

Prosodic Cues in Differentiating Request and Permission Directive Speech Acts

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Abstract

Directive Speech Acts (DSAs), encoded by the imperative mood, exhibit various interpretations across languages, including acquiescence, advice, requests, and commands (Searle 1979; Wilson & Sperber; Kaufmann 2012). This many-to-one relationship between form and meaning raises the key cognitive question: how do speakers disambiguate these interpretations? This study examines the role of intonation in Greek imperatives, focusing on Nuclear Pitch Accent placement and boundary tones within the autosegmental-metrical model of intonational phonology (Pierrehumbert 1980; Ladd 1996; Arvaniti & Baltazani 2005). Recordings were controlled to isolate linguistic cues provided by prosody while minimizing extralinguistic prosodic cues related to the speaker's emotional state. Preliminary findings indicate that a rising boundary tone consistently signals a request interpretation, whereas a combination of NPA and a falling boundary tone suggests weak permission. A follow-up study incorporating contextual stimuli, describing both the speaker's and addressee's situations, is underway to examine the influence of contextual cues on interpretation.