist which provide a frame of reference for the first steps in the analysis. But with prosodic features – the kinds of things that often don't show up in a segmental transcription – fieldworkers may feel that they are on shaky ground. They are insecure about hearing prosodic distinctions and unclear about the way these distinctions might be used in different languages. The available fieldwork manuals and guides are of little help in this regard, as they give short shrift to matters of prosody (other than lexical tone), if they mention them at all. The purpose of this article, then, is to provide basic guidance on prosodic analysis and description to (non-specialist) fieldworkers.[1] It consists of an elementary but comprehensive overview of the central phenomena and problems one may expect to encounter in the field (sections 2-4) and some practical advice regarding the collection of relevant data (section 5). It complements Himmelmann's (2006) tutorial on

[1]We have deliberately restricted ourselves here to the rather loose characterization of prosody as relating to the kinds of things that often don't show up in a segmental transcription; the technical details throughout the article give a more comprehensive idea of what we refer to as "prosodic." However, we should explicitly mention one topic that we are not concerned with, namely the range of phenomena often investigated under the rubric *prosodic phonology*: the structure of prosodic domains such as mora, syllable, foot, phonological word, and intonation unit, and the phonological and syntactic regularities relating to this structure. The term "prosodic phonology" was first used in this sense by Nespor and Vogel (1986); for a current summary of thinking on prosodic domains see Grijzenhout and Kabak (to appear).

Licensed under Creative Commons
Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike License
E-ISSN 1934-5275

Document URI: http://hdl.handle.net/10125/4345

the documentation of prosodic features, which discusses the question what kind of data need to be collected in order for a thorough prosodic analysis to become possible. It does not presuppose knowledge of the phonetics and phonology of prosodic features, but rather intends to introduce the uninitiated reader to a field often shied away from because of its (in part real, but in part also just imagined) complexities.[2]

There are two fundamental ways that prosodic features differ from more familiar segmental features. One is that they are relevant at different levels of structure: there are both word-level or lexical prosodic features and sentence-level or "post-lexical" ones. Probably the best known typological difference based on this distinction is the one between "tone languages" like Chinese, where pitch serves to distinguish otherwise identical lexical items, and non-tonal languages like English, where pitch only serves to signal sentence-level differences of "intonation." However, the use of prosodic features at different levels applies more widely as well: in English we can use stress at the lexical level to distinguish one word from another (e.g. *PERmit* [noun] and *perMIT* [verb]), but also at the post-lexical level to distinguish one sentence meaning from another (e.g. *I only put salt in the STEW* and *I only put SALT in the stew*.)

The other important property that sets prosodic features apart from familiar segmental features is that their sentence-level functions – like intonation and sentence-stress – are often broadly similar even in completely unrelated languages. For example, it is very common cross-linguistically to signal questions by the use of sustained high or rising pitch at the end of an utterance, even in languages that also have lexical tone. Similarly, some kind of overall widening of pitch range on the most prominent word of a phrase is seen in many languages around the world. There is disagreement about the significance of these similarities: Prelinguistic human universals? Features shared through language contact? Mere coincidence? It is certainly possible to overestimate the extent to which prosodic features are alike wherever in the world you go, but at the same time there can be little doubt that the similarities, even among unrelated languages, are real. (For further discussion see Gussenhoven 2004, chapters 4 and 5, and Ladd 2008, sec. 2.5.)

Because it works at different levels and because it has both universal and language-specific aspects, prosody is likely to seem mysterious and difficult. Speakers of a language that uses a given feature in one way are likely to find using it in a different way strange and exotic and (more practically) hard to hear: this is a common reaction of speakers of non-tonal languages when they encounter a tone language. (Conversely, speakers of tone languages may tend to interpret sentence-level intonational features as if they involved a sequence of distinctive pitches on specific syllables or words.) Furthermore, sentence-level distinctions are probably inherently more difficult to think about than lexical distinctions: the difference between a pin and a bin is instantly obvious and easy to demonstrate, whereas the difference between the two versions of the sentence about the salt and the stew

---

[2] We are grateful to René Schiering and an anonymous reviewer for *LD&C* for very helpful comments on earlier draft of this article. And many thanks to Claudia Leto for help with the figures. Himmelmann's research for this paper was supported by a generous grant from the Volkswagen Foundation. This version of the present article supersedes any earlier versions that may have been posted on the web.

in the paragraph above takes careful explaining. Nevertheless, prosody is an essential ingredient of every spoken language, and a description of prosody is an essential ingredient of every complete language description. In the following sections we will sketch some of the key phonetic, functional, and typological aspects of prosodic features (in sections 2–4), then go on to outline various techniques for achieving a satisfactory analysis of prosodic features in the field (section 5).

2. THE PHONETIC FUNDAMENTALS. We begin by briefly introducing four phonetic parameters which are relevant to prosody: pitch, duration, voice quality, and stress.

2.1 PITCH. Pitch is the property that distinguishes one musical note from another. In speech, pitch corresponds roughly to the fundamental frequency (F0) of the acoustic signal, which in turn corresponds roughly to the rate of vibration of the vocal cords. It is physically impossible to have voice without pitch – if the vocal cords are vibrating, they are necessarily vibrating at some frequency. In English and many other European languages we talk about pitch being "higher" or "lower" as the frequency of vibration gets faster or slower, but other sensory metaphors are used in other languages and cultures ("brighter/darker," "sharper/duller," etc.). Perhaps because pitch is a necessary property of voice, all languages – so far as we know – exploit pitch for communicative purposes.

The most striking thing about pitch is that it varies conspicuously from one speaker to another – men generally have lower voices than women. This means that the phonetic definition of pitch for linguistic purposes cannot be based on any absolute level of fundamental frequency but must be considered relative to the speaker's voice range. Normalization for speaker differences must also deal with the fact that speakers can "raise their voice" without affecting the linguistic identity of pitch features. The details of how this normalization should be done are not fully clear but the basic principle is not in doubt. Moreover, this seldom causes serious practical difficulties in fieldwork, because we can usually hear whether a given pitch is relatively high or low in the speaker's voice.

However, even if we find it relatively easy to abstract away from differences of overall pitch level, there are still major difficulties in the phonetic description of pitch. This is reflected in the lack of any agreement on an IPA system for transcription of pitch distinctions. One of the key issues for transcription is the relevance – or lack of relevance – of the tone-bearing unit. Thus, for example, in tone languages where the syllable is the tone-bearing unit, terms like "rise" and "fall" must be defined relative to the syllable: a sequence of a high-tone syllable and a low-tone syllable can be lexically completely different from a sequence of a falling-tone syllable and a low-tone syllable, even though both sequences involve an overall "fall" in pitch over the two syllables. In such a tone language, the overall "fall" is not relevant for phonetic description. In a language like English, on the other hand, a phonetic fall on a monosyllabic utterance (e.g. *John*) and a phonetic high-to-low sequence on a disyllabic one (e.g. *Johnny*) may be completely equivalent in the intonational system, which suggests that the "fall" must be regarded as a phonetic event regardless of the number of syllables it spans. This idea is strengthened by recent work showing that in languages like English and German functionally equivalent pitch movements can be "aligned" in different ways relative to syllables in different languages and language varieties.

In studying an unfamiliar language, in short, the fieldworker needs to be alert to the fact that descriptive assumptions can be hidden even in an apparently neutral label like "pitch fall". For fieldwork, the most important thing to know about pitch is that a useful phonetic description of pitch depends on the way pitch is used in the language. More specifically, fieldworkers must be prepared to detect what units are relevant for the phonetic chunking of the pitch contour, and must be aware that these may not be the same as in their native language.

2.2 DURATION. To the extent that we can divide an utterance into phonetic segments with clearly defined boundaries, we can measure the duration of the segments. In many languages duration is systematically manipulated for prosodic effect (e.g., distinctions between long and short vowels), but in all languages, segment duration is affected by a host of other factors as well. These include some nearly universal allophonic effects (e.g., vowels tend to be longer before voiced consonants than before voiceless consonants; low vowels tend to be longer than high vowels; fricatives tend to be longer than stops) and effects of speaking rate (faster rate means shorter segments, but vowels are generally more compressible or expandable than consonants). Segment duration is also affected by other prosodic factors: specifically, stressed vowels tend to be longer than unstressed vowels; segments in phrase-final positions tend to be longer than in other positions; and word-initial and phrase-initial consonants tend to be longer than consonants in other positions. For fieldwork, these differences mean that any suspected duration distinctions must always be checked in similar sentence contexts. In particular, if you ask someone to repeat two items that appear to be a duration-based minimal pair (like *Stadt* 🔊 'city' and *Staat* 🔊 'state' in German), it is important to hear the two members of the pair in both orders 🔊. That way you will not be misled by any lengthening (or occasionally, shortening) of whichever item is pronounced second.

Another topic that should be mentioned under the heading of duration is rhythm, and in particular the idea that there are "stress-timed" and "syllable-timed" languages. This notion has been around for the better part of a century. It seems fairly clear that, if taken literally, it is false, in the sense that there do not appear to be any languages in which syllables (or inter-stress intervals) are physically equal in duration and in which there is some higher-level rhythmic template that adjusts durations so as to achieve the alleged rhythmic regularity. At the same time, it is clearly true that there are many factors that may lead to the overall acoustic impression that the syllables or inter-stress intervals of a language are approximately equal; these include syllable structure (the absence of consonant clusters makes syllables more equal in duration), vowel reduction (the reduction and centralization of unstressed vowels makes inter-stress intervals more equal in duration), and many others. A good summary is presented by Dauer 1983; more recent work on this general topic is represented by Ramus et al. 1999, Low et al. 2000 and Dufter 2003.

2.3 VOICE QUALITY. The phonetic description of voice quality is less well advanced than that of other prosodic features. Many differences of voice quality – described by such impressionistic terms as "harsh," "breathy," "creaky," and so on – are based on different configurations of the glottis. As such they are difficult to observe directly, either in our-

selves or in others, except by the use of special equipment. The standard work on the impressionistic description (and transcription) of voice quality is Laver 1980, which remains a useful reference for fieldwork. Much recent research has focused on understanding the acoustic correlates of voice quality differences and/or the glottal configurations that give rise to them. This work is not likely to be of much direct relevance to descriptive fieldwork, but good fieldwork can provide the basis for directing instrumental phonetic studies into fruitful areas of research.

2.4 STRESS. Roughly speaking, stress is the property that makes one syllable in a word more prominent than its neighbors – for example, signaling the difference between the noun *PERmit* and the verb *perMIT*. Perhaps surprisingly, it is extremely difficult to provide a phonetic definition for this "greater prominence" and it thus remains unclear whether a specific, phonetically definable property "stress" actually exists. In line with most of the current literature, our exposition here assumes that it does, and we use the term "stress" only in reference to this putative phonetic property, reserving the term "accent" for abstract prominence at the phonological level, which may be phonetically manifested in a number of ways (see further section 4.2).

Impressionistically (for native speakers of many European languages), the phonetic basis of stress pertains to "loudness" – the stressed syllable seems louder than neighboring unstressed syllables – but perceived loudness is psychophysically very complicated, not just in speech but in all auditory stimuli. The most important phonetic correlate of perceived loudness is intensity (sound energy), but duration and fundamental frequency have also been shown to play a role – for the same peak intensity, a longer or higher-pitched sound will sound louder than a shorter or lower-pitched one.

A possibly more useful phonetic definition of stress is "force of articulation," which shows up less in effects on the overall energy in a segment or syllable and more in the distribution of energy in the spectrum of the sound. Specifically, it has recently been suggested that stressed vowels in Dutch have more energy at higher frequencies than unstressed vowels (they have "shallower spectral tilt" [Sluijter and van Heuven 1996]). There may also be effects of "force of articulation" on the relative duration of consonant and vowel portions of a syllable, although the details are not at all clear. Additionally, accented syllables often contain full (peripheral) vowels, while unaccented syllables may contain reduced (centralized) vowels such as schwa; alternatively, a language may have only or mainly peripheral vowels, but accented syllables may allow for larger vowel inventories than unaccented syllables. For example, Catalan distinguishes seven vowels /i e ɛ a ɔ o u/ in accented syllables but only three /i ə u/ in unaccented ones.

Part of the problem of defining the phonetic basis of "stress," in short, is the existence of conceptual and theoretical problems with the classification and description of accentual systems generally. We return to this issue in the next section, and in section 4.2.

3.0 TYPICAL FUNCTIONS OF PROSODIC FEATURES.

3.1 LEXICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS. The lexical functions of prosody are, on the whole, like the function of most segmental phonological distinctions: to distin-

guish between one lexical item and another. Just as English *pin* and *bin* differ minimally phonologically but are two unrelated lexical items, so pairs like Chinese *niàn* ‘study’ and *nián* ‘year’ or Dutch *man* ‘man’ and *maan* ‘moon’ or Greek [ˈxoɾos] ‘space’ and [xoˈɾos] ‘dance’ involve unrelated lexical items that are minimally different phonologically. Similarly, just as segmental distinctions can be used to signal different morphological categories (for example, English *foot/feet* for singular/plural or *drink/drank* for present/past), so prosodic features can be used in the same way, as in the differences seen in Shilluk [á-ŋɔl] (low fall) ‘was cut’ vs. [á-ŋɔl] (high fall) ‘was cut [by someone]’ vs. [á-ŋɔl] (late fall) ‘was cut [elsewhere]’ or Dinka [a-kòl] ‘you take out’ and [a-kòol] ‘s/he takes out’ or Italian [ˈpaɾlɔ] ‘I speak’ and [paɾˈlɔ] ‘s/he spoke.’

The examples just given illustrate the three most commonly encountered types of lexical prosodic distinctions: **tone** (as in the Chinese and Shilluk examples), **quantity** (as in the Dutch and Dinka examples), and **accent** (as in the Greek and Italian examples). It is common to treat the three of these together as “suprasegmental” features, and to identify them with the phonetic parameters of **pitch**, **duration,** and **stress**. A classic statement of this view, still useful for the data it contains, is Lehiste’s book *Suprasegmentals* (1970). However, this view is misleading in two distinct ways. First, the linguistic categories of tone, quantity, and accent are often cued in multiple phonetic ways. Tone is primarily a matter of pitch, but may also involve accompanying differences of segment duration and voice quality: for example, in Standard (Mandarin) Chinese syllables with “Tone 3” are not only low in pitch but tend to be longer in duration and to have creaky or glottalised voice as well. Quantity distinctions are based on segment duration, but often involve differences of vowel quality or (in the case of consonants) manner of articulation as well: for example, Dutch long and short vowels invariably differ in quality (as can be heard in the pair *man*/*maan* just mentioned) but sometimes only minimally in duration. As for accent, there are so many different phonetic manifestations of things that have been called “stress” or “accent” that there is very little agreement on what these terms refer to. In short, it is at best a gross oversimplification to think of tone, quantity, and accent as the linguistic functions of the phonetic features pitch, duration, and stress.

The second reason for not treating tone, quantity, and accent together is that they are functionally quite different. Where they exist, distinctions of tone and quantity are often functionally similar to segmental distinctions. Tone – especially in East Asia, much of sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of the Americas – generally has a high functional load, and it is not at all uncommon to find extensive minimal sets distinguished only by tone, for example Yoruba *igba* ‘two hundred’, *igbá* ‘calabash’, *ìgbá* ‘[type of tree]’, *ìgbà* ‘time’. Quantity systems are similar: in many languages with distinctive vowel or consonant quantity, all or almost all the vowels or consonants can appear both long and short in pairs of unrelated words, for example Finnish *tuli* ‘fire’ vs. *tuuli* ‘wind’ and *mato* ‘worm’ vs. *matto* ‘carpet’. Moreover, just as segmental phoneme inventories can differ from language to language, distinctions of tone and quantity also show quite a bit of typological variety. Some tone languages (e.g., many Bantu languages) have only a distinction between high and low, while others (e.g., Cantonese) have half a dozen distinct tone phonemes, including distinctive syllable contours such as high rise and low fall. Languages that have quantity distinctions may have them only on vowels (e.g., German) or only on consonants (e.g., Italian) or on both (e.g., Finnish); for the most part such distinctions are restricted to

short vs. long, but some languages (e.g., Dinka; Remijsen and Gilley 2008) have three-way quantity distinctions at least on vowels. The full range of typological possibilities is probably not fully known.

By contrast, accentual differences are often rather marginal in the lexicon of a language as a whole, yielding few minimal pairs and/or involving some sort of morphological relatedness. For example, in English the lexical accent in a word is certainly a distinctive part of its phonological make-up, and a misplaced accent (e.g., in foreign pronunciation) can make word identification very difficult. Yet there are very few minimal pairs in English based on lexical accent, except for derivationally related noun-verb pairs like *OBject-obJECT* and *PERmit-perMIT*. This difference is due to the fact that accent involves a syntagmatic relation (the relative prominence of two syllables), whereas tone and quantity, like most segmental features, are a matter of paradigmatic contrasts between members of a set of possible phonological choices. It is clearly meaningful to say of a monosyllabic utterance that is has a long vowel or a high tone, because these terms can be defined without reference to other syllables. It is often less clear what it means to say that a monosyllabic utterance is "stressed" or "accented."

Finally, we should mention lexical distinctions of voice quality, which are often not considered under the heading of "prosody" at all. In some languages there are phonemic distinctions of voice quality which are associated with specific consonantal contrasts: for example, in Hindi the distinction between "voiced" and "voiced aspirated" stops may be primarily a matter of voice quality in the following vowel. Similarly, in many East Asian tone languages there are characteristic differences of voice quality that accompany pitch differences in distinguishing between one tone phoneme and another, and which are therefore generally described as part of the tonal system. (This is the case with the glottalization that often accompanies Mandarin "Tone 3," as we just saw above.) However, voice quality distinctions (e.g., Dinka *kiir* 🔊 'big river' vs. *kïir* 🔊 'thorn tree') can be independent of both segmental and tonal distinctions: for example, the two distinctive voice qualities in Dinka can cooccur with any of the tone phonemes, any of the distinctive quantity categories, and most of the vowel and consonant phonemes (Andersen 1987). Likewise, the link between voice quality and consonant type in Hindi, just mentioned, has been broken in the related language Gujarati, where "breathy" or "murmured" voice quality can occur distinctively on most vowels in a variety of phonological contexts.

3.2 PHRASE-LEVEL AND SENTENCE-LEVEL FUNCTIONS. At the sentence level, prosodic features typically play a role in marking three general functions: (1) sentence modality and speaker attitude; (2) phrasing and discourse segmentation; and (3) information structure and focus. However, there is nothing intrinsically "prosodic" about any of these functions: all of them may also be marked in a non-prosodic way in addition to, or instead of, a prosodic marking. Thus, for example, while sentence modality and focus are often marked by intonational means in many European languages, many other languages employ particles or affixes in the same functions (e.g., focus particles in Cushitic languages, question-marking clitics in western Austronesian languages).

An important problem in studying the prosodic signaling of these functions is that many pitch-related phenomena are quasi-universal, which reflects their link to prelinguistic ways of communicating that we share with other species. As noted in section 2.1, women

have higher-pitched voices than men, and individuals can "raise" and "lower" their voices for various expressive purposes. These "paralinguistic" functions of pitch and voice quality are broadly similar the world around, though there are big differences between cultures in the way the paralinguistic functions are evaluated. For example, a voice raised in anger sounds much the same in any language, but raising the voice in that way may be dramatically less acceptable in one culture than in another. Similarly, in some cultures it is highly valued for males to have very low voices and/or for females to have very high voices, and speakers tend to exaggerate the biologically based differences, whereas in other cultures little importance is attached to such differences (see Hill 2006:115f for a very instructive example of an exaggerated use of falsetto voice and the failure of an experienced fieldworker to grasp its cultural implications).

3.2.1 SENTENCE MODALITY AND SPEAKER ATTITUDE. The prosodic expression of modality and attitude is most closely identified with speech melody and voice quality. Together, these are the characteristics we are most likely to think of as the "intonation" of an utterance. Typical examples include the use of overall falling pitch in statements, overall rising pitch in yes-no questions, or the use of overall high pitch in polite utterances.

These examples are also typical examples of the difficulty of distinguishing linguistic and paralinguistic functions of pitch. For example, there have been disagreements about whether overall rising pitch in "question intonation" is part of a language-specific intonational phonology or merely based on the universal use of high pitch to signal tentativeness or incompleteness. Our view is that it is necessary and appropriate to talk of "intonational phonology" for at least some sentence-level uses of pitch (see further section 4.1 below). It is important to remember that languages may diverge considerably from the quasi-universal tendencies mentioned above: there are languages such as Hungarian or some dialects of Italian, where question intonation includes the kind of final fall which is typical of statements in other western European languages. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that there is genuine empirical uncertainty about how to distinguish phonologized uses of pitch from universal patterns of human paralinguistic communication.

3.2.2 PHRASING AND DISCOURSE SEGMENTATION. In all languages, so far as we know, longer stretches of speech are divided up into prosodically defined chunks often called intonation units (IUs) or intonation(al) phrases (IPs). To some extent this division is determined by the need for speakers to breathe in order to continue speaking, and in the literature the term "breath group" may also be found for what we are here calling IU. However, it is important not to think of IUs purely as units of speech production, because they almost certainly have a role in higher-level linguistic processing as well, both for the speaker and the hearer. That is, intonation units are also basic units of information (e.g., Halliday 1967, Chafe 1994, Croft 1995) or of syntax (e.g., Selkirk 1984, Steedman 2000). Closely related to the issue of segmentation into IUs are the prosodic cues that help control the smooth flow of conversation (e.g., signals of the end of one speaker's turn) and the cues that signal hierarchical topic structure in longer monologues such as narratives (e.g., "paragraph" cues). An eventual theory of prosodic phrasing will cover all these phenomena.

The phonetic manifestations of phrasing and discourse chunking are extremely varied. The clearest phonetic marker of a boundary between two prosodic chunks is a silent pause, but boundaries can be unambiguously signaled without any silent pauses, and not all silent pauses occur at a boundary. Other cues to the presence of a boundary include various changes in voice quality and/or intensity (for example, change to creaky voice at the end of a unit), substantial pitch change over the last few syllables preceding the boundary (such as an utterance-final fall), pitch discontinuities across a boundary (in particular, "resetting" the overall pitch to a higher level at the beginning of a new unit), and marked changes in segment duration (especially longer segments just preceding a major boundary). However, it is also important to note that there are extensive segmental cues to phrasing as well, especially different applications of segmental sandhi rules. For example, in French, "liaison" – the pronunciation of word-final consonants before a following vowel – is largely restricted to small phrases and does not occur across phrase boundaries: *allons-y* 'let's go' (lit. 'let's go there') is pronounced [alɔ̃zi] but *allons à la plage* 'let's go to the beach' is normally pronounced [alɔ̃ alapla:ʒ], signalling the presence of a stronger boundary between *allons* and *à la plage*.

An important conceptual problem in discussing phrasing and discourse segmentation is that we need to recognize different levels of prosodic structure, and there is no agreement on how to do this. In corpora of ordinary spontaneous speech it will often be easy enough to distinguish a basic level of IU, perhaps 6–10 syllables long, set off by relatively clear boundaries signaled by silent pauses and other cues. However, merely dividing texts into a single level of IUs tells us nothing either about the smaller units that distinguish one syntactic structure from another, nor about the larger units (often called "episodes" or "paragraphs") that signal higher-level textual organization in monologues. This important topic is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.

3.2.3 INFORMATION STRUCTURE AND FOCUS. Related to the marking of boundaries and cohesion is the use of prosody to signal semantic and pragmatic features often collectively known as "information structure." This includes notions like "contrast," "focus," and "topic," and refers to the way new entities and new information are introduced into a discourse and to the way in which entities and information already present in a discourse are signaled as such. One important means of conveying this kind of information is to put specific words or phrases in prosodically prominent or non-prominent positions. In some languages word order can be extensively manipulated in order to achieve this, whereas in other languages the same string of words can have different prosodic structures. Both strategies are exemplified in English constructions involving direct and indirect objects: we can say either *I gave the driver a dollar* or *I gave a dollar to the driver*, putting either the amount of money or the recipient in the prosodically prominent final position. Other things being equal, the first construction is used when the amount of money is more informative in the discourse context and the second when the point of the sentence is to convey something about the recipient. However, we can achieve similar effects by restructuring the prosody so that the major sentence-level prosodic prominence occurs on a non-final word: *I gave the DRIVER a dollar* (… not the waiter) or, somewhat less naturally, *I gave a DOLLAR to the driver* (…not a euro).

There is an extensive literature on these matters, especially in the European languages; the reader is referred to Lambrecht 1994 and Ladd 2008 for useful summaries. Fieldworkers should probably be wary of expecting to find close analogues of European phenomena in languages in other parts of the world.

4. PHONOLOGY OF TONE, INTONATION, AND ACCENT. From the foregoing sections it will be clear that "prosodic" features – defined on the basis of phonetic properties that are not normally indicated in a segmental transcription – do not form a linguistically coherent set. Among other things, this means that there is no way of knowing ahead of time how the phonetic features loosely referred to as "prosodic" – pitch, duration, and so on – are going to be put to phonological use in any given language. Speakers of all languages produce and perceive differences in pitch, duration, voice quality, and probably relative prominence, but they may interpret these differences in radically different ways. There is no unique relation between a given phonetic feature and its phonological function.

As we suggested earlier, some "prosodic" distinctions turn out to work in ways that are no surprise to any linguist, while others – sometimes involving the same phonetic raw material – are still in need of extensive new theoretical understanding before we can be sure that our descriptions make sense. What seems fairly clear is that the "unsurprising" prosodic features (like lexical tone and quantity) involve linguistic elements that are grouped into strings and contrast paradigmatically with other elements, like most segmental phonemes. The "problematical" prosodic features (like accent and phrasing) are somehow involved in signaling phonological structure, the grouping of linguistic elements into larger chunks. In this section of the article we provide a little more detail on two problematical topics: the tonal structure of intonation, and the nature of "accent."

4.1 TONE AND INTONATION. As we've already seen, pitch provides the main phonetic basis for prosodic distinctions both at the word level ("tone") and at the sentence level ("intonation"). Tone languages are extremely varied, and it would be possible to devote this entire article just to describing the many varied phenomena of lexical and grammatical tone. However, since there are good descriptions of numerous prototypical tone languages from around the world and a substantial body of literature discussing various aspects of their analysis, it would be pointless to attempt a mere summary here. The textbook by Yip (2002) provides a comprehensive survey, and is a useful guide to various descriptive and theoretical problems. Anyone embarking on the study of a language known or suspected to have lexical and/or grammatical tone should be well acquainted with this literature before leaving for the field.

We focus here instead on intonation. We use the term here in a strict sense, to refer to phrase/sentence-level uses of pitch that convey distinctions related to sentence modality and speaker attitude, phrasing, and discourse grouping, and information structure. The phonological structure of intonation is better understood now than it was a few decades ago, but there are undoubtedly many intonational phenomena waiting to be discovered in undocumented languages, and many things that we will understand better once we have a fuller idea of the range of possibilities. What we present here is a minimal framework for investigating intonation in a new language. Our discussion is based on the now widely ac-

cepted "autosegmental-metrical" theory of intonation (for reviews see Gussenhoven 2004 and Ladd 2008).

The most important phonological distinction to be drawn is the one between intonational features at major prominent syllables and intonational features at boundaries: in current terminology, the distinction is between "pitch accents" and "boundary tones." The existence of such a distinction has been recognized by some investigators since the 1940s, and is made explicit in current autosegmental-metrical transcription systems for numerous (mostly European) languages. The difference between the two can be readily appreciated in English when we apply the same intonational tune to sentences with markedly different numbers of syllables and/or markedly different accent patterns. For example, imagine two different possible astonished questions in response to the sentence *I hear Sue's taking a course to become a driving instructor*. One might respond *Sue?!* or one might respond *A driving instructor?!* In the first case, the pitch of the astonished question rises and then falls and then rises again, all on the vowel of the single syllable *Sue* (see figure 1).

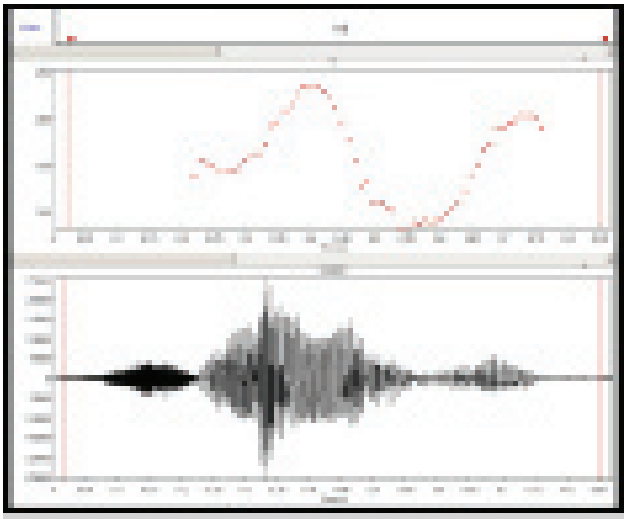

FIGURE 1

In the second case, the pitch is briefly fairly level at the beginning, then there is a steep rise in pitch on the lexically stressed syllable *dri-*, immediately followed by a fall, then a level low-pitched stretch until the very end of the utterance, at which point there is an abrupt rise (figure 2).

At a minimum, therefore, the contour consists of two separable parts: a rising-falling movement at the main stressed syllable and a rise at the very end. On the monosyllabic utterance *Sue* these two parts are compressed onto the single available syllable, which is both the main stressed syllable and the end of the utterance. But with a somewhat longer phrase the separateness of the two prosodic events becomes clear.

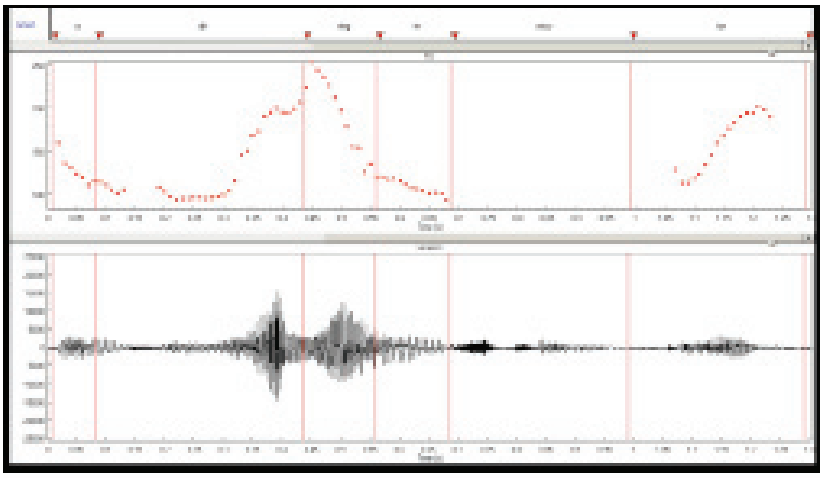

FIGURE 2

One important clue to the correctness of the distinction between pitch accents and boundary tones is the fact that in some lexical tone languages, where pitch primarily conveys lexical information, there are nevertheless intonational pitch effects at the ends of phrases or sentences. These effects typically involve modifications of the lexically-specified pitch contour on the pre-boundary syllable (and/or the occurrence of toneless sentence-final particles one of whose functions seems to be to bear the intonational tone). Early descriptions of this effect were given by Chang (1958) for Szechuan Mandarin and by Abramson (1962) for Thai. This coexistence of lexical and intonational pitch can be described easily if we recognize boundary tones: in these languages the pitch contour of an utterance is principally determined by the lexical tones of the words that happen to make it up, but at the edges of phrases it is possible to add an additional tonal specification – a boundary tone.

However, it should be emphasized that not all lexical tone languages use intonational boundary tones; for example, some West African tone languages appear not to have them, so that in these languages the pitch contour of an utterance is almost completely determined by the string of lexical tones. Conversely, there appear to be languages with intonational boundary tones that have neither pitch accents nor lexical tonal specifications. In these languages, all intonational effects are conveyed by pitch movements at the edges of phrases, and "nothing happens" phonologically in between. Obviously, there is phonetic pitch wherever there is voicing, but the linguistically significant pitch effects are restricted to phrase edges, and the pitch in between is determined by simple interpolation. Clear descriptions of such systems are given by Rialland and Robert (2001) for Wolof and Jun (1998) for Korean.

Current transcription systems for pitch accents and boundary tones, which are based largely on the ToBI system first designed for English in the early 1990s, analyze these pitch movements further: the astonished question contour just discussed would probably be transcribed as a L+H* pitch accent, an immediately following L- "phrase accent," and

a H% or L+H% boundary tone. The details are well beyond the scope of this article, but the reader who expects to deal with an unfamiliar intonation system in a language without lexical tone should consult the Ohio State ToBI web site (URL http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~tobi/) and its extensive series of links to ToBI systems that have been designed for a number of other languages; a valuable book-length resource is Jun (2005).

Before we leave the subject of intonation, we must note that in addition to pitch accents and boundary tones, intonation can make crucial use of what we might call "register effects." Recall that the phonetic realization of pitch distinctions is somehow relative to the speaker's pitch range: "high" does not refer to some absolute fundamental frequency level, but a level that is high for a given speaker in a given context. This even applies within a single utterance: as a result of the widespread phenomenon of "declination" – a gradual lowering of pitch across a phrase or utterance – the pitch of a "high" tone at the end of an utterance may be lower than that of a "low" tone at the beginning. That is, the phonological interpretation of pitch level is somehow relative to a frame of reference that varies not only from speaker to speaker and from context to context but also from one part of an utterance to another. Such changes of the frame of reference during the course of an utterance can be exploited for communicative purposes in various ways, and these are what we are calling "register effects." The clearest examples of such effects involve the interaction of lexical tone and overall pitch level to signal questions. In Chinese, for example, it is possible (though not very usual) to distinguish yes-no questions from statements in this way.

4.2 LEXICAL ACCENT SYSTEMS. The existence of tone languages is such a remarkable fact from the point of view of speakers of non-tonal languages that there are at least two typological schemes – devised by speakers of non-tonal languages – that attempt to accommodate lexical/grammatical tone in a larger theoretical understanding. One of these is based on the "domain" of pitch distinctions, while the other is based on a typology of "word prosody." Looking at the domain of pitch, languages have been divided into "tone languages" (where the domain of pitch distinctions is the syllable), "melodic accent languages" (where the domain of pitch distinctions is the word), and "intonation languages" (where the domain of pitch distinctions is the phrase or utterance). This typology goes back at least to Pike 1945 and is found in work as recent as Cruttenden 1997. Looking instead at the lexical uses to which "prosodic" features are put, we can divide languages into "tone languages" (in which each syllable has different tonal possibilities), "melodic accent languages" (in which one syllable in a word or similar domain is marked by pitch in some way), and "dynamic accent languages" (in which one syllable in a word or similar domain is marked by stress in some way). This typology is suggested by Jun (2005). Both typologies have obvious problems (e.g., the existence of intonational distinctions in tone languages, the existence of languages like Swedish with both dynamic accent and lexically specified melodic accent), and neither commands wide acceptance.

In our view, the problems with these typologies result from trying to incorporate tone and accent in the same scheme. As we pointed out earlier, tone often functions like segmental distinctions: it involves a choice of categories from a paradigmatic set, and it is meaningful to talk about e.g. a contrast between a high and a low tone on a particular syllable without reference to the tone on any other syllable. Accentual distinctions, on the other hand, are syntagmatic distinctions: they involve contrast with immediately adjacent

syllables in a string. Consequently, we believe that it is quite misleading to see, as in Pike's typology, a continuum from tone to melodic accent to intonation, and equally misleading, but in a different way, to take "tone" and "stress" as different kinds of "word prosody" that a language may have. Rather, we think it will be useful to discuss the ways in which accentual systems can differ without necessarily trying to incorporate them into a typological scheme that places them in the same dimension as intonation and tone. The typology of prosodic systems should probably involve three, at least partially independent, dimensions: tone, accent, and intonation.

A general and possibly universally valid definition of lexical accent is the singling out of a specific syllable in a word or similar domain (such as the "foot") for some sort of prominence or other special prosodic treatment. Lexical accent, as conceived of this way, is an abstract structural notion, and says nothing about how exactly the "special prosodic treatment" is manifested in the acoustic signal. In some languages, the special status of the accented syllable is based entirely on association with a specific pitch feature; in other languages, the accented syllable is distinguished from other syllables by phonetic "stress" – greater force of articulation leading to some combination of longer duration, greater intensity, more peripheral vowel quality, shallower spectral tilt, etc. (cf. section 2.4). This suggests a distinction between "melodic" and "dynamic" accent, a traditional distinction recently reestablished by Beckman (1986).

The distinction between melodic and dynamic accent is a phonetic one. Other typological dimensions on which accentual systems appear to differ involve structural properties. These include obligatoriness, culminativity, recursivity, transitivity, intonational anchoring, and lexical distinctiveness. We briefly outline these six properties here:[3]

Obligatoriness: In some accentual systems, an accent must occur within each domain of the specified size: if the "prosodic word" is the domain of accent, then each prosodic word must have an accent. In other systems, the accent may or may not occur in a given domain. For example, in Japanese, words can be accented or unaccented, whereas in English any word of more than one syllable must have at least one syllable that stands out as more prominent when the word is pronounced in isolation.

Culminativity: In some systems, for every accent domain there is a single major prominence peak. This does not preclude the possibility that other syllables in the same domain may also be prominent relative to surrounding syllables (see further below under RECURSIVITY), but there is only one which is the most prominent one of them all (e.g., in English *elèctrificátion* it is usually the penultimate syllable which is most prominent, but the second syllable (*-lec-*) is also more prominent then the adjoining ones). In a non-culminative system, there may be two prominences within the same domain without either of them being more prominent than the other one (in some languages, e.g., Chinese, accentuation in compounds appears to be non-culminative).

[3] The structural properties briefly mentioned here have all been discussed in the literature, though not necessarily under the same labels. Hyman (2001, 2006) uses a set of parameters similar to the ones above for distinguishing typical tone and accentual systems. As noted above, "accent" is the prosodic feature for which there is currently the least agreement, not only at the level of terminology but also in the basic theoretical concepts involved.

It is a matter of debate whether it is useful to distinguish obligatoriness and culminativity. The alternative is to operate with a single parameter, usually also called simply culminativity, defined as the property where every lexical accent domain has a single major accentuation. If one separates culminativity (in a narrow sense) and obligatoriness, languages such as Japanese have a non-obligatory, but culminative accent-system (i.e., not every word has to have an accent, but those that have an accent have only one). If one operates with a single parameter culminative (in a broad sense), then Japanese is non-culminative, since not every word has an accent.

Recursivity: In some languages, it is possible and useful to distinguish different levels of lexical accentuation. Thus for English, for example, one commonly distinguishes at least three different levels of syllable prominence: primary accent, secondary accent, and unaccented. Primary accent is assigned to the most prominent syllable in a word (as the English accent system is culminative, there can be only one such syllable). Secondary accents are assigned to syllables which are also somewhat prominent and in certain contexts can actually become carriers for the primary accent. There can be several of these in an English word, as in *èxtramètricálity* (using grave accents to mark secondary accents). However, in some languages there is no evidence – or at best very weak evidence – for anything resembling secondary accent: a single accent is assigned to a word domain, and all the other syllables are simply "unaccented".

One widely-adopted analysis of such secondary accents in languages that have them is in terms of sub-word domains called *(metrical) feet*. In a word with secondary accent, the word domain consists of two or more feet, each with its own most prominent syllable, and one foot is singled out as the most prominent foot of the word. The prominent syllable of the prominent foot is the primary accent; the prominent syllables of the other feet are secondary accents. In languages without secondary accent, we may say either that there is no level of structure corresponding to the foot, or that the feet are "unbounded," i.e., that they are coextensive with the word. See Ewen and van der Hulst 2001 for a comprehensive introduction to metrical structure.

Transitivity: Just as accentual prominence may apply within domains smaller than the word, so we may also find accentual prominence relations at the phrasal level when words are joined together to form phrases. Within a phrase such as *yellow paper* one word (normally *paper*) is more prominent than the other word, which entails that its most prominent syllable is more prominent than the most prominent syllable of the other word. That is, the most prominent syllable of the most prominent word becomes the most prominent syllable of the phrase, often called phrasal prominence or *sentence stress*. However, not all accent systems have this feature of transitivity, and then it is not possible to single out one accented word as the most prominent in its phrase.

Phrasal prominence can be analyzed in the same way as lexical secondary accent, in terms of nested domains each with its own most prominent constituent. However, not everyone accepts this point of view. In some analyses, phrasal prominence is treated as being qualitatively different from lexical prominence: on this view, lexical prominence is usually described as "stress", and phrasal prominence is described in terms of intonational "pitch accent" (see e.g. Selkirk 1984 or Shattuck-Hufnagel and Turk 1996). For this reason it is extremely difficult to make reliable and generally acceptable typological statements about these matters.

Intonational anchoring: In many languages, as we saw in sec. 4.1, a lexically accented syllable serves as the 'anchor' for the pitch accents that make up the intonational tune. This means that in, e.g., English and German the lexically most prominent syllable of the most prominent word in an utterance also carries an intonational pitch accent. This is the basis for the view of transitivity sketched in the preceding paragraph: according to this view, lexical accent is phonetically "stress," while phrasal prominence is "pitch accent." We prefer to see this as a fact about the relation between the accentual system and the intonational system of a given language; lexical accents may or may not serve the role of intonational anchors. In Japanese and many other languages with melodic accent, for example, there is no additional intonational feature that targets accented syllables. But this is not a function of having a melodic rather than a dynamic lexical accent: in Swedish and Basque, syllables marked with a melodic lexical accent may additionally also serve as anchors for an intonational pitch accent. Conversely, recent work on the Papuan language Kuot (Lindström and Remijsen 2005) suggests that it has dynamic lexical accent (phonetic stress) but that the intonational pitch accents do not have to occur on a stressed syllable. Rialland and Robert (2001) present similar data for the West African language Wolof.

Lexical distinctiveness: Finally, another commonly drawn typological distinction among accentual systems is that between fixed or predictable accent and lexically distinctive accent. In both Greek and Japanese, despite the fact that the former uses dynamic accent and the latter melodic accent, the location of accent can be used to signal differences between one lexical item or another (e.g. Japanese ***ha****si* 'chopsticks' vs. *has****i*** 'bridge'). In other languages, the position of stress is either completely fixed (as on the initial syllable in Hungarian or Czech) or entirely predictable (e.g. Latin, where the accent occurs on the penultimate syllable if it contains a long vowel (as in *lau****dā****mus* 'we praise') or if it is closed by a coda consonant (as in *lau****dan****tur* 'they are praised'), but otherwise on the antepenultimate syllable (as in *lau****da****vimus* 'we praised').[4]

The dimensions of accentual typology just discussed are probably not completely independent. Accentual systems with dynamic accent (or phonetic stress) typically have obligatory and culminative lexical accent, exhibit recursivity and transitivity, and involve intonational anchoring, and in fact it is widely assumed that all dynamic accent systems exhibit these properties more or less by default. Although there is no doubt that the dynamic accent systems of Europe typically show this cluster of features, we strongly advise fieldworkers not to take this as given. Kuot and Wolof appear to be examples of languages with phonetic stress, which show that one should be prepared to encounter unusual combinations and to try to provide substantial evidence for each of the parameters.

---

[4] The Latin rule brings up the topic of "syllable weight": the usual statement is that the penultimate syllable is accented if it is heavy**,** but the antepenultimate syllable is accented if the penult is light. Syllable weight often plays a role in the location of lexical accent, so it needs to be mentioned here, but it is also implicated in various other phonological phenomena and is thus well beyond the scope of this article. In the present context the only other important point is that syllable weight needs to be defined on a language-by-language basis; the Latin definition (a syllable is heavy if it contains a long vowel or a coda consonant) is one of several attested possibilities. For more on the topic of syllable weight see Gordon 2006.

Finally, since melodic accents are realized primarily by pitch changes, they are sometimes difficult to distinguish from tonal distinctions, and in a number of cases there is an ongoing discussion whether a given language is better analysed as a tone language or a melodic accent language. This problem typically arises when there are only two distinct pitch patterns (high/low or marked/unmarked) and when the pitch pattern changes only once per lexical item. This type of accent system is widely attested in African and Papuan languages and often discussed under the heading of 'word melody' (see Donohue 1997, Hyman 2001, and Gussenhoven 2004 for examples and discussion). The core issue in analyzing these languages is whether tonal marking has essentially a paradigmatic function, distinguishing one lexical item from the other, or rather a syntagmatic (or organizational) function, rendering the marked syllable(s) prominent in comparison to the neighboring syllables. While this distinction is reasonably clear on the conceptual level, there are many borderline cases in actually attested systems which may be quite difficult to assign to either category. The existence of such borderline cases is not surprising given the fact that prototypical lexical tone systems may change into melodic accent systems and vice versa.

In concluding this section, a note on the ambiguity of the term "pitch accent" as used in much of the literature is in order. This term is now regularly used in two distinct ways: on the one hand, it refers to the sentence-level (intonational) pitch features that may accompany prominent syllables in an utterance in a language like English; on the other hand it refers to the word-level – lexically specified – pitch features that accompany accented syllables in a language like Japanese. In this article, we have opted to use the term "pitch accent" only for intonational pitch features and use "melodic accent" for lexically specified accentual pitch features.

5. WORKING ON PROSODY IN THE FIELD. In approaching the analysis of segmental phonology or morphosyntax in an unfamiliar language, there are various well-tested techniques for determining the elements and structures one is dealing with (for example, minimal pair tests or permutation tests). For certain purposes, these are also relevant for prosody – for example, we have already described the existence of lexical minimal pairs that differ only in tone, and once you have determined that you are dealing with a lexical tone language it may be both possible and appropriate to elicit minimal pairs for tone in exactly the same way that you would for segmental differences. However, to the extent that prosodic features are not organized like ordinary segmental phonological and morphosyntactic features, different techniques are required.

The most important problems in studying prosody in the field are the fact that prosody is pervasive – you can't have an utterance (even a single elicited word) without prosody – and the fact that it is influenced by both lexical and sentence-level factors and may thus be contextually variable in ways that are difficult to anticipate, or to notice. For example, if you were asked out of context to give the name of the famous park in the middle of London where people come to make speeches to anyone who happens to want to listen, you would say *Hyde Park*, with the two words about equally prominent. However, if you were in a conversation about great urban parks – like Grant Park in Chicago or Central Park in New York or Stanley Park in Vancouver – you would probably say *HYDE Park*, with the main prominence on *Hyde*. (In fact, if you read the previous sentence aloud you will find it is very difficult to say the list of park names without putting the main prominence in each

on the proper name and de-emphasizing *Park* in each case.) If you were doing fieldwork on English and knew nothing about the language, you would have to become aware of this contextual effect before you could accurately describe the prosody of expressions like *Eiffel Tower* or *Princes Street* or *Van Diemen's Land* that consist of a proper noun and a common noun.

In this section, therefore, we will discuss research procedures which are particularly useful in prosodic research but rarely used in working on other aspects of the grammar of a given language. We begin by describing some useful "first steps" to take in the prosodic analysis of a previously undescribed language.

5.1 FIRST STEPS. It is important to establish early what sort of lexical prosodic features are found in the language you are working on. The literature on neighbouring and related languages may provide important pointers in this regard, but it is obviously necessary to remain open to all possibilities until clear language-internal evidence points in one direction or the other. If you are working on a language with distinctions of lexical accent (whether dynamic accent or melodic accent), it may take some time to become aware of the distinctions, because as we noted earlier the functional load of such distinctions may be relatively low. If you are working on a prototypical lexical tone language, it is likely to become evident quite quickly, because native speakers will usually point out to you that items that you appear to consider homophonous are not homophonous but clearly distinct for them. However, unless you are working with speakers who are also familiar with a well-described tone language, they will not necessarily make reference to tone (or pitch) in pointing out these differences. They may simply assert that the items in question sound very different, sometimes perhaps even claiming that the vowels are different.

Although there may be some languages with no lexical prosodic features whatever, in general it will be a useful starting hypothesis that in any given utterance some prosodic features will be lexically determined and some determined at the phrase or sentence level. Both levels are inextricably intertwined; there is nothing in the signal to tell you whether a given pitch movement is lexically motivated (e.g., lexical tone), intonationally motivated (e.g., sentence accent), or even both (e.g., the combinations of lexical and intonation tone commonly found on sentence-final syllables in Chinese or Thai). This problem is of central importance when analyzing pitch, but sometimes affects the analysis of quantity and accent as well. Perhaps the most important lesson to begin with is that recording and analyzing words in isolation does not in any way provide direct, untarnished access to lexical features. This is a classic mistake, unfortunately widely attested in the literature. A single word elicited in isolation is an utterance, and consequently cannot be produced without utterance-level prosodic features. For example, if you compare ordinary citation forms of the English words *PERmit* (noun) and *perMIT* (verb), you might conclude that high pitch, followed by a fall, is a feature of lexical stress in English (compre figures 3 and 4). However, high pitch associated with the stressed syllable is actually a feature of declarative statement intonation in short utterances: if you utter the same words as surprised questions, the stressed syllables will be low, followed by a rise in pitch to the end (cp. figures 5 and 6).[5] In short, even for

[5] For the moment, ignore the apparent stretch of low pitch at the end of the utterance in figure 6.

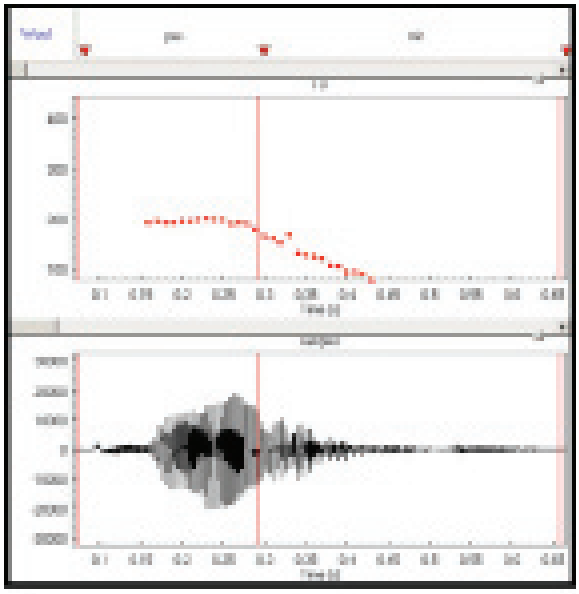

FIGURE 3: PERmit (noun, 'citation form')

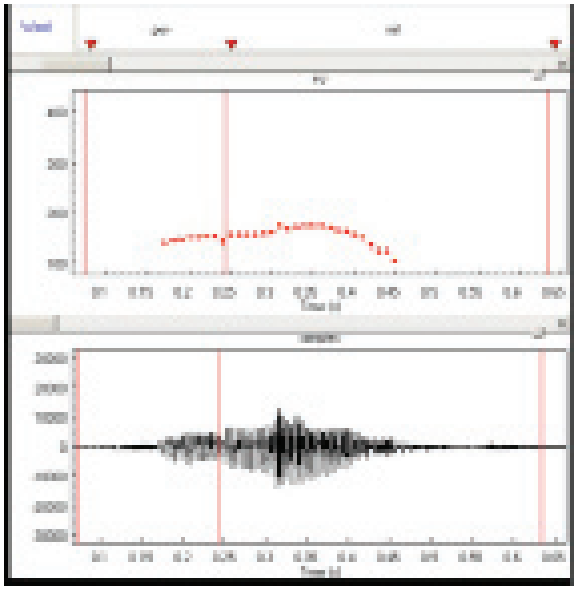

FIGURE 4: perMIT (verb, 'citation form')

This will be explained in section 5.5 below.

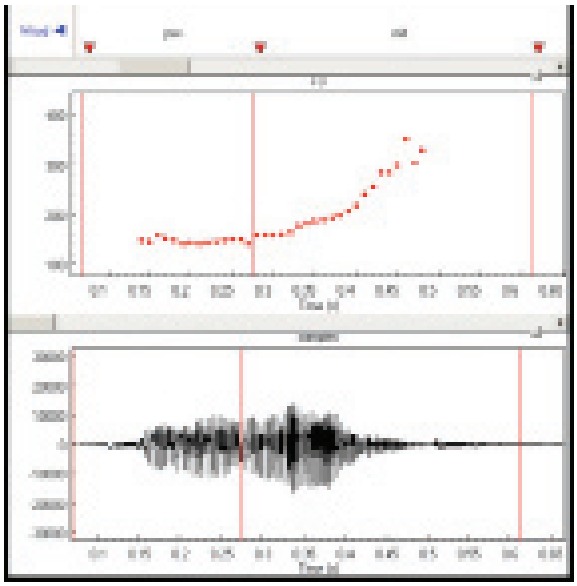

FIGURE 5: PERmit (noun, surprised question)

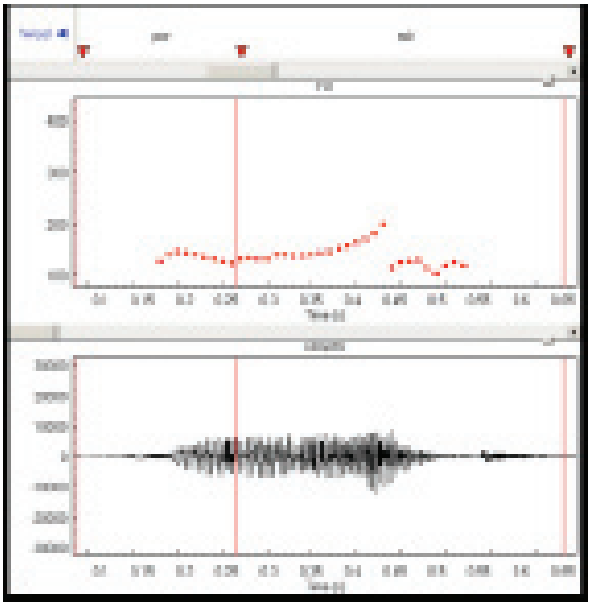

FIGURE 6: perMIT (verb, surprised question)

single-word utterances it is not a straightforward matter to distinguish between lexical and intonational prosodic features. There is no intonationally unmarked "citation form;" every utterance has intonation.

In order to separate the two levels, we need to observe lexical items in a number of different syntactic and semantic-pragmatic contexts. Whatever prosodic features remain constant across these contexts most likely pertain to the lexical level; features that change may relate to the sentence level. But especially in dealing with lexical tone languages, even this statement needs qualifying, because in many such languages there are complex locally-conditioned variations in tonal pattern, sometimes called *tone sandhi* (see Yip 2002 for examples and discussion).

To elicit target words in different contexts, one can construct short clauses or phrases where the target words may occur in different positions (i.e., initial, medial, final). A particularly useful variant of this technique is to record short (3–5 word) lists of target words with the words in different positions in the list. If speakers produce a coherent list rather than a sequence of minimal utterances, the result is likely to be a contrast between list intonation and minimal declarative utterance intonation. This may allow you to distinguish word-level prosodic effects. More generally, list intonation may be particularly useful in the initial stages of such an analysis for three reasons. First, it is relatively easy to elicit naturally: the act of listing elicited items does not differ in principle from listing items as part of a procedural description, whereas enacting a question is quite different from actually asking a question. Second, list intonation tends to be fairly simple in the sense that there is usually only an opposition between non-final and final members, or sometimes a three-way distinction between non-final, penultimate, and final. In particular, there are no differences of information structure (focus, topic) in lists, which often complicate the interpretation of prosodic features in other types of examples (see also section 3.2.3 above). Third, list intonation may be more consistent across speakers, which would make it easier to recognize the same intonational targets across speakers and at the same time would provide an indication of inter-speaker variability.

5.2 ELICITATION. All modern descriptive and documentary fieldwork includes the recording of a substantial corpus of (more or less) spontaneous "texts" (where "text" subsumes all kinds of communicative events, including conversations, narratives, oratories, etc.). If these recordings are done with reasonable quality, they can form the basis for subsequent auditory and instrumental analysis of many prosodic features of connected speech, features that may be difficult to observe in structured interview sessions and difficult for most native speakers to be aware of. However, just as you would not expect to study phonology or syntax solely on the basis of a recorded corpus, so in the case of prosody it is important to complement recorded texts with elicited data.

In eliciting data for prosodic analysis it is important to keep various factors in mind that are of only secondary importance for eliciting many other kinds of data. First and most important, it is essential to keep in mind the kind of effects that context may have, and to adjust elicitation procedures accordingly. For example, in English it is common for WH-questions to be pronounced with an overall falling contour in neutral contexts (*Where is he going?*), a relatively high level followed by a low rise at the end in polite contexts (*Where would I find Dr. Anderson?*), and an overall rising contour in repetition or reminder contexts (*Where did you say you were from?*). Eliciting such distinctions may require you to get native speakers to put themselves mentally in different contexts, which is not necessarily easy to do. We treat this topic at some length in the next section.

Second, it is important to record several speakers rather than relying on one or two primary consultants. One reason for this is the conspicuous difference of voice pitch between males and females; another is that many prosodic features vary more between individuals and between socially defined groups than do centrally "linguistic" features. Fieldwork situations will usually put severe limits on how many speakers you can work with, but if at all possible it will be valuable to record elicited material from at least four and as many as eight or ten speakers. Next, gender balance is an important concern in putting together a set of speakers. Finally, in situations where it is impossible to find several speakers for the same task, it may be useful to record the same material with the same speaker a few days or weeks apart. There is little use in recording the same example set twice as part of the same session because this will almost certainly produce repetition effects.

Third and finally, it is important to keep in mind that instrumental acoustic analysis is increasingly regarded as an essential part of reliable descriptions of prosody, and that preliminary instrumental work in the field may be invaluable for guiding your work. This means that elicitation must be done in such a way that the resulting recordings are usable for instrumental analysis. In devising test examples for prosodic features, it is important to pay attention to the segmental make-up of the example in order to minimize microprosodic effects (see section 5.5). However, it is often not possible to come up with materials that perfectly control for microprosody; either the phonotactics of the language may prohibit certain sequences that would be useful to include in your materials, or the only lexical exemplars of a particular sequence may create meaningless, obscene or ridiculous sentences that native speakers may refuse to say or will be unable to say naturally. As usual in experimental work, there is a trade-off between naturalness and the control of interfering variables.

5.3 PROBLEMS IN PROMPTING SPEAKERS. As the example of English WH-question intonation makes clear, eliciting example sentences for prosodic research requires attention to various factors that are not usually of concern to fieldworkers, and makes demands on speakers that ordinary phonological and syntactic fieldwork may not. Suppose you carefully construct a question-answer pair, paying attention to both pragmatic plausibility and segmental make-up. It is not enough to get native speakers to produce the segments of which the example sequence consists; they have to produce the first part as a question, the second as an answer. Do not underestimate the problems involved in explaining the idea of pretending to pose a question or give an answer. Moreover, be aware that some speakers may be unable to do things like this naturally, even if they understand the idea. This is one of the reasons why it is important to record multiple speakers wherever possible: without being able to compare across a sample there is no way of forming a reasonable hypothesis about who is acting reasonably well and who is doing something else.

We just spoke of carefully constructing question-answer pairs for native speakers to produce, but there is a significant problem of how to present tokens for prosodic research without unduly influencing the speakers. It is of little use to have a speaker repeat what the fieldworker is saying, since there may be direct effects of repetition on the speaker's production, or the speaker may in some way imitate the researcher's model. If you are working in a literate community, reading can be a good method for eliciting intonational data, provided that the speakers understand the need to vocally enact the illocutionary

force of the example sentences. Unfortunately, it often happens that even literate speakers are unable to read fluently in their native language; it is common to find speakers who are literate in a majority or national language but have little practice or experience reading their native language. One technique that has been successfully used with such speakers is to present them with material written in the language they are comfortable reading, and ask them to give equivalents in their own language. But only some speakers will produce natural-sounding utterances under such conditions. It is also known from work on major European languages that the intonation patterns found in reading may not perfectly match those found in spontaneous conversation. Here the influence of the standard norm may be a major issue.

If reading is not feasible, various role-playing and experimental tasks may be useful. For example, rather than constructing question-answer sequences in advance and asking speakers to "enact" them as naturally as possible, one may try to involve speakers in some kind of game or role play that requires them to ask questions. A technique widely used for this purpose involves matching tasks where one speaker instructs another speaker in reconstructing an arrangement of figures, pictures, or points on a map that is only visible to the instructing speaker, such as the map task or various space games. Another technique is to have speakers look at a picture sequence or watch video clips (such as the pear film or the frog story) and then to describe these or comment on them.[6] The big advantage of these techniques is that speakers are prompted with non-linguistic materials, and relatively spontaneously produce naturalistic speech. Moreover, unlike completely open-ended tasks such as recounting narratives or engaging in free conversation, these tasks permit a certain degree of control over what speakers will do, which makes it possible to collect comparable data from several different speakers. While it is rare that speakers produce completely identical utterances in these circumstances, a well-devised task usually requires them to use particular words, phrases, or constructions and to engage in specific linguistic routines such as asking questions or giving directions.

Such tasks are not without their problems, however. The major problem is that speakers in small and remote communities are generally not familiar with the idea of role-playing or experiment and may be unable or unwilling to participate. It is not unknown, for example, that speakers who are asked to retell a video clip they just watched comment on the colors of the main participant's clothes or the nature of the setting rather than the action depicted in the clip. Considerable time and ingenuity may thus be required in adapting the experimental set-up to the specific circumstances found in a given speech community and in explaining the task.

---

[6] For the map task, see http://www.hcrc.ed.ac.uk/dialogue/maptask.html. On space games and other elicitation tools, see de León 1991 and Levinson 1992 as well as the *Fieldmanuals* (http://www.mpi.nl/world/data/fieldmanuals) and the *Annual reports* (http://www.mpi.nl/research/publications/AnnualReports) of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen (http://www.mpi.nl). For the pear film, see Chafe ed. 1980 (and also http://www.pearstories.org); for the frog story, see Mayer 1969, Berman and Slobin 1994.

5.4 PERCEPTION EXPERIMENTS. For prosodic analyses it may also be desirable to obtain some perceptual data in addition to the production data generated with experimental tasks or documented in narratives and conversations. Perceptual data are needed to answer questions such as: Do native speakers actually perceive prominences at those locations where they appear in the acoustic data (or where they are perceived by the fieldworker)? Which of the various factors contributing to a given prominence (intensity, duration, vowel quality, change and height of pitch) is the one of major importance for native speakers? Which parts of a pitch contour are actually perceived as major cues for question intonation? Such questions can generally only be answered with some degree of certainty by devising perceptual tests, i.e., manipulating the prosodies of example clauses or phrases and testing speakers' reactions to them. For example, one may reduce the duration of putatively stressed syllables and ask speakers to identify stressed syllables in tokens computationally modified in this way, comparing the results with results obtained when identifying stressed syllables in naturalistic (unmodified) tokens. See van Zanten et al. 2003 and Connell 2000 for detailed descriptions of such experiments. Ding 2007 is a report on a recent perception experiment with unmodified stimuli.

Once again, however, it has to be pointed out that administering such experiments is not a straightforward matter and will not necessarily produce satisfactory results. Apart from problems involved in getting speakers to participate at all in a listening experiment (in some instances, putting on a headset may already be a problem), the main problem pertains to defining a task which speakers are able to perform and which also generates relevant data. In most non-literate societies, it will be impossible to use concepts such as syllable or prominence in explaining a task. Task types that may work – to a certain degree at least – are: (a) asking speakers to comment in a general way on prosodically modified examples (which produces very heterogeneous and non-specific results but may still be useful in providing pointers to relevant parameters); (b) tasks that involve the comparison or ranking of similar tokens (Which of these two items sounds "better"/"foreign"? Which token would you use when speaking to your mother? etc.).

5.5 COMPUTER-AIDED ACOUSTIC ANALYSIS. Perception experiments of the kind just mentioned presuppose the use of programs for acoustic analysis such as PRAAT, EMU, WAVE SURFER or SPEECH ANALYZER.[7] Use of such programs is strongly recommended for all kinds of prosodic analyses. The main reason for using them is that they may be of help in overcoming biases in one's own perception of prosodic data and in detecting phenomena one has not been listening for. As further discussed shortly, acoustic data are always in need of interpretation and auditory crosschecking. Nevertheless, they provide the only objective source of prosodic data, and an analysis which goes against major acoustic evidence is almost certainly false.

---

[7] All these programs are freely available on the net. EMU: http://emu.sourceforge.net; PRAAT: http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat; SPEECH ANALYZER: http://www.sil.org/computing/speechtools; WAVE SURFER: http://www.speech.kth.se/wavesurfer. For a recent review of EMU including a short comparison with PRAAT, see Williams 2008.

The programs just mentioned provide fairly reliable acoustic analyses of duration, intensity, and F0. These can be done on a laptop in a relatively short time and hence are feasible also in field situations, provided that laptops can be used at all. Handling the programs can be learned in a few hours (in particular in the case of speech analyzer or wave surfer). Hence, it would be most inefficient not to use these tools when tackling the prosodic analysis of a previously undescribed language.

The current section briefly reviews the most important things to keep in mind when interpreting F0 extraction.[8] For effective fieldwork it is not necessary to understand the mathematical and engineering aspects of F0 extraction. However, it is necessary to know something about the factors that affect F0 in order to interpret pitch contour displays appropriately and to select speech materials for phonetic analysis. It is easy to be misled by what you see on the screen, and easy to make instrumental measurements that are nearly worthless.

The rate of vibration of the vocal cords can be briefly but substantially affected by supraglottal activity – that is, by the fact that specific vowels or consonants are being articulated at the same time as the vocal cords are vibrating. Such effects are often collectively referred to as microprosody. Figures 7-9 show instrumental displays of three English utterances, pronounced with pitch patterns that are impressionistically the same. However, it can be seen that the pitch contours look rather different.

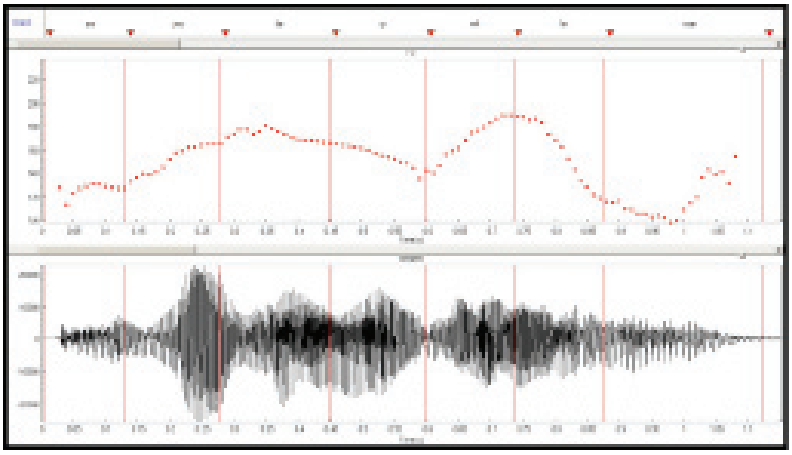

FIGURE 7: *Are you Larry Willeman?*

[8] The material presented here is an abridged version of the online appendix to Ladd (2008); cp. http://www.cambridge.org/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=9780521678360&ss=res).

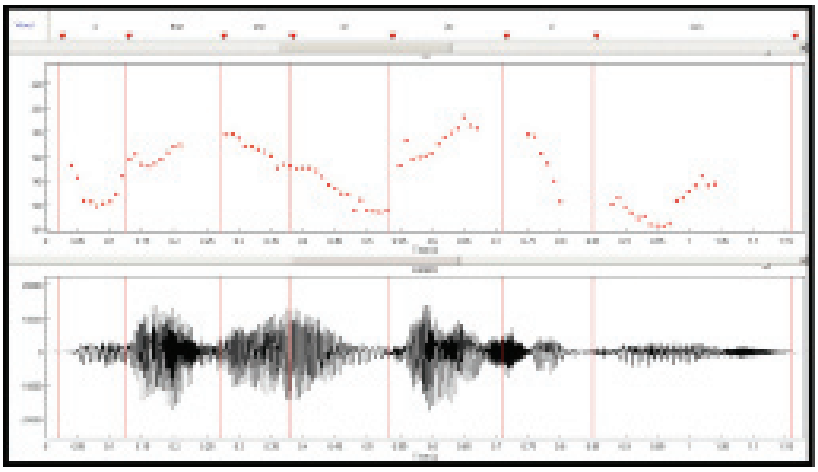

FIGURE 8: Is that one of Jessica's?

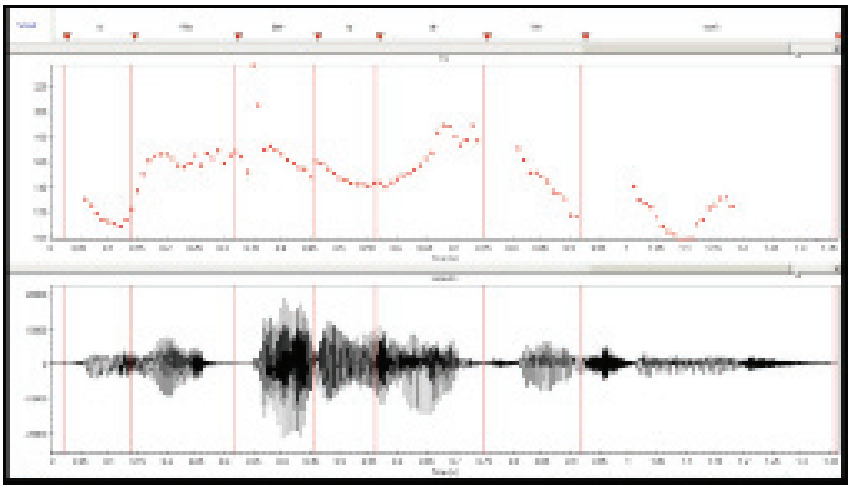

FIGURE 9: Is this Betty Atkinson's?

The most obvious difference is that in figure 7 the contour is continuous, whereas in 8 and 9 there are many interruptions. This makes sense if we recall that we must have voice to have pitch: voiceless sounds have no periodic vibration and therefore no F0. As listeners we are scarcely aware of these interruptions, but on the screen they are very conspicuous. Even more conspicuous is the fact that the F0 in the immediate vicinity of the interruptions jumps around a lot. These so-called "obstruent perturbations" are caused in part by irregular phonation as the voicing is suspended for the duration of an obstruent, or (in the case of voiced obstruents) by changes in airflow and glottis position as the speaker maintains

phonation during partial or complete supraglottal closure. Such effects can be seen clearly across the /s/ at the beginning of the third syllable of *Atkinson's* in figure 9: the extracted F0 before the interruption for the /s/ is much lower than that after the interruption, even though perceptually and linguistically there is only a smooth fall from the peak on the first syllable to the low turning point at the beginning of the third. The dip in F0 accompanying the /zð/ sequence in *is that* in figure 8, and the apparent discontinuity in F0 around the release of the initial consonant in *Jessica's* in figure 8, are similar. Even an alveolar tap (as in *Betty* in figure 9) often causes a brief local dip in F0; a glottal stop (at the end of *that* in figure 8) often causes a much greater local dip. The consequence of such obstruent perturbations is often that the pitch contour on a vowel flanked by obstruents (like the second syllable of *Jessica's* in figure 8) looks like an abrupt fall on the visual display. Methodologically, the existence of obstruent perturbations means that great care must be taken in interpreting visual displays of F0. Beginners tend to overinterpret what they see on the screen. In case of a conflict between what you see on the screen and what you hear, trust your ears! Obstruent perturbations also mean that the best samples of speech for making instrumental measurements of pitch are stretches containing as few obstruents as possible.

The other type of microprosodic effect that it is important to be aware of is "intrinsic pitch" or "intrinsic F0" of vowels. The phenomenon here is very simply stated: vowel quality affects pitch. Other things being equal, a high vowel like [i] or [u] will have higher F0 than a low vowel like [a]. If you say *to Lima* and *a llama* using the same intonation pattern and being careful not to raise or lower your voice between the two, the F0 peak on *to Lima* will be higher than that on *a llama* even though they sound exactly the same. This effect appears to have some biomechanical basis, although it is not entirely clear what that basis is. No language has ever been discovered to be without intrinsic F0 effects, although in some languages with more than two lexically distinct level tones the effect may be smaller than in other languages.

The methodological significance of intrinsic F0 is that if you want to measure F0 level instrumentally, you need to control vowel quality. Don't try to compare measurements of mid tones and high tones if all the mid tones occur on [i] and all the high tones occur on [o]. Be sure to compare like with like.

Finally, it is important to remember that automatic F0 extraction is based on mathematical algorithms applied to the digitized acoustic signal, not on human pattern recognition. These algorithms can occasionally be fooled and give spurious F0 values. The most important case is that of "octave errors," in which the reported F0 value is exactly twice or exactly half what it should be (i.e., a musical octave above or below its true value). Octave errors can sometimes happen for no apparent reason, but they are often associated with slightly irregular phonation. When they occur, octave errors often span many analysis frames, so that the F0 value plotted by the program is an octave too high or too low for as much as half a second or more. A good example of an octave error - presumably due to irregular low-energy phonation at the end of an utterance - is seen in figure 6 above: by doubling the low extracted F0 values at the very end of the syllable *-mit* we arrive at values that are continuous with the end of the steep rising pitch contour. Any abrupt change in extracted F0 such as the one at time 0.44 in figure 6 should be scrutinized carefully: if it is possible to arrive at values that are continuous with the preceding and/or following context by simply doubling or halving the extracted values on either side of the abrupt change, and

if no pitch jump can be heard impressionistically, it should be assumed that an octave error has occurred.

6. A FINAL THOUGHT. In addition to being a central part of any language description, prosody is relevant to the fieldworker in a very different way, because it may affect communication with native speakers and local authorities. It has frequently been suggested that misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication can be caused by misinterpreting prosodic cues. Although there are certainly generalizations about the sentence-level uses of prosody that are valid in language after language, the details may differ in crucial ways. What sounds rude and aggressive to one party may just be the normal way of marking emphasis for the other. A noticeable fall in pitch at the end of a unit may signal a simple assertion to the non-native hearer, but the speaker actually intended to pose a polite question. And misunderstandings may occur even if the fieldworker and the community members use a contact language to communicate, because both parties will tend to bring their native prosodic systems to the contact language. So an appreciation of the ways in which prosody can differ from language to language is in itself an essential tool for successful fieldwork.

References

Abramson, Arthur. 1962. *The vowels and tones of standard Thai: Acoustical measurements and experiments*. Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics.

Andersen, Torben. 1987. The phonemic system of Agar Dinka. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics* 9(1):1–27.

Beckman, Mary E. 1986. *Stress and non-stress accent*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Berman, Ruth A., and Dan I. Slobin. 1994. *Relating events in narrative: A crosslinguistic developmental study*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Chafe, Wallace L. 1994. *Discourse, consciousness, and time*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Chafe, Wallace L., ed. 1980. *The Pear stories: Cognitive, cultural, and linguistic aspects of narrative production*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Chuang, Nien-Chuang. 1958. Tones and intonation in the Chengtu dialect (Szechuan, China). *Phonetica* 2:59–84. [Reprinted in *Intonation,* ed. by Dwight Bolinger. Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 391–413.]

Connell, Bruce. 2000. The perception of lexical tone in Mambila. *Language and Speech* 43(2):163–182.

Croft, William. 1995. Intonation units and grammatical structure. *Linguistics* 33(5):839–882.

Cruttenden, Alan. 1997, *Intonation*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dauer, Rebecca. 1983. Stress-timing and syllable-timing reanalyzed. *Journal of Phonetics* 11(1):51–62.

de León, Lourdes. 1991. *Space games in Tzotzil: Creating a context for spatial reference*, CARG-Working Paper No. 4, Nijmegen: MPI

Ding, Picus Sizhi. 2007. The use of perception tests in studying the tonal system of Prinmi dialects: A speaker-centered approach to descriptive linguistics. *Language Documentation & Conservation* 1(2): 154–181.

Donohue, Mark. 1997. Tone systems in New Guinea. *Linguistic Typology* 1(3):347–386.

Dufter, Andreas. 2003. *Typen sprachrhythmischer Konturbildung*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Ewen, Colin J., and Harry van der Hulst. 2001. *The phonological structure of words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gippert, Jost, Nikolaus P. Himmelmann, and Ulrike Mosel, eds. 2006. *Essentials of language documentation*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Gordon, Matthew. 2006. *Syllable weight: Phonetics, phonology, typology*. New York: Routledge.

Grijzenhout, Janet, and Baris Kabak, eds. to appear. *Phonological domains: Universals and deviations* (Interface Explorations). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Gussenhoven, Carlos. 2004. *The phonology of tone and intonation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Halliday, Michael A. K. 1967. *Intonation and grammar in British English*. The Hague: Mouton.

Hill, Jane H. 2006. The ethnography of language and language documentation. In Gippert et al., 113–128.

HIMMELMANN, NIKOLAUS P. 2006. Prosody in language documentation. In Gippert et al., 163–181

HYMAN, LARRY M. 2001. Tone systems. In *Language typology and language universals*, ed. by Martin Haspelmath, Ekkehard König, Wulf Oesterreicher, and Wolfgang Raible, 1367–1380. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

HYMAN, LARRY. 2006. Word-prosodic typology. *Phonology* 23(2):225–257.

JUN, SUN-AH, ed. 2005. *Prosodic typology. The phonology of intonation and phrasing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 430–458.

JUN, SUN-AH. 1998. The Accentual phrase in the Korean prosodic hierarchy. *Phonology* 15(2):189–226.

LADD, D. ROBERT. 2008. *Intonational phonology*. 2nd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LAMBRECHT, KNUD. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form: Topic, focus, and the mental representations of discourse referents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LAVER, JOHN. 1980. *The phonetic description of voice quality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LEHISTE, ILSE. 1970. *Suprasegmentals*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

LEVINSON, STEPHEN C. 1992. Primer for the field investigation of spatial description and conception. *Pragmatics* 2(1):5–47.

LINDSTRÖM, EVA, and BERT REMIJSEN. 2005. Aspects of the prosody of Kuot, a language where intonation ignores stress. *Linguistics* 43(4):839–870.

LOW, EE-LING, ESTHER GRABE, and FRANCIS NOLAN. 2000. Quantitative characterizations of speech rhythm: Syllable-timing in Singapore English. *Language and Speech* 43(4):377–401.

MAYER, MERCER. 1969. *Frog, where are you?* New York: Dial Press.

NESPOR, MARINA, and IRENE VOGEL. 1986. *Prosodic phonology*. Dordrecht: Foris.

PIKE, KENNETH L. 1945. *Tone languages*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

RAMUS, FRANCK, MARINA NESPOR, and JACQUES MEHLER. 1999. Correlates of linguistic rhythm in the speech signal. *Cognition* 73(3):265–292.

REMIJSEN, BERT, and LEOMA GILLEY. 2008. Why are three-level vowel length systems rare? Insights from Dinka (Luanyjang dialect). *Journal of Phonetics* 36(2):318–344.

RIALLAND, ANNIE, and STÉPHANE ROBERT. 2001. The intonational system of Wolof. *Linguistics* 39(5):893–939.

SELKIRK, ELISABETH O. 1984. *Phonology and syntax: The relation between sound and structure*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

SHATTUCK-HUFNAGEL, STEFANIE, and ALICE TURK. 1996. A prosody tutorial for investigators of auditory sentence processing. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 25(2):193–247.

SLUIJTER, AGAATH M. C. and VINCENT J. VAN HEUVEN. 1996. Spectral balance as an acoustic correlate of linguistic stress. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 100(4):2471–2485.

STEEDMAN, MARK. 2000. Information structure and the syntax-phonology interface. *Linguistic Inquiry* 31(4):649–689.

Van Zanten, Ellen, Robert W. N. Goedemans, and Jos J. Pacilly. 2003. The status of word stress in Indonesian. In *The phonological spectrum II*: *suprasegmental structure*, ed. by Jeroen M. van de Weijer, Vincent J. J. P. van Heuven, and Harry G. van der Hulst, 151–175. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Williams, Briony. 2008. Review of EMU. *Language Documentation & Conservation* 2(1):166–175.

Yip, Moira. 2002. *Tone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nikolaus P. Himmelmann
nikolaus.himmelmann@uni-muenster.de

D.Robert Ladd
bob@ling.ed.ac.uk