

Tapping into prominence: evaluating continuous and discrete methods of prominence perception

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In this talk I will present findings from a study that extends two earlier studies (Wagner et al. 2019; Bruggeman et al. 2022) which employ a continuous scale for the evaluation of prominence in German. In past studies (e.g. Cole et al. 2010; Cole et al. 2019; Bishop et al. 2020 on American English and Baumann et al. 2018 on German) participants are typically asked to underline words judged prominent on a transcript of the spoken input, a so-called Rapid Prosody Transcription (RPT) task that yields binary prominence judgments. The prominence perception experiment discussed here requires listeners to represent the relationship between syllables of individual sentences in a continuous manner, by means of finger tapping on a pressure sensitive pad (Sensel Inc. 2021).

Results confirm previous results on prominence perception in German (as well as in various other languages) in showing, again, that pitch accentuation is the most critical predictor of perceived prominence - irrespective of the method used for the elicitation of prominence. On the tapping task, however, listeners pay attention more to various acoustic cues, and exhibit greater individual differences in the exact cues attended to. Discussion will consider the difficulties related to understanding exactly what participants are trying to do in a prominence perception task.