

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/10413.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/10413.001.0001)

Prosodic Theory and Practice

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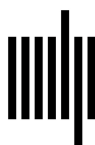
ISBN (electronic): 9780262543194

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2022

OA Funding Provided By:

OA Funding from MIT Press Direct to Open



The MIT Press

Preface and Acknowledgments

The ideas that came to shape this book arose for both its editors independently, around the same time, already several summers ago. For one of us, the spark came, for whatever reason, over rice porridge, during an otherwise agreeable breakfast at a professional meeting in a major Asian city to remain nameless. The previous day's discussions, featuring some of the most thoughtful and creative prosody scholars of our time, had focused in large part on a comparison of the ideas, assumptions, virtues, and liabilities of the main theoretical approaches to prosody in active use today. Such a discussion should have been tremendously illuminating, and yet it felt at least to one observer more like a series of missed opportunities. Meanwhile, halfway across the world, during yet another workshop, the other of us was coming to a similar set of conclusions: prosody research today is moving at breakneck speed. There is more interest now, and more activity, from researchers representing an unprecedentedly broad range of disciplines, than perhaps has ever graced a subfield of the science of speech and language. Interest comes now not just from linguistics, but also from cognitive psychology and neuroscience, from computer science, speech technology (automatic recognition and synthesis of speech), and even from the medical profession, where it is increasingly recognized as a clinically significant domain.

At the same time, gaining competence in this area can be tricky. Models of often great technical sophistication have proliferated faster than even most established researchers can claim to control comprehensively. For beginning students, or scholars from allied disciplines taking first steps in the prosody literature, the situation is more dire still. While excellent surveys of the basic questions in the field do exist, they are typically couched within, or primarily devoted to, a single theoretical framework. Furthermore, as our own recent experiences in a number of public discussions at professional meetings have driven home to us, conflicting theories are often not mutually well understood. (Indeed, the extent to which competing theories even conflict in the first place is often both far from clear, and less actively investigated than one might initially suppose.) Part of the problem seems to be that central issues, such as the nature and role of phonology within prosodic theory, are understood differently by different people, in ways that are seldom made fully explicit. Criteria for the evaluation of a model's success or failure are often similarly assumed, rather than stated, leaving talented and well-intentioned proponents of competing theories sometimes talking at cross-purposes.

What would be ideal, we felt, would be if someone were to compile, in a single published resource, compact and accessible presentations of each major approach currently influential in the realm of prosodic theory and practice (e.g., in the formation of transcription systems, corpus development, etc.). Each chapter would lay out, in its

developers' own words, that theory's central goals and assumptions, its strengths (what it does well), and also its weaknesses (what it is not able, or indeed not designed, to do). These chapters then could serve both as works of reference for established scholars and, perhaps more importantly, as tutorials for students just entering the field.

The present work was conceived with an aim of doing precisely this. In inviting contributions, we tried to represent both the most influential frameworks currently under active development, as well as certain historically significant frameworks. As the astute reader will surmise, we were not able to secure contributions representing all the theories we had hoped to include, but we believe the coverage we did achieve does justice to the diverse landscape of prosodic inquiry today.

As we describe in more detail in our introduction, each invited contributor was provided not just with a general topic and target word count, but also with a list of questions that we feel are critically in need of answers if we are to understand adequately how different research traditions relate to one another, and what their comparative strengths and weaknesses might be. Furthermore, to the extent that certain approaches represent subjects of particular ongoing controversy in the field at this moment, in a number of cases we have invited, as a complement to the main chapter, a critical commentary on the chapter written by a researcher whose views we felt might represent a particularly illuminating counterpoint to those of the frameworks' developers.

For the selection of commentators, one could imagine an editorial strategy that would seek to maximize disagreement between contributors. Indeed, this might seem in keeping with our current era of public spectacle vanquishing content, in which the loudest dispute is automatically assumed to be most entertaining, and hence also worthiest of our attention. This is not what we chose to do. Instead, in each case, we asked ourselves whose views on a given framework we would personally be most interested in. In some cases, this led us to avoid soliciting commentaries from researchers whose views on a given framework are widely known, or have already been published elsewhere. We think the result, together with, in some cases, authors' responses to their respective commentaries, is a series of exchanges that are both cordial and enlightening. They also represent the conversations we would most like to see continued as the field develops. To readers involved in one way or another with the production of this volume, it is likely clear that this chapter-commentary-response format has not resulted in the rapidest publication schedule one might have envisioned for this book. We hope most will agree, however, that it was worth the wait.

Long ago, before we even drafted a proposal for this book, we agreed that our primary reason for putting it together was just that we both really wanted to read it when it was done. We feel a great deal of satisfaction now that we are finally getting to do so, and can share that enjoyment with the broader community of prosodists as well. We are also extremely grateful to the many people that helped to make this book possible. Our deepest gratitude goes to the chapter authors and commentators, without whom this book clearly would not exist. Their patience and cooperation through the lengthy gestation process made the task of collecting all contributions a more reasonable one. Our colleagues at The MIT Press have been an important part of the process, and Bev Miller's editorial assistance in preparing a stylistically unified manuscript draft also provided a critical boost to our progress. In addition, a number of colleagues, including some of the chapter authors, provided additional advice and encouragement; we are especially grateful to Janet Pierrehumbert, Mariapaola D'Imperio, and Bob Ladd in this regard. We also thank the participants in a special session at a relatively recent Speech Prosody meeting, whose strikingly different views on what constitutes a theory of prosody galvanized us

to create this book. Finally, we wish to express our thanks to certain people who are not represented here but whom we nonetheless regard as some of the mothers and fathers of modern prosody theory, without whom none of the work described in this volume would have been possible, including Mary Beckman, Bruce Hayes, Lisa Selkirk, Marina Nespør, Irene Vogel, and Carlos Gussenhoven. Despite the formidable challenges of understanding how speech prosody works, and of formalizing and quantifying that understanding, we are inspired by multiple discussions with a wide range of prosodists over the years to believe that this knotty set of problems will yield to theoretical insight eventually. And we hope that this volume will contribute to that process.

Jonathan Barnes and Stefanie Shattuck-Hufnagel
September 2019, Greater Boston, MA

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The MIT Press would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this book. The generous work of academic experts is essential for establishing the authority and quality of our publications. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of these otherwise uncredited readers.

This book was set in Stone Serif and Stone Sans by Westchester Publishing Services.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

Names: Barnes, Jonathan, 1970– editor. | Shattuck-Hufnagel, Stefanie, editor.

Title: Prosodic theory and practice / edited by Jonathan Barnes and Stefanie Shattuck-Hufnagel.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021000764 | ISBN 9780262543170 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Prosodic analysis (Linguistics)

Classification: LCC P224 .P739 2022 | DDC 414/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021000764>