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Prosody in Interactional Discourse

The terms *prosody* and *discourse* are common currency these days. As for *prosody* — disregarding the metricists' use of the term — there appears to be a modicum of consensus on what one means, at least among linguists (although all too often attention centers on pitch and stress to the exclusion of timing, rhythm and dynamics). What is even more striking, however, is the apparent agreement on *discourse*: ask any linguist to explain the difference between our understanding of discourse and that of Foucault and the explanation will be not only immediate but widely agreeable to linguists of any persuasion. Yet appearances can mislead — and in the case of *discourse*, I fear they do: too often one linguist's *discourse* is another linguist's *spoken prose* (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996).

This paper is situated within a relatively new approach to the study of discourse, one which understands it to be the product of social interaction between two or more speakers. It focusses on spoken discourse in particular and views linguistic structure as a resource for the accomplishment of interactional tasks. In the following I will discuss four ways in which the difference between discourse as conceptualized here and spoken prose makes itself apparent. I will then introduce my way of thinking about prosodic form and function and the methodology I propose for coming to terms with them. Finally, I will demonstrate this approach and methodology using a case study from English conversation.

1. Talk as Social Interaction

In speaking of an interactional approach to discourse, I follow in the steps of well-known ethnomethodologists (see e.g. Garfinkel 1967,

also Heritage 1984) and conversation analysts (see e.g. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974 and the collections edited by Psathas 1979, Schenkein 1979, Atkinson and Heritage 1984), to mention only a few of the better known names in this increasingly large research community. The key to understanding discourse in this frame is the notion of *social interaction*. Whatever else we may be doing when we issue 'bursts of language', as Schegloff (1996:53) terms them, we are engaging in action. To speak with Austin (1962), we are doing things with words. But these actions are not performed in a void. Instead they are embedded in social situations, in response to or in anticipation of other verbal actions by a prototypically co-present partner or partners. In other words, talk is one of our principal ways of interacting with others. Discourse is thus in a very fundamental sense a form of social interaction.

Talk-in-interaction has at least four qualities (and probably more) which distinguish it from a prose-like understanding of discourse: (i) it is inherently *temporal* in nature, which means that like time it is directional. Talk constantly moves forward in time, never backwards. We have no way to un-say something once it is said, although we do have intricate ways to revise, recast or rework its import after the fact. (ii) As participants we experience talk-in-interaction as *emergent*. Of course, as analysts we have access to the finished product, neatly captured in transcription on the page or our computer screen. But for participants talk is an activity which evolves in real time; it prohibits looking ahead to see what happens five minutes later. (iii) Talk-in-interaction is eminently *contingent*. Despite its appearance of 'seeming inescapability' (Schegloff 1982), each and every component part of talk could have been different. It is for this reason that conversation analysts are in the habit of saying that conversation is an 'achievement' (Schegloff 1982, 1988, 1995). (iv) Talk-in-interaction is *situated*. Utterances are designed to be appropriate to an actual recipient on an actual occasion. Lift them out of their situation of occurrence and they are interactionally meaningless. Because of this, talk-in-interaction defies decontextualization.

What does this mean for the investigation of prosody? Since

prosody is an integral part of any bit of talk-in-interaction, it must be thought of in the same way. That is, it must be conceived of as temporal, emergent, contingent and situated. This precludes the study of interactional prosody in laboratory tests or in constructed texts read aloud. Prosody is first and foremost a resource — like words — which speakers have for the construction and interpretation of talk-in-interaction.

2. Prosody as Contextualization

But unlike words, which are prototypically referential in nature, prosody is a special kind of resource with a special way of functioning. We might say that it has a special semiotic status. Rather than standing for some concrete object or abstract entity in extralinguistic reality, prosodic signs point to ways of understanding talk: in other words, they are *indexical*. This explains their contextual boundedness. Just as, for instance, deictic elements in speech take on different interpretations depending on context, so prosodic elements ‘shift’ their indexical value in different contexts. It is therefore impossible on principle to associate decontextualized meanings directly with single prosodic features. A final high rise does not ‘mean’ a question illocution or even an attitude of indefiniteness. An increase in speech rate does not ‘mean’ excitement; a pause does not ‘mean’ hesitation or doubt. Instead, such features signal or cue situated ways of understanding what is being said: they contextualize language by hinting at possible inferences which might be required in order to make full sense of what is going on in a particular situation (see also Auer and di Luzio 1992). But they do not provide an ultimate guarantee for these inferences. A speaker cannot be held accountable for having prosodically ‘hinted’ at one interpretation rather than another. In fact, prosody — along with other indexical and iconic signs in language — is in many ways “beyond the level of pragmatic awareness”, as the anthropologist and semiotician Michael Silverstein (1976) has put it. The ‘hinted at’ interpretations do not become relevant or valid unless they are implicitly ratified by

recipients. Because of this, the full meaning which results from prosodically contextualized talk-in-interaction is less a product of something the speaker does alone than a product of negotiation between speaker and recipient.

How do prosodic ‘hints’ work? Once again, it is virtually impossible to establish direct relations between a particular prosodic feature and a particular kind of ‘hint’. Instead some one prosodic phenomenon (or set of phenomena) together with a particular verbal carrier in a particular sequential environment as part of a particular speech event, etc. etc. will tend to be associated with a particular interpretation. The associations will be based on past experience in a given speech community or sub-community. That is, associations between prosodic features and contextualizations are products of our linguistic socialization. This means that for the uninitiated (e.g. a child or a foreigner) in verbal interaction, prosodic contextualization cues may be *uninterpretable* — or, worse, *misinterpretable* (Gumperz 1982).

3. Generating and Warranting Prosodic Analyses

All of this places utmost hardship on the would-be prosodic analyst. How can ‘hints’ be got at if they never receive explicit articulation? How can generalizations be made if meanings are constantly changing with situations? How can group-specific associations be made tangible for outsiders? One possible way to answer these questions — following up on the seminal work of John Local (e.g. Local, Wells and Sebba 1985, Local, Kelly and Wells 1986, Local 1992) — is to co-opt the methodology of conversation analysis for prosodic study (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996). Conversation analysis relies on (i) the *sequential* and (ii) the *methodical* nature of talk-in-interaction for generating and warranting its claims:

(i) Speakers who display their understanding of prior talk in current turns are at the same time providing analysts with observable evidence of this local understanding. For prosodic study this means using the cues which participants themselves provide via their interaction with one another in order to generate prosodic

hypotheses, modify and/or ultimately validate them.

(ii) Speakers' means for constructing order in conversation are method-like, i.e. they can be generalized over sets of similar situations. For prosodic study this means that sets of similar particularized contextualizations will yield generalizations which extend beyond one particular situation.

Crucial for the study of prosody within a conversation analytic framework is assuming a participant perspective on talk, i.e. relying on participants' own behavior in the analytic process. Granted, we will rarely be fortunate enough as analysts to find participants commenting explicitly on the pitch, loudness and timing of their interlocutors' speech. At most we may only have vague references to "the way something was said" or to someone's "tone of voice". But fortunately metalinguistic commentary is not a *sine qua non* for prosodic analysis. In its absence we can look for various kinds of intrinsic hints in talk as to how the prosody of a particular turn or turn-constructive unit (henceforth TCU) is contextualizing it. (The terms 'turn' and 'turn-constructive unit' are employed here according to accepted conversation analytic usage. Roughly, TCUs are morpho-syntactic units of varying size (word, phrase, clause) which form the building blocks of turns. They are capable of constituting turns on their own but can also under specifiable conditions be combined to form multi-unit turns. It is at the possible completion of a TCU — typically marked by a form of prosodic closure, e.g. a final fall in pitch to low — that speaker transition becomes relevant. This moment in interactional time is referred to as a transition-relevance place, or TRP. For further discussion, see Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974 and Schegloff 1996.)

For instance, (i) there may be a hint in the actual words of a TCU about how it (together with its prosody) is to be taken. Moreover — because every turn-at-talk is at once retrospectively tied to what has preceded and prospectively designed to anticipate what will follow — evidence can be sought in the prior turn and in the next turn. Specifically, (ii) the way a current speaker designs a particular TCU (and its prosody) as a follow-up to a prior turn may suggest something about the contextualization of this TCU. And

(iii) the way a next speaker responds to a particular TCU (and its prosody) may likewise suggest something about its contextualization.

To restate the point on a more general level: we view the prosody of a turn or turn-constructive unit as part of its recipient design. By examining how the TCU fits into its sequential environment, we can make inferences about its prosodic make-up as a means for (co-)producing the sequential fit. Multiple instances of a given prosodic shape associated with a particular sequential fit will permit generalizations about prosodic contextualization.

4. A Case Study: Contextualizing the Reason for One's Call

In order to make these rather abstract observations somewhat more concrete, I will now demonstrate my approach and methodology with a case study from English conversational discourse. The following analysis is based on approximately four hours of talk from a local radio phone-in program recorded in Berkeley, California, during the Gulf War crisis in 1991. The recordings were made shortly after the first bombings in Iraq, at a time when numerous peace protests and rallies were taking place in Berkeley, some of which had erupted into violence. The studio lines were open for callers to phone in in order to — as the anchorman Leo Laporte puts it — “talk about what’s going on overseas and ... in the Bay area ... and give people a chance to express their feelings and their fears and ‘move on’”.

There are two questions that we need to ask when examining prosody in interactional discourse. First, what are the tasks which participants must accomplish in the type of speech event at hand? And second, what contribution, if any, does prosody make in the accomplishment of these tasks? I will address these two questions, in this order, with respect to my data, which involves multiple instances of a speech event that might be named — for want of a better term — *calling in on a radio phone-in program*.

4.1 Task: Establishing the Reason for the Call

In telephone communication, as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have shown, one of the concerns of the initiating caller is to establish why one is calling. Making a phone call is not a random activity, nor is it usually purposeless. Callers have routine ways of letting their interlocutors know why they have called. This may be done explicitly: “The reason I’m calling is...”, “I’m calling to ...” or more implicitly by sequential positioning. In the latter case the reason for the call will be recognized by the position of some mentionable in a particular slot: typically the crucial slot will be closer to the beginning of the conversation than to its end, although in situations requiring delicacy, the reason for one’s call may be postponed until rather late in the conversation.

On radio the medium constrains both time and topic to a much greater extent than in private telephone conversations. Callers on the radio will be observed to state their reason for calling very early in the call. On the radio program in question this means (typically) immediately following an initial exchange of greetings, at a position which Schegloff (1986) aptly labels *anchor position*. To take some prototypical examples (anchor position is marked by an arrow in each case):¹

(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

LL:	Franklin
	uh you’re next on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
	from San Raphael
F:	hello
LL:	hi Franklin
F:	hi
==>	uh first I wanna say that uh
	I’m one of the protesters and (.)
	I wanna say right up front that uhm (.)

¹ In the following transcripts, one line within the turn of a single speaker stands roughly for one intonation phrase. Intonation phrase boundaries have been identified according to the principles set forth in Couper-Kuhlen 1986.

I support (.)
the soldiers over there

(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

LL: Bob
you're on the Giant sixty eight
thanks for calling
B: hi Leo
LL: hi Bob
B: uhm
=> I wanted to say something about uh
a couple of things about uhm
the war
our attack on uh
Irak
uhm a lot of people are saying it's about oil
I think it's about uhm
freedom

(3) Joseph (15B,1.09.32)

LL: Joseph
on the line from Menlo Park
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
I'm Leo Laporte
hi Joseph
J: hello (.)
=> uh I had a comment on: the:
things that you were saying about uh
protesting
about supporting the people who were over there

(4) Marie (16A, 8.52)

LL: Marie on the line from Pacifica
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
thanks for calling Marie
M: hi Leo
LL: hi
=> M: uhm I just had a comment about the: uhm

protesters
and I think
I would rather last night have thought of ourselves as
demonstrators
as one of the people among the ten thousand

(5) Julie (17B, 1.15.31)

LL: Julie on the line from Pleasanton
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
J: hi Leo
LL: hi Julie
==> J: I'm calling because I have
a really nice friend
real nice friend
in Israel
and (.) I'm sure lots of other people have friends (.)
not (.) here

Notice that with the exception of (5), these callers announce that they want to say something or make a comment on some aspect of the Gulf War crisis. The caller in (5) appears to have a slightly different reason: after introducing her friend in Israel, she announces that her call is intended to let his parents know that she is thinking of him. Yet in all five cases the callers' announcement of the reason for their phoning in is initiated in a turn immediately subsequent to an exchange of greetings with the anchorman.

On other occasions, the point the caller wishes to make is introduced after a foreshortened greeting sequence, e.g. as in (6) after a single greeting token by the caller:

(6) Patricia (17B, 1.12.08)

LL: Patricia on the line from San Jose
thanks for holding on Patricia
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
P: yeah hi
==> I was wondering if it could be possible
that China had a secret alliance with Mr Hussein

and they could come and attack (.) us
while we're busy over there in the Gulf

Here Patricia does not name the action that her call is intended to carry out; instead she describes her thoughts about an aspect of the crisis. We hear this in the context of the radio phone-in program in question as an implicit way of eliciting commentary on these thoughts from the anchorman and from later callers.

Finally, greetings are sometimes foregone altogether by anchorman and caller, with the caller proceeding immediately to the reason for the call:

(7) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

LL: Karen on the line from Newark
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
K: uhm
==> I just want to talk about the:
protesters
and:: uh
a litte bit in terms of how we got here
one- one of the things I'd like to-

How do we know that all the arrowed turns are indeed introducing the callers' reason for calling? First, there is internal evidence: some reasons are explicitly marked with *I'm calling because...*(5) or they are tagged as *a comment* (3), (4) or *something to say* (2). If there are several reasons (*a couple of things*) (2), they may be enumerated, e.g. with *first* as in (1). All of these devices suggest prior planning with respect to what the caller's contribution is intended to be. Second, there is evidence in the moderator's behavior: Leo Laporte treats these turns as requiring extended talk. In other words, he does not come in at the first possible syntactic or prosodic completion point in callers' turns but instead routinely holds off with a recipient response until callers have made a recognizably full statement of their concern. In (4), for instance, there is a transition relevance place (TRP) after *protesters* and after *demonstraters*: speakers have reached a point of possible syntactic

completion (the talk so far could stand alone) which coincides with a point of possible prosodic completion (final pitch falling to low). Yet despite the fact that a speaker transition could occur here, Leo does not take up the floor. Similarly, in (5) there is a TRP following *Israel* and in (7) one following *protesters*, all of which are passed up by the anchorman.

Leo's withholding of talk in these cases is systematic. Yet it is not automatic or ubiquitous. In fact, there is another set of cases in which Leo *does* come in at the first possible completion point in the caller's anchor-position turn:

(8) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- LL: Mike on the line from Walnut Creek
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
hi Mike
- M: oh hi there
- ==> I have a little something to say about the: uh
protests that are taking place
- ==> LL: okay
- M: uhm I kind of feel that uh
if people
I think there're a lot of reasonable people out there
who want to uh
support peace

(9) Noel (16A, 41.51)

- LL: Noel on the line from San Carlos
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
I'm Leo Laporte
- ==> N: yeah I have a question for you
- ==> LL: sure
- N: uhm (.)
if the thing in the-
the war in the gulf
continues to grow uhm
are they gonna (.)
start the draft or

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

- LL: Dustin on the line from Antioch
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
- D: hh you got me
- LL: got you Dustin
- D: how you doing Leo
- LL: thanks for calling
 good
- ==> D: uh I've got an opinion question for you
- ==> LL: alright
- D: is-
 Sa- Saddam Hussein(.)
 is he- is he playing naive
 or is he just stupid

In these cases callers are not heard as having made a recognizably full statement of their concern (the reason for their call). Instead, they are heard as engaging in a so-called 'preliminary' or 'pre' (Schegloff 1979) — a type of turn which prefigures some specific (often delicate) activity such as inviting or requesting and invites collaboration in carrying it out. 'Pre's' serve to test the ground for the projected activity. Where problems are encountered, the activity in question can be modified, rerouted or abandoned altogether (Levinson 1983:345ff). In the cases at hand, we might say the activity of *saying something about the protests*, *asking a question* or *asking an opinion question* is being projected. Callers' anchor-position turn names the upcoming activity and seeks ratification of this activity from the anchorman before it is carried out.² This may be motivated in the first case by the delicacy of the topic involved (the peace protests were very controversial) or in the latter cases by the non-standard nature of the activity — statements of opinion rather than questions being the norm on this

2 Since Mike's next turn in (8) does not yet introduce the *little something* he wants to say, it too is a preliminary, thus rendering his earlier turn *I have a little something to say...* a 'preliminary to a preliminary' or a 'pre-pre' (Schegloff 1980).

radio phone-in.

To sum up the discussion so far, we have identified two tasks which callers need or may need to accomplish on this radio phone-in program. First, they need to make clear early in the conversation why they are calling — i.e. they must state what their opinion, belief or feeling is. And second — when their reason for calling departs from the non-controversial or the routine — they may need to secure prior ratification from the anchorman before stating a controversial opinion or asking a question.

Notice now that it is not always immediately obvious from the way a turn is phrased whether it is stating the reason for the call itself or requesting a go-ahead before doing so. This can be seen by comparing, e.g., example (7) *I just want to talk about the: protesters* with example (8) *I have a little something to say about the: uh protests that are taking place*. Verbally there is nothing to signal that (7) is introducing the caller's reason itself, while (8) is merely a preliminary to the introduction of the reason.³ Yet the anchorman treats these two turn-constructural units differently, thereby demonstrating that he interprets their status differently. How can these differing interpretations be accounted for?

One possible hypothesis is that there is something about the prosodic configuration of the turns at anchor position which cues different interpretations. To test this hypothesis, we must look for one or more prosodic features which might distinguish the two sets of data.

4.2 Prosody's Contribution: High vs. Non-high Onset

If we examine the prosodic configuration of the caller's first TCU in anchor position in (7) — *I just want to talk about the: protesters* — we notice that it ends in falling pitch. The next TCU — *and: uh*

³ It is true that in (7) the caller's topic introduction is preceded by *uhm*, whereas in (8) it is not. Yet this does not seem to be a systematic cue, since not all reasons-for-the-call have a hesitation particle: see (5) and (6), nor do all 'pre's' lack them: see (9) and (10).

a little bit in terms of how we got here, which extends the turn — also ends in a fall. I will represent both these falls with a period and following DuBois, Schuetze-Coburn, Paolino and Cumming (1993), speak of ‘period intonation’:

(7) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

- LL: Karen on the line from Newark
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 K: uhm
 I just want to talk about the:
 ==> protesters.
 and:: uh
 ==> a litte bit in terms of how we got here.
 one- one of the things I'd like to-

The anchor-position TCU in (8), on the other hand, *I have a little something to say about the: uh protests that are taking place*, ends with a kind of non-falling pitch which I shall represent with a comma and call ‘comma intonation’:

(8) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- LL: Mike on the line from Walnut Creek
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 hi Mike
 M: oh hi there
 I have a little something to say about the: uh
 ==> protests that are taking place,
 LL: okay
 M: uhm I kind of feel that uh
 if people
 I think there're a lot of reasonable people out there
 who want to uh
 support peace

Prima facie it may appear to be Mike's non-falling intonation which invites the anchorman to come in and signals the preliminary status of his turn. This hypothesis is initially confirmed by the

following case:

(11) Erica (15B, 1.11.21)

- LL: Erica on the line from Alameda
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 E: hi
 I was just calling up to uh
 ==> talk about the protesters?
 ==> LL: okay

Erica uses high rising intonation at the end of her anchoring position turn, which I am representing with a question mark and calling 'question-mark intonation'. Like comma intonation, this is a non-falling pitch contour, and it could be argued that it is what elicits an immediate response from the recipient.

Yet, although preliminaries to the reason for the call *may* be configured with comma or question-mark intonation, it is by no means the case that they always are. This can be seen from examples (9) and (10), both of which have falling intonation and are treated as 'pre's':

(9) Noel (16A, 41.51)

- LL: Noel on the line from San Carlos
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 I'm Leo Laporte
 ==> N: yeah I have a question for you.
 ==> LL: sure
 N: uhm (.)
 if the thing in the-
 the war in the gulf
 continues to grow uhm
 are they gonna (.)
 start the draft or

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

- LL: Dustin on the line from Antioch
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
- D: hh you got me
- LL: got you Dustin
- D: how you doing Leo
- LL: thanks for calling
 good
- ==> D: uh I've got an opinion question for you.
- ==> LL: alright
- D: is-
 Sa- Saddam Hussein(.)
 is he- is he playing naive
 or is he just stupid

Since final falling intonation is also encountered in TCUs which receive up-take from the anchorman, as here, it does not seem possible to associate a single type of terminal pitch contour with preliminary status.⁴

Further counter-evidence is provided by instances in which a non-falling terminal pitch contour is used but the anchor-position turn is not treated as a 'pre'. For instance:

(12) Sherry (15B, 1.30.35)

- LL: Sherry on the line from San Francisco
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
- Sh: (thanks ??)
 uh this is Sherry
- LL: [hi Sherry
- Sh: [I was calling about uhm
 you know I just feel that we applaud

⁴ Final falling pitch is found not only with preliminaries of the form 'I have a question/opinion question for you' but also e.g. with the preliminary 'I'd like to take a step to (=state an opinion on, EC-K) the invasion here'. Therefore, the pitch fall cannot be accounted for by the form of the TCU in (9) and (10) alone.

- ==> in this country we applaud Eastern Europe,
and- and their: uh
- ==> coming out in great numbers,
and changing their government,

Here Sherry uses a series of rising pitch peaks at the end of her turn-constructural units, yet Leo does not come in at these points. Despite the comma intonation, he treats these as part of Sherry's as yet incomplete reason-for-the-call turn. Therefore, final pitch movement at the end of the caller's first turn-constructural unit in anchor position must be excluded as a possible contextualization cue for the distinction between a reason for the call and a preliminary to the reason for the call.

Rather than pitch at the *end* of callers' first turn-constructural unit in anchor position, I would like to argue that it is pitch at the *beginning* of this turn-constructural unit which is a more reliable cue to the way callers display their turn and the way it is treated by the anchorman. By pitch at the beginning of a TCU I mean specifically the height of the onset, or first stressed syllable, in the first intonation phrase of a caller's turn-constructural unit. In fact, in each of the first seven examples the caller's onset at anchor position is noticeably higher than in prior TCUs. I have represented this by placing an upwards arrow before the first stressed syllable in question:

(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

- LL: Franklin
uh you're next on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
from San Raphael
- F: hello
- LL: hi Franklin
- F: hi
- ==> uh ↑first I wanna say that uh
I'm one of the protesters and (.)
I wanna say right up front that uhm (.)
I support (.)
the soldiers over there

(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

LL: Bob
 you're on the Giant sixty eight
 thanks for calling
 B: hi Leo
 LL: hi Bob
 B: uhm
 ==> I † wanted to say something about uh
 a couple of things about uhm
 the war
 our attack on uh
 Irak
 uhm a lot of people are saying it's about oil
 I think it's about uhm
 freedom

(3) Joseph (15B, 1.09.32)

LL: Joseph
 on the line from Menlo Park
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 I'm Leo Laporte
 hi Joseph
 J: hello
 ==> uh I † had: a comment on (.) the:
 things that you were saying about uh
 protesting
 about supporting the people who were over there

(4) Marie (16A, 8.52)

LL: Marie on the line from Pacifica
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 thanks for calling Marie
 M: hi Leo
 LL: hi
 ==> M: uhm † I just had a comment about the: uhm
 protesters
 and I think

I would rather last night have thought of ourselves as
 demonstrators
 as one of the people among the ten thousand

(5) Julie (17B, 1.15.31)

LL: Julie on the line from Pleasanton
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 J: hi Leo
 LL: hi Julie
 ==> J: ↑I'm calling because I have
 a really nice friend
 real nice friend
 in Israel
 and (.)
 I'm sure lots of other people have friends (.)
 not (.) here

(6) Patricia (17B, 1.12.08)

LL: Patricia on the line from San Jose
 thanks for holding on Patricia
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 P: yeah hi
 ==> ↑I was wondering if it could be possible
 that China had a secret alliance with Mr Hussein
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(7) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

LL: Karen on the line from Newark
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 K: uhm
 ==> ↑I just want to talk about the:
 protesters
 and:: uh
 a litte bit in terms of how we got here
 one- one of the things I'd like to-

If we examine an acoustic analysis of pitch in these examples, we find that the height of the first stressed syllable in callers' turns is routinely higher than that of prior stressed syllables. For instance, consider the f_0 track at the beginning of Franklin's anchor-position turn in example (1): see Figure 1 in the Appendix. Franklin's pitch on the syllable *first* is approximately 80 Hz higher than that on his *hi* in prior talk. Likewise, Bob's pitch in example (2) on *wanted* is approximately 100 Hz higher than that on his *hi*: see Figure 2 in the Appendix.⁵ Similar patterns are found in the other cases.

By contrast, the onsets in the anchor-position turns which are treated as pre's by the anchorman are *not* higher than prior onsets by the same speaker. An acoustic analysis of pitch in these examples reveals no appreciable increase in fundamental frequency on the first stressed syllable of caller's TCU as compared to prior onsets. Consider, for instance, the f_0 track for Mike's anchor-position turn in example (8): Figure 3 in the Appendix. The fundamental frequency on Mike's *I* in *I have a little something t'say* is not higher than that on his *hi*. The same holds for Dustin's onset in the anchor-position turn of (10): see Figure 4 in the Appendix. There is no appreciable increase in fundamental frequency on *I got* in *I got an opinion question for you*, compared to the onset on *doin'* in *how'r'ya doin' man*.

There is thus initial evidence that the height of the onset at the beginning of a turn-constructural unit in this particular sequential position and in this particular kind of speech event may be cueing the status which callers are giving their current turn-at-talk. High onset relative to a prior onset by same speaker appears to format the turn in such a way that it is treated by recipient as the reason for the call.

Corroborating evidence for this hypothesis will be found in the prosodic configuration of these callers' turns following the anchorman's ratification of the 'pre':

⁵ The pitch tracks in the Appendix are raw fundamental frequency curves obtained via pitch extraction using X-waves software.

(8') Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- LL: Mike on the line from Walnut Creek
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
hi Mike
- M: oh hi there
I have a little something to say about the: uh
protests that are taking place
- LL: okay
- ==> M: uhm ! I kind of feel that uh
if people
I think there're a lot of reasonable people out there
who want to uh
support peace

(9') Noel (16A, 41.51)

- LL: Noel on the line from San Carlos
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
I'm Leo Laporte
- N: yeah I have a question for you
- LL: sure
- N: uhm (.)
- ==> if the ↑thing in the-
the war in the gulf
continues to grow uhm
are they gonna (.)
start the draft or

(10') Dustin (16B, 51.11)

- LL: Dustin on the line from Antioch
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
- D: hh you got me
- LL: got you Dustin
- D: how you doing Leo
- LL: thanks for calling
good
- D: uh I've got an opinion question for you
- LL: alright
- D: is-

Sa- Sad 1 dam Hussein(.)
 is he- is he playing naive
 or is he just stupid

Following these 'pre's', once Leo has signalled that callers may proceed, next turns are configured with a high onset. We can see this clearly, for instance, in the f_0 track of the arrowed turn in (8') compared to the anchor-position turn: Figure 5 in the Appendix. Mike's pitch on *I kinda* is approximately 60 Hz higher than that on his *I have a little...*

Based on the data examined so far then, *lack* of high onset appears to cue a TCU which is preliminary to callers' introduction of the reason for their call. Yet there is a further set of cases in which callers' anchor-position turns lack high onset but are not 'pre's' in the strict sense. For instance:

(13) Theresa (15A, 45.38)

LL: Theresa's been hanging on from El Granada
 Theresa thanks
 you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
 Th: hi Leo
 LL: hi Theresa
 ==> Th: I'm a first-time caller
 LL: glad you called
 Th: uhm
 1I'm kind of unhappy
 because I don't feel the media
 is accurately reflecting
 the feelings of most people
 regarding this Persian Gulf conflict

Examining the acoustic analysis of this exchange, we see that Theresa's pitch on *I'm* in *I'm a first-time caller* is approximately 50 Hz lower than that on her *hi*: Figure 6 in the Appendix. Yet her anchor-position turn is not a pre in the sense described above: it is not prefiguring some upcoming delicate activity. On the other hand, it is not delivering her reason for the call either. The point of

Theresa's call is not introduced until somewhat later, when it is cued — appropriately — with high onset: *I'm kind of unhappy because I don't feel the media....* Theresa's turn *I'm a first-time caller* might then be thought of as an aside: it provides the anchorman with background information which will be important for the way he handles her call. For this reason it must be introduced as early as possible in the call, before proceeding to business. It is thus the special nature of the turn in question which warrants its sequential location and accounts for a prosodic format which — because high onset is noticeably avoided — tags the turn as *not* introducing the caller's reason for calling.

A related phenomenon is encountered in the following call:

(14) Debbie (16A, 23.47)

LL: Debbie on the line from San Jose
you're on the Giant sixty eight K N B R
I'm Leo Laporte

D: hi Leo

LL: hi Debby

D: uhm

==> gee that guy I just listened to
that really really upsets me [uhm

LL: [why

D: well the †reason why I called is
I was uh
in San Jose on Monday
downtown at the- the: uh
demonstration that was going on then
and it- was such a different feeling
than from what I'm seeing these last few days
it was so peaceful

In the arrowed turn Debby refers to an immediately prior, on-the-spot report from an anti-war demonstration, in which the reporter has described how he is boxed in by demonstrators and policemen with tear gas. This turn is designed with non-high onset and is also hearable as an aside. Debbie's real reason for calling is delayed, but when it comes, it is marked with high onset: *well the*

reason why I called is... Both Theresa and Debby thus use prosody, specifically the *absence* of high onset, as a means to cue their turns as *not* being the reason for their calls.

In Debby's case, prosody serves as a resource for another task which callers sometimes find themselves confronted with, when the contingent 'now' of radio phone-in talk imposes a new and immediately relevant mentionable which takes priority over other, planned mentionables. The dilemma which callers then find themselves in is nicely expressed by Mark in the following call:

(15) Mark (16A, 4.23)

LL: Mark on the line
from Martinez
you're next on the Giant sixty eight

M: uh how you doing Leo

LL: thanks for hanging on

M: yeah uhm

==> you know its funny
when you listen to you
y- you come on with uh one thought
and then you listen to all the people calling
and it changes what you're gonna say but
(...)

M: yeah well y-
but the reason I called is that I think-
that uh th- the protests that are going on
I think it's great
I think it's a part of America
they can go out there and do that

Significantly, Mark's deployment of onset height here is another instance of the methodical use of prosody which we are claiming is routine in this kind of interactional discourse. Like Debby in (14), he configures the immediately relevant mentionable as an aside and the planned mentionable as the reason for his call. In a wider sense then, prosody serves these callers as a resource for marking the difference between an official reason for the call and

an unofficial mentionable which requires preemptive treatment in talk.

5. Conclusion

I have tried to isolate a number of distinct tasks which callers are confronted with during calls to this radio phone-in program. These include (i) stating the planned mentionable or reason for one's call, (ii) prefiguring or projecting what kind of mentionable has been planned, and (iii) making an aside to provide background information relevant to the call or to deal with some more immediate issue which has just arisen. We can show that the first task is different from the second and third because it has a different sequential development: the anchorman withholds talk until a recognizably full statement of the caller's concern has been made in the first case, whereas in the second and third, he comes in immediately after the first TCU.

I have then argued that the prosodic configuration of turns in set one is methodically different from that of turns in sets two and three. In set one, the turn introducing the reason for the call has high onset, in sets two and three the turn initiating a pre or an aside lacks high onset. Finally, I have argued that this pattern is not coincidental but that speakers are deploying onset height as a resource for cueing the interpretation of their turns at talk.

Recognizing the importance of onset height as a prosodic contextualization cue represents somewhat of a departure from traditional studies of intonation, where attention has tended to focus on final pitch movement. I do not mean to imply that the way intonation phrases end is irrelevant but merely that the way they begin may be relevant too. The present study suggests that in certain discourse contexts, onset level may be the more telling of the two types of pitch cue. But in other contexts, we must be prepared for the fact that it may be negligible.

The above case study can be thought of as an exercise in interactional prosodic analysis. In addition to describing a recurrent prosodic practice on the part of callers to this radio phone-in, it

demonstrates a methodology which is transferable to a study of other phone-ins and indeed of other speech events. Because of this, it should help us come to a better understanding of the workings of prosody in interactional discourse. Moreover, because the methodology can be readily adapted to the study of any language, it promises to produce valuable cross-linguistic insights.

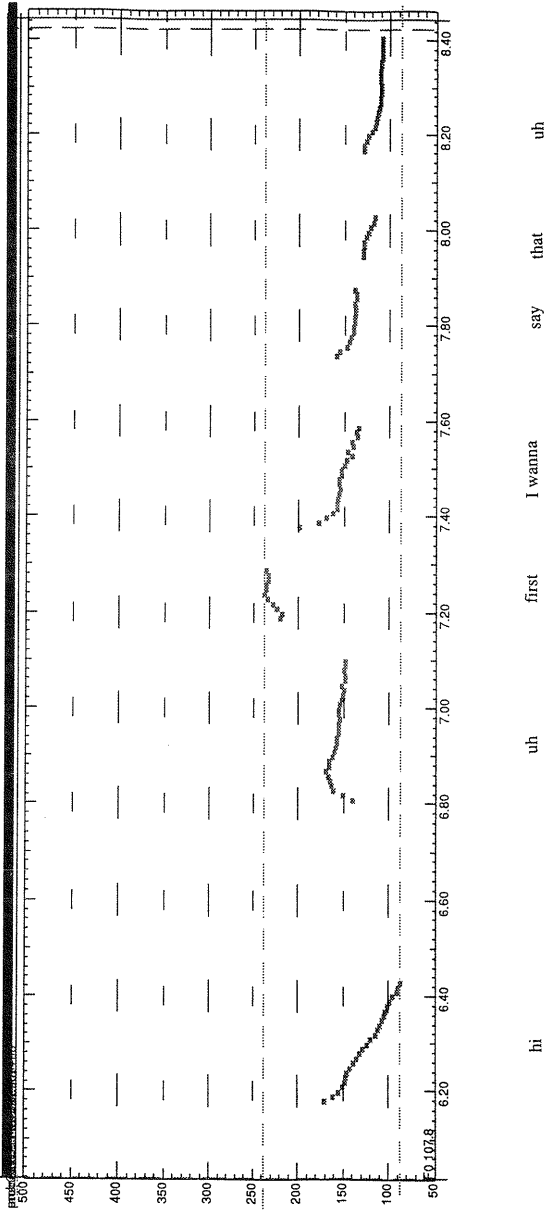
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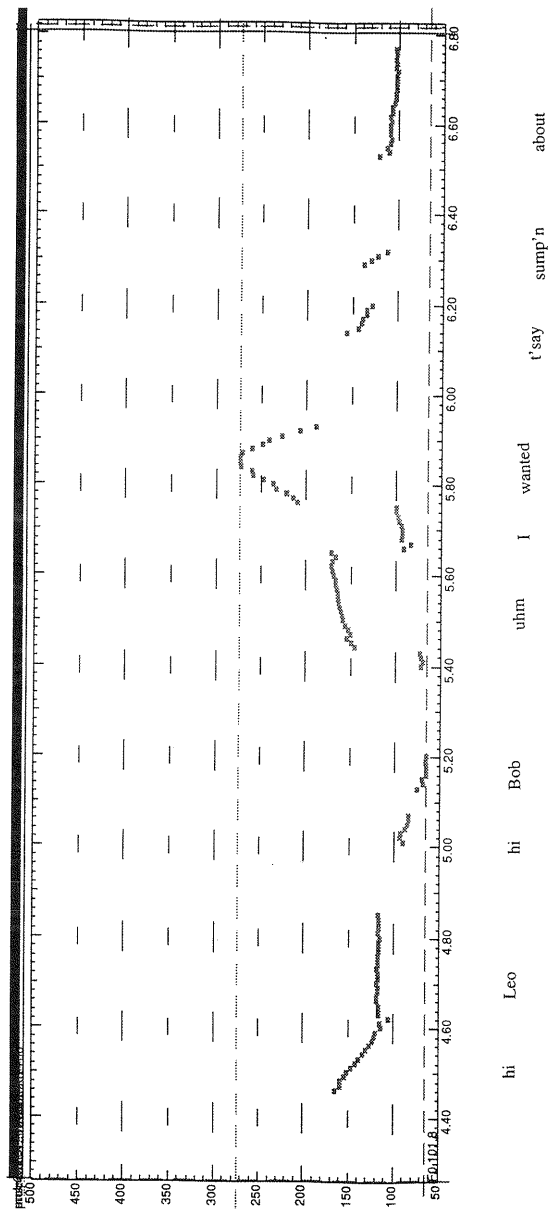
Appendix



(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

F: hi first I wanna say that uh

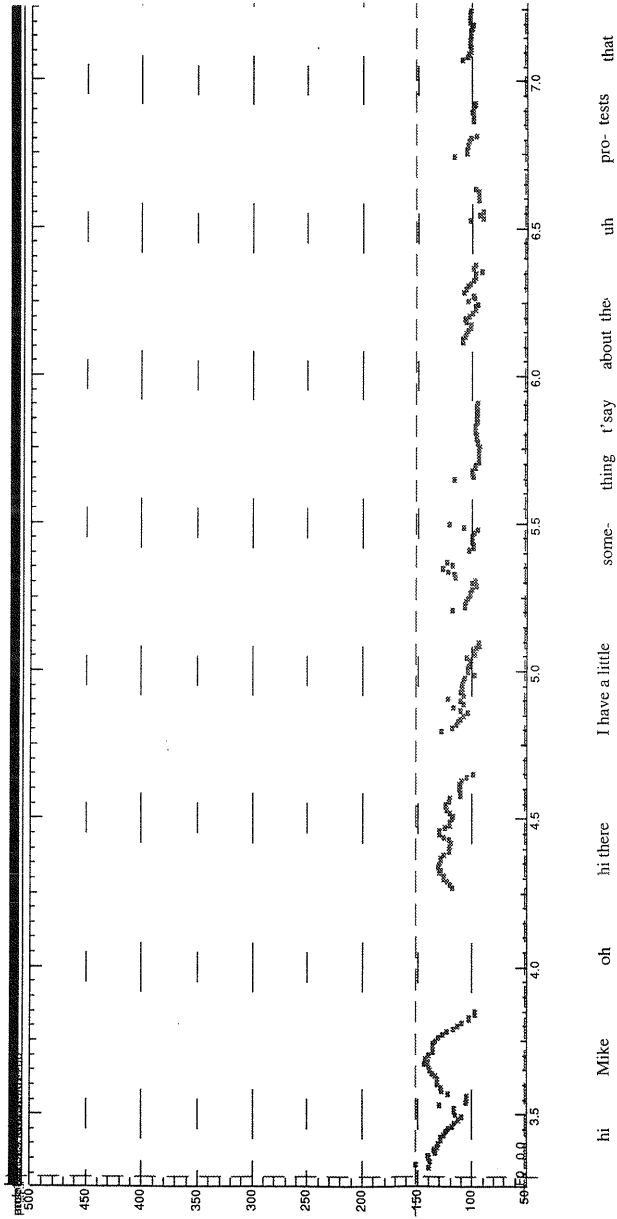
Figure 1



(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

B: hi Leo
LL: hi Bob
B: uhm
I wanted to say something about uh

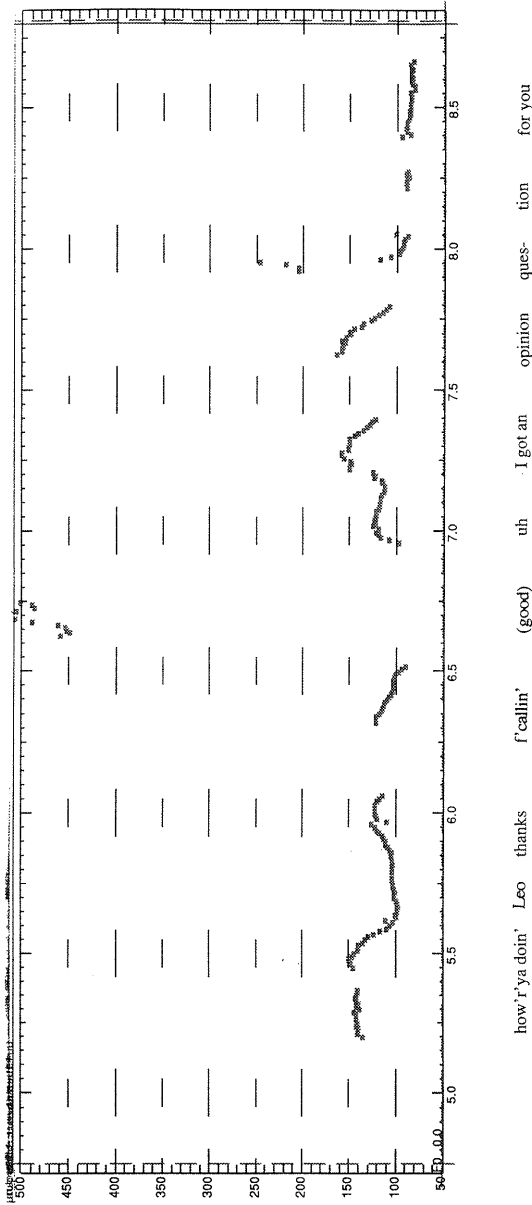
Figure 2



(8) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

LL: hi Mike
oh hi there
M: I have a little something to say about the: uh
protests that are taking place

Figure 3

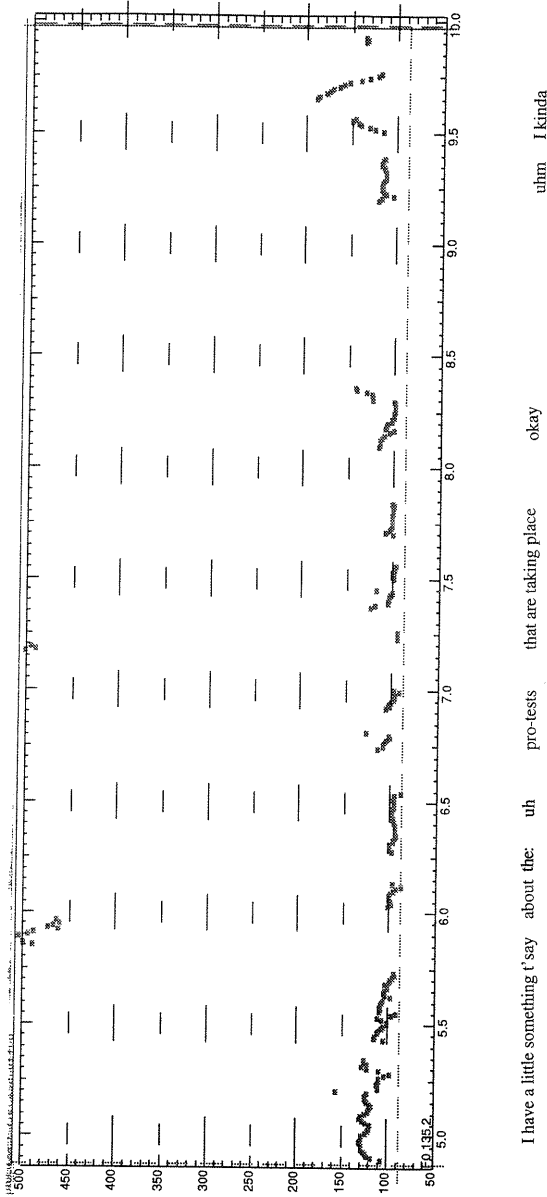


how 'r'ya doin' Leo thanks f'callin' (good) th I got an opinion ques- tion for you

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

- D: how you doing Leo
- LL: thanks for calling
- good
- D: uh I've got an opinion question for you

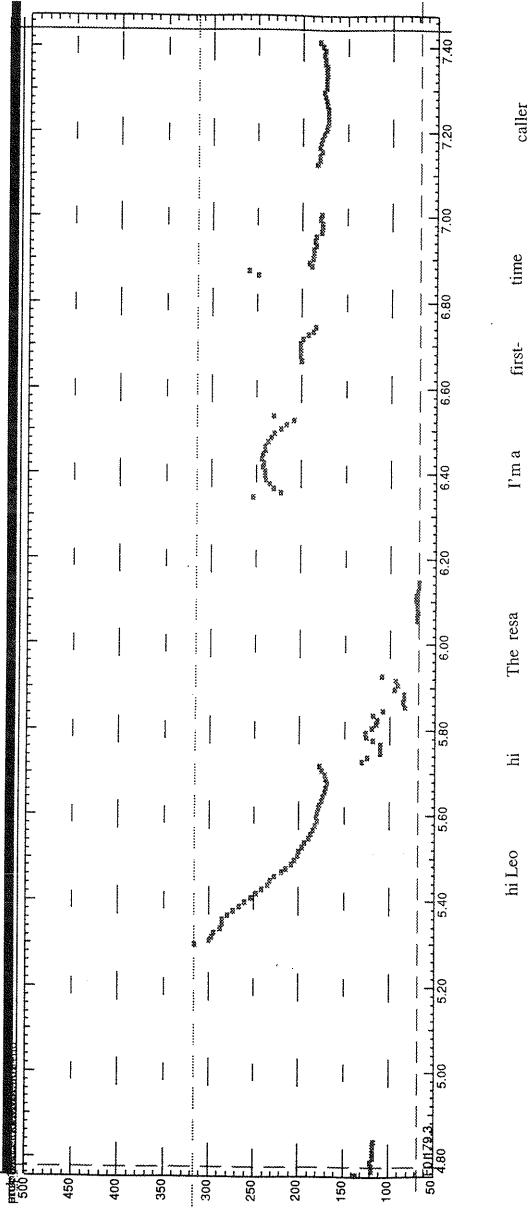
Figure 4



(8') Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- M: I have a little something to say about the: uh
- protests that are taking place
- LL: okay
- M: uhm I kind of feel that uh

Figure 5



(13) Theresa (15A, 45.38)

Th: hi Leo
LL: hi Theresa
Th: I'm a first-time caller

Figure 6