Annotating prosody: design specifications for a prosodic ontology

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This contribution addresses the problem of developing an adequate ontology-based annotation system for prosody, and deals, first, with widespread annotation schemes; second, with the underlying problems of developing a prosodic ontology (following the example of the the GOLD approach to linguistic ontology development); and third, with a proposal for a prosodic ontology in the form of a semantic network rather than as a classical tree-shaped ontology.

There are several transcription and annotation schemes for prosody, the most well-known of which are the tonetic, ToBI, IntSint and SAMPROSA systems. Each of these systems represents a particular decomposition of the forms of prosody, partly into sequential autosegments (e.g. the ToBI tones), partly into parallel tiers (e.g. the ToBI tones and the break indices), partly into implicit feature bundles (e.g. tonetic specifications such as 'high-mid fall'). Occasionally functional terminology is found, such as 'call contour' or 'question intonation', transcribed with punctuation marks of various kinds, but such terminology is holistic, and does not capture prosody as such.

It is shown that a useful annotation scheme for prosody can most appropriately be based on an explicit semiotically based prosodic ontology, rather than on a purely form-based approach. The application of this semiotic approach to examples of typologically different prosodic systems is demonstrated.