The cohesive function of prosody in Ékegusií (Kisii) narratives

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What is prosody?

• suprasegmental (Fox 2000)

• hierarchical phonological structure (Cruttendon 1986; Ladd 2008; Nespor & Vogel 2007)

• syntactic mechanism (Downing 2013; Selkirk 1986)

• means of information packaging (Chafe 1994)

• interactional (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting; Barth-Weingarten & Reber 2010; Szczepak Reed 2011)

• affective (Gussenhoven 2004: 71-96)

• delineates units of discourse (Swerts 1994)
Prosodic features

• intonation
• tempo
• loudness
• pause
• syllable structure
• voice quality / phonation
• tone
• (morpho)phonological processes
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?
Areas of agreement about prosody

• Functions ‘at the level of discourse’ or ‘postlexically’ (Cole 2015: 2; Himmelmann & Ladd 2008)

• Closely associated with intonation (Cruttenden 1986: 1ff; Jun 2005)

• Demarcation of larger stretches of discourse (Cole 2015; Fónagy & Bérard 2006; Himmelman & Ladd 2008; Jun 2005; Wennerstrom 2001:7)

• ‘Purely phonological’ vs. discourse-level prosody (Nespor & Vogel 2007: 3)
Prosody & Discourse

• What does it mean for prosody to be a discourse-level phenomenon?

• *cohesion* – distinguishes a text from a collection of random utterances

• *ties* – “Where the interpretation of any item in the discourse requires making reference to some other item in the discourse” (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 11)
Prosody & Discourse

• Grammatical structure is cohesion-forming

• Prosody connects large units of discourse (Brown 1977; Genetti 2011; Ladd 1986, 1988; Swerts & Geluykens 1994; Yule 1980)

• Prosody signals relatedness between successive units of discourse (e.g. pitch reset) (Brazil 1985; Couper-Kuhlen 2004; Ladd 1986, 1988; Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990)
Prosody & Discourse

“When prosodic cues are available, listeners do appear to make use of them in detecting discourse boundaries and in evaluating the degree of discourse cohesion or juncture between successive utterances in a discourse.” Cole (2015: 9)
Ékegusií (Kisii)
Bantu, Niger-Congo
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)
Prosodic Features

- pause
- vowel elision
- prosodic accent
- pitch reset
- isotony (intonational parallelism)
- intonational contour
That woman went and made fire.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (s)</th>
<th>chisésé chiriá chigaachá</th>
<th>chigachaaka</th>
<th>(SNIFF) (SNIFF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>those dogs came.</td>
<td>They started,</td>
<td><em>sniff</em>, <em>sniff</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

500Hz

75Hz
Repair without pause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>éndo criá eka--</th>
<th>ógasusú akabwátwa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>that lion it--</td>
<td>Rabbit was caught,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vowel elision

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

índóré ómontó ógoothá ória chínchúgu chúañé
I.see person who.goes to.eat ground.nuts my

[índór#ómoont#óyootʃ#óri#tʃintʃúɣú tʃiáné]

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(\text{o}) kanyambú akamotéebié</th>
<th>(\text{ó}) gasusú tónjikáránsérá</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time (s)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Oh,” Chameleon told him,</td>
<td>“Rabbit don’t sit on me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prosodic accent

chíséesé chiriá chigaacha chikamwááka igó

the dogs came from behind and hit her hard,
Pitch Reset
Lack of pitch reset indicating narrative continuity
<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chigacheaka</td>
<td>(SNIFF)</td>
<td>(SNIFF)</td>
<td>égento giatiškire igá igá</td>
<td>(SNIFF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They started,</td>
<td><em>sniff</em>, <em>sniff</em>.*</td>
<td>Something has smelled here.</td>
<td><em>sniff</em>.,</td>
<td>Something has smelled here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time (s) 0 6.041
Lexical repetition without isotony

(0.6) téébú buyá

“Speak the truth.

n’áyé kwárió
ómwárá ómíntó

Is it you who ate my sibling?“

yáayá ínhé tímórioítí

“No, me I have not eaten her.“

téébú buyá

(0.1)

“Speak the truth.

Time (s)
Isotony without lexical repetition

The lion came with a club.
Isotony across multiple IUs

ógasutsì akaminyékà
Rabbit nm.

“...When I try to look behind...”

Chameleon is nowhere to be seen.

6000 Hz

700 Hz

Time (s)
Intonational Contour Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mama ćmwabó akaímóka ćsabaria</th>
<th>akagenda</th>
<th>ékerő agenda aiká árora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Her mother set on the journey,</td>
<td>and went.</td>
<td>When she went and reached there,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time (s)
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.
### Terminal Rise – adverbial ‘when’ clause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>čkerő yaíká màgorọba</td>
<td>òmogááka oriá agatēebíá òmong'ina oriá</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When it reached the evening,</td>
<td>the old man told the wife,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Note: The diagram illustrates the intonation patterns for the given sentence.*
Terminal rise – new topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ómoiséké n’áaréngé</th>
<th>ábaíséké mbáré háaréngé babéré (0.7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There was a girl,</td>
<td>there lived two girls,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time (s)
Prosody as Cohesion

• “there is an English-specific system of intonation built upon a rhythmic foundation that functions as a “grammar of cohesion.” This means that prosody, particularly intonation, contributes information about connections among constituents in discourse, conveying meaning beyond what is provided through lexical and syntactic systems” (Wennerstrom 2001:7)
Prosody as Cohesion

• Avoids problems with the list approach and definitions focused on suprasegmentals

• 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


Pauses in a single text

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