Prosody and cohesion in Ékegusií (Kisii) narrative

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What is prosody?

- intonation
- tempo / rhythm
- loudness
- pause
- syllable structure
- voice quality / phonation

• What do these things have to do with one another?
What goes on the list?

“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.” (Himmelmann & Ladd 2008: 253)

The phonetic cues that signal phonemic distinctions in one language may have purely prosodic functions in another, and vice versa.

How does one decide when a given linguistic feature is functioning prosodically or not?
Prosody

The set of phonetic and phonological cues that speakers use to give cohesion to their discourse, by signaling the transitions from one unit of discourse to the next, the relations that hold between those units, and their relative prominence.

• Prosody is fundamentally a discourse phenomenon

• Prosody is a tool that speakers use to structure their speech
  • (but not the only tool – works in tandem with morphosyntax)
Ékegeusií (Kisii)
Bantu, Niger-Congo
Districts in Nyanza Province Where Ekegusii Is Spoken

NYANZA PROVINCE

KISII
- Kisii
- Kitutu Chache
- Bonchari
- Nyaribari Chache
- South Mugirango
- Bututu
- Ruumetere
- Bobasi
- Nyaribari Masaba
- Kienya
- Mgenacho
- Nyacheki

NYAMIRA
- Nyamira
- North Mugirango/Borabu
- West Mugirango
- Gesina
- Gesina
- Keroka
- Kiamokara
- Masireti

GUCHAR
- Gucha
- Kamagambo
- Ongando
- Kiambe
- Mogongya
- Nyachepa

Nyanza Province Boundary
District Boundary
Constituency Boundary

Map taken from Nash (2011)
Ékegusií (Kisii; Bantu, Niger-Congo)

- Endangered language of southwest Kenya
- Few speakers under 30
- 2.2 million ethnic Gusii people, ~600,000 speakers
- Surrounded by Nilotic languages
- Tonal: H vs. L tone (L orthographically unmarked)
- Data: 24 folktales; lexical database with audio (14,000 words)
Pause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(0.6)</th>
<th>ómong'ina oriá akagenda akaúútá ómorero</th>
<th>(0.4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That woman went and made fire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time (s)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chiséésé chiriá chígaachá</th>
<th>chigachaaka</th>
<th>(SNIFF) (SNIFF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>those dogs came.</td>
<td>They started,</td>
<td><em>sniff</em>, <em>sniff</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pauses in a single text

- Introduction of narrative and participants
- Complicating action
- Movement toward climax
- Climax

The diagram shows the pauses in seconds over time during various stages of the narrative.
Vowel elision

éndo égatéébá reéró ígo íngóóchá kógënda íntége
lion it.said today so I.am.going to.go I.trap

[éend#éyatééβá rẹẹgó#yó#óŋgóótsá kɔỳẹẹndá#ántéγé]

‘The lion said, “Today I’ll go and lay a trap.”’
Vowel elision

índóré ómonto ógoochá ória chínchúgú chíáné
I.see person who.goes to.eat ground.nuts my

[índór#ómoomont#óyootʃ#órí#tʃíintʃúyú  tʃíáné]

‘[...] so that I see who comes to eat my ground nuts.’
Vowel elision
Lack of vowel elision at transition into reported speech

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>oo</td>
<td>á</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kanyambú</td>
<td>akamotéébiá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>ógasusú</td>
<td>tôngi ikaránsérá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Oh,”</td>
<td>Chameleon told him,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Rabbit don’t sit on me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pitch Reset

who was married to dogs.

This girl, when she got married to dogs, she didn't want her parents to go there.

One day,
Lack of pitch reset indicating narrative continuity
Isotony

They started, "sniff", "sniff".

Something has smelled here.

"sniff".

Something has smelled here.

"No!"
Lexical repetition without isotony

(0.6) tēēbā buyā
“Speak the truth.

n’āyē kwāriá ōmwańa ōminto
Is it you who ate my sibling?“

yāayā ínché tímórioiti
“No, me I have not eaten her.“

tēēbā buyā
“Speak the truth.

Time (s)
Isotony without lexical repetition

The lion came with a club,
Isotony across multiple phrases

őgaszt akarmyśkã
Rabbit nm.

închi koojigêrêria margvã
"When I try to look behind,
Chameleon is nowhere to be seen."

6kanyambî finkari ändê

őgaszt akarmyśkã
Rabbit nm.

închi koojigêrêria margvã
"When I try to look behind,
Chameleon is nowhere to be seen."

6kanyambî finkari ändê
The day came that the invited visitors came.
The food was prepared there.
The meats were there.
The breads were there.
The mandazi [donuts] were there.
People ate and drank sodas.
These people drank tea with mandazi.
They rejoiced and sang well.
It reached the evening.
Prosody as Cohesion

• Avoids problems with the list approach

• Offers a language-general functional definition of prosody which helps identify when a phonetic feature is being used prosodically, and when it is not

• Provides a framework for future typological studies of prosody
References
