

# Phonetics and social action in agreements and disagreements

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## Abstract

This paper integrates sequential, interactional and phonetic analyses to provide an account of how ‘paralinguistic’ features create meaning. The analysis is based on assessment sequences from conversation, which were analysed using the methodology of Conversation Analysis in conjunction with phonetic analysis (cf. Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996; Couper-Kuhlen and Ford 2004, and papers therein).

The analysis shows that there is a close relationship between the action conveyed in a turn and its phonetic format. Second assessment turns may be formatted lexically and syntactically as conveying agreement (such as *isn't that good news/yes it's very good news*), but given the right phonetic shape, they are treated as projecting disagreement. This highlights the significance of phonetics in participants' construction of meaning.

The phonetic resources used to convey agreement and disagreement are broadly speaking ‘paralinguistic’, because they are gradient rather than categorial, and do not relate straightforwardly to propositional content. While paralinguistic features are usually said to relate to “the speaker's current affective, attitudinal or emotional state” (Laver 1994:21), this analysis shows that linguistic forms are recurrently mapped on to the actions conveyed by turns at talk, and that the details of these forms are syntagmatically related to the design of prior turns.

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## 1. Introduction

The communicative function of many phonetic parameters, perhaps most notably intonation, has remained elusive. Phonologists, in working on meaning, have tended to concentrate on lexical meaning, while acknowledging that meaning of other kinds is conveyed through the use of

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phonetic resources such as rhythm and timing, pitch span and range, loudness, and voice quality. Some of these other dimensions of meaning are (Cruttenden, 1997:87):

1. ‘attitudinal’ or ‘affective stance’ (Ochs, 1996:41), i.e. how speakers convey their attitude towards what is being said—such as ‘incredulity’ or ‘uncertainty’—or to the person to whom it is said, such as ‘condescension’; not only the kind of stance can be indexed, but also its intensity;
2. ‘discoursal’, for instance the regulation of turn-taking, or the management of topic;
3. ‘sociolinguistic’, which indexes aspects of the speaker’s social identity such as gender, age, ethnicity or locality.

There is a substantial and growing body of research into both ‘discoursal’ (e.g. Couper-Kuhlen and Ford, 2004; Local, 2003a; Ogden, 2001) and ‘sociolinguistic’ (e.g. Docherty, 2003) dimensions of meaning. However, many of the ways in which participants in conversation index more socially constructed aspects of meaning, such as ‘attitudinal’ meaning, or affective and epistemic stance (Ochs, 1996:410), or the relation between social acts (Ochs, 1996:41) such as requests, complaints and assessments and their linguistic design, are less well understood, and provide a rich ground for those working at the prosody and pragmatics interface.

Research into phonetic aspects of non-lexical meaning is fraught with difficulties, particularly those aspects which refer to affective or attitudinal stance. One, identified by Crystal (1967) is that the terminology used to label such things as ‘speaker attitude’ can be highly subjective. What one person labels ‘energetic’ may be labelled as ‘aggressive’ by someone else: such terms have no clear empirical warrant other than the analyst’s intuition as a native speaker; the participants’ own orientation to the talk as conveying the attitude or stance labelled by the analyst is not generally considered; and there is no obvious constraint on the set of terms.

A second difficulty is the generalisability of findings. In part this arises from the multi-layered nature of talk, and the fact that many things are indexed simultaneously, and many linguistic parameters have more than one function. For instance, an expanded pitch span can signal change of topic, a return from a parenthetical remark or a change in the degree of involvement, depending on the context (Hirschberg, 2002). As work by Hirschberg and Ward (1992) also shows, changes in pitch span co-occur with other phonetic details in conveying particular kinds of activity. Such strong contextual effects rightly lead some researchers, e.g. Ladd (1996), to be wary of strong claims about the universality of ‘paralinguistic’ effects.

One recent model of paralinguistic meaning (Gussenhoven, 2004) relates factors such as pitch span and register to biologically-based codes. This approach attempts to solve the problems of labelling that crystal identified by using an experimental paradigm which pools impressionistic judgements from a number of listeners on the degree of, e.g. ‘friendliness’ or ‘confidence’ encoded in a decontextualised speech signal (which may be in a language not familiar to them). However, it is not at all clear that the scales along which participants are asked to judge are categories relevant to participants at any or all points in ongoing talk; this makes the generalisability of such findings questionable. In addition, any social context is removed in such experiments, and thereby (perhaps paradoxically) introduces a new context, and with it, different devices for the conduct of the talk (cf. Schegloff, 1991a:54ff.). As Hawkins (2003:380) writes, this is problematic:

“... we have gone too far in neglecting context: our controlled experiments in effect extol the primacy of “no obvious context”, despite the fact that most utterances are made within a context that is understood by all participants in the situation.”

A central problem for phoneticians in analysing naturally occurring talk, I suggest, is that all talk occurs within a context. Context is embedded within talk, and talk also creates context. The hard task for the prosody–pragmatics interface therefore is to elaborate our understanding of context so that we can consider the relation between linguistic structure and the construction of meaning in a social context.

This paper presents an approach combining conversation analysis with phonetic observation (e.g. Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 1996; Couper-Kuhlen and Ford, 2004; Curl, 2003, 2005; Local et al., 1985; Local and Kelly, 1986; Local, 2003a,b; Local and Walker, 2004; Ogden, 2001, 2004; Ogden et al., 2004; Schegloff, 1999). It differs from other approaches in a number of ways.

Firstly, the methodology takes as its object of attention whole sequences of talk, rather than sentences which are contextualised by just one or two (imagined) preceding or subsequent utterances, a favoured technique in much discussion of the meaning and function of prosodic features.

Secondly, the methodology is a qualitative approach, whose aim is to identify similar sequences of talk. The sequences may be identified as ‘similar’ on several levels, including lexical, syntactic, sequential and interactional. The usual technique is to build up collections of similar, comparable cases and identify the practices used recurrently by participants, and thereby work out what the normative mechanisms of interaction are. The resulting analysis is therefore constrained by and is a synthesis of statements at several levels.

Finally, the data used is naturally-occurring or unscripted, and does not rely on intuited data. The assumption made is that conversation is the natural home of human language, and thus it is to be expected that many of its design features have evolved to cope with the exigencies of interaction. The approach therefore places natural, unscripted interaction at the centre of investigation, and does not treat it as a subordinate activity.

In this paper, I explore how phonetic resources are deployed alongside other levels of linguistic, sequential and interactional analysis in expressing agreement and disagreement in assessment sequences. Expressing agreement and disagreement is a common action which is closely related to speakers’ affective stance. Section 2 presents an overview of assessment sequences, highlighting their sequential and linguistic organisation, and outlines the aims of the paper more fully. Assessment sequences therefore provide rich ground on which to explore the prosody–pragmatics interface. Section 3 describes the data and analysis methods. Sections 4–7 illustrate the connection between phonetic organisation and the ways in which agreement and disagreement are conveyed. Finally, section 8 presents some conclusions.

## 2. Overview of assessments

Assessment sequences provide a good sequential structure to consider the relation between the deployment of phonetic resources and the construction of interpersonal meaning since assessing is a social action whose linguistic and interactional shape is reasonably well understood.

Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) discuss the forms assessments may take. They note (p. 154) that “the word ‘assessment’ can in fact be used to refer to a range of events that exist on analytically distinct levels of organisation”. They raise a number of complex issues of definition, which I do not address here. In an earlier paper, Pomerantz (1984) treats assessments as turn constructional units (TCUs) which contain a referent and an overt assessment turn; she defines second assessments as “assessments produced by recipients of prior assessments in which the referents in the seconds are the same as those in the priors” (p. 59). This is the sense in which I shall use the term ‘second assessment’.

Fragment 1 illustrates an assessment sequence taken from a food programme on the radio. The first assessment, *because just raw [they're really] really pre- pretty boring aren't they* is labelled 1→ and the second assessment, *I don't think they're boring* is labelled 2→. At 1→, the assessable is raw nuts, and the assessment term is *pretty boring*; at 2→ P2, the recipient of 1→, makes a second, disagreeing assessment (*not. . . boring*) of the same referent. Thus, both TCUs contain reference to an assessable (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992:156), raw nuts, and an assessment term, and 2→ is related to 1→ in the manner that Pomerantz (1984:59) defines as criterial for second assessments.

### Fragment (1) vegtalk 19.12.03 nuts

((P2 is toasting nuts))

- 1 P3 and you wouldn't believe how much (.) extra flavour  
 2 [ it gi ]ves to them  
 3 P2 [ no I ]  
 4 P3 1→ because just raw [they're really]  
 5 P2 [I would ]  
 6 P3 1→ really pre- pretty boring aren't they  
 7 P2 2→ I don't think they're boring

After a first assessment, a relevant action for a co-participant is to agree or disagree with the assessment offered in the prior turn. One issue in conveying agreement or disagreement in a second assessment is the linguistic design of the turn and its relation to the first assessment. Pomerantz (1984) shows the relationship between the type of agreement (ranging from “strong agreement” to “strong disagreement”) and the lexical choices made in the two parts of the adjacency pair. These are summarised in Table 1, with examples given from my collection. Agreement of various strengths can be conveyed by tuning the choice of assessment term in the second assessment to that of the first assessment. Strong agreement is conveyed by ‘upgrading’ the assessment term; strong disagreement by using an antonym or a contrasting assessment.

Table 1  
Relation between agreement type and linguistic form

Agreement type	Linguistic form	Example
Strong agreement	Upgraded assessment term modifier	<i>hot</i> → <i>boiling</i> <i>not bad</i> → <i>not bad at all</i>
‘Same’ assessment	Repeat of assessment term partial repeat but no assessment term	<i>nice</i> → <i>nice</i> <i>that's nice</i> → <i>yes it is</i>
‘Downgraded’ assessment	Scaled-down or weakened assessment	<i>really nice</i> → <i>nice</i>
Strong disagreement	Antonym opposite polarity	<i>boring</i> → <i>really good</i> <i>I certainly don't like</i> <i>Nathan</i> → <i>oh I like Nathan</i>

A second issue in assessment sequences is that of preference organisation. ‘Preference’ here is used in the technical sense of, e.g. Bilmes (1988), Heritage (1984) and Sacks (1986): preference organisation is a form of normative organisation, where deviations from the norm are accountable by and/or problematic for participants. Preference thus has consequences for the way that sequences of talk are built, as shown by Pomerantz (1984:65), and summarised in (1). The preferred responsive action to a first assessment is generally agreement. However, disagreement is the preferred action in some action environments such as compliments, following self-deprecations, complaints, etc.

## (1) Relation between preference organisation and turn design.

## Preferred turns (e.g. agreement)

- gap between first pair part and second pair part minimised (e.g. done in overlap with or immediately after the prior turn);
- agreement takes up whole turn;
- agreement is indexed soon;
- agreement (e.g. *yes*) is explicit.

## Dispreferred turns (e.g. disagreement)

- disagreement delayed:
  - no immediately forthcoming talk;
  - repair initiation;
  - devices for delay, e.g. *well, uh*, etc.
- common format: [agree + disagree]; [agree] component done with ‘same’ or ‘downgraded’ assessment;
- disagreement is frequently implicit.

As well as the linguistic design and the preference organisation of assessments, a third issue is that of speakers’ epistemic authority to assess. In making an assessment, a speaker makes a claim to some grounds on which to assess, such as knowledge or experience. One basis for declining to offer an assessment is inadequate grounds or knowledge on which to base it (Pomerantz, 1984). This is exemplified in Fragments 2 and 3. In Fragment 2, Viv invites Michael to make an assessment of a non-present party; Michael rejects the invitation to assess on the grounds that he does not have adequate epistemic grounds to do so. In Fragment 3, Tony makes an assessment of his and Marcia’s son and his girlfriend; in her next turn, Marcia claims inability to provide her own assessment as she has not met her son’s girlfriend.

**Fragment (2) Chicken dinner:12;24-28**

- 1 VIV so wuddiyou thi:nk.  
 2 (2.2)  
 3 SH? pwehh °hh  
 4 MIC I’on’know I couldn’ (1.4) I din’rilly git tih talk  
 5 to’m that much uh- I can’t say.

**Fragment (3) MDE:MTRAC60-1:3;20-22**

- 1 T Tha:t’s uh,hh (0.4) They’re rilly quite a nice  
 2 couple.  
 3 M At’s w’t evrybuddy says I haven’t met her but I-  
 4 °hhh I guess I- I ↑wi:ll, hh

In other cases though, speakers may make a stronger or weaker claim of access to the assessable. Heritage and Raymond (2005) explore some of the linguistic resources available to coparticipants in staking their claim to epistemic authority to assess. As well as agreeing or

disagreeing with one another in assessment sequences, they argue, co-participants are also frequently jostling over the rights to assess, which are gained by having a stronger claim to access. While both first and second assessments can be unmarked in this regard, both can also upgrade or downgrade the speaker's claim to epistemic authority. Heritage and Raymond discuss some of the linguistic resources that are available to speakers to do this. Fragment 4 provides an example. Diane is describing to Brian a party she had been at. Brian's assessment at 1→ indexes his second-order access to it with *sounds*. Diane, in her second assessment, provides an alternative assessment of the party, and indexes her greater claim to access with her choice of the word *was*.

#### Fragment (4) mw/01.0260.naked party

1	D	and everyone <u>dancing</u> outside in the <u>street</u>
2		and (.) oh dear
3	B	oh my <u>god</u>
4	D	it's a bit naughty really
5	B	1→ sounds like a good night (.) .hh
6	D	2→ it was a good <u>laugh</u> <u>actually</u>

A fourth dimension not so far explored systematically is the way in which the manipulation of phonetic parameters contributes to conversationalists' joint construction of agreement and disagreement. To illustrate the problem, consider the sequence at 5, taken from a BBC radio phone-in show.

#### Fragment (5) vegtalk 19.12.03 hogweed

1	P2	Molly, so hogweed in your garden
2	C	1→ yes hogweed is a ghastly weed
3		(.)
4	P1	2→ it is=
5	C	=spreads like anything [.h
6	P1	[ <u>terrible</u> thi[ng
7	C	[mm

What degree of agreement is conveyed at 2→ with the assessment at 1→? Intuitively, the turn at 2→ can be produced in a number of ways. For instance, it could be produced with a low, level pitch, and rather quietly (“↓it \_is”). This might give the impression of only weak agreement. Alternatively, it could be produced with a pitch peak high in the speaker's range and a falling intonation contour (“it ↑is”). Intuitively, this would give the impression of ‘greater involvement’ (cf. Cruttenden, 1997:115) or stronger agreement than the first hypothetical production; and it might project another TCU conveying a more explicit agreement. A fall-rise intonation contour on the other hand might project an overt disagreement in the next TCU by the same speaker (“it ∨ is, but . . .”).

There are of course other details of the sequence which could be drawn upon to muster evidence for the kind of agreement conveyed in P1's turn, such as its timing relative to 1→; the absence of an overt assessment term; C's treatment of it in her subsequent turn; and the way P1 continues with the activity of assessing. So the phonetic detail occurs in a sequential context. Nonetheless, at the point of completion of the TCU, part of how it can be understood and treated by a co-participant is the way it is produced phonetically. However, in discussing the function of pitch span, the placement of the intonation contour in the speaker's range, etc., sequential and

interactional details are generally not considered by phoneticians. In order to explicate the function of the ‘paralinguistic’ properties of turns at talk, it is necessary to understand in greater detail how sequences of interaction are constructed linguistically.

The aims of this paper then are (1) to explore the contribution to meaning made by the systematic deployment of phonetic resources alongside other levels of linguistic, sequential and interactional analysis in assessment sequences, and (2) to consider the relationship between the action promoted by a turn at talk and its phonetic design, leaving aside for now the issue of speakers’ claims to epistemic access.

### 3. Data

The data come from the following corpora of British and American talk-in-interaction:

- The CallHome corpus, a corpus of phone calls from Americans to friends and family abroad.
- The “York Lab Data” corpus, consisting of pairs of friends (mostly students in their early 20s) chatting in a recording studio.
- British (local and national) radio phone-in shows.
- The Holt corpus.
- Collections of data known as “NB”, “SBL” and “Rahman”.

The corpora contain about 40 h of talk in all. Most of the data presented here in detail are taken from the York Lab Data corpus, since the audio quality of this data is very high and this facilitates auditory and acoustic analysis. Occasionally in this corpus, participants demonstrate an orientation to the laboratory situation; but in the assessment sequences presented in this paper (and the longer fragments in which they are embedded), there is no evidence of such an orientation, and the sequences are structurally identical to those in other situations.

The phonetic analysis presented in this paper attends to both the ‘segmental’ and the ‘prosodic’ aspects of the production of assessments. F0 traces are shown of illustrative examples. These are plotted on a logarithmic scale, which is more representative of speakers’ perception of intonational span than plotting on a linear scale (Nolan, 2003). The plots are scaled in Hertz for ease of reference. The top, bottom and median of the speaker’s normal pitch range are indicated on the plot. These were established by extracting one minute’s worth of representative speech for each speaker, producing a pitch trace using PRAAT which was manually checked, and then extracting some simple statistics from it. In addition, impressionistic records (Kelly and Local, 1989a,b) are given to draw attention to ‘segmental’ properties of talk. In the data presented in this paper, articulatory settings can be manipulated as part of a phonetic practice of ‘upgrading’ and ‘downgrading’, which also implicates pitch and amplitude (cf. Curl, 2003, 2005, who finds similar practices in other-initiated repair sequences).

For the purposes of the analysis, the data were restricted to pairs of TCUs with a given format. The second assessment turns all contain an overt assessment turn, so they normally have the shape [NP + Verb + Assessment term]. Examples where the verb is itself the assessment term (such as *hate* or *like*) are also included. Fragments where the second assessment does not contain an overt assessment term were excluded. This means that pairs of the format *It’s X/It is* (such as in Fragment 5) are not included. Pomerantz (1984) classes these assessments as a form of ‘same’ assessment. By including only tokens with an overt assessment term in the second assessment, it is easier to be sure without resorting just to phonetic resources whether the second assessment is an upgraded, downgraded or ‘same’ assessment as the first in lexical terms.

Assessment pairs are frequently oriented to as closing a sequence. Such sequences are generally not included in this study. Goodwin and Goodwin (1992:170ff.) show one assessment pair in this context. Their example is produced in ways that turn out to be different from those in this paper, where the assessments generate more talk on the same topic: their example has a quiet first assessment followed by a quieter (but lexically upgraded) second assessment, accompanied by withdrawal of gaze. Similar properties are true also of Fragment 6, where the talk in line 1 is very loud (marked as capitals), in line 3 is at the speaker's normal volume, and the talk at 1.4 is quiet (marked with degree signs). The assessment sequence is followed by a gap and then a change in topic.

#### Fragment (6) NB II.2;12

1 E the SUN'S COMING OUT  
 2 N I know it  
 3 E 1→ beautifu[l  
 4 N 2→ [°just beautiful°  
 5 (0.3)  
 6 N so anyway let me uh .hh just call Rol's mother

Approximately 100 examples of assessment sequences are included in the collection. It is hard to be precise about the exact number of assessment tokens in the study, since some of them are interactionally very complex. For instance, the first assessment may be ironic, while the second assessment spells out a non-ironic version of the assessment; or the assessment pair may be one of a list of pairs, where 'listing' is an interactional activity alongside 'assessing'. Cases such as these have to be treated as more complex, and to make sense of them, it is necessary to understand the simpler structures first. It is the interactionally simpler structures this paper focuses on.

The next three sections present a more detailed analysis of representative data fragments where the second assessment conveys strong agreement, strong disagreement, and agreement followed by disagreement. These form the basis for the analysis of a more complex case examined in section 7.

#### 4. Second assessments which convey strong agreement

Fragments 7–9 provide examples of pairs of assessments where the second assessment conveys strong agreement with the first. This is achieved in part by lexical upgrade. The second assessment comes immediately after the first assessment, or once its referent is resolved (Fragment 8). The first assessment turn is marked 1→, and the second assessment turn 2→.

#### Fragment (7) smc/00.0907.german castle

1 B and there was one day when I had like work to do  
 2 and stuff so I said "right this is what you're  
 3 doing todahahay" showed them like in the guide book  
 4 where it was sent them off on their own=  
 5 A ="listen it's just south of here" [hehe  
 6 B [hehe .mmh  
 7 A "and if you take highway duh"  
 8 B 1→ it's supposed to be really really pretty  
 9 A 2→ oh it's supposed to be g:orgeous



10 crowds are supposed to be pretty  
 11 bad [in the summer]  
 12 B [yeah really] bad cos it's like one hundred  
 13 percent touristy

**Fragment (8) nrb/01.irishman**

1 K 1→ I find that guy (.) really funny no:w=  
 2 J =that Iris[h one  
 3 K [Irish guy  
 4 J 2→ he's hila:riou[s  
 5 K [because I thought he was really  
 6 (.) scary and really like .hh ehm sort of set in  
 7 his ways and  
 8 J [yeah ]  
 9 K [he's just in]terested isn't he he's like .h "well  
 10 I was r:eading about this"  
 11 and I'm like "((high pitch \* \* \*  
 12 [ \* \* \* \* ))"  
 13 J [but he's quite interested]  
 14 K yeah  
 15 J he is a bit frightening though I mean that black  
 16 nail polish  
 17 K horrendous quite scary isn't

**Fragment (9) Callhome 4610 290**

1 B I'm in the Hamptons  
 2 A Eah  
 3 B E [I'm  
 4 A [which one  
 5 (0.5)  
 6 B ehm  
 7 (0.3)  
 8 B actually I'm in Amagansett [which is] between  
 9 [(click)]  
 10 B Bridgehampton and Easthampton I guess  
 11 A 1→ it sounds enormously po[sh]  
 12 B [pt]  
 13 B 2→ it'[s ] it's superposh here I am going from  
 14 [(click)]  
 15 B Santa Fe to the Hamptons my summer is just filled  
 16 with luxury  
 17 A s[ounds wonderful]  
 18 B [.hh ha ha] ha  
 19 A how's Helena

Let us take a closer look at the interactional, sequential and phonetic detail of Fragment 7. Beth is telling Alice about when her parents came to visit her during a year she spent in Germany

(ll.1–4). Earlier in the conversation she has told Alice that she sent them off to see a famous castle in the area.

Alice comes in at line 5 and, mimicking a voice that is not her own, gives some instructions to Beth’s parents; her laughter at the end of this shows that this is to be treated as a light-hearted aside. Beth joins in with laughter in l.6, aligning with the light-heartedness of Alice’s turn. In l.7, Alice continues her pretend instructions, and in l.8 Beth comes in with a first assessment (marked 1→), in her own voice, and the pronoun, *it*, refers to the castle she sent her parents to. This first assessment is receipted with a second assessment which lexically upgrades the first (*really really pretty* → *gorgeous*). The *oh*-prefacing marks the second assessment out as presenting a position which Alice had reached independently from Beth (Heritage, 2002a; Heritage and Raymond, 2005). *Is supposed to* in both turns on the other hand indexes both speakers’ second order access. Thus the second assessment can be understood as conveying agreement with the first, while at the same time indexing the speaker’s epistemic independence (but same degree of epistemic access) in the second assessment.

Phonetically, there are some striking differences between the two utterances. The first assessment has rather level pitch below the speaker’s median pitch level which does not end at the bottom of the speaker’s range. The second assessment has clearer peaks and troughs, on average it is located higher in the speaker’s pitch range and uses a wider pitch span, including creak on *to be* and *-geous*. The pitch range of 1→ is 5.7 semitones, and that of 2→ is 7.3 semitones (ignoring the creaky portion). The stressed syllable of *gorgeous* has a rising intonation contour. So overall the intonation contour of the second assessment is more dynamic than that of the first, and has a wider span (Fig. 1).

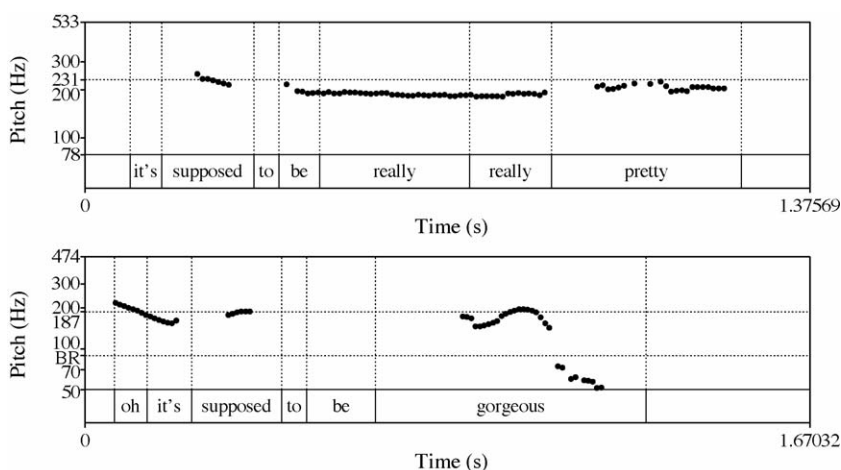


Fig. 1. Pitch traces of first and second assessments of Fragment 7. Upper panel: speaker’s normal range = 78–533 Hz. Lower panel: speaker’s normal range = 89–474 Hz (scaled to 50 Hz to include creak; bottom of the range marked as BR at 89 Hz).

Impressionistic records of the two utterances are given at (2) below.

(2) Impressionistic records of the assessments in Fragment 1.

1 → ?s:ɸ3s tʰ βɪ ɹ̥ɪ:ɹ̥ɪ ɹ̥ɪɹ̥ɪ pɹeʔɪɪ

2 → v ɪtsɸɹɹɹ β̥ɪk̥ ɡ:ʷɔ:ɹɹɹɹɹ

Overall, the articulatory setting of the first assessment is more open than the second. The consonants in the accented syllables are less tightly articulated. Notice, for instance, that the words *supposed to be* contain portions of open labial approximation rather than complete closure. The lateral in the first token of *really* does not have complete alveolar closure, and no discrete lateral portion can be observed spectrographically. The second assessment has overall a closer setting. The word *supposed* has a portion of complete bilabial closure. There is a very long portion of velar closure in *gorgeous* (approximately 225 ms), during the latter part of which there is voicing. (Compare this with the stressed syllable of *hilarious* at 2→ in Fragment 4, which is also lengthened.) The rate of articulation of the second assessment is slower than the first (9.48 syllables/s: 6.6 syllables/s for the first assessment: second assessment, respectively).

Thus, the overall setting of the second assessment is quite different from the first: it is closer to being ‘hyperarticulated’ (Lindblom, 1990).

Similar phonetic properties can be found in the other data fragments. In particular, the pitch span of the second assessment is consistently wider than that of the first (Table 2).

Table 2  
Pitch span (semitones) of Fragments 7–9

	Fragment 7	Fragment 8	Fragment 9
1→	5.7	3.7	4.5
2→	7.3	7.9	5.2

One claim of a sequential analysis is that meaning is a local and collaborative achievement. The implication of this claim is that the linguistic features of turns should be considered in their local context; from this point of view, the second assessment has ‘upgraded’ phonetics in relation to the first. Thus, there seems to be a connection between lexical and phonetic upgrading in the production of second assessments which convey strong agreement.

In summary, where a second assessment conveys strong agreement, ‘upgrading’ is achieved both lexically and phonetically simultaneously. Overall the phonetic exponents of the ‘upgraded’ second assessment relative to the first typically include:

- an expanded pitch span over the whole turn;
- more dynamic pitch contours on accented items;
- pitch higher in the speaker’s range than the first assessment;
- slower tempo;
- closer, tenser articulations (closer to ‘hyper-speech’ than ‘hypo-speech’, Lindblom, 1990).

In the next sections, we shall see that phonetic upgrading and downgrading are related in a consistent way to other displays of agreement in the second assessment position.

## 5. Strong (overt) disagreement

Another possible action in the second assessment is to display disagreement with the stance proposed by the first. The sequences considered in this section have three parts. The first part, marked 0→ in the transcripts, contains the expression of a stance by a speaker, which is refuted in the first assessment by the co-participant. The second assessment (by the first speaker) presents strong disagreement with the first assessment, and re-states the prior stance.

‘First assessment’ for the turns here labelled 1→ is probably not the most felicitous term, since an assessment has already been provided by the co-participant, and this provides a context of assessment in which the turns marked 1→ are offered. I retain the term ‘first assessment’ however as a structural term on the grounds that the relationship of the turns labelled 1→ and 2→ in the data examined here is the same as in the other cases in this paper. Firstly, the turn marked 2→ recycles some of the lexis and syntax of the turn marked 1→. This is in general not true of 0→ and 1→. Secondly, the referent of the assessment at 0→ is not always quite the same as the one at 1→ and 2→, which always share referents. (Recall that one of Pomerantz’ criteria for a second assessment is that it has the same referent as a first assessment, Pomerantz, 1984:65.)

For instance, in Fragment 10, 0→ is an assessment of Diet Coke in comparison with Pepsi Max; whereas 1→ and 2→ are assessments of Diet Coke. In Fragment 11, 0→ is an assessment of being seen to eat; 1→ and 2→ are assessments of *sitting in the window*, which is a different formulation. In Fragment 12, 0→ is an assessment of going to Holland; 1→ and 2→ are assessments of going to Amsterdam. So although these assessment pairs are related to prior talk in slightly different way from the other assessment pairs, nonetheless the relationship between 1→ and 2→ in these fragments is the same as in other environments in this paper. The claim is, then, that the phonetic details are ascribable to the relation between 1→ and 2→, and not straightforwardly to the location of the turn in sequence. The phonetic design of first assessments in relation to prior talk is a matter this paper does not touch on.

Overt disagreements are often prefaced by ‘no’. The assessment term is an antonym (as in *like* → *hate*), or a contrasting term (e.g. *really boring* → *good*), or has opposite polarity (e.g. *they’re boring* → *I don’t think they’re boring*). Overt disagreements are generally timed to come in either in overlap with the first assessment or very soon after it; they thus have the format of *preferred* turns, rather than the expected *dispreferred* turns. Goodwin et al. (2002) show that disagreement moves in girls’ game disputes have similar sequential and phonetic features, where the expression of disagreement is achieved through formats that resemble those of preferred turns. They argue that disagreement can be a *preferred* action, because it promotes sociability. Thus it may not be surprising that these second assessments typically have ‘upgraded’ phonetics relative to the first, because one interactional goal of the participants in the places where these data are found (radio phone-in shows and students in a lab setting with nothing to do but talk) is to generate talk: by disagreeing, a participant can do exactly this. The second assessment in these cases also presents an upgraded claim on the part of the speaker, because it reasserts a prior and disagreed-with stance.

Fragments 10–12 present examples of this sequential organisation.

#### Fragment (10) smc/00.0090.diet coke.aiff

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | A | [it’s OK]   |
| 2 | B | [it’s horri]ble   |
| 3 |   | (0.7)   |
| 4 | A | well I mean it’s not like fabulous                      |
| 5 |   | (0.3)   |
| 6 | A | 0→ much prefer diet coke                                |
| 7 |   | (0.5)   |
| 8 | B | 1→ no- well you see diet coke’s <u>exa</u> (ha)ctly the |
| 9 |   | 1→ same <u>disg</u> usting yeu#:a[gh::#                 |

- 10 A 2→ [.hh no diet coke is better  
 11 's- I don't like aspartame  
 12 B ((quiet giggle))  
 13 A and diet coke has nutrasweet

**Fragment (11) njc/00.restaurant.aiff**

- 1 M 0→ we always end up in the window though which I  
 2 0→ normally don't like but they've got really thick  
 3 net curtains there so people can't see in  
 4 0→ I hate people that- seeing you eat  
 5 W 1→ oh I like sitting in t[he window]  
 6 M 2→ [oh I h: ]Ate it  
 7 (0.7)  
 8 W oh n[o: ]  
 9 M [I always] feel like some sort of  
 10 performing chimp  
 11 (1.0)  
 12 M (\* \* \*) I always seem to spill my dinner down my  
 13 front that's not good to be on public display

**Fragment (12) Nightowls amsterdam.0036.boring**

- 1 C I'm going to Holland .h for my (.) .h holiday in  
 2 Easter=  
 3 P 0→ =ah excellent=whereabouts in Holland=  
 4 C =Amsterdam and I just do not wanna go  
 5 P why  
 6 C 1→ I just don't wanna go=it's gonna be (.) boring I  
 7 think  
 8 P 2→ no it's gonna be rea:lly [good]  
 9 C [it is ]n't I'm tranna  
 10 trade my (0.5) my ticket for my friend's cuckoo  
 11 clock  
 12 P hahahahahahahahahahah

In Fragment 10, Alice and Beth are discussing relative merits of Pepsi Max and Diet Coke. Their preferences revolve around the kind of artificial sweetener in each one. In 1.6 (the turn marked 0→), Alice states her preference for Diet Coke over Pepsi Max. After this, there is a 0.5s delay before Beth takes her turn and offers a negative assessment of Diet Coke (11.8–9). The turn is marked with *no* as presenting a stance different from the one offered by Alice. The assessment term includes a nonce form (*yeuagh*), which is produced with creaky voice and is very long.

Alice's second assessment restates her prior position. It is marked as an overt disagreement with the first word, *no*. Her next three turns at talk (11.11, 13, 15–16) offer an account of her preference for Diet Coke over Pepsi Max.

The pitch of Alice's second assessment is quite different from Beth's first assessment: the accented syllable *Diet* is produced high in her range, and she uses a wide pitch span (17.3 st), with a fall to low in her range; this contrasts with Beth's pitch in her first assessment, which has little pitch movement, and which is mid-low in her range with a span of 10.7 st, not including the final

creak. The rate of articulation of the two TCUs is approximately the same, with 1→ at 5.27 syllables/s, and 2→ at 5.56 syllables/s. The same temporal pattern is observable for Fragment 12, with 1→ at 4.80 syllables/s and 2→ at 4.49 syllables/s. For Fragment 11, the rate of articulation of the second assessment is slower than the first (7.01 syllables/s: 3.01 syllables/s for the first assessment: second assessment, respectively), although this should be treated cautiously, since the second assessment is produced in partial overlap with the first (Fig. 2).

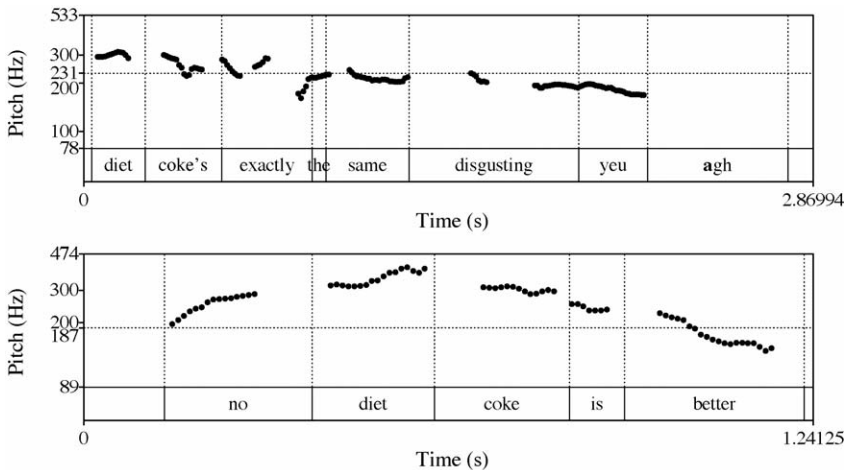


Fig. 2. F0 trace of the assessments in Fragment 10.

Table 3 shows the relative pitch spans of the first and second assessment turns for Fragments 10–12. Note that the second assessment turn has a wider pitch span than the first assessment; and in these examples it is also a very wide span of around one and a half octaves.

Table 3  
Pitch span (semitones) of Fragments 10–12

	Fragment 10	Fragment 11	Fragment 12
1→	13.6	13.4	5.7
2→	17.8	17.9	18.5

This section has shown examples of overt disagreements. These are rare in the data, but where they occur they are not just second assessments but also reassertions of a position that has already been stated or is inferable. These disagreements lack most of the properties of dispreferred turns: they are timed to come without delay with respect to the first assessment, and they share phonetic properties with upgraded assessments that convey agreement. On the other hand, when seen as reassertions of a speaker's prior stance, the fact that these turns are 'upgraded' at least in speakers' pitch span seems less surprising. The next section explores the rather different phonetic properties of agreements which preface disagreements.

## 6. Agreements that preface disagreements

Disagreement is, in most circumstances, the dispreferred response to a first assessment (Pomerantz, 1984). As a dispreferred action, it is commonly delayed; and in assessment sequences, a typical way to delay the disagreement is to preface it with something which looks like a preferred response, i.e. with something that apparently conveys agreement, albeit weak. In this section, I consider examples where disagreement is prefaced by agreement. In lexical terms, second assessments which perform this task tend to be ‘same’ or downgraded.

Fragments 13–15 all contain examples where the second assessment is no stronger than a ‘same’ assessment, and is followed by a turn which presents either a disagreement with the first assessment, or evidence against such an assessment. This third part of the sequence is marked 3→.

### Fragment (13) smc/00.0425.househunting

- 1 B they came back and stuff and it’s just like .h  
 2 you haven’t got time to search for a house  
 3 A yeah [you can’t]  
 4 B [and they’re there ] I mean I came  
 5 [back here in the middle of August]  
 6 A [you can’t do that from ] thousands of  
 7 miles away  
 8 B and you need at least one person who’s willing  
 9 to do it all  
 10 to sort out  
 11 to find somewhere  
 12 A 1→ and it’s (.) ?a lot of effort=  
 13 B 2→ =it is quite a lot of hassle  
 14 3→ unless you like cos sometimes it’s just luck(y)  
 15 3→ isn’t it you just like walk in and find someone  
 16 3→ who’s got a house for the right number of people

### Fragment (14) nrb/01.reluctant lover

- 1 J he wouldn’t stop asking her out  
 2 he used to ring her like three times a day and  
 3 she’d go “no: no:” .h or she’d say yes and not turn  
 4 up and then she just completely fell for him  
 5 K ! a:[h: that’s love]ly=  
 6 J [ together ]  
 7 K 1→ =she’s- she’s- she’s rea:ly nice in’t [she  
 8 J 2→ [she is  
 9 2→ nice=  
 10 3→ =.h I do find that she just says stuff just for the  
 11 3→ sake of £saying stu(h)uff though£  
 12 K [yeah  
 13 [yeah  
 14 J [even when she’s not got that much to say

**Fragment (15) gw/00.washing machine.aiff**

1	E?	°‘ts crap°
2	E	they should just put a slot machine in that- that
3		bloo[dy
4	H	[↑mm
5		(0.6)
6	H	stupid
7		(2.0)
8	E	[I mean why]
9	H	1→ [but it’s ] <u>b</u> etter than tokens though
10		(0.4)
11	E	2→ yes it <u>i</u> s better than token[s
12	H	[cos like you always
13		went to the porter and he said “oh we’ve got none”
14		like went back two days later and he still had none
15	E	3→ .mt we-uhm (1.0) my card always says bad card all
16		the time

Let us look in more detail at Fragment 13. Beth and Alice are both students; Alice is American. They are discussing the difficulties of finding housing during the summer vacation; Alice finds it particularly hard because of the problem of distance (1.6–7). In 1.9–11, Beth makes a three-part list of some of the things which have to be done when house hunting. The turn is constructed as a continuation of Alice’s prior turn. At 1→ Alice offers an assessment, *and it’s a lot of effort*. This turn is presented with *and* as a continuation of Beth’s prior talk in 1.8–9; it summarises the problem that she faces in looking for a house from abroad. As an assessment, it could be heard as a closure-relevant evaluation of the list which Beth produced in 1.8–9; and it also neatly returns the topic to Alice, as the one who has first-hand experience of house-hunting from a distance.

Beth, at 2→ in 1.11, produces a second assessment which recycles some of the syntax and lexis (*it + Copula + a lot of*) of Alice’s first. The turn ends with a low rise L-H% intonation, projecting an upcoming contrast (cf. Ward and Hirschberg, 1985; Kadmon, 2001). On the face of it, the second assessment agrees with the first: *it is quite a lot of hassle*. But the second assessment conveys only weak agreement with the first, with the modifier *quite* downgrading *a lot*, with *effort* recycled from the first assessment. Beth’s continuation of her turn at 3→ provides an example of house-hunting where things can go more smoothly and with less trouble, i.e. an example of a case where it is not *a lot of effort* to go house-hunting. In other words, her talk at 3→ provides a rationale for the weak agreement at 2→, and in so doing effectively displays disagreement with the position taken in 1→. So Beth’s turn has the format [agree + disagree], where the second assessment conveys weak agreement.

The phonetic details are consistent with ‘downgrading’. Beth’s turn at 2→ is done quite quiet and fast: compare the duration of the two utterances with respect to one another (Fig. 3); their speed is 4.7 and 7.7 syllables/s, respectively. Impressionistic records of these utterances are given at (3).

(3) Impressionistic records of the assessments in Fragment 13

1 → ʔãĩĩʔsʔəl::atʔəvɛfɔ̃tʔ

2 → ɪɪzzkwæɔ̃ɔ̃pʰhasʔʏ



As can be seen, the first assessment has closer, longer articulations than the second; thus the relationship between the articulatory settings in this pair is opposite from that of Fragment 3. (It is also worth observing that lengthening is found in *gorgeous* at 2→ in Fragment 7, *hilarious* at 2→ in Fragment 8, *hate* at 2→ in Fragment 11, *really* at 2→ in Fragment 12, *lot* at 1→ in Fragment 13, *really* at 1→ in Fragment 14, and *long last* at 1→ in Fragment 16. In each case, the item with the lengthening occurs in an assessing TCU which is phonetically ‘upgraded’ relative to the other one in the pair.)

The pitch of 2→ is also consistent with ‘downgrading’: it has a narrower pitch span than Alice’s turn, and is placed below Beth’s median pitch level; in the cases of ‘upgrading’, the second assessment turns were frequently produced with pitch above the speaker’s median.

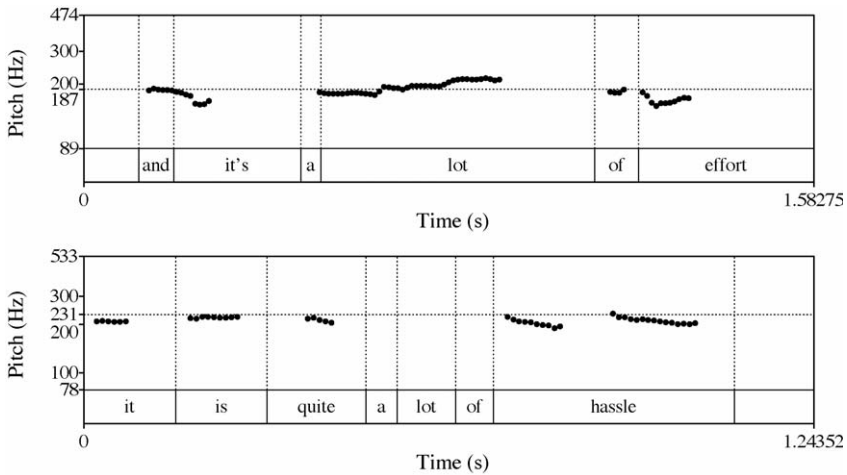


Fig. 3. F0 trace of the assessments in Fragment 13.

So the second assessment turn here conveys only token agreement with the first assessment, and is phonetically downgraded.

A feature of these second assessment turns is that they often have a final low rise (L-H%) intonation, which has been claimed (Ward and Hirschberg, 1985; Kadmon, 2001) to project an upcoming TCU which takes a different stance from the current one. This same intonation contour appears on other comparable TCUs in these fragments:

L\* L-H%

it is quite a lot of hassle

H\* L\* L-H%

she is nice

H\* L\*            L-H%

yes it is better than tokens

Participants can be seen to orient to the phonetic design of turns which convey token agreement while simultaneously projecting impending disagreement. In Fragment 11, the co-participant’s orientation to impending disagreement is seen in her incoming talk in l.12, which is

just in overlap with the end of the [agree] part of Elizabeth's turn. By coming in at this point, before the projected [disagree] part of Elizabeth's turn, she staves off Helen's impending disagreement, and uses the turn space to provide more evidence for her own stance. Helen's [disagree] turn at 3→ is thus delayed.

Table 4 shows the pitch span for the first and second assessment turns in Fragments 13–15. The pitch span in 2→ is narrower than in 1→ (Fig. 4).

Table 4  
Pitch span (semitones) of the assessments in Fragments 13–15

	Fragment 13	Fragment 14	Fragment 15
1→	6.0	6.5	5.1
2→	3.6	4.7	4.6

In summary, in cases where a second assessment conveys weak or downgraded agreement as part of a longer turn that has the format [agree + disagree], the [agree] component has recurrent lexical and phonetic properties. The assessment is 'same' or 'downgraded' lexically. Overall the phonetic exponents of the [agree] part of the second assessment relative to the first include:

- a narrower pitch span, and a concomitant lack of dynamic pitch movement;
- faster tempo;
- articulations with more open stricture (closer to 'hypo-speech' than 'hyper-speech', Lindblom, 1990);
- a decrease in loudness.

In these cases, then, although the propositional content of the second assessment conveys weak agreement, the second assessment is heard as projecting an incipient disagreement by virtue of (1) the preceding delay, (2) the 'same' assessment (i.e. lack of upgrade) and (3) the phonetic design, which projects a turn that takes a different stance from the current one, which in this case means disagreement after a token agreement. So in these cases, the 'downgraded' phonetics conveys weak agreement and projects a dispreferred action.

On the basis of the data in sections 4–6, a connection has apparently been established between the action of a second assessment turn, lexical choice and phonetic form. In section 7, we will see that the association is more complex than it appears on the basis of the data so far.

## 7. A more complex case

With such an apparent match between the lexical and phonetic resources used to convey agreement and disagreement, a relevant question to ask is whether these two linguistic resources are necessarily interrelated, or whether one can operate without the other to accomplish the task of displaying agreement or disagreement. In this section, I consider a more complex case which shows that the phonetic design of a turn is related to the organisation of preference.

In Fragment 16, Skip has called Freddy, a colleague. There has been some *cash in today*:

**Fragment (16) Holt U88.1.10 pay**

- 1 Ski that's alright I just wanted to make sure: (.)  
 2 whether you'd p'hh gone back or no[t.h  
 3 Fre [yes I did.  
 no[I got that=  
 4 Ski [.hhhhhhh.p  
 5 Fre =thanks 'n I, I've also heard about th'of course  
 6 about the cash in toda:[y.  
 7 Ski 1→ [gYes::. yes isn't that  
 8 1→ good at l:ong la:[st. [((sniff))  
 9 Fre2→ [that[s- that's (.) very good  
 10 news. b't'v cour[se it (0.3)  
 11 Ski [khhhhhhhh  
 12 Fre we'll haf to pay out a lot a'that I [guess  
 13 Ski [.hhhhhh ih:s  
 14 but at least it'll bring us int'th'black hh.hhh in  
 15 the middle of Ma:y whi:ch is just the time when we  
 16 should be[k.mhhhh[hhh.glp.tk]lp  
 17 Fre [(0.5) [ih y e: s ]but buh[but (.) do we  
 18 owe:I mean=  
 19 Ski [u h h h h h h h  
 20 Fre =ih- we haven' paid any of the (Almans) 'n people  
 21 like that yet I[(take it)  
 22 Ski [eeyes we paid some of them-

In ll.5–6, Freddy announces that he has heard some news which Skip seems to be already party to. Skip's response at 1→ in l.7–8 is to offer a positive assessment in the form of a negative interrogative. As a negative interrogative, it strongly favours a positive, agreeing response (Raymond, 2000, 2003; Heritage, 2002b; Heritage and Raymond, 2005). Freddy's second assessment at 2→ in l.9–10, *that's- that's (.) very good news* is thus fitted in terms of its sequential placement (in overlap, which is a property of a preferred—agreeing—response) and in terms of its lexical format, which is to upgrade the first assessment from *good* to *very good news*.

Based on Pomerantz's description of the lexical make-up of second assessments, then, this turn would be expected to convey strong agreement, because it has all the syntactic and lexical features of such a turn, and is timed as a preferred action. On the basis of similar examples discussed in section 4, we should expect this turn to be phonetically 'upgraded' as compared to the immediately prior one.

However, 2→ does not convey strong agreement, as it turns out. By withholding *yes*, the turn prioritises confirmation over agreement (Heritage and Raymond, 2005), and so makes a claim to epistemic priority in the rights to assess. Furthermore, this TCU prefaces a series of turns by Freddy which treats Skip's good news as something less than *very good*. In ll.10–12 Freddy says that much of the money they have just got will have to be *paid out*; when Skip counters that the money will put them *in the black*, Freddy talks about debts that are owed. The second assessment therefore has the lexical and syntactic features of a turn which conveys agreement, but in fact it prefaces a sequence of talk which undermines Skip's treatment of the news as *good news*. Thus, it

is an instance of the [agree + disagree] format discussed in section 6, and not an instance of the [agree] format discussed in section 4.

Phonetically, the second assessment is downgraded relative to the first. It uses a narrower pitch span (6 st as opposed to 8 st in the first assessment), and the accented word *very* is produced with a pitch accent lower in the speaker's range (just at his median pitch level). It is produced quietly, and followed by talk which is louder. Overall, then, the production of this second assessment is 'downgraded' relative to the first, and it displays none of the features of 'upgraded' second assessments discussed in sections 4 and 5.

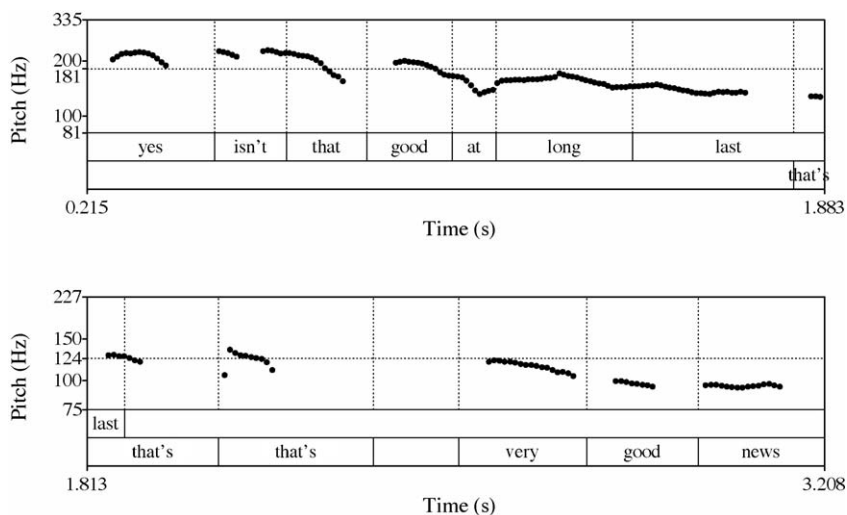


Fig. 4. F0 trace of the assessments in Fragment 16. Pitch range and median for lower panel are estimates because of limited amount of talk by this speaker, and poor recording quality.

Thus, Fragment 16 shows that there is not a simple correspondence between the lexical resources used in second assessments and the phonetic resources used. The second assessment turn does a display of agreement by being lexically and morphosyntactically fitted to the immediately prior turn which is its first pair part. By being fitted in this way, the turn is hearable as an appropriate next turn. However, while the turn seems to display agreement, it *projects disagreement*, which is conveyed through phonetic downgrading and through the rest of Freddy's extended turn.

This case shows that the phonetic properties of second assessment turns relate to the action which the turn promotes, and not straightforwardly to the lexical and propositional content. One consequence of this is that even though the lexis may seem to promote a preferred action, the phonetic characteristics of the turn in the sequence bear more directly on the kind of action which the turn promotes. 'Agreement' and 'disagreement' as actions are not conveyed linguistically just by lexical choice, but crucially also by the deployment of particular phonetic parameters.

## 8. Conclusions

For any given sentence, there is perhaps an infinite number of ways in which it can be phonetically realised. One task of linguistic phonetics is to explore constraints on phonetic realisation and relate these to other levels of analysis implicated in speakers' construction of 'meaning'.

In this paper, I have considered how one aspect of meaning, 'agreement' and 'disagreement', is conveyed in a well-understood adjacency pair, the assessment sequence. Conversation analytic work on these sequences has related lexis and syntactic form on the one hand to the sequential and interactional organisation of preference on the other. In this paper, I have shown how phonetic resources are used by conversationalists to convey preferred and dispreferred actions in assessment sequences. In doing a preferred action, the second pair part of the adjacency pair is phonetically 'upgraded' relative to the first pair part. In projecting a dispreferred action, the second pair part is phonetically downgraded relative to the first pair part.

'Agreement' and 'disagreement' were not found to have unique phonetic properties associated with them. For instance, turns which convey disagreement can be done with what I have loosely called 'upgrading' or 'downgrading' depending on the sequential environment. Disagreements are 'upgraded' when they convey a preferred action, which in the case of the examples here was to generate talk, but agreements which are part of an [agree + disagree] sequence are downgraded phonetically. The lexical choices speakers make in second assessments relate to whether their turn displays agreement or disagreement with the assessment proposed in the first turn, and this is constrained by the form of the first assessment. The phonetic devices which speakers use do not relate to the propositional content of a turn, but to the action that the turn promotes in its particular sequential environment. In some cases there can be a mismatch, where the propositional content of a second assessment suggests agreement, but the production of the turn promotes disagreement.

The phonetic properties of the second assessments which have been shown in the examples in this paper are generally treated as 'paralinguistic' (e.g. Laver, 1994:21ff; Ladd, 1996:33ff; Gussenhoven, 2002; Hawkins, 2003:384, 389). This is because they are gradient properties rather than categorial, and do not relate in a straightforward way to propositional content. Generally, they are said to handle properties of "interpersonal meaning" (cf. Ladd, 1996:33) or "the speaker's current affective, attitudinal or emotional state" (Laver, 1994:21). Whether these categories (which primarily index affective stance) are the most salient or relevant ones to participants in assessment sequences is a moot point: in this paper, these properties have been shown to relate to social actions and the interactional organisation of preference (cf. Ochs, 1996), which are well understood concepts in conversation analytic literature.

According to Gussenhoven's findings (2002), high register is associated with 'lack of confidence' and 'submissiveness', while a wide pitch span is claimed to convey 'friendliness'. High register and wide span are properties of the second assessment turns examined in section 5, where the speaker overtly disagrees with the co-participant's prior turn and reasserts their own stance: hardy actions which require 'friendliness' or 'lack of confidence' for their successful accomplishment. The findings from conversational data and participants' orientation to them are clearly at odds with the predictions made by Gussenhoven's theory, and according to that theory would have to be treated as grammaticalised. Rather, the results here suggest (along the lines of Hawkins, 2003; Local, 2003b) that what is needed in order to make sense of phonetic details such

as these is a better understanding of context, and an account of these which treats language polysystemically.

In this paper, the details of ‘context’ have been described in sequential and interactional terms, to provide an account of the social actions conveyed through turns at talk. The warranting of categories such as ‘agreement’ and ‘disagreement’ has been done through a consideration of the participants’ observable orientation to these categories through the construction of sequences of talk, and the choice of lexical and syntactic forms concurrent with phonetic forms. Sequential and interactional analysis along the lines of Conversation Analysis reveals that assessment sequences have recurrent properties in terms of their turn design and sequential placement; and we can also show that these turns have regular (though not yet fully explicated) phonetic characteristics.

The phonetic details observed in the data are related to preference organisation in a consistent way; in this case, the organisation of preference relates to the conveyance agreement or disagreement of various strengths. This kind of ‘meaning’ does not reside solely in the minds of individuals, since ‘agreement’ and ‘disagreement’ only have meaning in relation to at least two people. In order to understand the phonetic practices used to convey agreement or disagreement, it is essential to understand turns at talk as part of a social process (cf. Schegloff, 1991b). How a speaker making a second assessment conveys (dis-) agreement phonetically is sensitive to the other’s talk, and the phonetic details of one turn are fitted to the phonetic details of the prior. Thus, even the production of talk must attend to the perception of talk, in order for the phonetic relation between the current turn and the prior turn to be such that the appropriate action is conveyed. In other words, a competent speaker matches their own phonetic production to that of another speaker and manipulates the relation between their co-participant’s production and their own in ways that have implications for meaning.

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