

The cohesive function of prosody in Ékegusií (Kisii) narratives

Daniel W. Hieber

Discourse Workshop

University of California, Santa Barbara

Nov. 14, 2016

What is prosody?

- suprasegmental (Fox 2000)
- hierarchical phonological structure (Cruttendon 1986; Ladd 2008; Nespor & Vogel 2007)
- syntactic mechanism (Downing 2013; Selkirk 1986)
- means of information packaging (Chafe 1994)
- interactional (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting; Barth-Weingarten & Reber 2010; Szczepek Reed 2011)
- affective (Gussenhoven 2004: 71-96)
- delineates units of discourse (Swerts 1994)

Prosodic features

- intonation
- tempo
- loudness
- pause ?
- syllable structure ??
- voice quality / phonation ???
- tone ????
- (morpho)phonological processes ?????

What goes on the list?

“there is no way of knowing ahead of time how the phonetic features loosely referred to as “prosodic” – pitch, duration, and so on – are going to be put to phonological use in any given language.”
(Himmelman & Ladd 2008: 253)

The phonetic cues that signal phonemic distinctions in one language may have purely prosodic functions in another, and vice versa.

How does one decide when a given linguistic feature is functioning prosodically or not?

Areas of agreement about prosody

- Functions ‘at the level of discourse’ or ‘postlexically’ (Cole 2015: 2; Himmelmann & Ladd 2008)
- Closely associated with intonation (Cruttendon 1986: 1ff; Jun 2005)
- Demarcation of larger stretches of discourse (Cole 2015; Fónagy & Bérard 2006; Himmelman & Ladd 2008; Jun 2005; Wennerstrom 2001:7)
- ‘Purely phonological’ vs. discourse-level prosody (Nespor & Vogel 2007: 3)

Prosody & Discourse

- What does it mean for prosody to be a discourse-level phenomenon?
- *cohesion* – distinguishes a text from a collection of random utterances
- *ties* – “Where the interpretation of any item in the discourse requires making reference to some other item in the discourse” (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 11)

Prosody & Discourse

- Grammatical structure is cohesion-forming
- Prosody connects large units of discourse (Brown 1977; Genetti 2011; Ladd 1986, 1988; Swerts & Geluykens 1994; Yule 1980)
- Prosody signals relatedness between successive units of discourse (e.g. pitch reset) (Brazil 1985; Couper-Kuhlen 2004; Ladd 1986, 1988; Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990)

Prosody & Discourse

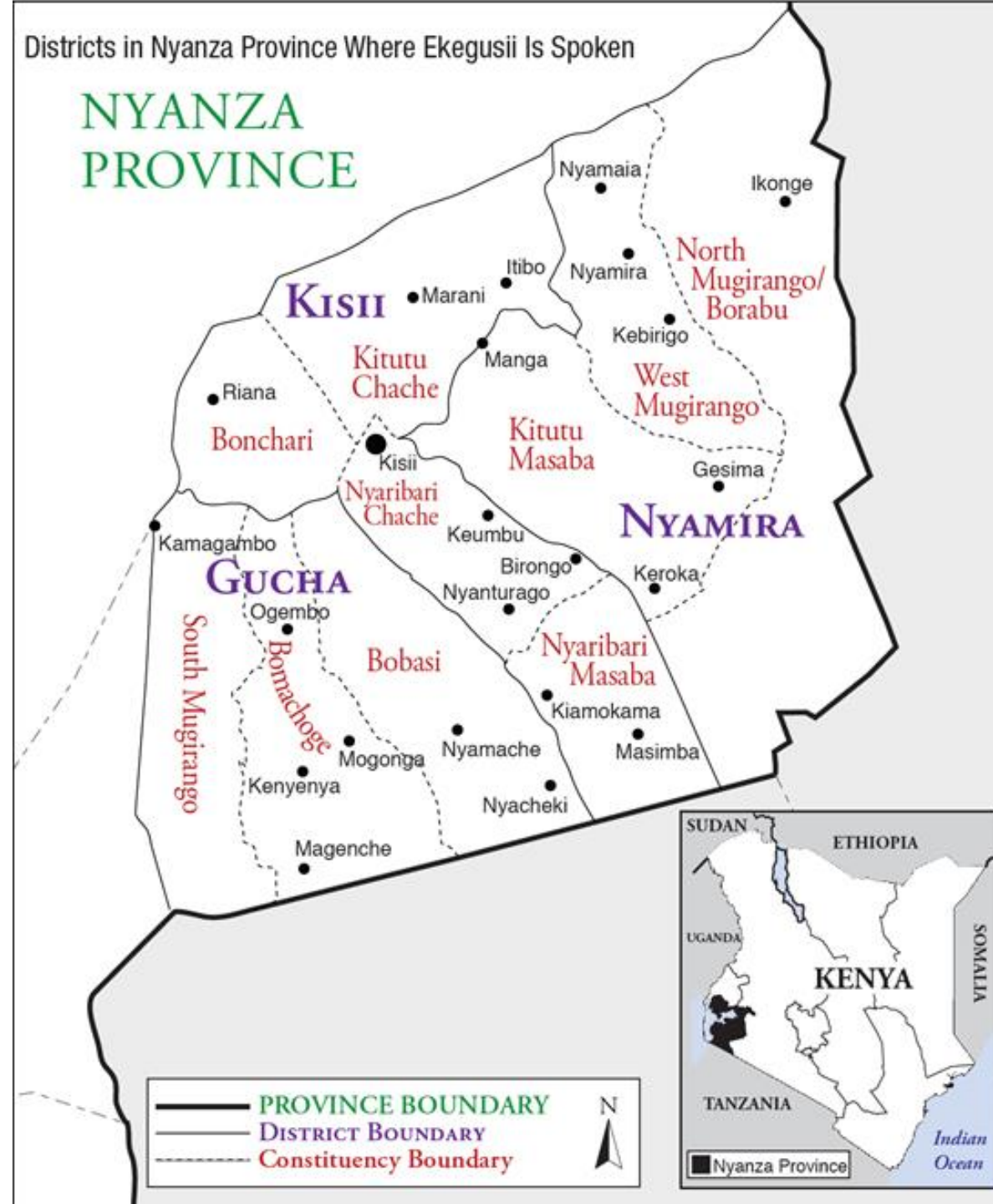
“When prosodic cues are available, listeners do appear to make use of them in detecting discourse boundaries and in evaluating the degree of discourse cohesion or juncture between successive utterances in a discourse.” Cole (2015: 9)

Ékegusií (Kisii)

Bantu, Niger-Congo

Districts in Nyanza Province Where Ekegusii Is Spoken

NYANZA PROVINCE



Ékegusií (Kisii; Bantu, Niger–Congo)

- Endangered language of southwest Kenya
- Few speakers under 30
- 2.2 million ethnic Gusii people, ~600,000 speakers
- Surrounded by Nilotic languages
- Tonal: H vs. L tone (L orthographically unmarked)
- Data: 24 folktales; lexical database with audio (14,000 words)







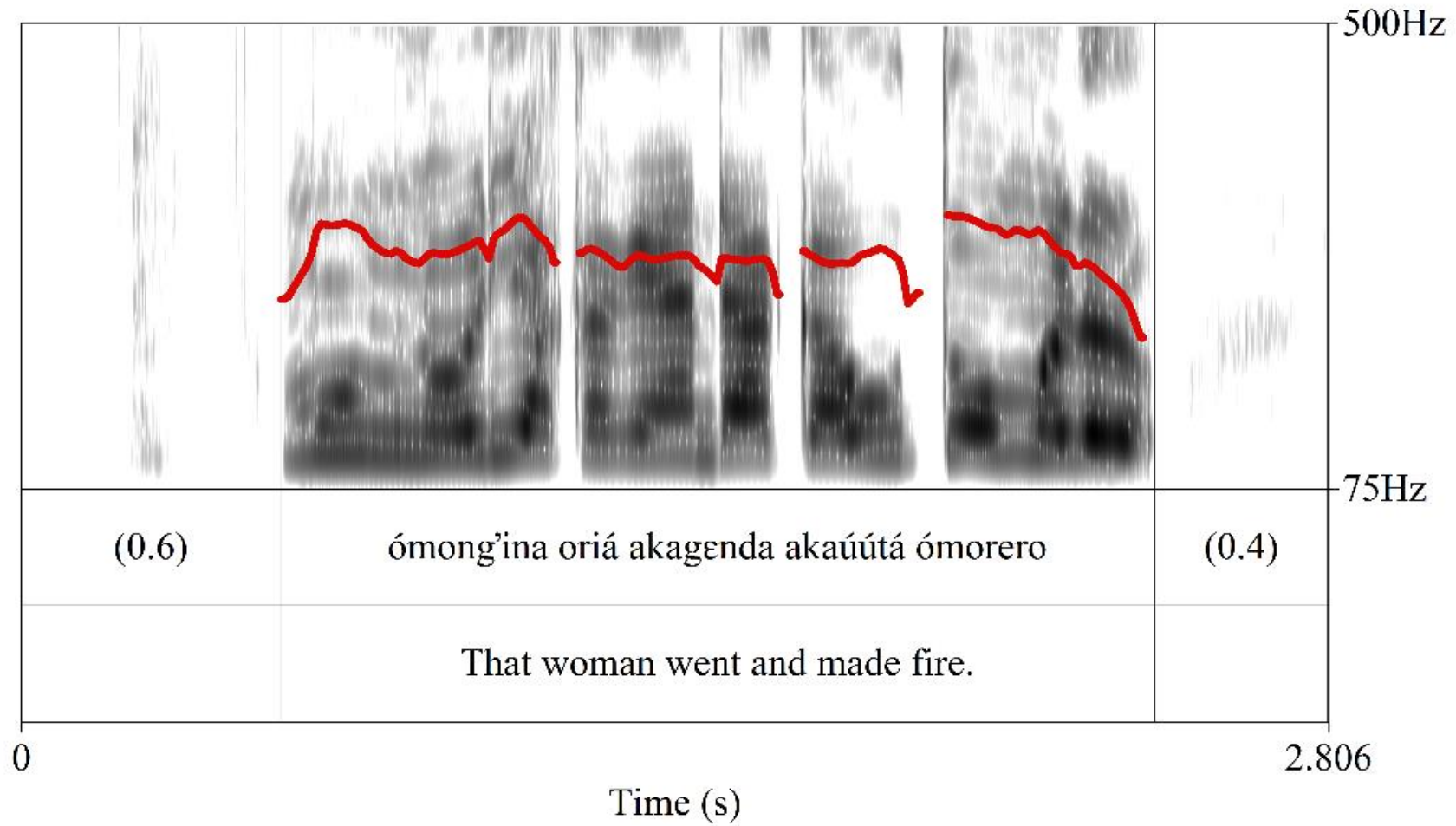


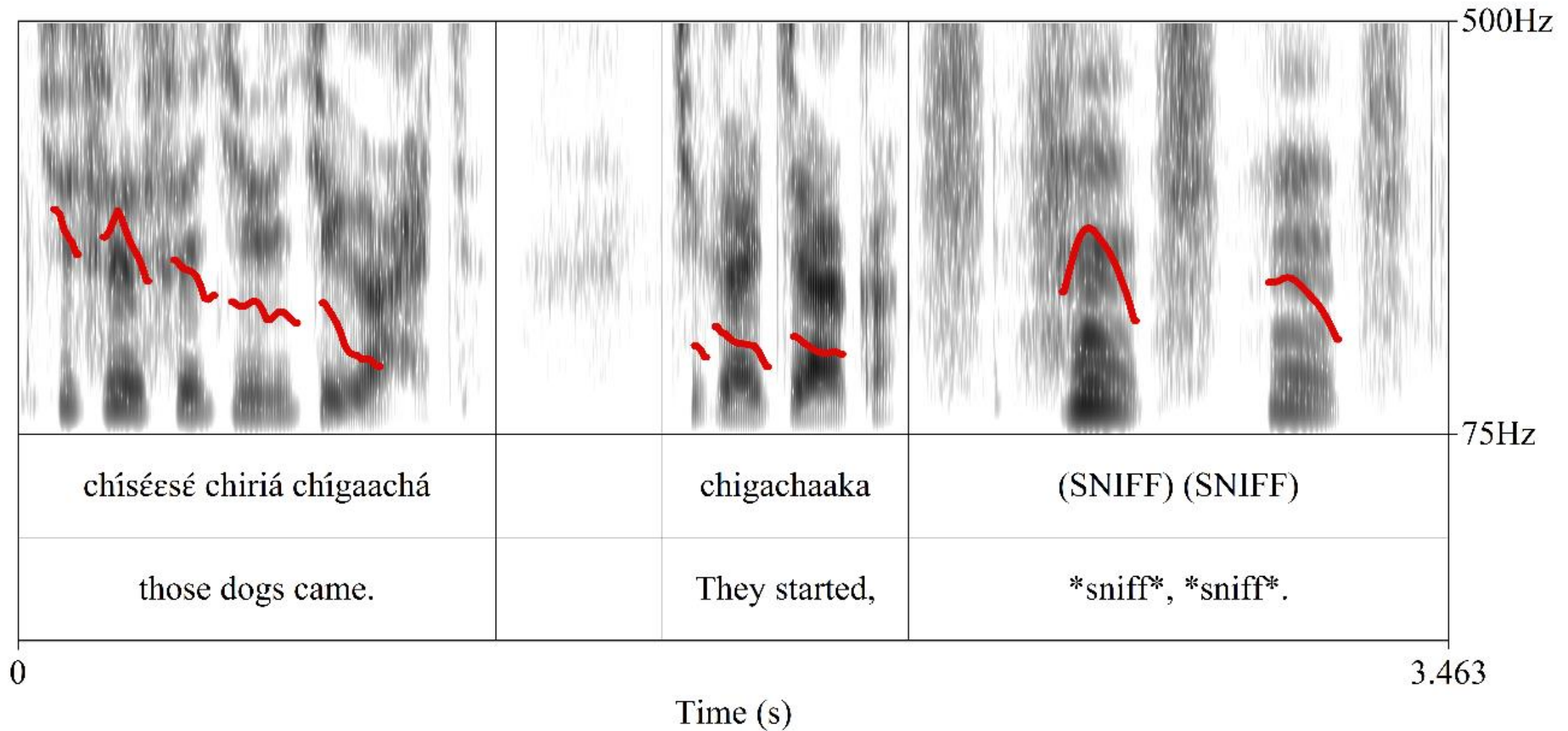


Prosodic Features

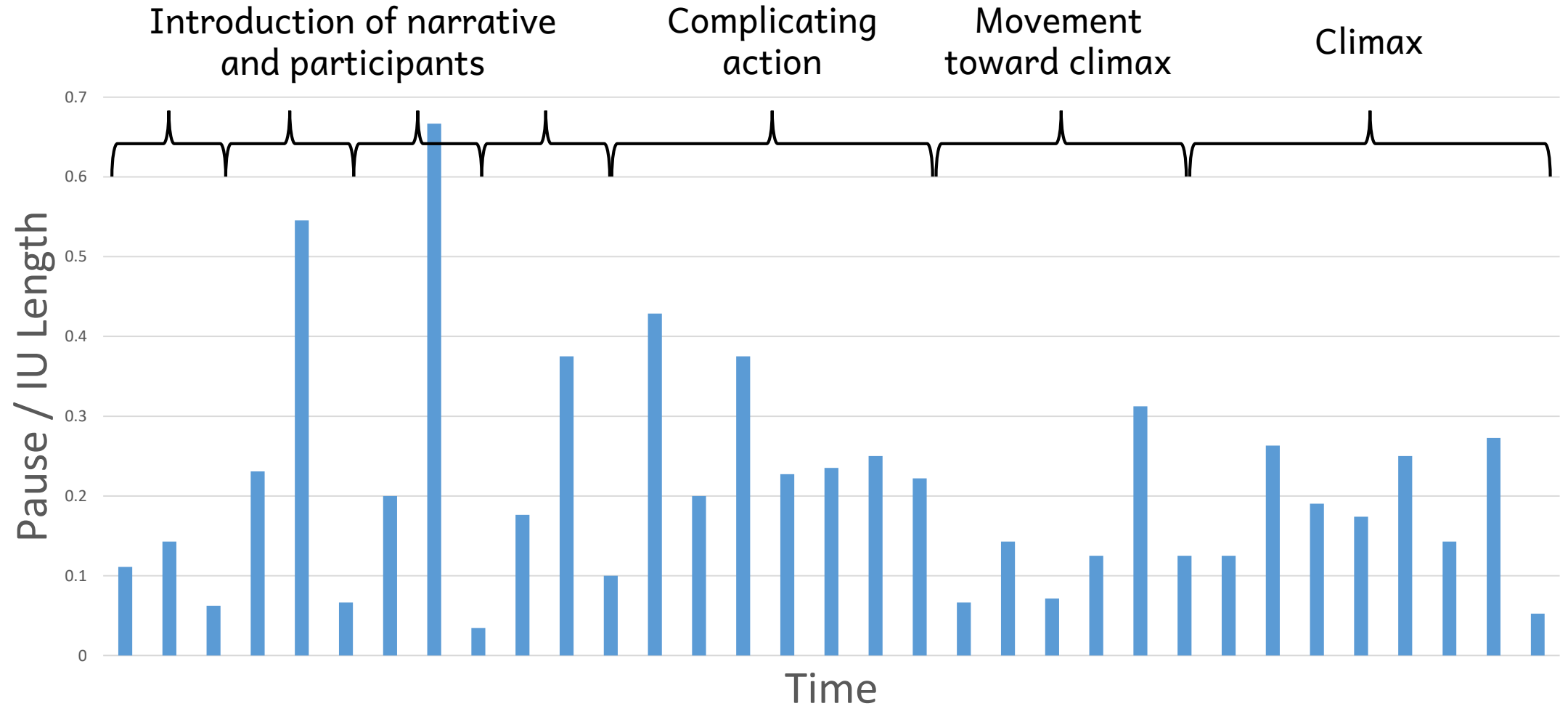
- pause
- vowel elision
- prosodic accent
- pitch reset
- isotony (intonational parallelism)
- intonational contour

Pause

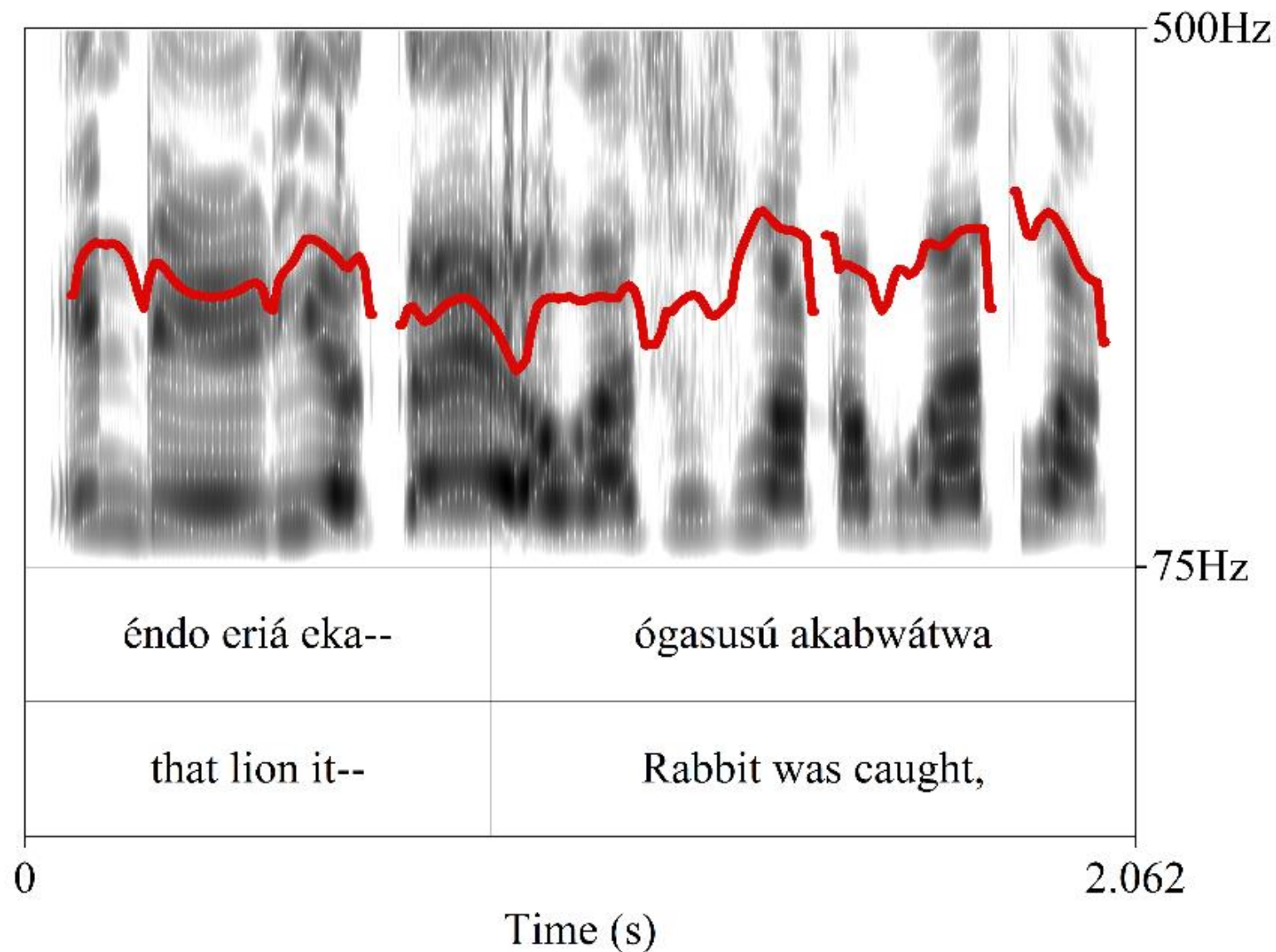




Ratio of pause to IU length in a text



Repair without pause



Vowel elision



éndo	égatéeébá	ρεεɾɔ	ígo	íngóóchá	kógenda	íntégé
lion	it.said	today	so	I.am.going	to.go	I.trap

[éend#égatéeébá ρεεɾɔ#γó#ón̩góót͡ʃá kɔχɛendá#ántéχé]

‘The lion said, “Today I’ll go and lay a trap.”’

Vowel elision

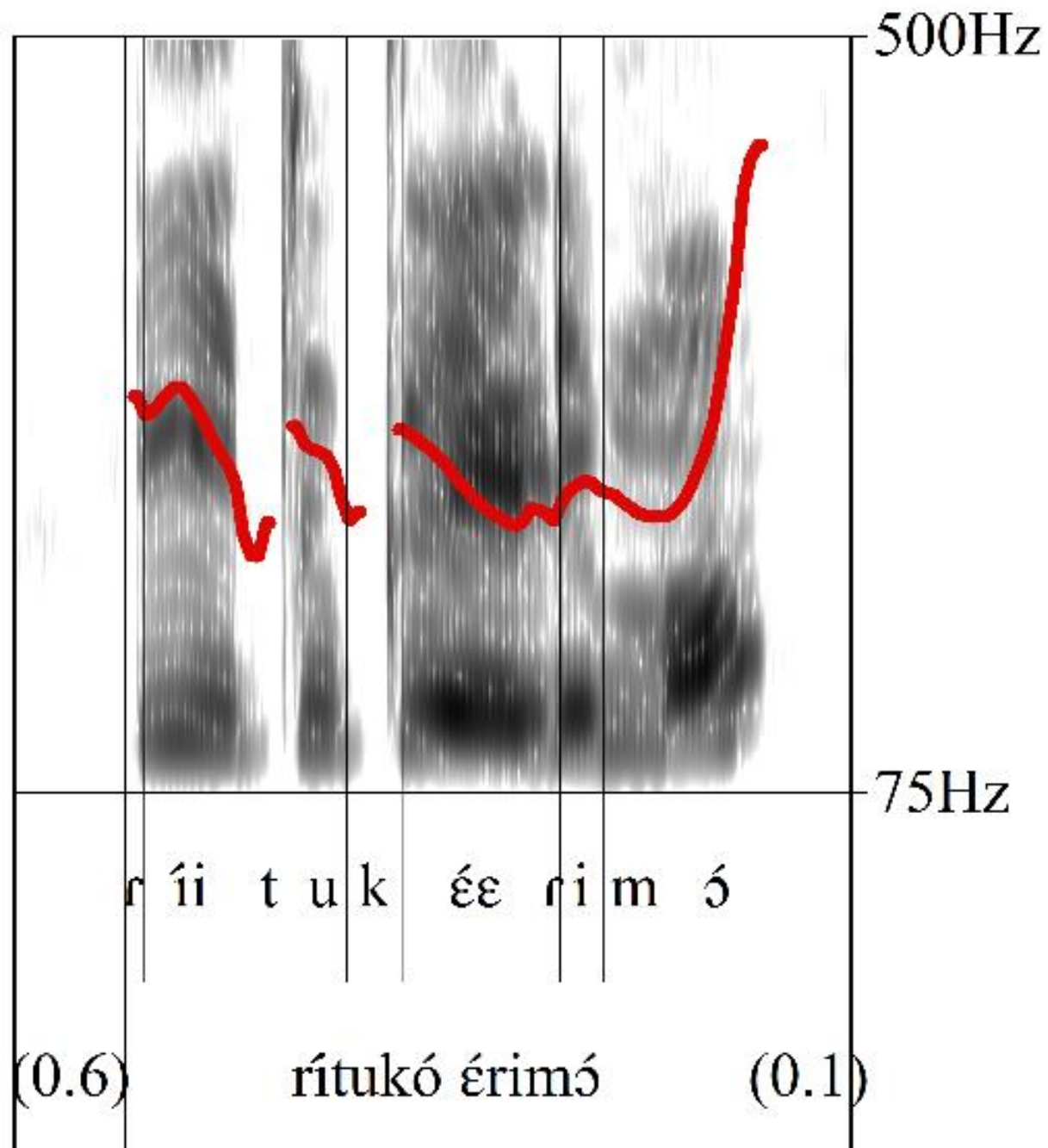


índóré	ómontó	ógoochá	ória	chínchúgú	chíáné
I.see	person	who.goes	to.eat	ground.nuts	my

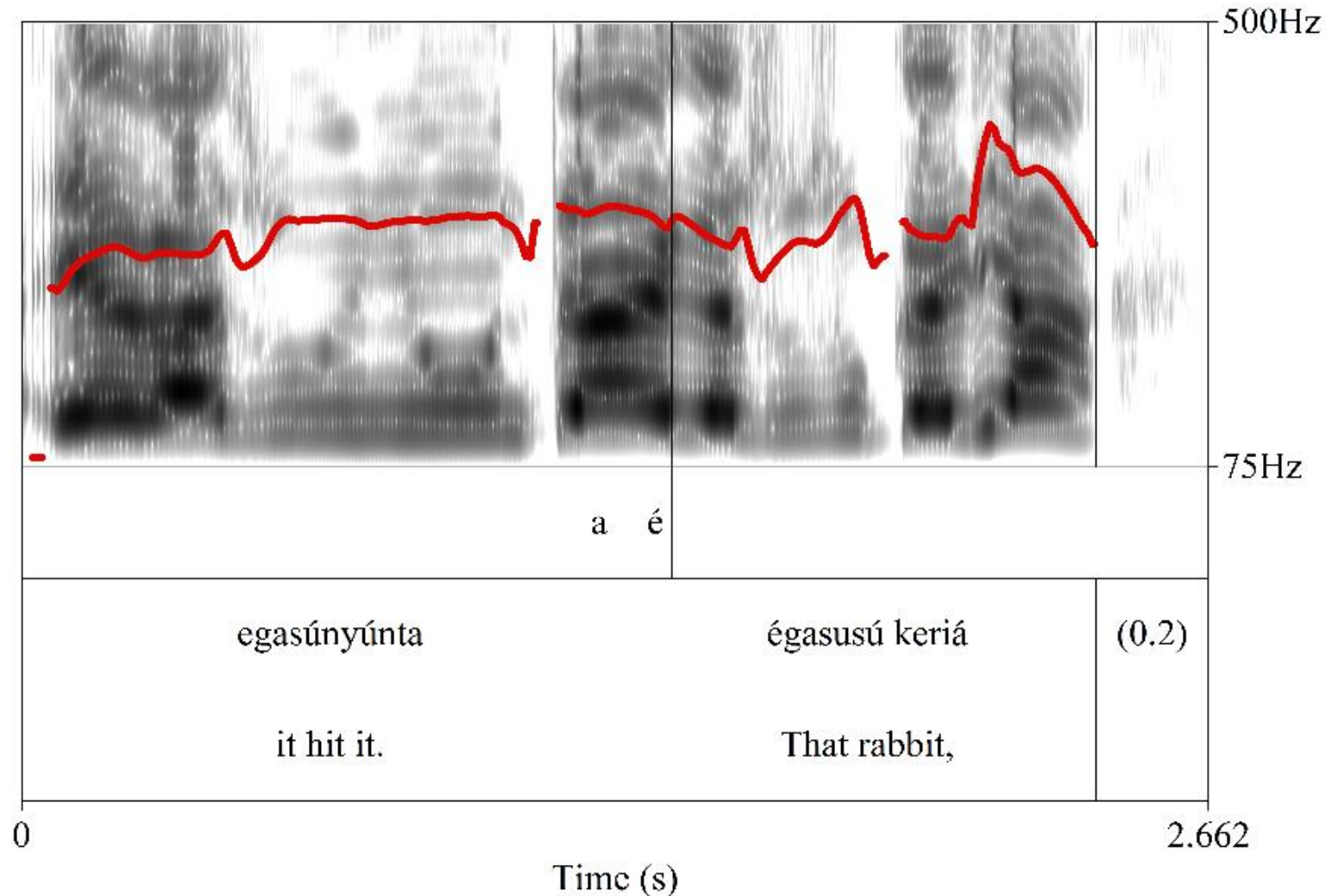
[índór#ómoont#óɣootʃ#óri#tʃíintʃúɣú tʃíáné]

‘[...] so that I see who comes to eat my ground nuts.’

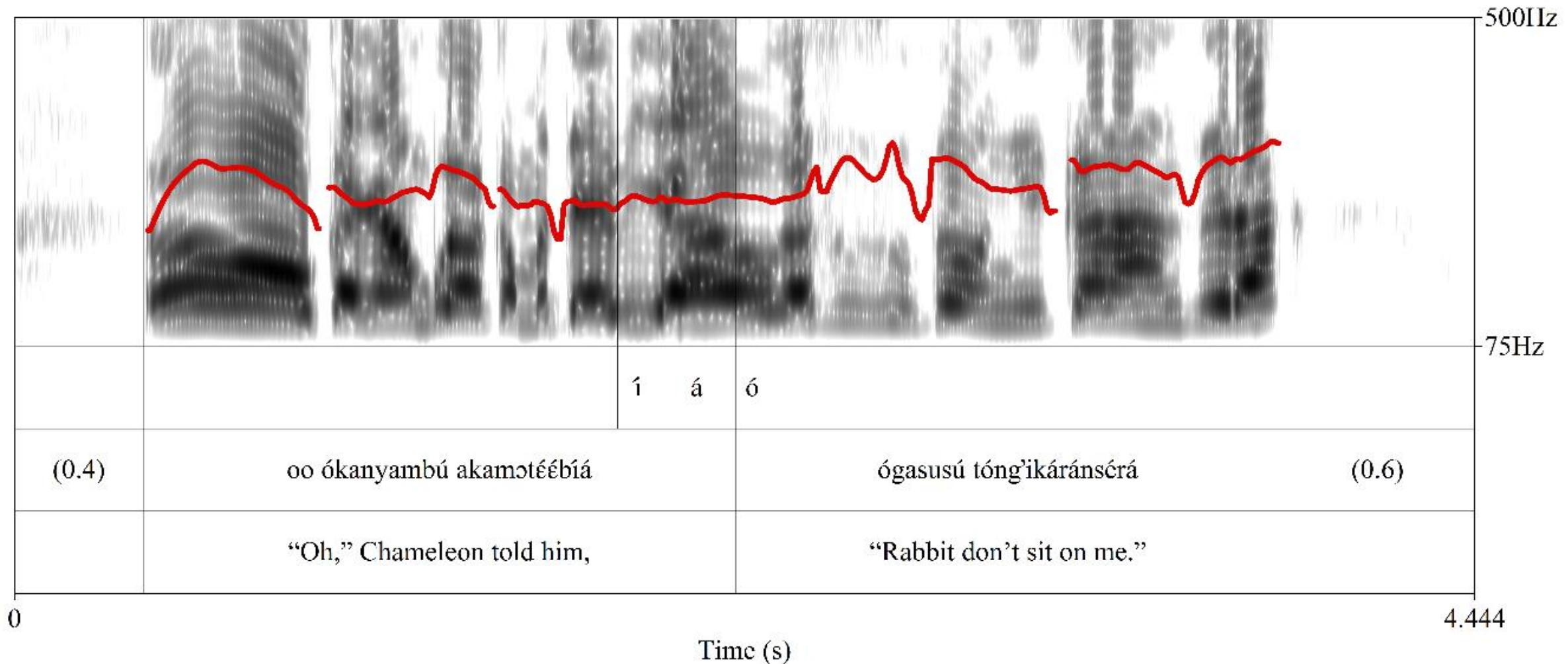
Vowel elision



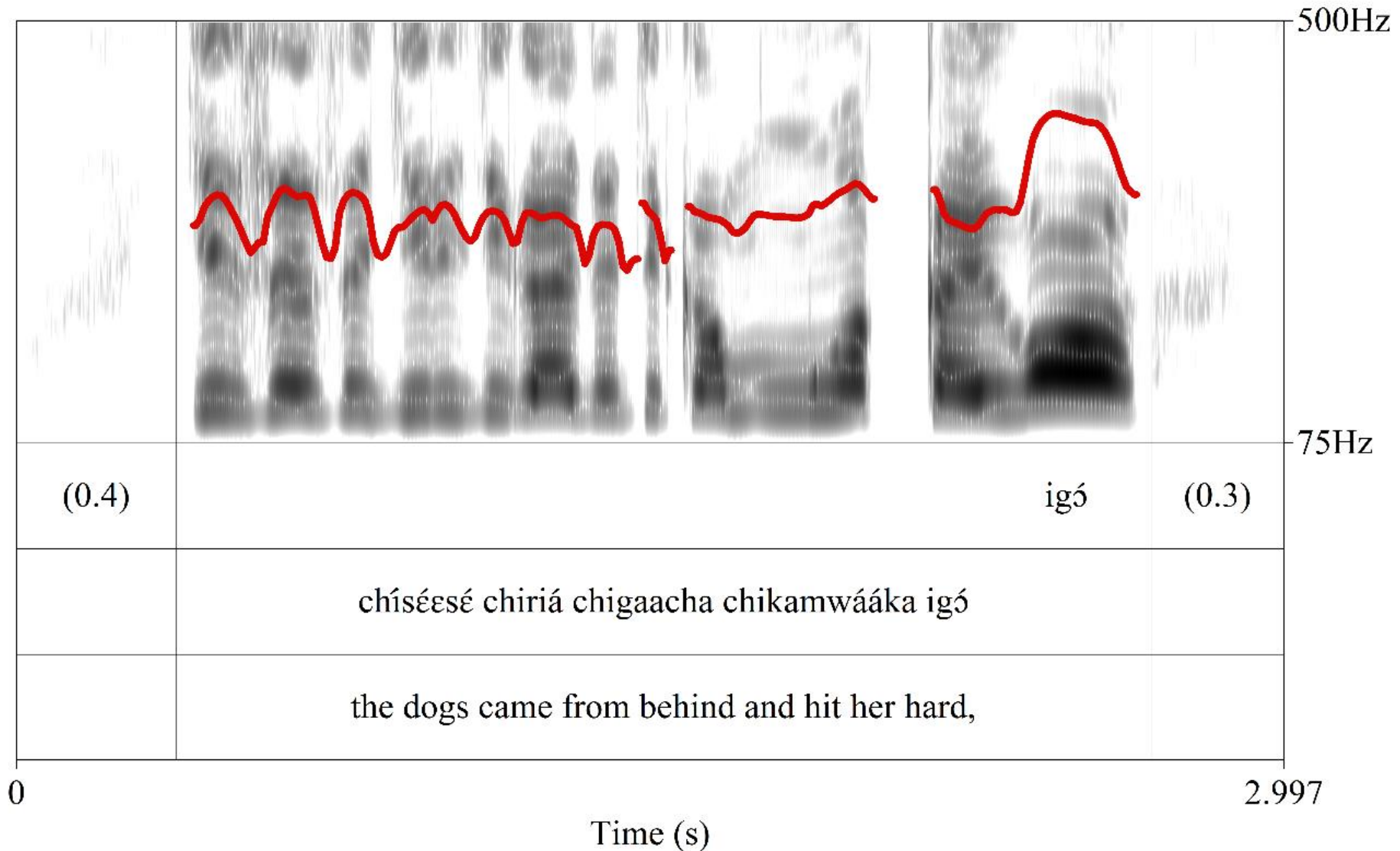
Lack of vowel elision indicating a prosodic break



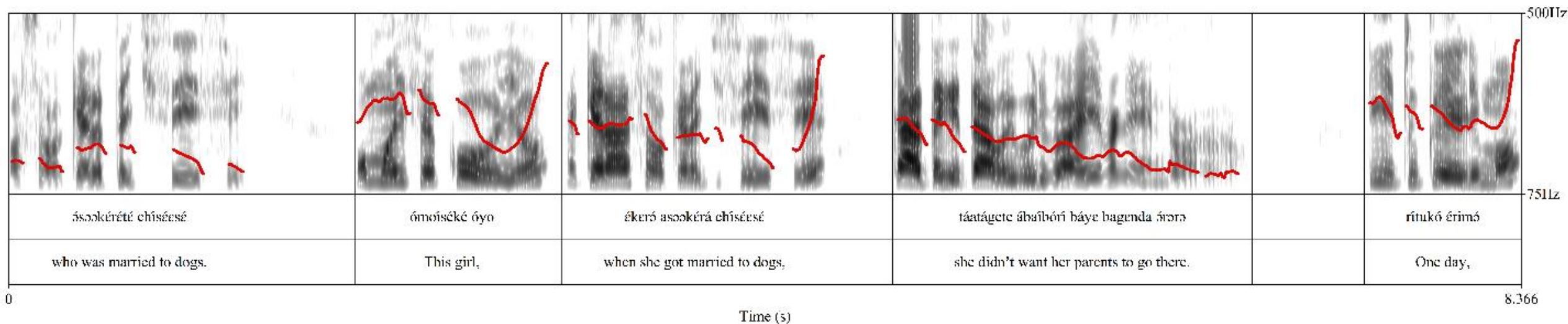
Lack of vowel elision at transition into reported speech



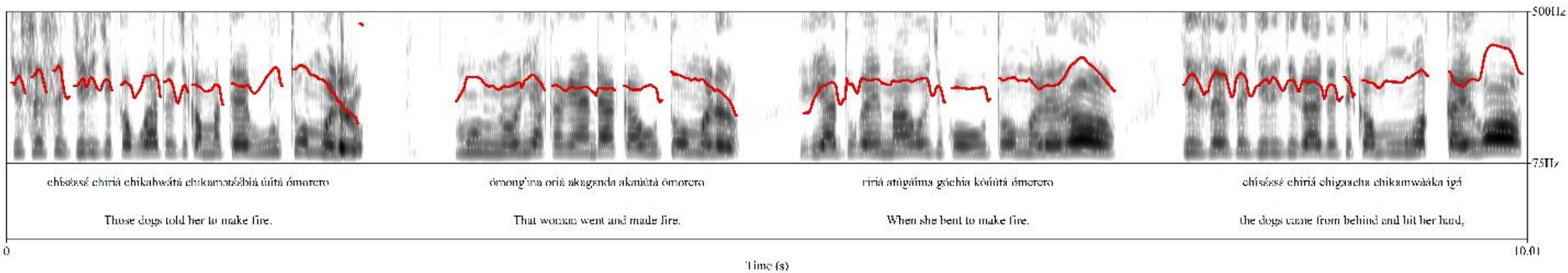
Prosodic accent



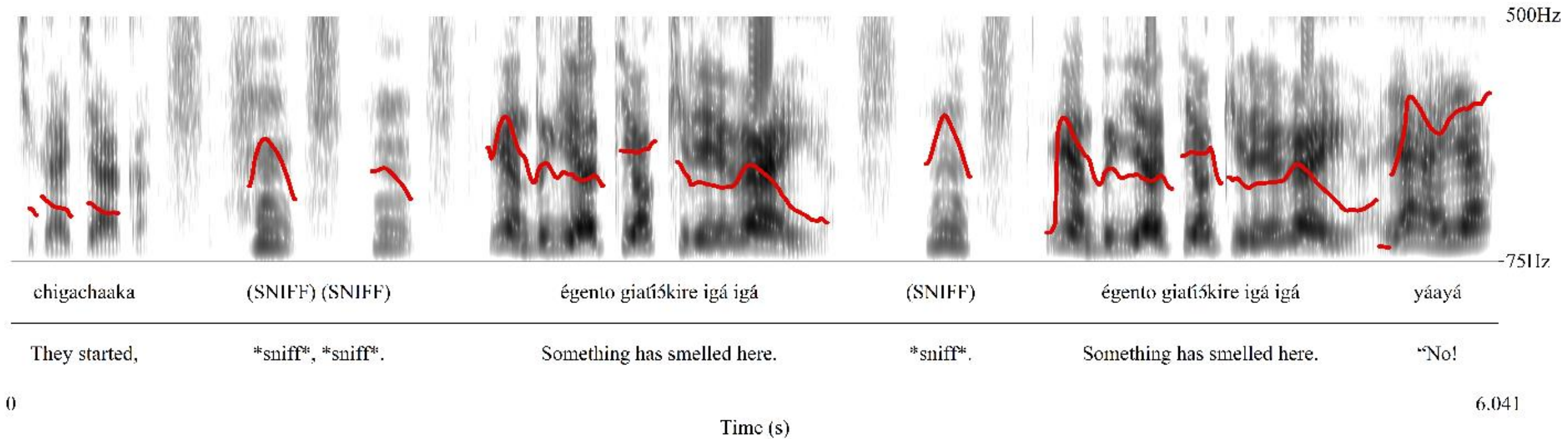
Pitch Reset



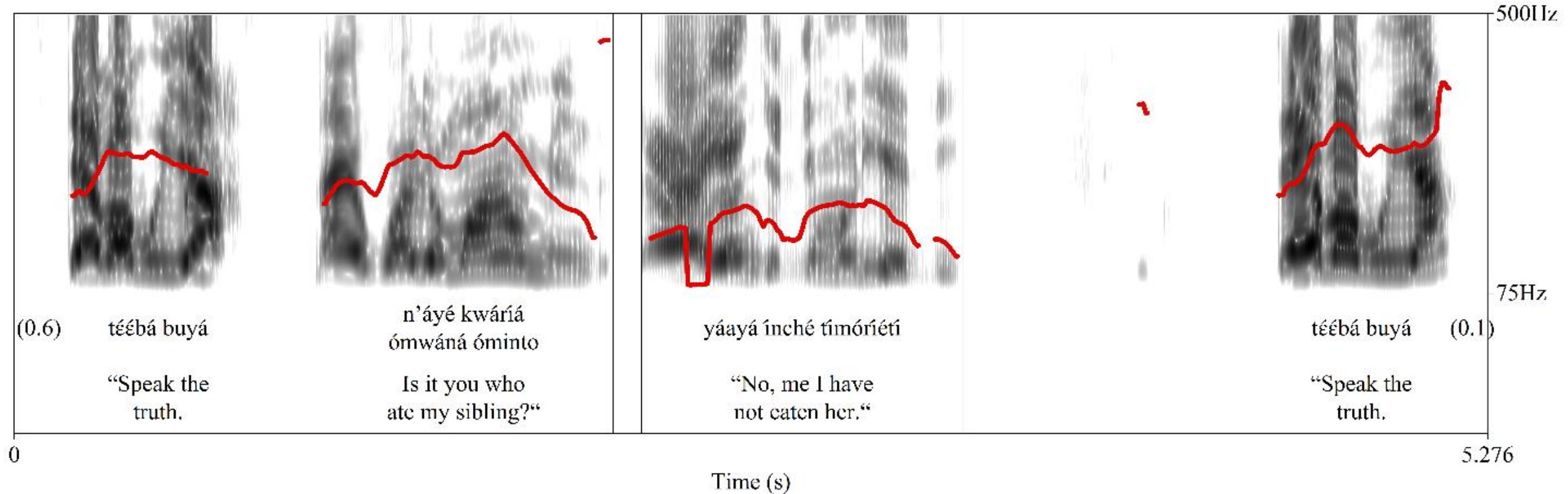
Lack of pitch reset indicating narrative continuity



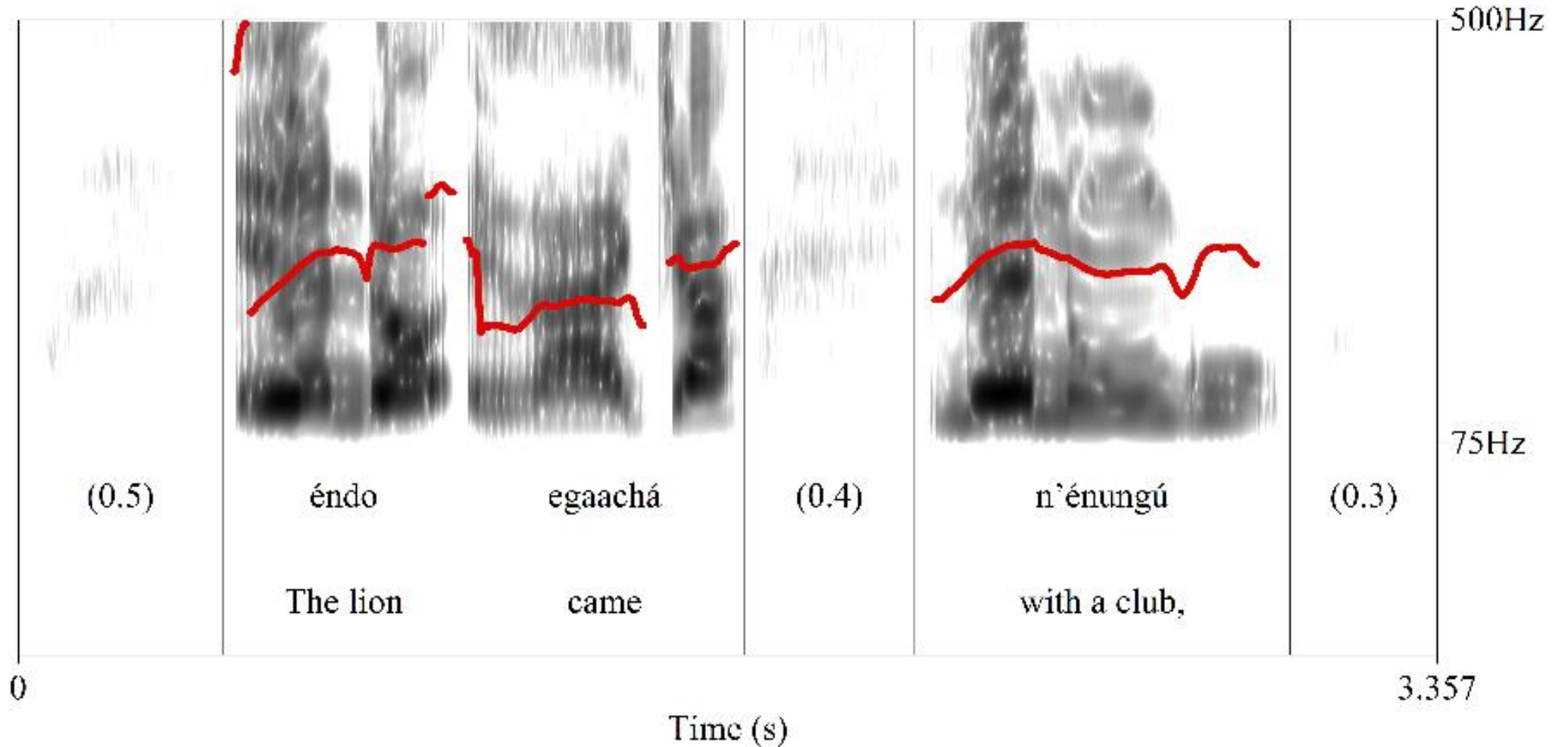
Isotony



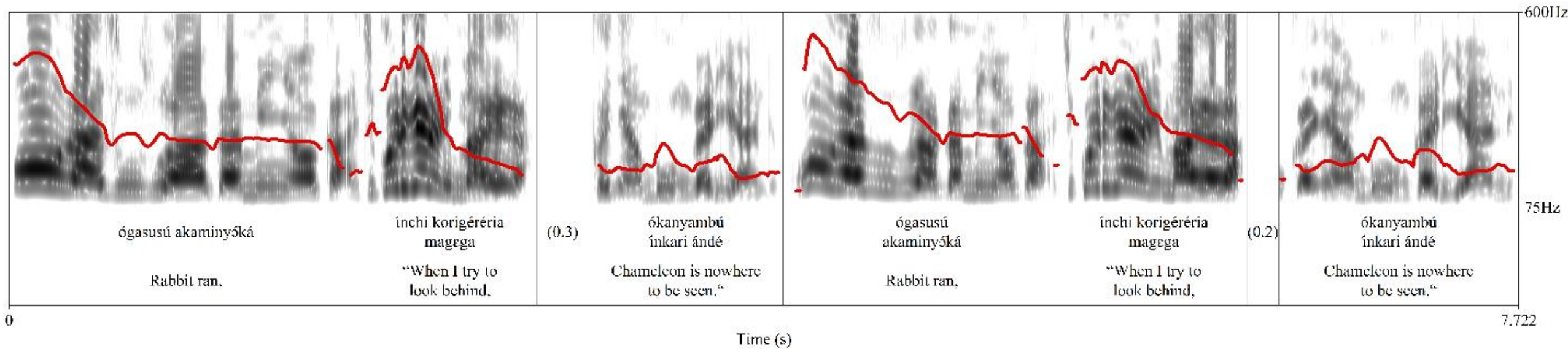
Lexical repetition without isotony



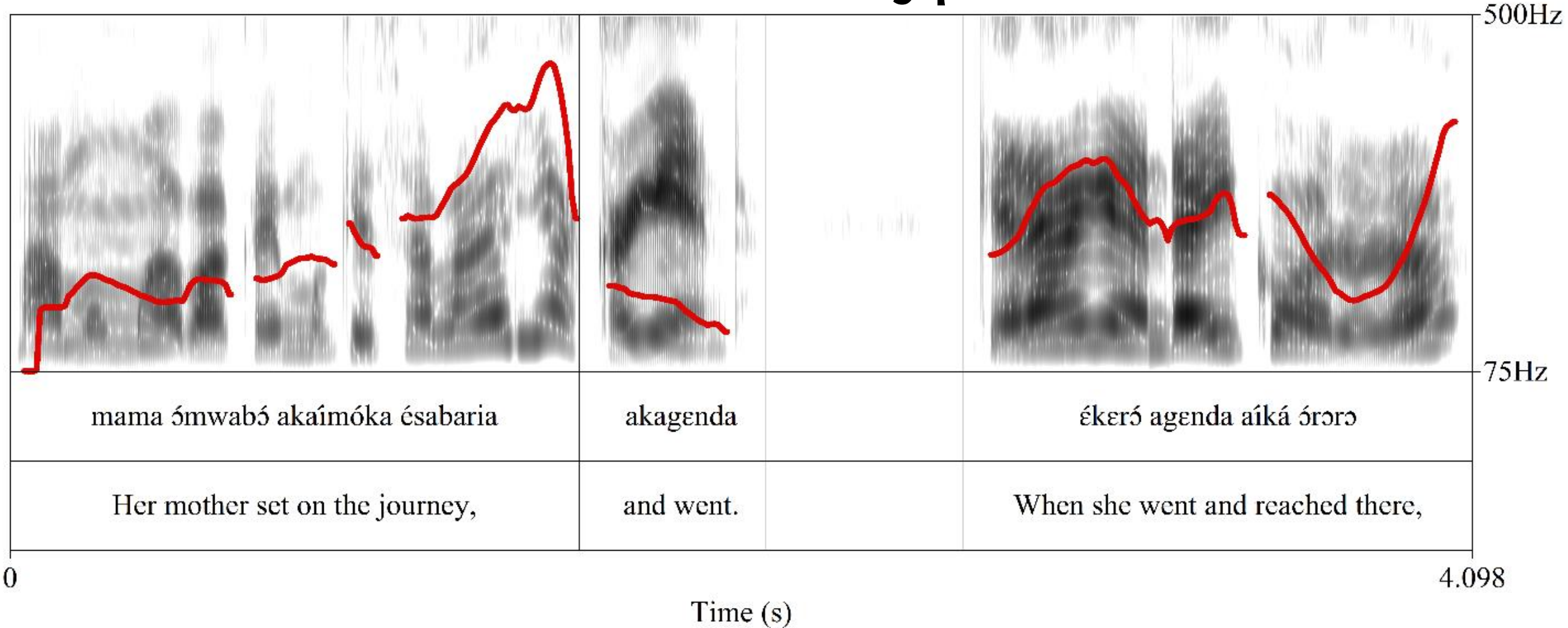
Isotony without lexical repetition



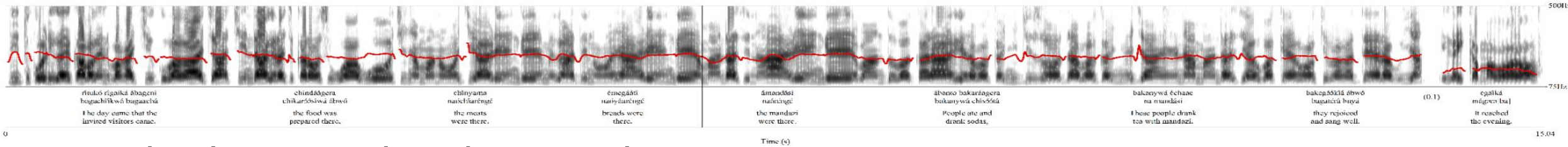
Isotony across multiple IUs



Intonational Contour Types

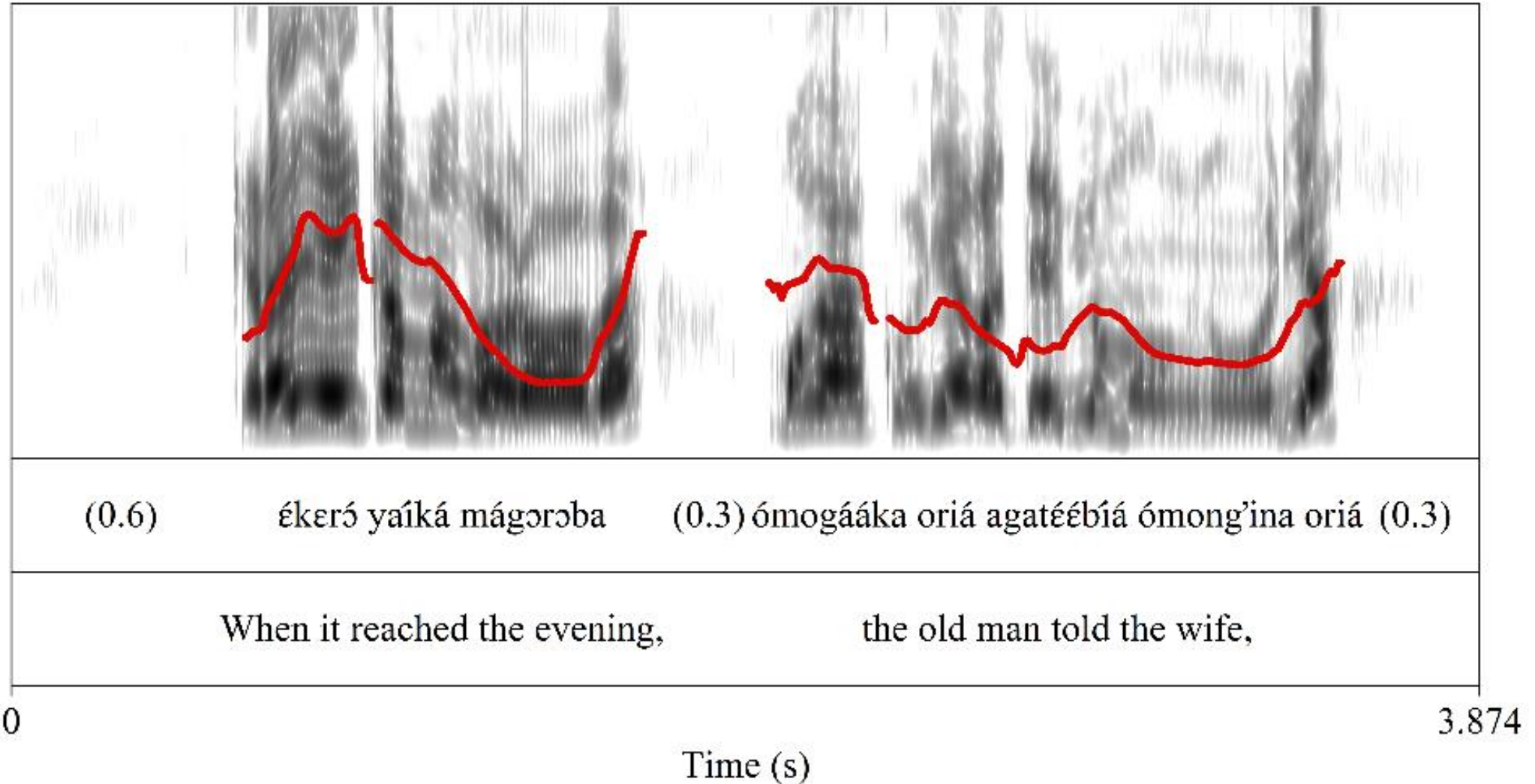


High Register

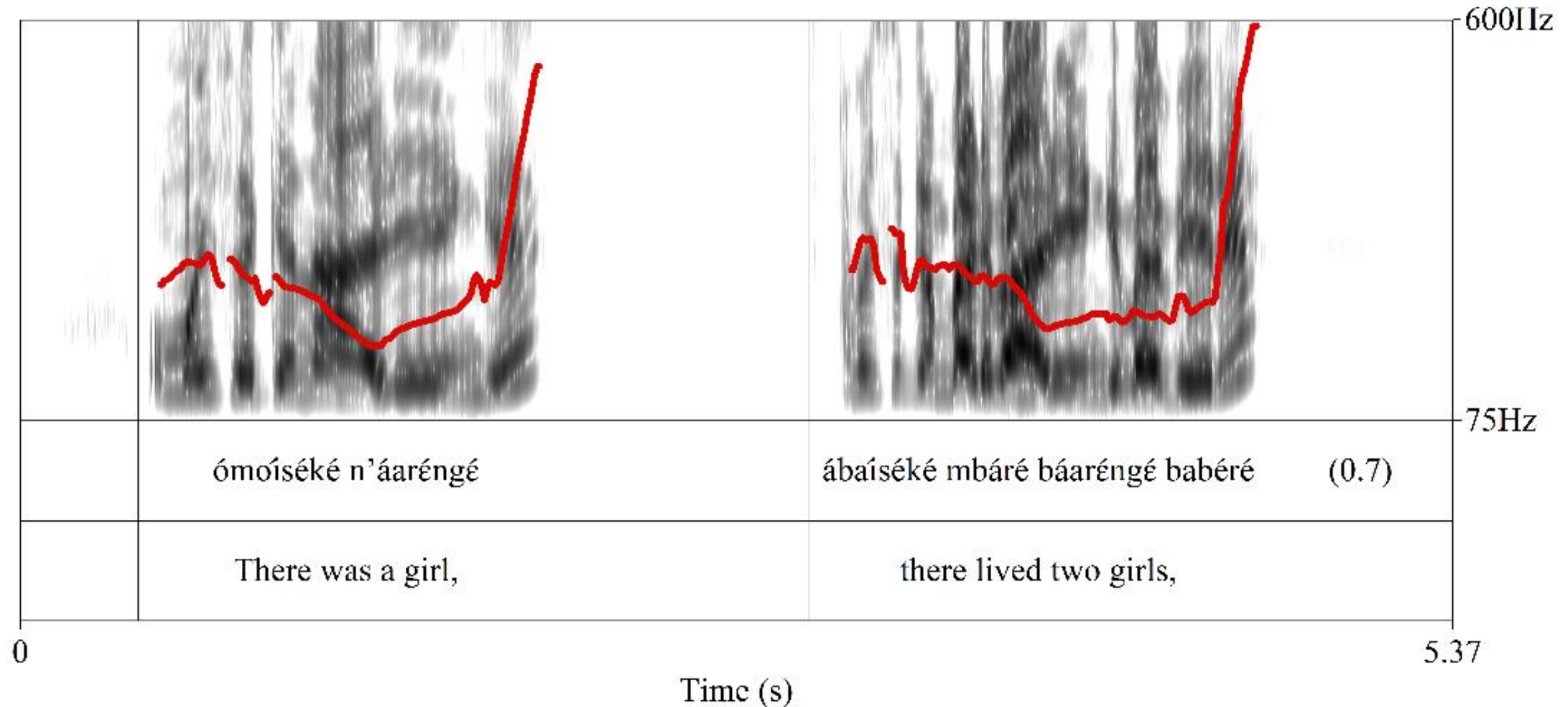


- The day came that the invited visitors came.
- The food was prepared there.
- The meats were there.
- The breads were there.
- The mandazi [donuts] were there.
- People ate and drank sodas.
- These people drank tea with mandazi.
- They rejoiced and sang well.
- It reached the evening.

Terminal Rise – adverbial ‘when’ clause



Terminal rise – new topic



Prosody as Cohesion

- “there is an English-specific system of intonation built upon a rhythmic foundation that functions as a “grammar of cohesion.” This means that prosody, particularly intonation, contributes information about connections among constituents in discourse, conveying meaning beyond what is provided through lexical and syntactic systems” (Wennerstrom 2001:7)

Prosody as Cohesion

- Avoids problems with the list approach and definitions focused on suprasegmentals
- Offers a language-general functional definition of prosody which helps identify when a phonetic feature is being used prosodically, and when it is not
- Provides a framework for future typological studies of prosody

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Pauses in a single text

