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# Prosody and cohesion in Ékegusií (Kisii) narrative

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# What is prosody?

- intonation
- tempo / rhythm
- loudness
- pause
- syllable structure
- voice quality / phonation

- What do these things have to do with one another?

# 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." (Himmelmann & Ladd 2008: 253)

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

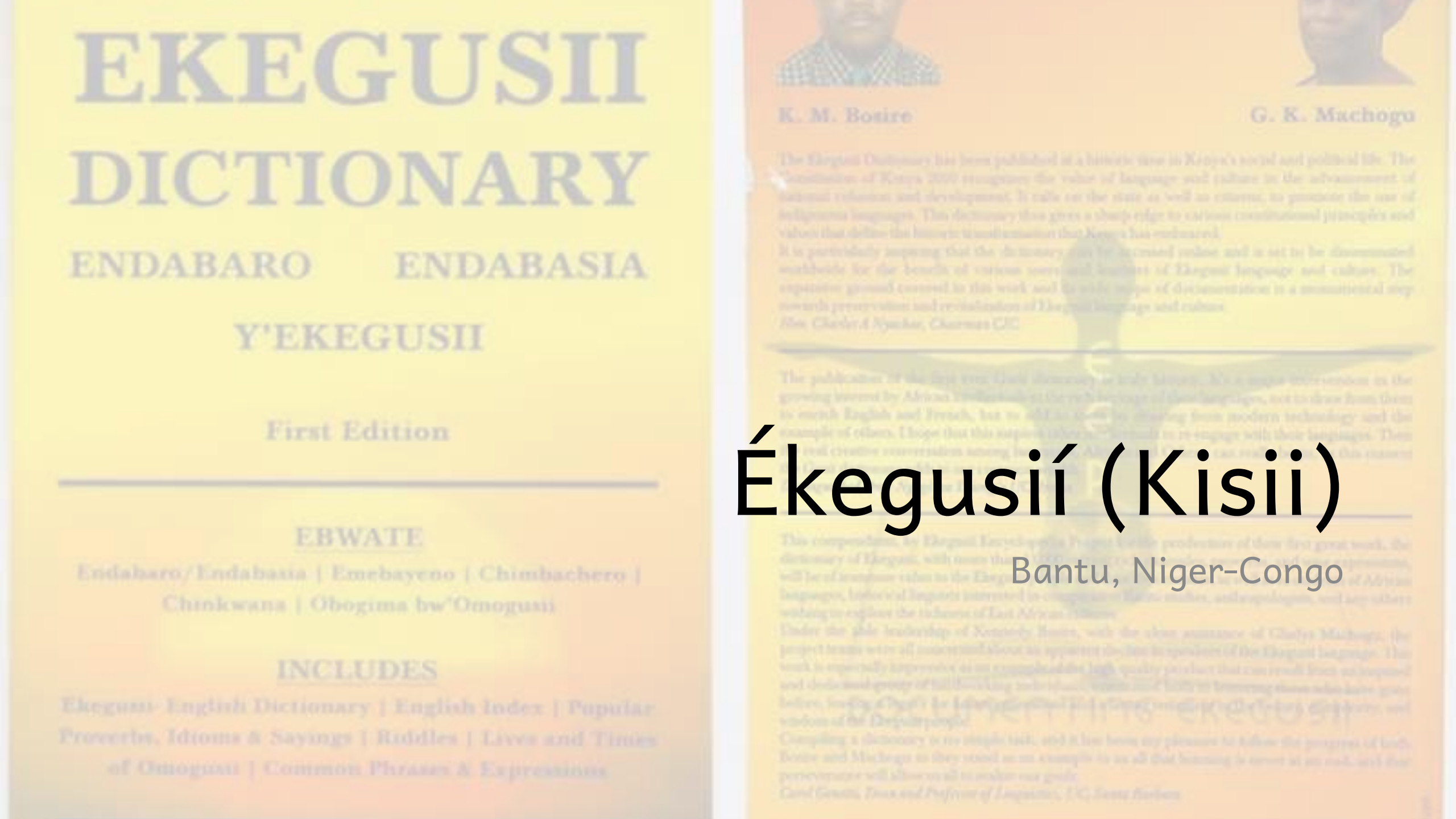
How does one decide when a given linguistic feature is functioning prosodically or not?

# Prosody

**The set of phonetic and phonological cues that speakers use to give cohesion to their discourse, by signaling the transitions from one unit of discourse to the next, the relations that hold between those units, and their relative prominence.**

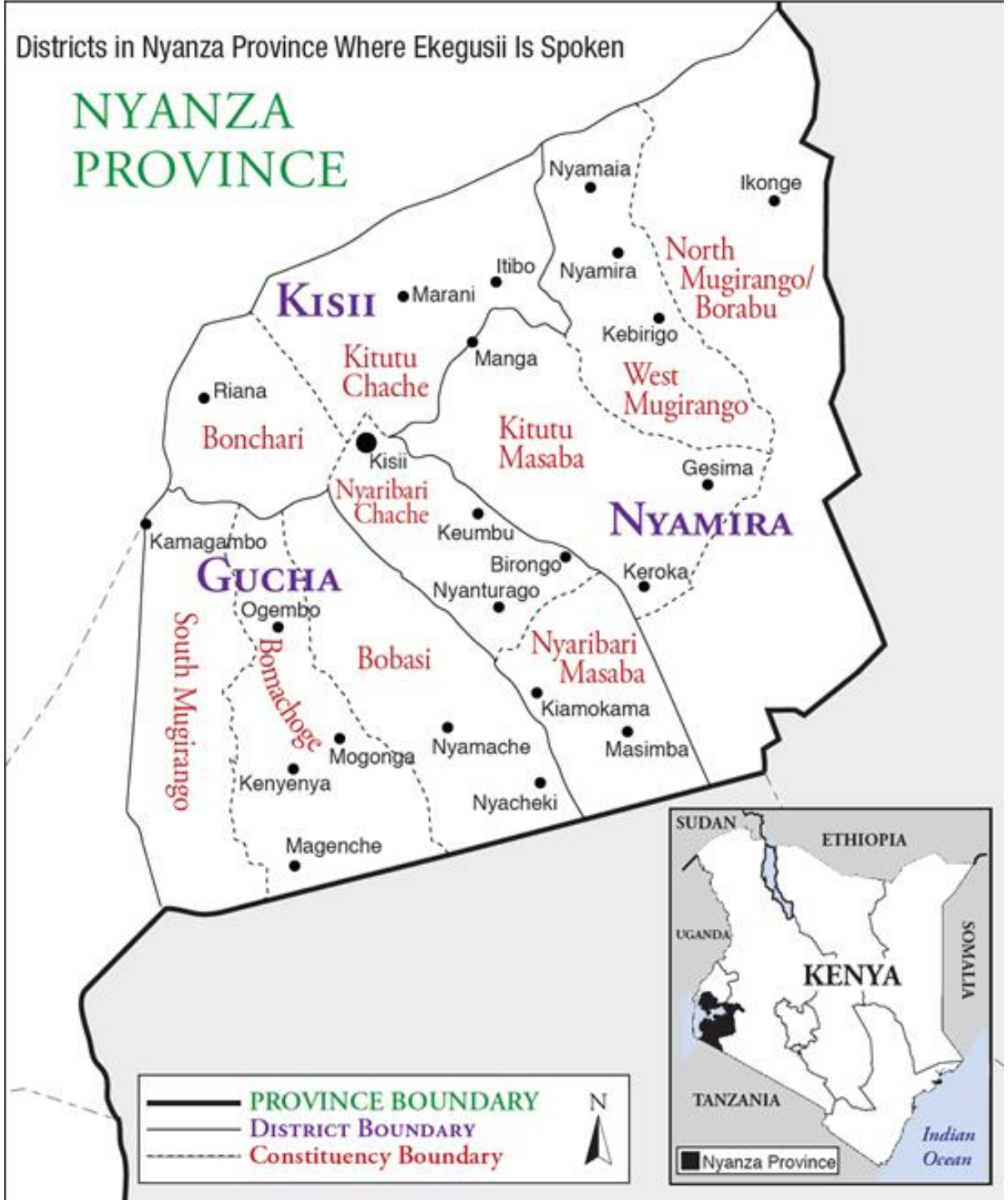
- Prosody is fundamentally a discourse phenomenon

- Prosody is a tool that speakers use to structure their speech
  - (but not the only tool – works in tandem with morphosyntax)




# Ékegusií (Kisii)

Bantu, Niger-Congo




Map taken from Nash (2011)

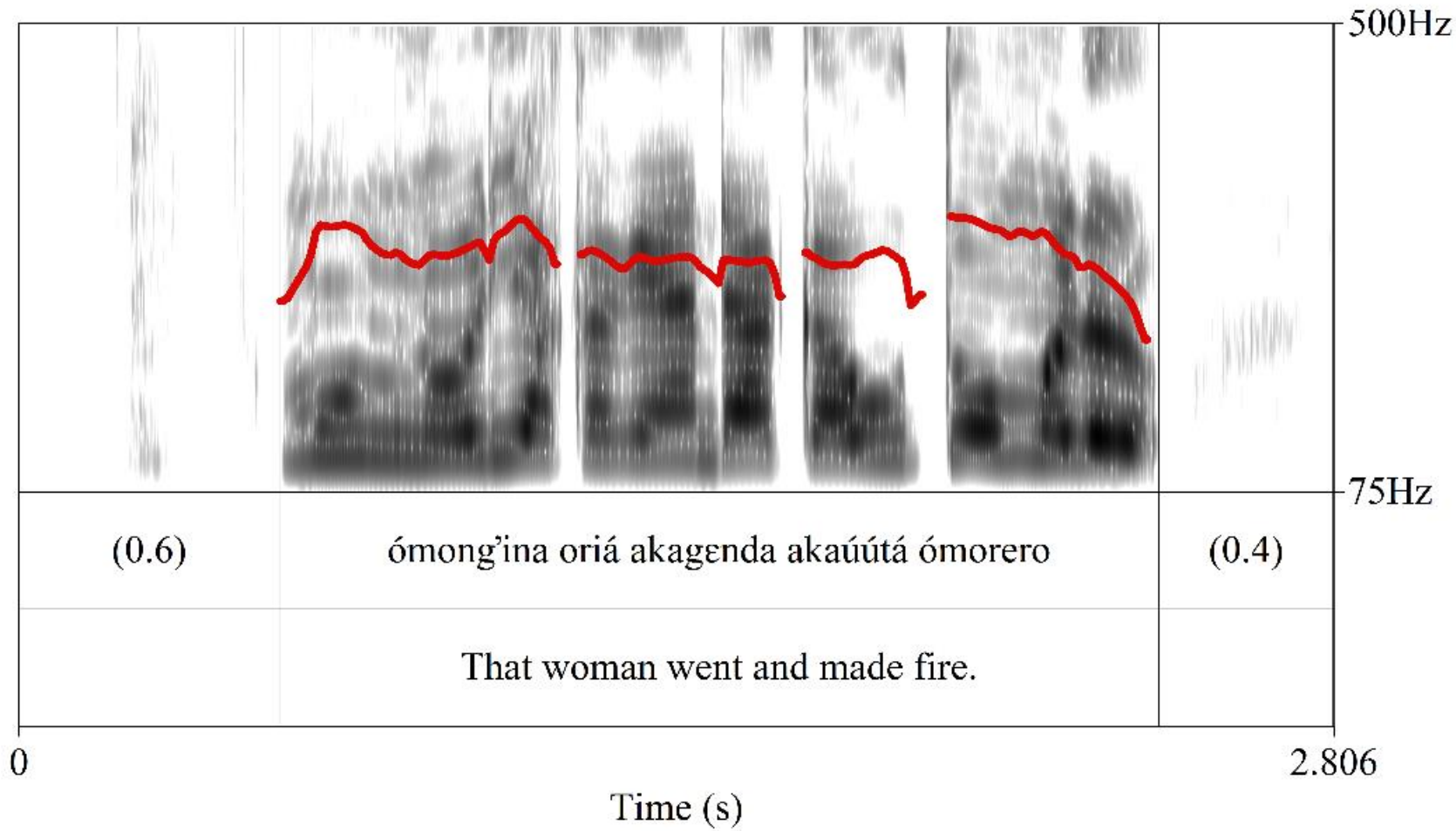
# Ékegusií (Kisii; Bantu, Niger-Congo)

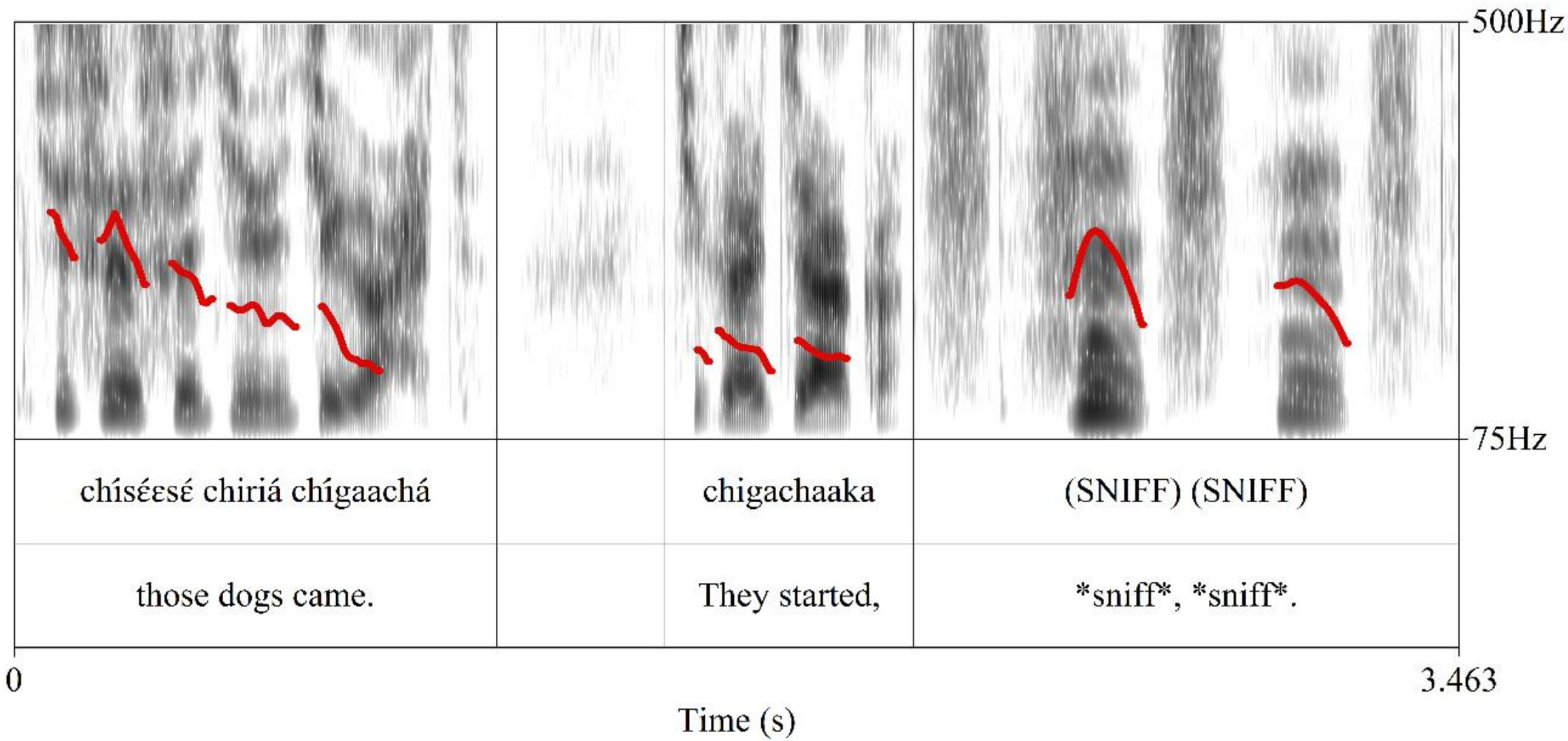
- Endangered language of southwest Kenya
- Few speakers under 30
- 2.2 million ethnic Gusii people, ~600,000 speakers
- Surrounded by Nilotic languages
- Tonal: H vs. L tone (L orthographically unmarked)
- Data: 24 folktales; lexical database with audio (14,000 words)

GOLANG2014

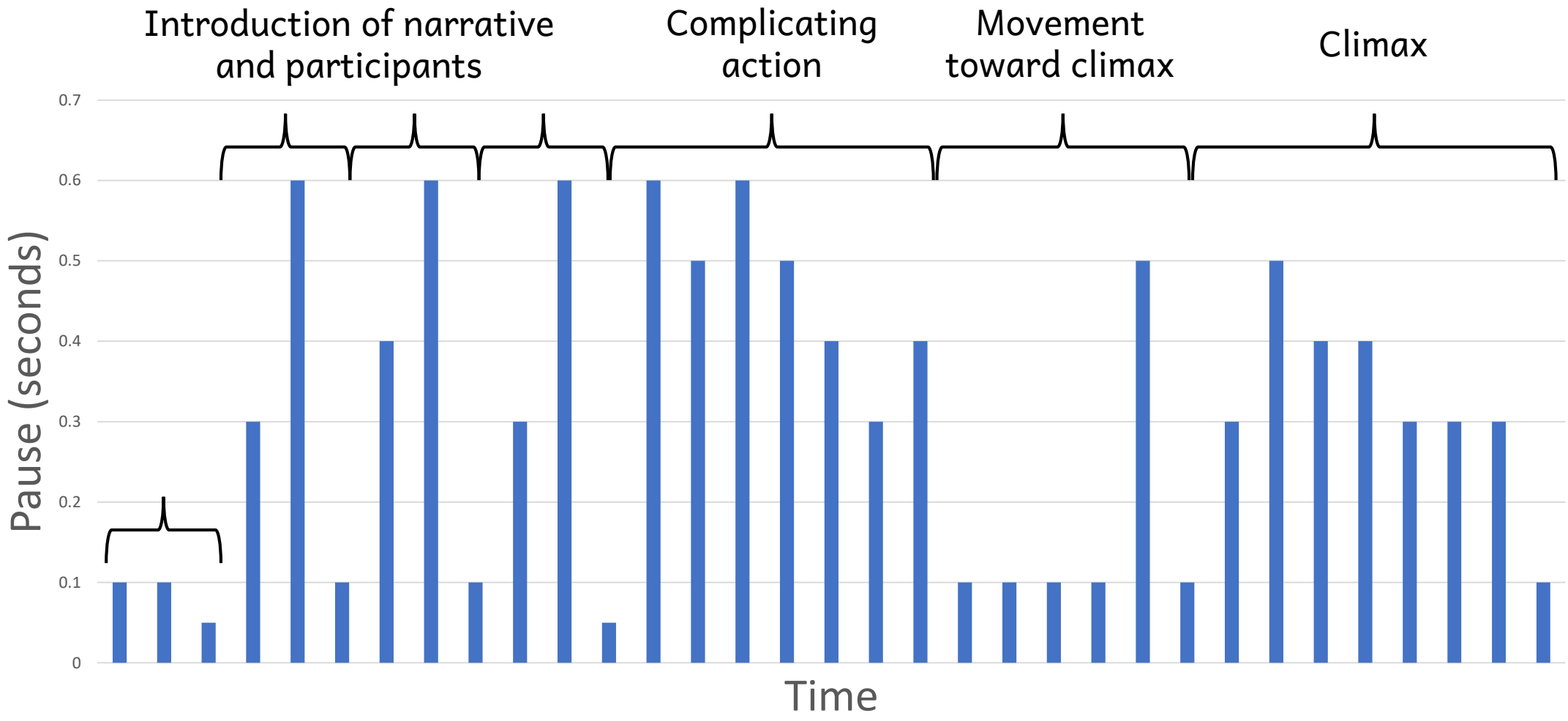
EKEGUSII
DICTIONARY

# Pause


500Hz
75Hz
(0.6)
ómong'ina oriá akagɛnda akaúútá ómorero
(0.4)
That woman went and made fire.
0
2.806
Time (s)


500Hz
75Hz
chíséɛsé chiriá chígaachá
chigachaaka
(SNIFF) (SNIFF)
those dogs came.
They started,
*sniff*, *sniff*.
0
3.463
Time (s)

# Pauses in *a* single text



# Vowel elision

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| éndo | ɛ́gatɛ́ɛ́bá | rɛɛrɔ | ígo | íngóóchá | kógɛnda | íntɛ́gɛ́ |
| lion | it.said | today | so | I.am.going | to.go | I.trap |

[éend#ɛ́ɣatɛ́ɛ́βá ɾɛɛɾɔ́#ɣó#óŋgóótʃá kɔɣɛɛndá#ántɛ́ɣɛ́]

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

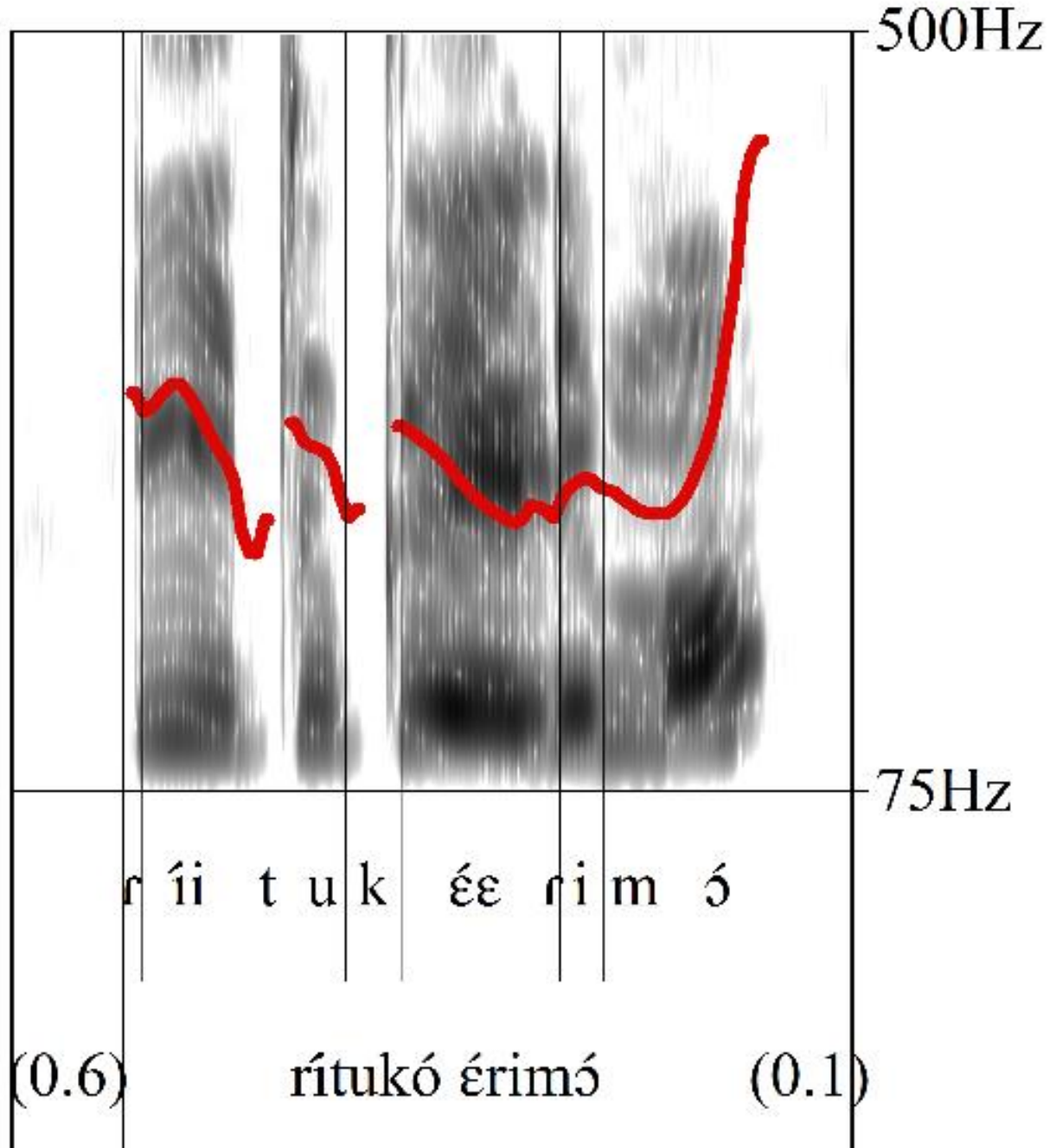
# Vowel elision

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

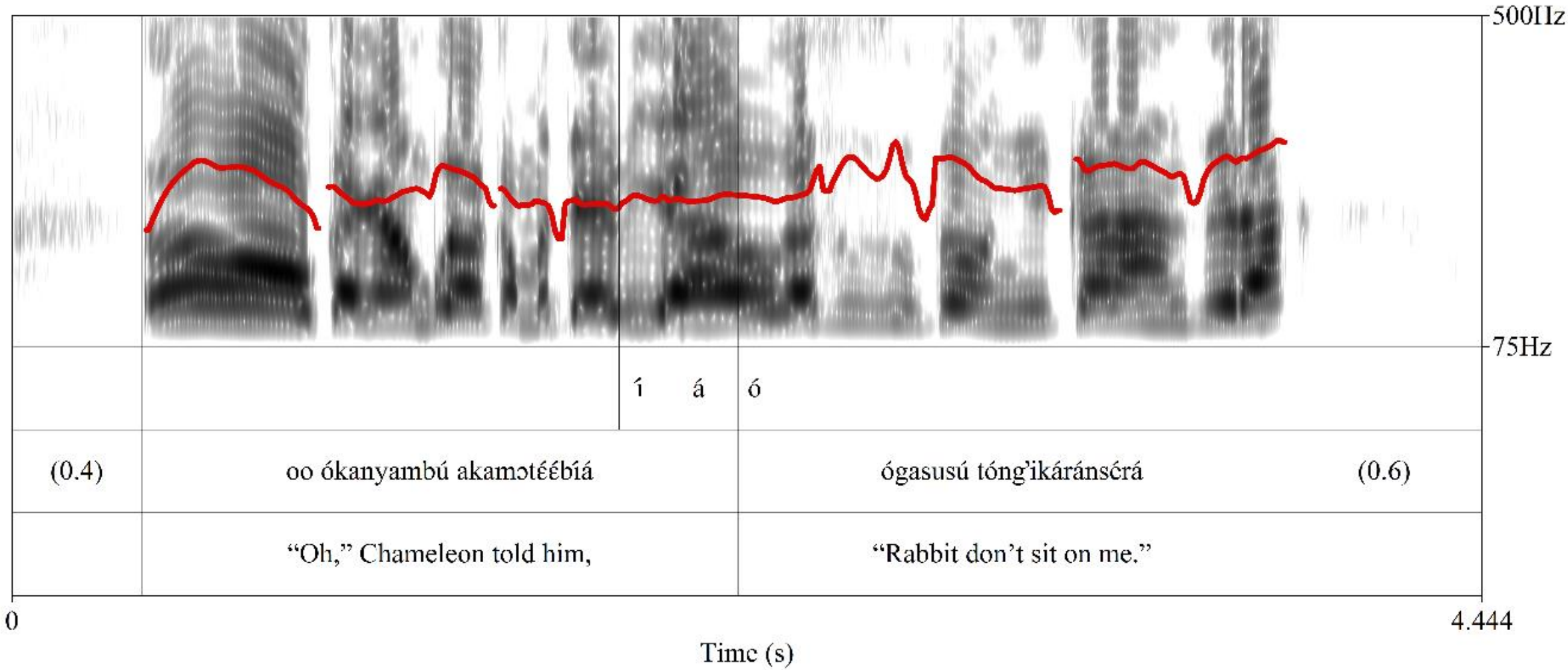
[índóɾ#ómoont#óɣootʃ#óɾi#tʃíintʃúɣú t͡ʃíáné]

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

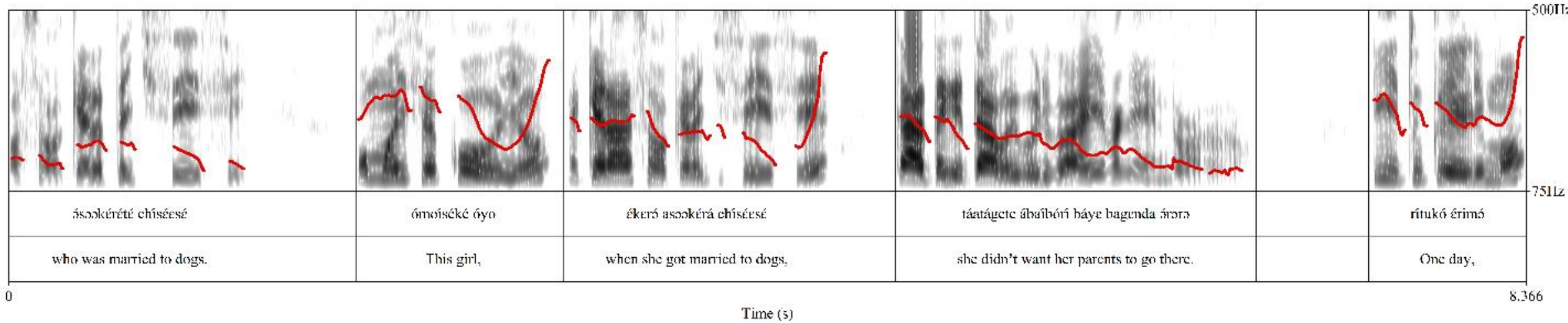
# Vowel elision



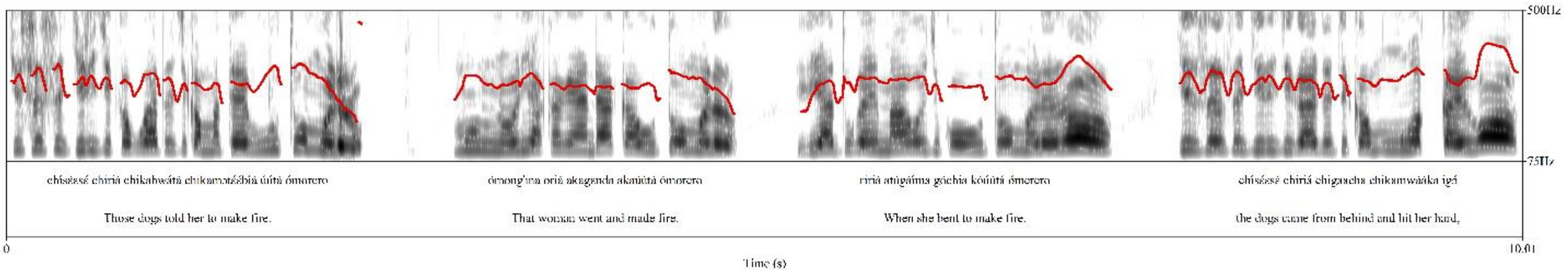
# Lack of vowel elision at transition into reported speech



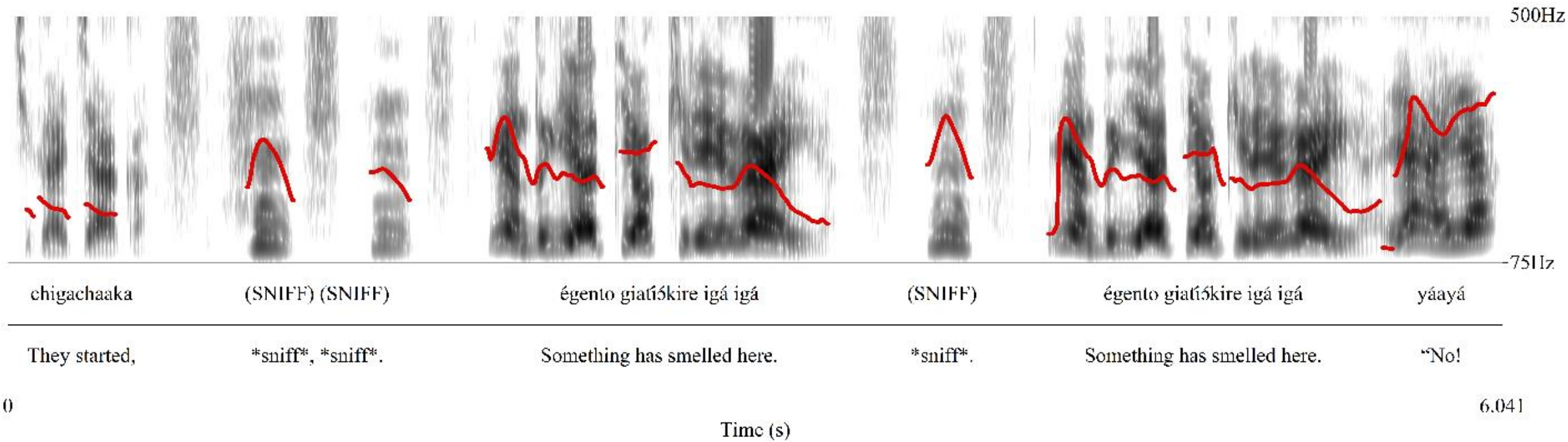
# Pitch Reset


500Hz
751Hz
ɔsɔɔkérété chíséesé
ómoíséké óyo
ékeró asɔɔkéra chíséesé
táatágete ábaíbóri báye bagenda órɔrɔ
ritukó érimó
who was married to dogs.
This girl,
when she got married to dogs,
she didn't want her parents to go there.
One day,
0
8.366
Time (s)

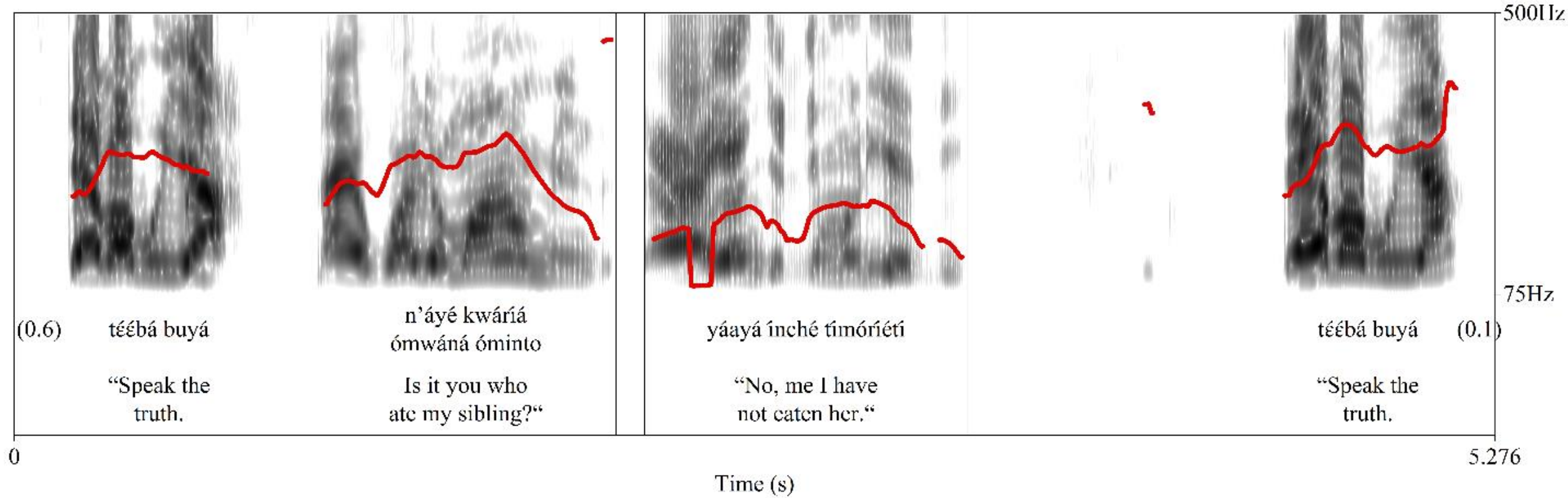
# Lack of pitch reset indicating narrative continuity



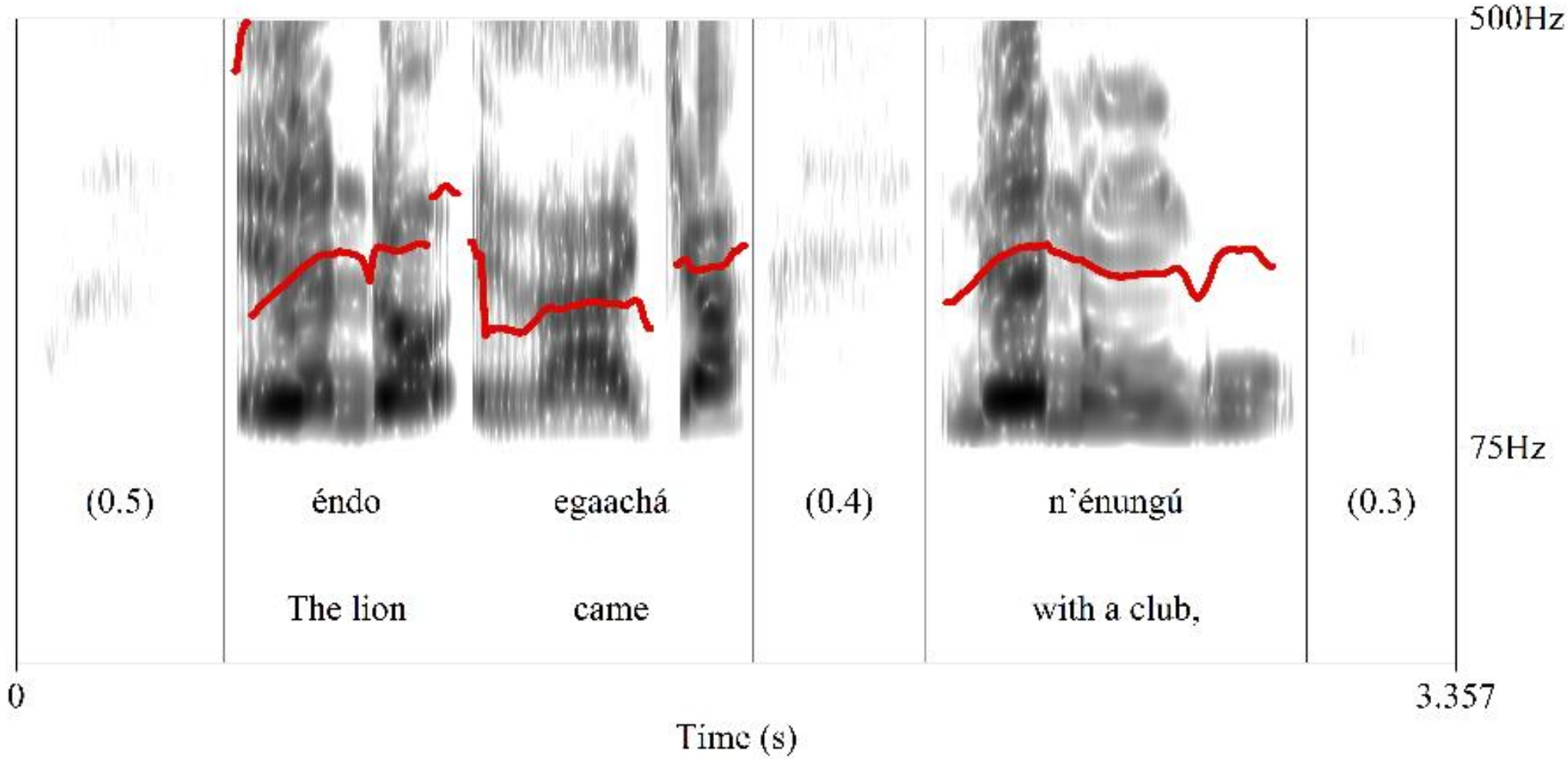
# Isotony


500Hz
75Hz
chigachaaka
(SNIFF) (SNIFF)
égento giatíśkire igá igá
(SNIFF)
égento giatíśkire igá igá
yáayá
They started,
*sniff*, *sniff*.
Something has smelled here.
*sniff*.
Something has smelled here.
"No!
0
6.041
Time (s)

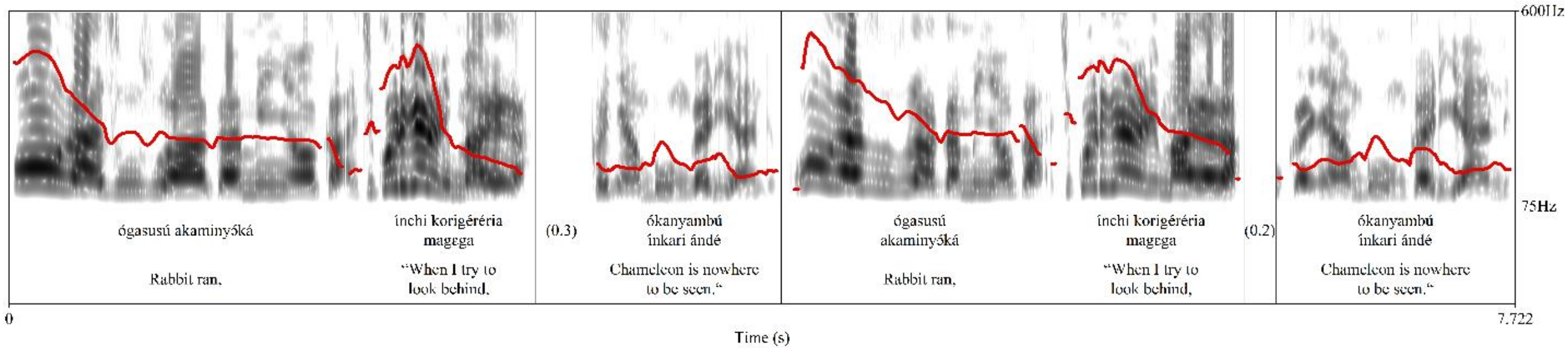
# Lexical repetition without isotony



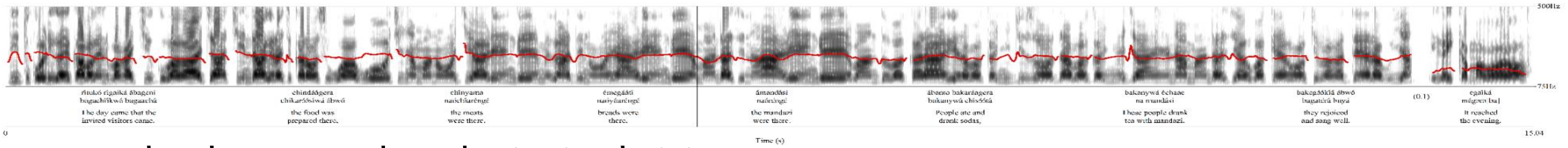
# Isotony without lexical repetition



# Isotony across multiple phrases



# 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.

# Prosody as Cohesion

- Avoids problems with the list approach
- 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

# References


- Himmelman, Nikolaus P. & D. Robert Ladd. 2008. Prosodic description: An introduction for fieldworkers. *Language Documentation & Conservation* 2(2). 244–274. http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/4345.
- Nash, Carlos. 2011. *Tone in Ekegusii: A description of nominal and verbal tonology*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Santa Barbara.