Intonation and its meaning: Beyond essential differences

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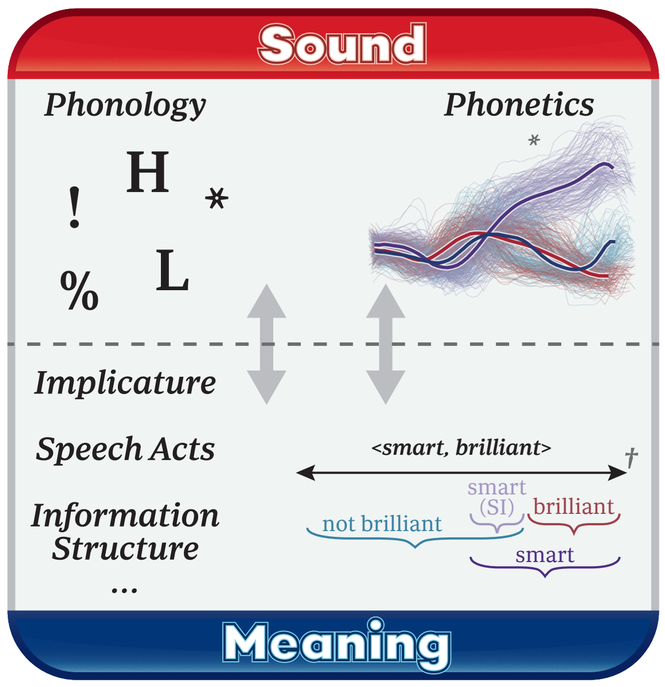
Introduction

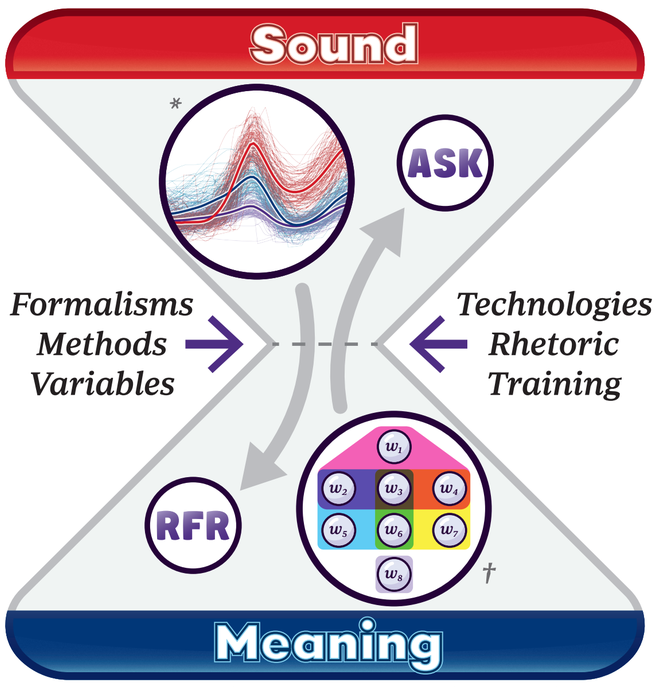
Which properties of intonational **form** encode which **meaning** distinctions? Each domain has complex theories and analytic frameworks , but with little cross-talk, researchers in one domain rely on simplified "essential" differences in the other. This fundamentally limits the development of an explanatory theory.

Take-Homes

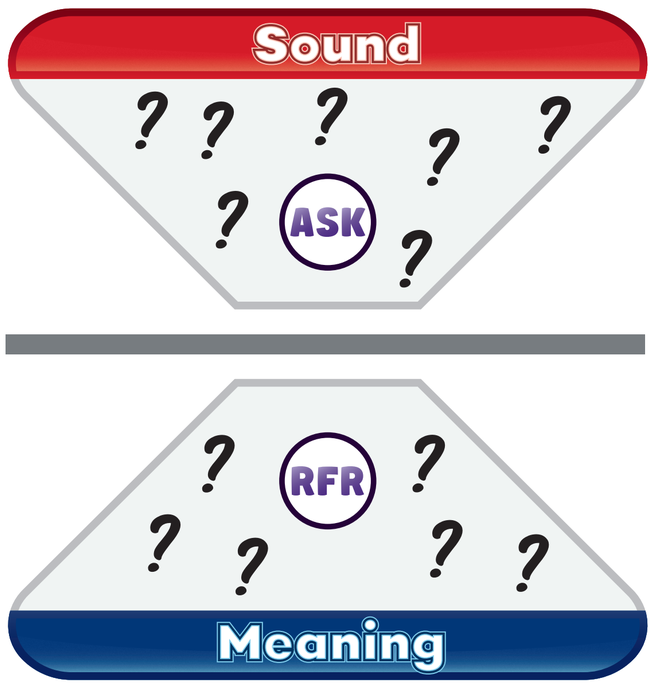
Our experiments testing pragmatic interpretation support category-level edge tone and durational form distinctions, with additional graded interpretative effects related to within-category phonetic variation. These findings are made possible by rejecting essentialism and embracing complexity in both domains.



*Iskarous, Cole, and Sostarics (2024), †Aparicio and Ronai (2023, Fig.1)



*Sostarics, Ronai, and Cole (2024), †Sæbø (2019, Fig.4)



Contrastiveness versus Intensification

(Sandberg 2024, Ph.D. Thesis)

Prosodic **prominence** is associated with **Information Structure** through the location and tonal type of pitch accent.

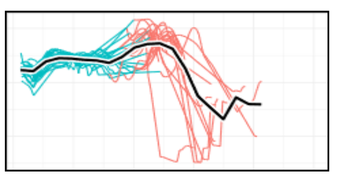
The phonetic parameters associated with accents are also linked to **Semantic Intensity**. Are these the same type of prominence?

Prosodic Prominence (accenting)	Givenness	**Lexical:** given<accessible<new **Referential:** given<bridging<unused<new
	Focus	**Types of contrast:** narrow>similarity>...>exhaustive>corrective
cued by		
Pitch, Tempo, Loudness, Voice Quality	Intensity	**Semantic:** raised gradable adjective thresholds **Expressive:** commitment, attitude, emotion

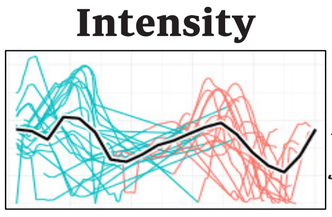
Take-away: Prominence effects on different acoustic parameters cue different kinds of pragmatically enriched meaning, distinguishing interpretations related to Information Structure vs. Intensity.

High peak, compressed prenuclear f0, post-focal deaccenting

Contrast



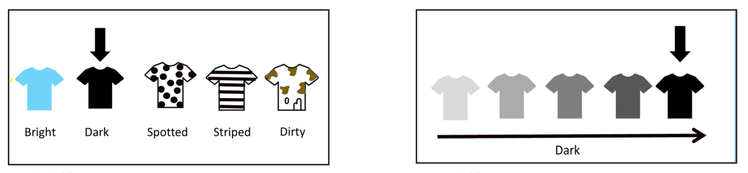
Intensity



Variable, high peak or low flat shape, no deaccenting

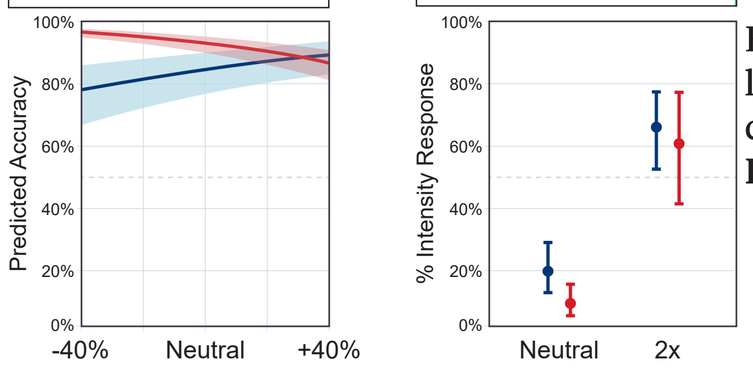
Which picture do you think the speaker was most likely looking at when they uttered this sentence?

*The shirt is **dark***



Shorter
↓
Contrast

Longer
↓
Intensity



Extreme lengthening conveys **Intensity**

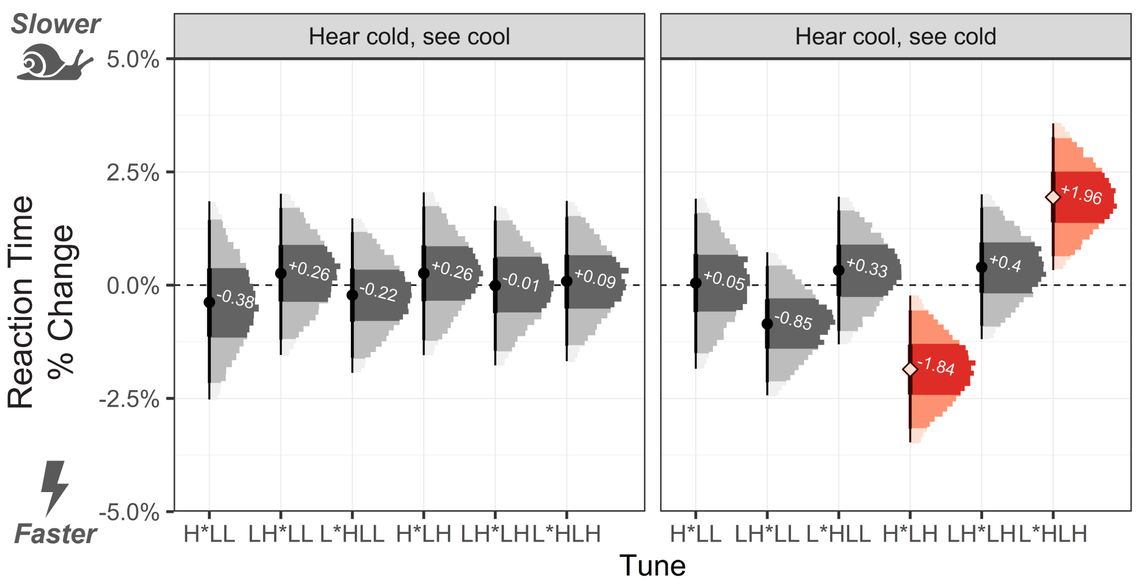
Prosodic Profile **Contrastive** **Intensity**

Rise-Fall-Rise and Scalar Inference

(Sostarics in progress, Ph.D. Thesis)

Pragmatics literature offers many competing proposals for how "the" **rise-fall-rise** tune interacts with higher alternatives. But AM theory predicts **three** RFR-shaped tunes that differ in the pitch accent used (H*, L+H*, L*+H).

Do different functions map onto different RFRs, or does a similar function hold for a broad class of RFR tune shapes? We look at RFR through the lens of **scalar inference (SI)**.



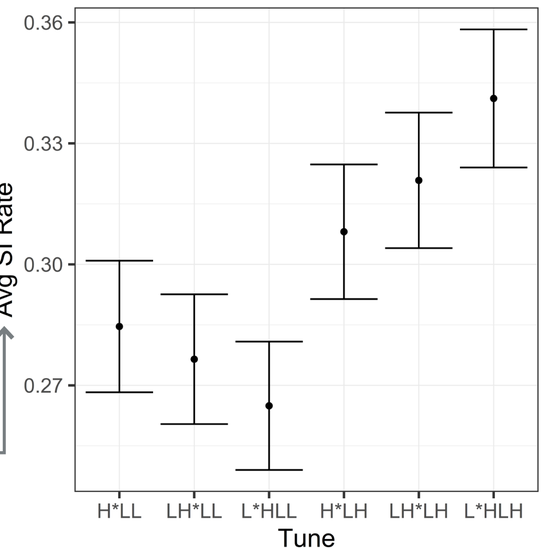
Auditory materials with varied RFR and falling contours:

Q: Did someone leave a window open in the office overnight?

A: The office feels ***cool*** *RFR*

Would you conclude that the office does not feel cold?

Yes (SI: *cool* but not *cold*)
No (SI not calculated)



Take-away: RFRs overall encourage SI calculation relative to falls, suggesting a broad class of RFRs with small graded distinctions.

In priming with lexical decsion, RFR shows an asymmetry when probing a higher (*cold*) or lower (*cool*) alternative. The RFR with the smallest pitch range shows additional facilitation for *cold*, but the RFR with the largest pitch range leads to **less** facilitation.