Bringing multiple methodologies to bear on speech: experiment design and data

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Traditional methods within laboratory-based linguistics have focused on underlying structures, with language being a phenomenon existing within the mind of the language user, while parallel developments in sociology emphasize the existence of language as an element of the communicative system that is collaboratively produced between interlocutors. A major challenge for modern linguistics, particularly in the realm of phonetics and phonology, is to bring the insights of these two research threads together in order to gain a better overall picture of how spoken language works. This is particularly important as these fields continue to grow in awareness of the importance of studying conversational/spontaneously-produced speech. Taking as my background specifically the fields of Instrumental Phonology (IP), on one hand, and the Phonetics of Talk-in-Interaction (PTI), on the other, I will discuss ways in which results from within these two fields can inform and improve one another. As concrete examples, I will present results from studies investigating discourse topic structure and turn-taking in spontaneous two-party conversation. By using categories supplied or refined by PTI, the quantitative and controlled methods of IP can yield more contextually-sensitive results, thus providing us a more sophisticated understanding of how phonetic/phonological variation can influence meaning in conversational settings.