Teaching prosody in EAP

- This session is largely a participatory workshop. It explores the diagnosis and possible solutions for student pronunciation problems in an EAP context

- It should last about 80 minutes

TEACHING PROSODY IN EAP

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Workshop Aims

- To explore what elements of pronunciation / prosody might be most applicable in an EAP situation - student academic oral presentations
- To present a simple diagnostic tool to help identify the key prosodic elements in this context
- For you to try out the tool and offer comments
- To discuss and share possible teaching strategies to help students improve in the elements above
- To briefly discuss potential areas for further research into this area

Session Outline

- General framework and previous research in this area
- Our ideas/research in this area
- The ideas underlying the development of our diagnostic tool
- Trying out the tool – feedback
- Implications – discussion of teaching strategies and possible further research
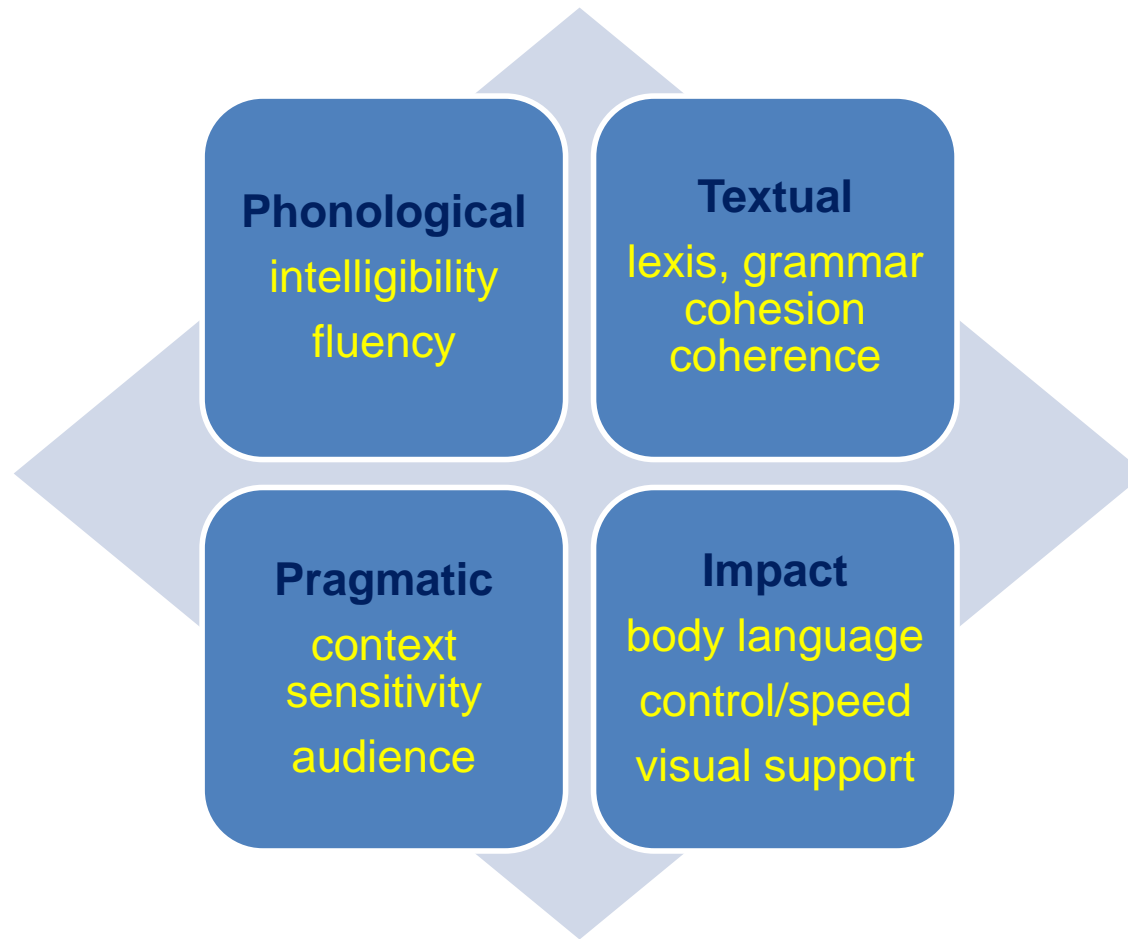
Introduction

Prosody – the patterns of intonation and stress in speech

… intonation is central to oral communication … it relates to discourse segmentation … information structure, discourse coherence and self-expression.

(Wennerstrom 2006, p.80)

But how important is prosody in helping to contribute to overall spoken academic discourse (SAD) in this context?

SAD Competencies for oral presentations

Phonological
intelligibility
fluency

Textual
lexis, grammar
cohesion
coherence

Pragmatic
context
sensitivity
audience

Impact
body language
control/speed
visual support

(adapted from Pennington 1990)

Previous research

- Chafe (2006) – differences in prosody between spoken and read aloud conference presentations
- Wennerstrom (2006) – models of spoken language and role of intonation (not specifically EAP)
- Thompson (2003) – phonological paragraphs in lectures
- British Academic Spoken English [BASE] (2005) (see BASEplus, though mainly lecture/seminar) and Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English [MICASE] (2007)
- Derwing & Munro (2009) – the impact of 'accent' on intelligibility and comprehensibility – what we might expect of our students?

The present study (1)

Research questions

- What are the crucial elements of EAP prosody that students need to develop for effective communication in academic presentations?

- How might these elements differ from those identified for effective 'general' L2 oral communication?

- [What teaching strategies might be used to develop these elements in an EAP context]?

The present study (2)

- Analysed 10 minutes of audio-visual recordings of 5 student presentations
- Variety of L1, disciplines and gender
- Different degrees of presentation effectiveness
- Constructed a basic diagnostic tool, using Gilbert´s (2008) 'Prosody Pyramid' as a basis

Initial ideas

The Prosody Pyramid
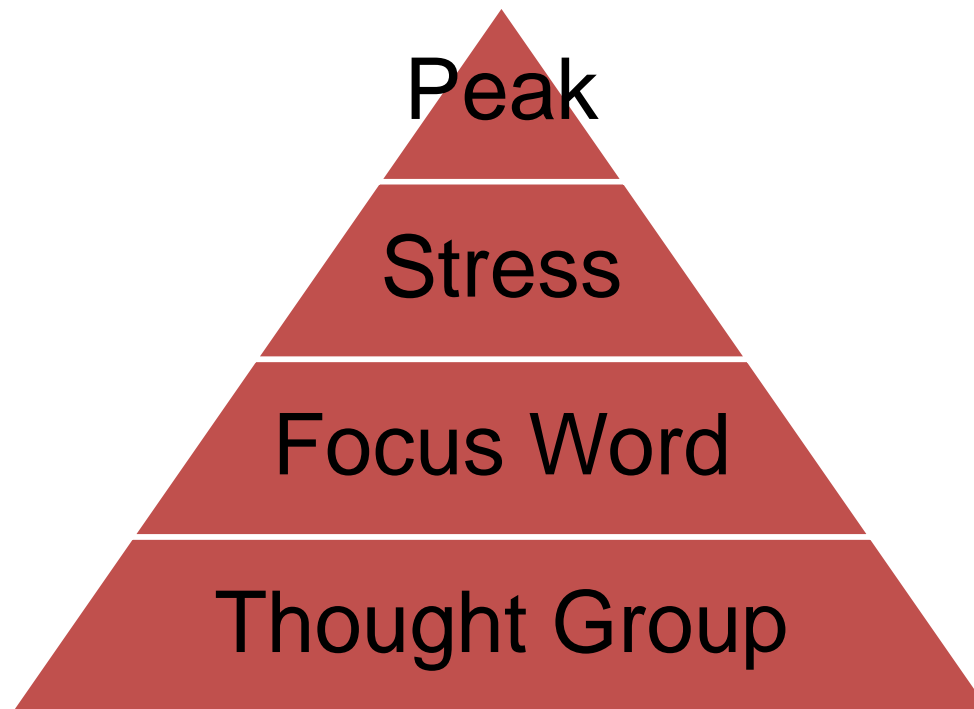
(Gilbert 2008, p. 20)

The present study (3)

Some basic premises

- Students should be <u>fluent</u> and <u>intelligible</u> to audience in this context (i.e. <u>not</u> NS norms, cf. Jenkins 2000)

- 'Accent' not included (Derwing & Munro 1990)

- 'Rhythm' as in stress-/syllable timed distinction not considered (Ling Low 2006)

Developing ideas

Spoken Academic Discourse: A scoring sheet

Presenter:_____

Topic: _____

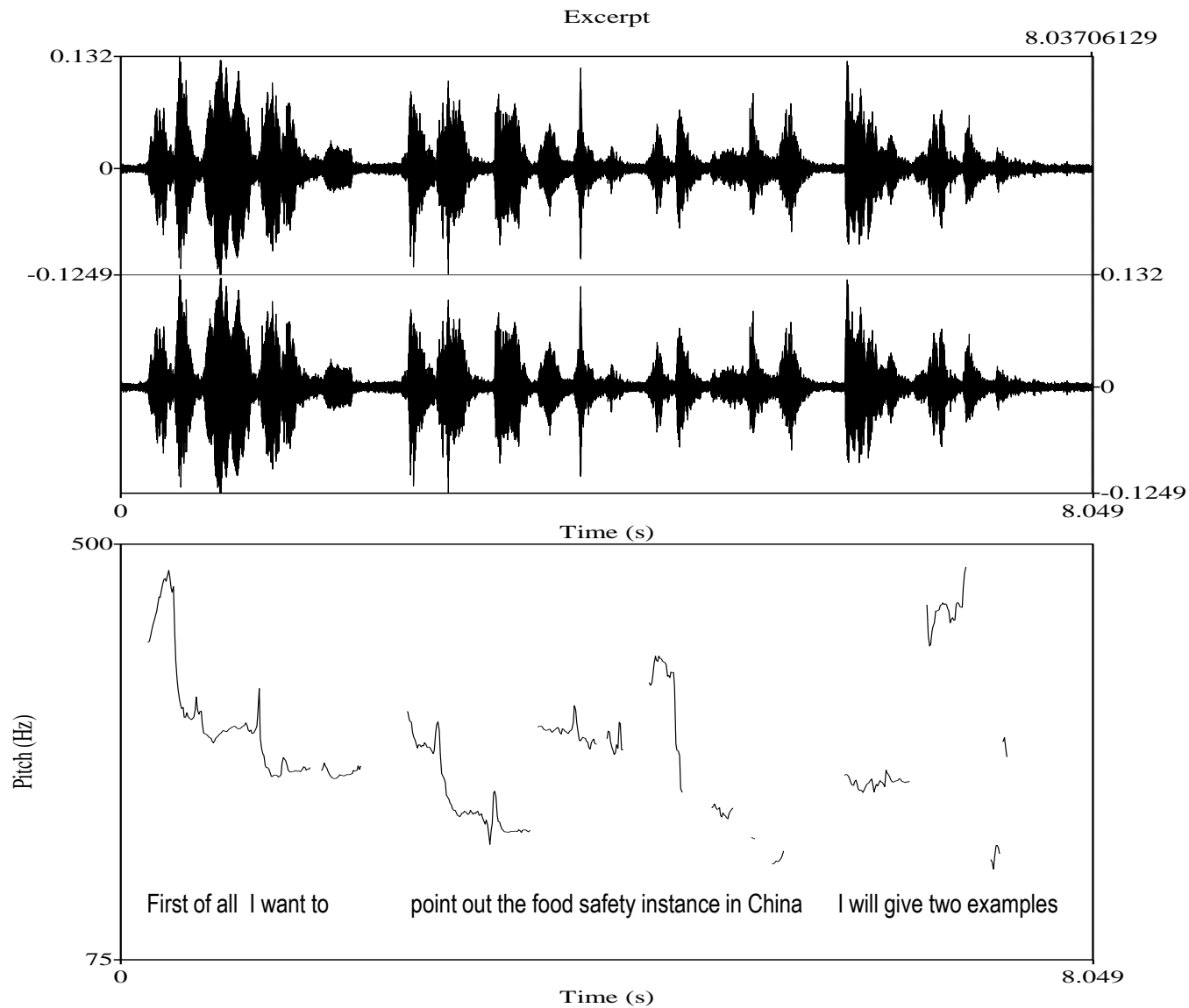**General assessment of speech**

SAD	1 (very effective)	2	3	4	5 (ineffective)
Clarity	1 (very intelligible)	2	3	4	5 (unintelligible)
Fluency	1 (very fluent)	2	3	4	5 (disfluent)
Impact	1 (very high)	2	3	4	5 (very low)

Detailed assessment of speech

Thought group marking	1 (very strong)	2	3	4	5 (very weak)
Peak syllable stress	1	2	3	4	5
Word stress	1	2	3	4	5
Rhythm	1	2	3	4	5

Prosody in action

First video extract

- Please watch the following student presentation and try to evaluate it, using the SAD scoring sheet

- Did you find it easy?
- How would you evaluate this student´s SAD phonological competence overall?

Second video extract

- Please watch the following student presentation and evaluate it, using the SAD scoring sheet

- How would you evaluate this student´s SAD phonological competence?
- Which prosodic features do you think could have helped this student deliver a more effective academic presentation?

Feedback on research tool

- Do you find the proposed research tool to be valid and reliable?

- Do you think the proposed scoring sheet does identify the most important elements of EAP prosody?

- Are there any other phonetic features you think are bound to be important in effective SAD?

Implications (1)

Teaching prosody for EAP

Having identified student weakness in specific areas:

- **What specific ideas/activities do you have/could you use to address them?**

- What general strategies might be effective?

- What kind of balance between awareness raising and practice might there be?

- To what extent might 'modelling' be employed – and how would this be carried out?

- What kind of online/independent resources might be available?

Implications (2)

Possible areas for further research into EAP prosody

- How do NS and NNS academic presenters differ in terms of prosody?
- Does EAP prosody vary by discipline?
- How far do NS and NNS tutors/audiences differ in their perception of what SAD phonological competence entails?
- To what extent do the concepts of thought groups and fluency overlap?
- How far can visual support counteract weak prosody?
- Which teaching methods seem to be most effective?

Conclusions

- Although not easy to isolate, prosody is a key component of overall SAD competencies for oral presentations.
- Communicating quite complex ideas/information in an academic presentation may require a different mix of prosodic elements from other contexts.
- The 'thought group' as a phonological concept seems a useful one in this context. However, the links between different thought groups ('prosodic cohesion') may also be important in academic contexts.
- Presented a tool - practical use in diagnosing key areas of phonological competence for student academic presentations which tries to take account of the above points
- Discussed a number of ways of helping students improve in these areas

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