

# The Investigation of Prosody in Spoken Corpora

Dina El Zarka, University of Graz

Prosodic description of naturally occurring speech have frequently been done in a rather impressionistic manner. Even if instrumentally aided acoustic analysis is applied, the description is often reduced to only one or two prosodic features, such as identification of the main prominence or phrasing. As pointed out by Chafe (1994), the segmentation of naturally occurring speech into intonation units is a very important issue. However, there is a lot more in prosody that is relevant for communication.

On the other hand, very detailed and sophisticated investigations of prosody have been carried out by phoneticians and phonologists. Especially, scholars working within the framework of *Laboratory Phonology* have developed annotation guidelines for various languages adapted from the original ToBI framework (Beckman & Ayers 1994). This latter line of research, however, has been mostly relying on laboratory speech and the descriptive units applied are based on phonological primes that exhibit a high degree of abstraction and are frequently not apt to account for the empirical facts.

In this talk, I will argue for a corpus-driven approach to the investigation of the prosody of naturally occurring data that, whenever possible, should be complemented by experimental studies, following Kohler's plea for a paradigm that subordinates "all phonological categories and phonetic measurements to the relevance for communicative functions. (Kohler 2007: 43). Drawing on data from Egyptian Arabic, I will show the importance of different prosodic features (duration, rhythm, pitch contours and intensity) for information structure and identify some methodological and analytical problems.

## References

- Beckman, M. E., and G. M. Ayers. 1994. *Guidelines for ToBI Labelling*. Unpublished manuscript, Ohio State University.
- Chafe, Wallace. 1994. *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing*. University of Chicago Press.
- El Zarka, Dina (forthcoming). *On the Interaction of Information Structure and Prosody: Evidence from Egyptian Arabic*. Habilitationsschrift, University of Graz.
- Kohler, Klaus. 2007. Beyond Laboratory Phonology. The Phonetics of Speech Communication. In: Solé, Maria-Josep et al. (eds.), *Experimental Approaches to Phonology*, 41-53, Oxford, N.Y: Oxford Univ. Press.