Uses of Positive Assessment Prosody in Local Radio News
Nigel Ward

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In American English, positive feeling can be conveyed with a specific temporal configuration of prosodic features, consisting of a high pitch, then a lengthened syllable, often relatively loud, and then a silence or pause (Ward 2019). The connection between this prosodic construction and the meaning of positive assessment has been experimentally demonstrated, and previous work data has categorized the pragmatic contexts where this construction, the "Positive Assessment Construction", is frequently deployed in dialog. These include showing respect to the conversation partner and positively assessing someone, something, or an aspect of the current situation.

The present paper examines how this construction is used in local radio news. I computed a battery of prosodic features at each of several hundred thousand timepoints, sampled densely across 90 minutes of broadcasts, and then applied Principal Component Analysis to derive dimensions, each corresponding to one or two commonly recurring patterns. The negative side of Dimension 5 turned out to match the Positive Assessment Construction, with a pitch peak followed closely by a region of increased loudness and then a region of lengthened phonemes, with the entire configuration typically lasting about 1.2 seconds. Listening to places in the data which most strongly matched this configuration revealed that most did indeed involve positive assessment. (In the examples, the asterisk marks the word where the Positive Assessment prosody begins.) Listening again to identify the typical contexts and pragmatic functions revealed several common uses.

These included positive assessments of situations, actions, or people, as in "[name of suspected criminal] is in *custody," "the homeowner and his family *apparently safe", much as seen in the dialog data, but also other uses:

- During station identification, as in "this is Space Coast *Radio News".
- When mentioning local cities, institutions and sports teams, as in "a resident of *Melbourne" or "Brevard County *Manatees today are on the road".
- To nullify the usual negative connotations of some words, as in "now that tropical storm *Chantelle has fizzled" and in "medical *marijuana".
- When recommending locations and events to the listeners, as in "the *Bonefish Grill is now open" and in "enjoy the Wonders of *Water event on Thursday".
- When referring to victims of accidents or crimes, as in "*[name] was stabbed by [name]".
- When winding up a broadcast or a topic, as in "the leak apparently caused by a generator; *investigation underway".

Interestingly this prosodic construction does not always occur on the words directly associated with the positive situation. For example for "arrested on ten counts of *producing child pornography", the positive prosody comes several words after the mention of the positive event, the arrest. This may reflect the fact that news announcers may read stories without having time to consider beforehand the meaning and significance, leading to a word-by-word delivery with appropriate prosody lacking or delayed.

This study illustrates how a prosodic construction can be adapted for functions beyond its core meaning.