

Prosodic Aspects of Political Rhetoric

Paul Touati

Department of Linguistics and Phonetics
Helgonabacken 12, S-22362 Lund, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I addressed the issue of rhetorical prosody in French politics. Overall pitch variation is analyzed as expression of a paradigmatic contrast between a pre-electoral persuasive speech and a pathos-oriented post-electoral press-conference, and a syntagmatic change within the specific setting of the pre-electoral speech. As a result of this analysis, I wish to propose a two-fold categorization of overall pitch variation in French: one in terms of range and the other in terms of register.

INTRODUCTION

In public discourse in general, and in politics in particular, the art of persuasion is often based on a dual rhetorical transaction. It consists on the one hand of a clear identification of the audience to be persuaded – the voters –, and on the other hand of the careful exercise of target-oriented rhetoric by the persuader – the politician himself. In Touati (1991) I explored how some rhetorical features were translated into prosodic categories and specified as acoustic-phonetic properties in the particular setting of a pre-electoral television debate. Here, I addressed again this issue of rhetorical prosody by analyzing contrasts in overall pitch as produced by a French politician (J. Chirac) in two different settings (a pre-electoral speech versus a post-electoral press-conference) and within the specific setting of the pre-electoral speech. As a result of this analysis, I wish to propose a two-fold categorization of overall pitch variation in French: one in terms of range and the other in terms of register.

RHETORICAL PROSODY IN POLITICAL SPEECH

The nature and span of rhetorical prosody may appear with greater clarity if prosodic features could be captured when produced in rather different and specific rhetorical transactions: pre-electoral television debate, pre-electoral speech, post-electoral press-conference; in short and well time-defined discourse events. During pre-electoral periods, persuasive monologues typify the speaking style adopted by politicians. Rhetorical features such as intensifiers, parallelisms and meta-discursive comments (i.e. incidental comments, parenthetical comments or direct quote-comment structures) are then used with dexterity. Intensifiers are often used in order to highlight certain aspects of the argumentation. One way for the speaker to intensify what he is saying is to underline individual words tonally and rhythmically. The function of parallelism is to facilitate monologue processing by reducing information density and increasing redundancy. It is achieved by repeating certain words or phrases. Meta-discursive comments are used to relate the speaker himself, his contender, or a new argument to the topic which is under discussion. Meta-discursive comments are often part of a topic-comment structure produced with specific rhythmic and tonal contrasts. Focal accents apparently work as intensifiers, contrasts in overall pitch being used to express meta-discursive comments and pauses helping to synchronise parallel prosodic configurations. Obviously these three strategies seem to account for typical prosodic means used in French political rhetoric. In the present paper I choose to analyse the opposition pre-electoral versus post-electoral speech because this is when persuasion (when a politician aims to gain votes) gives way to objective pathos (when a politician comments his political victory or defeat). It seems then that overall pitch range is used at a paradigmatic macro-level to establish this contextual opposition. On the other hand, overall pitch variation is also used at a

syntagmatic micro-level as in the pre-electoral speech. To persuade and to gain votes seems to demand more refined rhetoric and richer prosody. Chirac's pre-electoral speech is structured in a nearly classical rhetoric manner, its 'dispositio' consisting of an ex-abrupto exordium (prooimion), a narration of the facts (diégèris), a confirmation of the facts (pistis), and a peroration (épilogos) (see Figure 1 in Touati 1993, and for the notion of 'dispositio' and an introduction to rhetoric see Barthes 1970). Interestingly, building blocks for the dispositio are provided by the recurrent use of a direct quote-comment structure (hereafter DQCS) where each DQCS is segmented into three units: the quoting (lead-in) segment, the quoted segment and the comment segment.

ACOUSTIC-PROSODIC ANALYSIS

The acoustic-prosodic analysis was done within a methodological framework developed in a multilingual research project called Contrastive Interactive Prosody ('KIPROS') conducted at the Department of Linguistics and Phonetics in Lund, Sweden (see Bruce and Touati 1992 for a presentation of the research methodology and exemplifications from Swedish and French). The recorded material were digitalized and analyzed using the LUPP program (see Eriksson 1990). The acoustic segmentation of the recordings was made by visual inspection of the tonal configuration and interactive listening to the segmented speech. Every 10 ms, a F_0 value was computed for each segment of speech. The data files were exported to a statistical package. For this analysis I examined average F_0 (means and standard deviation), the absolute F_0 minimum and maximum values and the range.

Overall pitch contrasts in different settings

Results for the analysis of pitch contrasts in different settings are presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, the pre-electoral speech was uttered with a higher mean F_0 while the post-electoral press-conference was uttered with a lower mean F_0 . Absolute F_0 minima are similar. On the other hand, maxima values are lower and range is more reduced in the post-electoral press-conference. By using this long term reduced overall pitch range, J. Chirac is acting in the role of a generous and tranquil winner or, more to the point, seeking to impose on the audience such an image of himself.

Table 1. Pitch range and register in two different settings. Average F_0 (means and standard deviation), absolute F_0 minimum and maximum values and F_0 range in two different settings (A: pre-electoral speech, B: post-electoral press-conference; values are in Hz).

	MEAN	ST DEV	MIN	MAX	RANGE
A	163	38	79	250	171
B	117	22	71	209	138

Overall pitch changes in direct quote-comment structure

Results for the analysis of pitch changes in the DQCS are presented in Table 2. As shown in Table 2 and as an example in Figure 1 (1), quoting segments were uttered with a high F_0 mean, with a very high F_0 minimum and maximum, and a reduced F_0 range. On the other hand, quoted segments were signalled, in contrast to quoting segments, by a lower F_0 mean, lower absolute F_0 minimum and maximum and larger F_0 range. Comment segments generally show a strong tendency to contrast with quoted ones in the same way that quoted segments contrasted with quoting ones (comment segments are realized by a lower F_0 mean, lower absolute F_0 minimum and maximum, and larger F_0 range). There is an exception: the last comment segment has a reduced F_0 range (see Figure 1 (2)). This is probably due to its position as comment in the épilogos (final part) of the speech.

Table 2. *Pitch range and register in DQCS. Average Fo (means and standard deviation), absolute Fo minimum and maximum values and Fo range in DQCS (A: quoting segment, B: quoted segment and, C: comment segment; values are in Hz).*

1) Quoting the socialists

	MEAN	ST DEV	MIN	MAX	RANGE
A	183	29	147	221	74
B	172	28	95	204	109
C	155	38	86	228	142

A (ils nous disent) B(on continue) C (c'est tout voilà l(e) programme)
 (they are telling us) (we continue) (That's all, that's the programme)

2) Quoting the President

	MEAN	ST DEV	MIN	MAX	RANGE
A	195	23	156	241	85
B	160	27	93	215	122
C	160	45	83	210	127

A((et le Président de la République nous dit) B (il faut voter pour nous car on n(e) change pas une équipe qui gagne) C (sans complexe c'est tout)
 (And the President of the Republic is telling us)(you vote for us because you don't change a winning team)(it's that simple, that's all)

3) Quoting the Prime Minister

	MEAN	ST DEV	MIN	MAX	RANGE
A	176	34	133	245	112
B	157	34	94	226	132
C	151	28	102	189	87

A ((quant) au premier ministre il nous dit) B(au secours la droite revient) C (point final)
 (As for the Prime Minister, he is telling us) (help! the right wing is back) (Period)

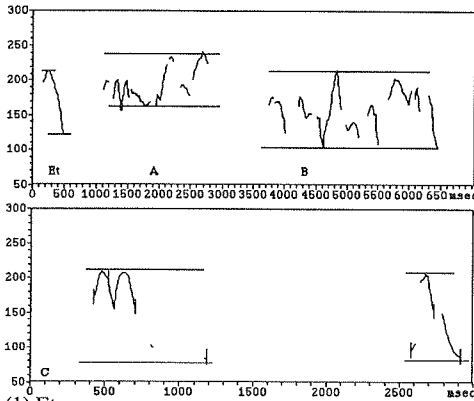
CONCLUSION

During our work in KIPROS, we assumed that changes in overall pitch were essentially changes in range and were mainly achieved by raising/lowering the Fo peaks. This assumption is confirmed here in the analysis of different fragments of rhetorical prosody. It seems that pitch range variation is used when establishing a paradigmatic contrast between pre-electoral speech and post-electoral speech or a syntagmatic change between direct quote segments and comment segments. But, as it was possible to observe in the pre-electoral speech, changes from a higher register to a lower register were used in order to express the opposition quoting segments-quoted segments (variation in register in spontaneous French was observed by Mertens 1987). Our analysis of overall pitch in a pre-electoral speech as opposed to a post-electoral press-conference and within the specific setting of the pre-electoral speech provide evidence that we need a two-fold categorization of overall pitch variation in French: one in terms of range and the other in terms of register. I also propose an adjustment of the KIPROS transcription system concerning overall pitch in the following way:

- Pitch range: [↔] = same range [↑] = expanded range [↓] = reduced range
 Pitch register: [⇒] = same register [↑] = higher register [↓] = lower register

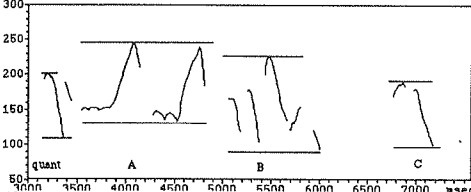
REFERENCES

- R. Barthes (1970), "L'ancienne rhétorique. Aide-mémoire", in *Communication*, Vol. 16
- G. Bruce and P. Touati (1992), "On the analysis of prosody in spontaneous speech with exemplification from Swedish and French", in *Speech Communication*, Vol. 11:4-5, pp. 453-458.
- L. Eriksson (1990), "New phonetic programmes for Macintosh", *Working Papers*, Vol. 36, pp. 73-80.
- P. Mertens (1987), *L'intonation du français. De la description linguistique à la reconnaissance automatique* (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven).
- P. Touati (1991), "Temporal profiles and tonal configurations in French political speech", *Working Papers*, Vol. 38, pp. 205-219.
- P. Touati (1993), "Overall pitch and direct quote-comment structure in French political rhetoric", in *RUUL*, Vol. 23, pp. 98-101.



(1) Et

- A. ↓ ↑ le Président de la République nous dit:
- B. ↑ ↓ "il faut voter pour nous car on n(e) change pas une équipe qui gagne",
- C. ↑ ⇒ sans complexe , c'est tout.



(2) quant

- A. ↓ ↑ au premier ministre il nous dit:
- B. ↑ ↓ "au secours la droite revient ",
- C. ↓ ⇒ point final.

Figure 1. Fo range and register in DQCS (A: quoting segment, B: quoted segment and, C: comment segment; values are in Hz), (1) Quoting the President (pistis) and (2) Quoting the Prime Minister (épilogos).