Prosodic marking of semantic contrasts: Do speakers adapt to addressees?

Prosodic marking of semantic contrasts: Do speakers adapt to addressees? describes a series of psycholinguistic experiments on the extent to which speakers adapt to addressees by using contrastive intonation. Four studies have been carried out to investigate prosodic adaptation processes of different kinds. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 report studies on the extent to which speakers, in the way they prosodically mark semantic contrasts, account for the knowledge state of their addressees. Chapter 4 and 5 report studies on the extent to which paralinguistic prosodic adaptation processes between interlocutors affect the prosodic marking of semantic contrasts. The experimental approach throughout the thesis consists of eliciting speech recordings which are analyzed by production and perception measures.

Taking all studies in this thesis together, we can conclude that the way speakers mark information structure prosodically, by means of contrastive intonation, is highly determined by the interaction with the interlocutor. That is, speakers adapt their prosody depending on their assumptions about the knowledge state of the addressee as well as their own (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). Furthermore, we find a relation between prosodic adaptation and the extent to which prosody is used in a functional way. In particular, the degree of perceived (Chapter 4) or produced (Chapter 5) adaptation depends on the extent to which prosody contributes to the linguistic meaning of utterances.