

## IUs in sequence: what prosodic sentences tell us about linguistic structure

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Language documentation over the last decades has made corpora of unscripted speech available, providing the basis for the investigation of grammar in as yet little-studied languages. These investigations have highlighted the role of prosody in speech, crucial to decide on the linguistic relations within a sequence of words (Izre'el et al 2020), and on the organisation of discourse and interaction. In traditional linguistic description, the unit of analysis is the sentence, but anyone working with natural data soon acknowledges that segmenting the flow of speech into sentences raises many methodological challenges. The intonation unit (IU), following Chafe (1994), is widely used as a basic unit of speech (see Inbar et al (2020) for new research in neurolinguistics). When speakers talk, they produce stretches of speech with specific and coherent rhythmic, melodic, and articulatory properties. Cognitively, IUs pace how information is shared, each containing a new idea or a focus of consciousness, they have a complete communicative function.

This presentation is interested in series of intonation units that form larger constructions, referred to as 'prosodic sentences' which can show an overall declination in pitch, often with intermediate pitch resets at the beginning of each unit. Prosodic sentences coincide with syntactic completion, semantic cohesion, and pragmatic and interactional management. To understand the contribution of such sequences of IUs to meaning and grammar, it is useful to adopt a relational perspective, taking account of the context in which they occur, not only of the syntagmatic relationships between IUs themselves, but envisaging them as part of the situations in which they occur, in their material and social environment. We will show how prosody participates (1) in the organisation of the information to be conveyed, signalling changes in topics, or reiteration of topics, foci, and the degree of accessibility of referents (Mithun 2020); and (2) in regulating verbal interactions by signalling evidentiality with tags, or using turn-taking strategies (Mushin 2014). Data are drawn from studies of Jaminjung and Ngarinyman, Australian languages spoken in the Northern Territory (Schultze-Berndt)

Along the way, we will highlight some of theoretical difficulties that arise in studying prosody: many of the objects we seek to describe show characteristics that are continuous or gradient, as opposed to the discrete and distinctive units which are the basis of much linguistic research.

### References

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