

Information Status and Pitch Prominence:  
Variation in the Prosodic Realization of *Not*-Negation in American English

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In some analyses of the prosodic aspects of negation in English, researchers have demonstrated that negative particles tend to be realized with pitch prominence (O’Shaughnessy and Allen 1983; Hirschberg 1990). They ascribe this finding to the fact that negatives convey cognitively critical focal information and thus ought to bear pitch prominence. In contrast, Schlegoff et al. (1977) point to studies of conversational speech in which negatives showing overt disagreement are avoided or downplayed, to minimize the face-threatening nature of the speech act. Yaeger-Dror (1985, 1996) argues that register is a critical variable for understanding this conflict, claiming that informational registers will support pitch prominence on negatives, while interactional registers will disfavor it. In such registers, she asserts, interactional stance affects prosodic realization: prominence should occur on negatives that express supportive statements or self-corrects, but not on negatives that express face-threatening acts. Yaeger-Dror et al. (2003) similarly contend that in “supportively interactive” situations, social concerns predominate: pitch prominence is dispreferred for remedial negatives, and even purely informative negatives tend not to be realized as prominent, whereas supportively-used negatives favor prominence. In the present study, I focus exclusively on one register, casual speech between intimates (the “supportively interactive” register), to attempt to determine which variables are most likely to support pitch prominence on *not*-negatives (hereafter NEG) in declarative sentences. I examine data from 16 30-minute telephone conversations from the HUB-5 (CALLHOME ENGLISH) corpus. All participants were native speakers of American English conversing with intimates. The digitized sound files were analyzed with the Praat software program.

I argue that prominence on NEG occurs when the speaker wishes to mark the propositional content *P* in a negative sentence (expressing  $\sim P$ ) as presupposed in the discourse model -- i.e. part of the common ground between speakers (Stalnaker 1974) – but as having been neither affirmed nor denied. Negation that is discourse-new is unlikely to favor pitch prominence, as is discourse-old negation. Certain cases, however, can be categorized as neither fully "old" nor fully "new":

1) [discussion of A looking for a roommate]

B: mm what is Ann going to do?

A: I don't know. But I know that she won't live with me because I hate John.

Here, “she won’t live with me” is clearly “new” information: A does not believe that B knows that Ann won’t live with her. What A *does* believe is that the idea “Ann will/will not live with A” is already in B’s consciousness (Chafe 1976). This idea can be best understood as a kind of open proposition -- *Ann X-will live with A* -- whose variable represents affirmation vs. denial (Ward 1985; Prince 1986) and which, A has reason to believe, is presupposed by B. Of 332 instances of NEG in the data set, 19.3% were pitch-prominent; 72% of the 43 open-presupposed tokens were pitch-prominent. Varbrul analysis shows that, contrary to previous

work, interactional stance does not significantly affect pitch prominence on NEG. Other variables (gender, age, morphological realization of NEG) are also insignificant. Information status, however, is highly significant.

KEYWORDS: prosody, negation, discourse analysis

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