

# Illocution and intonation

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Speech acts taxonomies usually cover a large number of illocutions (Austin 1962, Vanderveken 1998, Searle & Vanderveken 2009). These inventories are established based on the authors' introspective judgment or the observation of written language; it relies mainly on the presence of performative verbs or expressions. However, in oral, spontaneous language, the importance of prosody in the characterization of an illocution has been emphasized (Firenzuola 2003, Cresti 2000, Moneglia 2011, Raso in press).

Indeed, many illocutions are typically "intonational" in the sense of presenting dedicated prosodic contours, which, in the absence of other relevant factors, define the illocutionary force to be assigned to a given utterance.

Beside the prosody, syntactic features of the locutionary act, such as word order, verbal mood (the traditional declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory sentence types), the kind of propositional content (action in the future or not) as well as contextual and situational aspects – especially the position that it occupies in a dialogical exchange (Moneglia 2011, Bunt 2007) – also contribute actively to the characterization of the communicative value of a given illocution.

When considering the prosody, the relevance of the speaker's attitude in the composition of an illocutionary act is an especially important point. However, to decide whether two melodic contours should be considered phonologically and pragmatically distinct variants of expressive or merely the same illocutionary act is no simple task.

In this contribution, I will address this question, discussing if the presence of “affect prosody” – emotions, feelings, attitudes (Scherer 2003) – interferes in a decisive way in the constitution of “illocutionary prosody”, or whether they work as independent categories instead.

Based on the analysis and perception of assertive and interrogative utterances produced with different attitudes, a sharp distinction between interpersonal and propositional attitudes is suggested after their prosodic characteristics. Propositional attitudes address the propositional content of the sentence (e.g. doubt, obviousness, irony), while interpersonal ones refer to the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the receiver (e.g. politeness, irritation, arrogance). From a prosodic point of view, I argue that the melodic modifications suffered by the basic contours, when affected by interpersonal attitudes (and by emotions in a certain sense) work as an independent, orthogonal system, which can be added to any language production, whatever the speech act; they affect the melodic contour globally, and not really its phonological form, which remains the same. The crucial role played by the visual channel (mainly facial gestures) in the expression of interpersonal attitudes is also worth noting. On the other hand, the effect of propositional attitudes changes the basic configuration of the contour; they are punctual and can be located at specific points of the contour.

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