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**Advances in interaction-based prosody research**  
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## Advances in interaction-based prosody research

Dagmar Barth-Weingarten, Elisabeth Reber, Margret Selting. 2010. *Prosody in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

*Prosody in Interaction* stems from the 2008 conference *Prosody and Interaction* in Potsdam and is a festschrift to Elisabeth Couper-Kuhlen, who spearheaded the study of prosody in naturally occurring interaction. The volume is presented in three parts plus an extensive introduction. It has a refreshing format of main paper + response for most chapters. Many chapters include supplementary audio and/or video, which further aids readers in forming their own opinions of the analyses. As a conversation analyst who is interested in prosody, I found it quite useful and accessible.

Whilst Elisabeth Couper-Kuhlen has undoubtedly made significant contributions to the study of prosody, the preface and foreword frame her work as foundational to prosody research in general. Margret Selting's introduction offers a more well-rounded view of prosody research (whilst remaining focused largely on post-Couper-Kuhlen research) and is extremely interesting. Although the focus is understandably on prosody *in interaction*, a stronger historical account of previous work that involved prosody in various ways that have informed the field would be useful to non-prosodic researchers (e.g., from psychology and linguistics: Bing 1980 and Duncan 1972; work on aphasia: Danly and Shapiro 1972 and Weintraub, Mesulam, and Kramer 1981; in particular languages: Vaissière 1975 and Halle and Keyser 1966; and in poetry: Shapiro and Beum 1965). These criticisms aside, Selting clearly defines how prosody is conceived in the volume through a "West European research tradition" (p. 4). She describes prosody as *always* co-occurring with grammar and lexis, ignoring non-lexical vocalisations (e.g., Wiggins 2002) but later addressing them as a research area (p. 23).

Selting raises the relationship between prosody and syntax of a *turn constructional unit* (TCU) with respect to transition between speakers (p. 9). This is a very important and interesting issue where input from researchers with prosodic expertise is very valuable. Unfortunately for readers unfamiliar with Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), the inevitably brief treatment of how transitions are organised (Section 2.3) could be misleading, especially because of references to "turn yielding" and "turn holding" which are central to Duncan's account of turn-taking (Duncan 1972) rather than Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) model. German speakers may also find the extracts confusing in relation to the text. For example, extracts that are given as multi-unit turns (and would be in English) are not multi-unit in German due to final position verbs (p. 8). These criticisms aside, section 2.4

contains a particularly compelling account of action formation grounded in the practical concerns of participants. Section 3.1 contains a concise and informative history of technological advancements in prosody research, and Selting gives a fair assessment of her own transcription systems.

Selting provides convincing arguments why other research traditions ought to be concerned with prosody in natural conversation and how different approaches have accomplished different goals. Arnulf Deppermann responds with an argument for large public corpora and technology as important moves forward.

Part I deals with linguistic organisation (including prosody) in social interaction.

Gareth Walker (pp. 51-72) provides a thorough account of prosodic and phonetic features of rush-throughs. His analysis is accessible to a wide audience and includes clear figures and explanations whilst also addressing potential criticism. Whilst Susanne Günthner's critique (pp. 73-79) appears unnecessarily harsh, she adds greater depth to some of the issues that Walker mentions.

Whilst Walker explores the prosodic features that occur in a particular structural position, Richard Ogden (pp. 81-102) goes on to demonstrate the potential of comparing prosodic features across positions and categories and describes how initial complaints and summing up differ. It is an ambitious paper, and future research in this area could include summing up of complaints versus summing up other topics. Auli Hakulinen (pp. 105-108) provides a substantive and thought-provoking critique, citing the need to clearly define phenomena using recurrent features that are available to interactants. She discusses how this approach applies to how complaints are oriented to as such by participants and expands on the construction of complaints as actions, alluded to by Ogden, working from a largely *conversation analytic* (CA) framework.

Continuing from a CA framework, Geoffrey Raymond (pp. 109-130) offers a beautifully woven analysis incorporating classical and current CA research that would be intelligible to people who are new to CA or yes/no interrogative (YNI) research yet has analytic depth relevant to specialists. The breadth of related phenomena and availability of supplementary data contribute substantially to his explication of prosody's role in responses to YNIs.

John Local et al. (pp. 131-159) describe the position and prosody of reissued turns with a focus on structural considerations. Although their reasons for classifying such turns as *retrieving*, *redoing*, and *resuscitating* are unclear, they make a strong case that there are

prosodic differences between reissues in these positions. Greater depth of analysis of what these prosodic differences accomplish would be welcome.

Harrie Mazeland and Leendert Plug (pp. 161-188) return to the approach of examining the prosodic features of a very particular practice. They discuss sequential and prosodic characteristics of the Dutch particle *hoor*. Although their analysis could be improved by clearly justifying their terminology (e.g., *marked* and *un-marked* with seemingly conflicting data) and comparing a wider range of responses and actions, this chapter offers an engaging account of *hoor* that is very accessible to non-Dutch speakers.

Part II moves from the prosodic properties of organisational structures to prosody as a structuring device itself. Beatrice Szczepk Reed (pp. 191-212) begins Part II by questioning whether intonation phrases exist in natural conversation. Most research on intonation phrases has used elicited speech, so this is a very relevant external validity issue. Engagement with Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) would have enhanced the chapter greatly, as many of the points and criticisms she makes are addressed in this and related papers. For example, it is thus not surprising that people design their turns so that pauses fall mid-TCU, as silence at the end of a TCU would create a gap between speakers. It is unclear how the new terminology she suggests is an advance in our understanding of turn design. Rather, I think the important message is that whilst pauses separate smaller *chunks* of speech within TCUs, the prosodies of these chunks do not follow intonation phrase patterns as described in classical elicited-speech and oratory research. Jan Anward (pp. 213-216) challenges Reed's analysis that a participant's chunks within her turn are a trouble source. He analyses the trouble source as the peculiarity of the participant's desire and notes that the chunks are syntactically impeccable immediately before one repair initiation. He goes on to suggest further research areas around *chunking*.

Prosody in stylistic delivery is then explored by Friederike Kern (pp. 217-238). She draws on a large body of research on sport commentaries and provides a thorough prosodic analysis of German radio football commentary. Johannes Wagner (pp. 239-242) engages well with Kern's analysis, drawing on differences between football and other commentaries. He proposes that although commentators have similar resources available, they are used to accomplish different styles.

Looking at a very different setting, Bill Wells (pp. 243-262) delivers an important and thought-provoking analysis of child-parent interactions and the role of prosody in interpreting very young children's speech. He aims to explore tonal repetition/contrast but focuses on lexical

repeats of the adult's turns. Greater attention to the sequential environment could improve what currently appears a rather superficial assignment of turns as tonal *repetition* and *contrast* based on phonetics rather than tone. Wells shows that although very young children do not use adult prosodies, their prosodies are neither random nor meaningless. Picking up on the issue of lexical repeats, Traci Walker (pp. 263-266) expands on the adequacy of the child's phonetically imperfect turns based on tonal repetition.

Although not escaping entirely from structural considerations, Part III aims to address prosody as a semiotic resource. Elisabeth Gülich and Katrin Lindemann (pp. 269-294) begin this part by offering a single case analysis involving a woman with epilepsy in the context of a research interview. Their work adds to a growing literature on how fear and panic are expressed in German without naming emotions. Elisabeth Reber (pp. 295-302) addresses how the constructions of fear are interactionally managed rather than unilateral phenomena.

Hiroko Tanaka (pp. 303-332), looking at a particular recurrent practice, focuses on one Japanese non-lexical response token, *huun* (pronounced approximately 'hmm'). She shows how *huun* in Japanese conversation is used to do a variety of tasks. Perhaps most interesting to an English speaker is how *huun*, even with "affective loading", promotes topic closure rather than expansion. It would be very interesting to see a cross-cultural study on similar vocalisations. Dagmar Barth-Weingarten (pp. 333-338) follows with a discussion of the technical aspects of visual and prosodic resources that Tanaka mentions and how these can aid in research on lexical and non-lexical items.

Also exploring a non-lexical resource, Cecilia E. Ford and Barbara A. Fox (pp. 339-368) take a multimodal approach to the construction and recognition of *laughables*, which they show is necessary for understanding co-present laughables. Whilst I take issue with the term *laughable* (its denotation is that something merits derision), I can appreciate that it is a widely used term. On the other hand, they define laughter colloquially, thus avoiding elitism and distance from participant orientations. They also provide a detailed account of non-vocal practices involved in (some) constructions of humorous utterances and their responses.

One briefly mentioned issue is that of (h) being used in transcripts when an utterance is not in fact plosive. This may necessitate a return to Gail Jefferson's transcription of breath quality during utterances (e.g., Jefferson, 2004), as she distinguishes between breathy (as in h) and plosive (as in (h)) speech among others. New transcription symbols may become necessary to capture the nuances of laughter. Karin Birkner (pp. 369-372) critiques the attempt to address such broad phenomena as speech-laugh or "possibly laugh relevant sounds"

(Jefferson 2010). She clarifies that what is being studied is the sharing of amusement. However, some aspects of her critique seem unwarranted, such as “a laughable is a holistic phenomenon which is difficult to reconstruct by reading the transcripts without listening to the excerpt.” Precisely because transcription of laughter is imprecise, one would expect the supplementary videos that have been provided.

Using a detailed single case analysis approach, Charles Goodwin (pp. 373-394) demonstrates the prosodic resources used by a man with aphasia, Chil, during an interaction with his family. Chil has a three word vocabulary and uses a range of gestures and prosodies to convey rich meaning using these three words and non-lexical vocalisations. Video extracts and drawings within transcripts bring the interaction to life along with a clear and engaging writing style. Helga Kotthoff (pp. 395-400) takes implications of Goodwin’s analysis to children and second language learners. Whilst she makes some valid points, it is a leap from a man who has lost his ability to communicate with people who had previously been able to understand him to these populations. Any pedagogy relevant to Goodwin’s data is Chil’s family learning to understand, not teaching Chil to speak competently. Nevertheless, issues of understanding and finding ways to communicate unknown words exist across these populations.

Overall, *Prosody in Interaction* is a collection of work falling broadly under the heading of prosody research. Some are very high-level prosodic analyses and others are more traditionally conversation analytic. Despite the precipitating conference being “international” (xv), all authors list their affiliations in Western Europe or the US. No work on tonal languages is included, and most are Germanic with much of the transcription in GAT or GAT2 and no transcription key provided. A more global orientation would be appreciated and useful. As a festschrift, however, the volume represents a lively and constructive debate amongst friends. The variety of topics and styles makes it accessible to a wide range of people of different interests and career stages, but it is not necessarily comprehensive. The inclusion of responses to most of the papers lends a nice touch for both the student and the experienced researcher.

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