

Meaning and Prosody. A Project in Cognitive phonetics

The intonation patterns and prosodic profiles found in phonetic performance of linguistic structure reflect certain salient properties of the semio-syntactic organization of sentences. Additionally, they reflect intentional and emotional speaker states related to the situation of communication. These 'pragmatic' states can be categorized in terms of 'modes of enunciation', incl. the volitive, interrogative, evaluative modes, and declaratives such as performatives and constatives. These modes seem to differently affect the prosodic expression of emotional meanings stemming from dialogically connected speaker subjectivities. But between grammatical and pragmatic meanings reflected in prosody, we also find frame-semantic meanings involving dynamic schemas with dramatic energy and therefore inviting 'narrator'-intonational phrasings; and finally, we find prosodic phrasings stemming from lexical sources rooted in specific experiential domains that imply corresponding 'chanting'. Prosodic profiles informed by such different areas of meaning simultaneously would form an inextricable chaos of overlaid and superimposed signals. In order to experimentally sort out the most prominent parameters, we are measuring prosodic features of a strictly controlled corpus of utterances and a small set of variables grounded in the five basic levels of linguistic organization stipulated by the semio-cognitive theory that accompanies the stemmatic, non-linear view of language architecture.

Experimental results will be presented to show the relevance of postulating distinct levels of meaning reflected in prosody.