

Notes on Prosody Transcription

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Basics of prosody transcription

- Transcription is a method for written documentation of percepts of spoken language.
- There are many different transcription conventions for documenting prosody and no consensus, in contrast to the International Phonetic Alphabet for speech sounds.
- The differences are largely due to:
 - different underlying theories about categorial perception of prosody (e.g. pitch levels vs. pitch contours vs. pitch relations)
 - typological differences between languages (e.g. tone vs. Pitch accent vs. intonation)
 - different levels of abstraction (e.g. prosodic functionality vs. phonological generalisations vs. phonetic detail)
 - different purposes (e.g. linguistic theory, language teaching, speech technology)

The variety of prosody transcription types

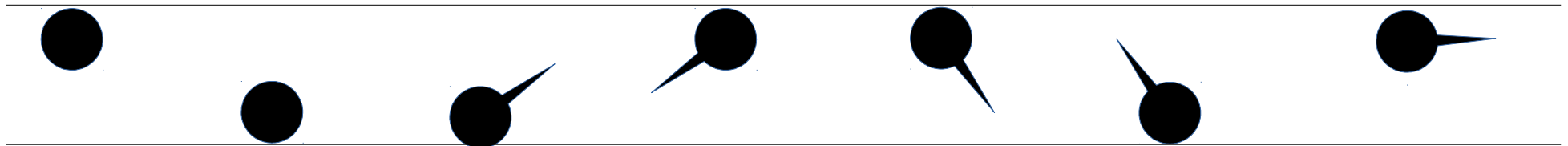
- There is a little agreement on some of the following properties of prosody (with different terminologies and transcription systems):
 - Properties of syllables and words:
 - Properties of phrases and sentences:
 - boundary marking
 - stress (realised by pitch accent)
 - realised by pitch, intensity and duration patterns
 - Properties of discourse:
 - adaptation to partner
 - signalling of turn-taking and exchange framing
 - discourse-specific intonations such as chanted calls

The variety of prosody transcription types

- Properties of syllables and words:
 - lexical (phonological and morphological) tone and stress
 - realised by pitch, intensity and duration patterns
- Properties of phrases and sentences:
 - boundary marking (by pitch change, syllable lengthening)
 - stress (realised by pitch accent):
 - structural (nuclear stress), semantic (contrastive stress), pragmatic (emphatic stress)
 - realised by pitch, intensity and duration patterns
- Properties of discourse:
 - adaptation to partner, signalling of turn-taking
 - discourse-specific intonations such as chanted calls

Three selected transcription conventions

- Tonic stress marking:
‘John de’cided to \leave
- Traditional iconic ‘tadpole’ notation (often used in language teaching):



- Tone and Break Index (ToBI) notation:

H*

L*

L*H

LH*

H*L

HL*

H*H

<http://www.tobi.com/>

A practical strategy

- For prosody transcription exercises, orthography, plus SAMPROSA where needed:
 - <https://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/sampa/samprosa.htm>
- For annotation (e.g. with Praat):
 - SAMPA conventions for English speech sounds
 - <http://extras.springer.com/2000/978-0-7923-7904-1/HDBK2000/node560.html>
 - and Pinyin for Mandarin Chinese