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## Persuasive talk and pitch



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## ABSTRACT

The goal of the present study is to explore how the impact of pragmatic value, degree of giving and position in Intonation Phrase (IP) rhythmic structure can be reconciled in the ongoing discourse. Six interviews were saved on tapes, and then they were transcribed. These interviews were divided into two parts: auditory and acoustic. For analysis, 389 words were selected, and the mean syllable duration in these selected words showed the cognitive scenario and intensifiers. The data were grouped according to novelty/giving, the pragmatic value of the words representing different frames (concepts) of the scenario and the position in IP construction. Statistical analysis showed that the prominence category is on a gradient. Moreover, the pragmatic value of the words represent different concepts/frames in the scenario. According to this research's data, the final position in IP is most favourable. Based on the results of this study, rhythm has a role in regulating and rearranging discourse.

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## 1. Introduction

Our study stems from the necessity to check whether the rhythm of language, together with semantic and pragmatic factors, plays a role in prominence-lending information bearing prosodic organization of the spoken language. A brief overview of the major prosody research issues reveals that the rhythmic nature of information delivery in spoken language seems to be neglected. The cognitive approach to spoken language, according to Chafe (1987) and Lambrecht (1994), has brought tangible results in correlating prosody information structure (Baumann, 2006; Baumann and Riester, 2010).

Within the framework of Autosegmental Metrical phonology, Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg (1990) and Ladd (1996) have shown that different accent types mark the information status of individual discourse (Chafe, 1987; Gussenhoven, 2005). On elaborating fine-grained technique of speech analysis, Baumann (2006, 2010) has applied it to the German spoken language to prove that semantic-pragmatic categories are crucial for the interpretation of prosody in terms of information status and cognitive activation states (Halliday, 1967; Hirst and Di Cristo, 1998). We assume that

the rhythmic factor is a third regulating force that accounts for prosodic speech prominence of words in the spoken language. Speech rhythm is viewed as regular, periodical, and commensurable speech events. Intonation phrase (IP) is taken to be the basic unit of prose rhythm, which is a higher-level unit in the hierarchy of phonological units, and above the phonological word and foot (Hirst and Di Cristo, 1998; Gussenhoven, 2005) (Ladd, 1996; Lambrecht, 1994). We maintain that structurally IP is a construction consisting of three parts: the initial, the medial and the final (nuclear) part. As Halliday argued, it is an information unit (Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg, 1990). Cognitively, it is a unit of speech planning, the length of which is determined by echoing memory, breathing and perception constraints.

The grouping of words into IP conforms to the speaker's global pragmatic aim of the talk, as well as her/his current intention, which in combination with the lexical choices, the construction schema and prosody results in bringing particular words into the foreground (focus); thus, taking the message across (Valimaa-Blum, 2005). Prosodic means of prominence are accentuation and phrasing, which are measured acoustically as Fomax, Fospan, and syllable duration of accented words and pause occurs.

The goal of the present study is to explore how the impact of three factors, pragmatic value, degree of giving and position in IP rhythmic structure, can be reconciled in the ongoing discourse. Some previous studies (Vance, 1987) expressed that rhythm has a

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main role in discourse because it can regulate the discourse and the information, and it can facilitate a learner's comprehension.

## 2. Text corpus

The unique features of the corpus, "Interviews with the ten most successful networkers in the USA", (Upline, 1986) (4 h, 10 speakers, 3 women and 7 men) is its authenticity and the fact that the talks have been previously repeated over the years, thus optimizing their effectiveness in communication aimed at persuasion. The talks are built around frames that we called 'success', 'business', and 'leaders'.

The six subjects whose talks were selected for the narrow corpus (in search for gender differences, we balanced the number of men and women to three in each gender group) are 'great communicators' sharing their experience in building and duplicating their businesses. The pragmatic aim is to persuade the listener, often a complete stranger, to join the company for one's own benefit, develop it through duplicating and find new leaders whose enthusiasm, energy and desire to succeed will guarantee further development.

The total for the narrow corpus is 18 min 30 s; 413 IPs containing 3131 words with 315 words representing the 'success-business-leaders' scenario concepts; and 74 words, adjectives and adverbs, serving as intensifiers. The total amount of 389 tokens corresponds to 131 lexical entities, each repeated approximately three times (2.97). Repetitions give us a chance to observe how the degree of 'giving' affects prosodic prominence of the repeated words.

An intonation phrase that we assume to be the major unit of prose rhythm averages in the corpus at 2.3 s (followed by an average pause of 0.46 s), which is close to the echoing memory capacity of 3 s. The length of an IP in the present discourse is therefore optimal for human perception.

## 3. Method

Six interviews were saved on tapes, and then their tapes were transcribed. These interviews were divided into two parts: auditory and acoustic. Auditory analysis consists of IPs (from pause to pause), accents and tonal marking. Acoustic analysis (Speech Analyser v 2.5) consists of Fomax, Fomin, and Fointerval (span). In terms of the process of analysis, 389 words were selected, and the mean syllable duration in these selected words show the cognitive scenario and intensifiers. Acoustic and auditory analyses were used for the rest of the text (minus the selected lexical items) in 413 IPs. The data was grouped according to the following:

- 1) According to the novelty/giving value in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and other occurrences of each lexical item in the speaker's performance;
- 2) According to the pragmatic value of the words representing different frames (concepts) of the scenario and 'intensifiers';
- 3) According to the position in IP construction: initial, medial or final. (One-word IP formed a separate group).

Additionally, Statistical analysis (ANOVA) was used for analysing the data.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Scenario words are in the foreground

For auditory analysis, 386 words are accented. Acoustically, there is considerable contrast in pitch range characteristics of the accented scenario words compared to the background of the

discourse. The selected lexicon is realized within the pitch range of 7.5–10.6 st, while the rest of the text is realized within 1–7 st. Thus, pitch prominence is reserved for the conceptual scenario words (together with intensifiers), and this distinction may be considered categorical.

There is a clear-cut division in the foreground, on the one hand, and in the background, on the other. The findings evidenced a gradient in the prominence category, but one important point should be made here is that the relative prominence does not mean that the scenario words could be pushed into the background.

### 4.2. Prominence is graded with giving

In this section, the researcher considered pitch height, pitch range and duration variation in three or more occurrences of each particular word in each speakers' speech. The degree of novelty/giving, for the present study, is according to the first second and third occurrences in the discourse. As Table 1 shows the general tendency transpires when they averaged over three or more consecutive occurrences in all the talks.

The relevant parameters indicated a drop in prominence is Fomax and Foint (span). Additionally, syllable duration values fluctuate, but a drop on the second word occurrence is constant. This demonstrates that we have found a gradient in novelty/giving operating on the prosodic level. Previous research results appear to be confirmed, which signals that cognitive planning is regular and, probably, automatically adjusting to each successive word mention.

### 4.3. The gradient is caused by pragmatic value

According to Table 2, the next finding of this study is related to the gradient within the prominence group determined by the relative pragmatic value of the three concepts or frames. According to their occurrence in the discourse, they are graded prosodically. The 'success' words (success, successful, opportunity, and benefit, etc.), which symbolize the motive and the reward in the networkers activity are more salient than the 'business' words (business, network, marketing, organization, industry, distributor, duplicating, and partnership, etc.). However, the 'leaders' key frame words (leaders, leadership, pick performers, passion, enthusiasm, responsible commitment, committed, noticeable development, personal growth, result, ability, mentality, communication skills, synergy, contribute, and competitive, etc.) are the most prominent

**Table 1**  
Givenness in pitch and duration.

Occurrences parameters	1	2	3
Fomax Hz	183	175	170
Fomin Hz	112	108	112
Foint st	9.1	9.0	7.5
SyllID ms	232	210	222

**Table 2**  
Pragmatic value in pitch differences.

Occurrence	1		2		3	
	Max Hz	Int st	Max Hz	Int st	Max Hz	Int st
Parameters concepts						
Success	179	9.3	160	10.7	150	7.7
Business	173	9.8	169	10.6	156	8.1
Leaders	191	8.0	187	7.0	195	7.9
Intensifiers	188	9.1	178	7.0	179	6.4

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