

# Modeling Long and Short-term prosody for language identification

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## Abstract

This paper addresses the problem of modeling prosody for language identification. The main goal is to validate (or invalidate) some languages characteristics proposed by the linguists by the mean of an automatic language identification (ALI) system. In previous papers, we defined a prosodic unit, the pseudo-syllable. Static modeling has proven the relevance of the pseudo-syllable unit for ALI. In this paper, we try to model the prosody dynamics. This is achieved by the separation of long-term and short-term components of prosody and the proposing of suitable models. Experiments are made on seven languages and the efficiency of the modeling is discussed.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of automatic language identification is to recognize a language spoken by an unknown speaker, within a finite set of languages and for relatively short utterances (usually from 3 to 50 seconds).

In this paper, we investigate the efficiency of prosodic features for language identification, as they are known to carry a substantial part of the language identity (section 2). However, modeling prosody is still an open problem, mostly because of the suprasegmental nature of the prosodic features. To address this problem, automatic extraction techniques of those features are studied (section 3). Those techniques allowed us to characterize a prosodic unit adapted to language identification. Results obtained by static modeling of prosodic features extracted on this unit are recalled in section 4. Dynamic modeling of sequence of those units is then addressed in section 5. The experiments and results are described in section 6.

## 2. Motivations

This paper aims at determining to what extent may prosodic features characterize languages. Consequently, rhythmic and intonative properties of languages are considered and results from perceptual experiments are evoked.

### 2.1. Languages' rhythm

Languages' rhythm has been defined as an effect involving the isochronous (that is to say at regular intervals) recurrence of some type of speech unit [1]. Isochrony is defined as the property of speech to organize itself in pieces equal or equivalent in duration. Depending on the

unit considered, the isochrony theory allows to classify languages in three main sets:

- stress-timed languages,
- syllable-timed languages,
- mora-timed languages<sup>1</sup>.

Syllable-timed languages share the characteristic to have regular intervals between syllables, while stress-timed languages have regular intervals between stressed syllables, and for mora-timed languages, successive mora are quasi equivalent in terms of duration. This point of view has been made popular by Pike [2] and later by Abercrombie [3]. Distinction between stress-timed and syllable-timed languages is strictly categorical, languages cannot be more or less stress or syllable-timed. Despite its popularity among linguists, the rhythm class hypothesis is contradicted by several experiments (notably by Roach [4] and Dauer [5]). This forced some researchers (Beckman [6] for example) to slide from "objective" to "subjective" isochrony. True isochrony is described as a constraint, and the production of isochronous units is perturbed by phonetic, phonologic and grammatical rules of the languages. Some other researchers have concluded that isochrony is mainly a perceptual phenomenon (for example Lehiste [7]). Isochrony can then be seen as a concept relative to speech perception.

### 2.2. Languages' intonation

Three main groups of languages can be characterized regarding to their use of intonation:

- tone languages (as Mandarin Chinese),
- pitch-accent languages (as Japanese),
- other languages.

According to Cummins [8], distinction between languages using fundamental frequency alone had a moderate success. This can be explained in two ways:

- On one hand, we can imagine a discrimination based on the use of lexical tone (Mandarin) or not (English), but intermediate cases exist (Korean dialects) which are usually considered as representing transitory states between languages of one class and those of another.
- On the other hand, phenomenon linked to accents and intonation are less easy to handle with. There

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<sup>1</sup>a mora is a sub-unit of the syllable often constituted by a short vowel and the preceding consonants



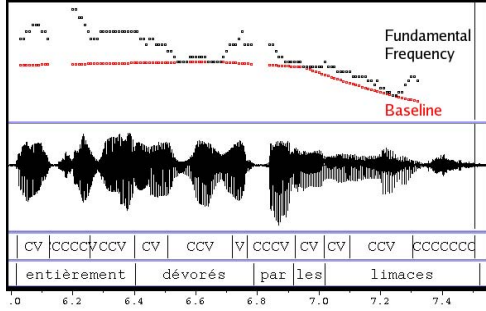


Figure 2: Extraction of the baseline

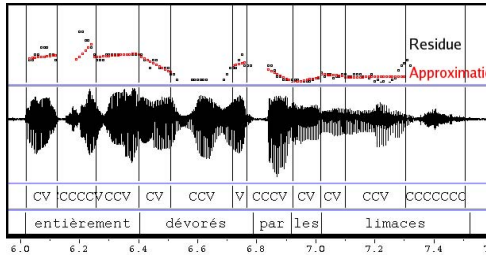


Figure 3: Approximation of the residue

### 5.2. Energy coding

The energy curve is approximated by linear regressions on each considered units (segments or pseudo-syllables) (figure 4). The process is the same as the one used for the residue coding. The labels are also the same, with three possibilities : Up, Down and Silence.

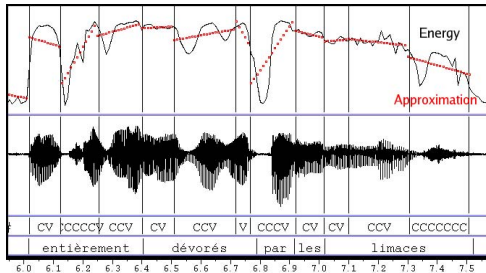


Figure 4: Approximation of the energy

### 5.3. Duration coding

Two duration coding are used regarding the considered unit.

- Considering pseudo-syllable units, 4 labels are used to characterize the contrasts between the vocalic and consonantic durations.
- For the segments units, 2 labels are used (short or long), regarding the nature of the segment (vocalic or consonantic).

### 5.4. Modeling

To model the prosodic variations, we use n-multigram language modeling [17], which can model recurrent pat-

terns in the observation sequence. Unlike classical n-gram modeling, these patterns can have a variable length. The multigram modeling consist in finding the most likely segmentation in an observation sequence. This modeling is applied to the pseudo-syllable labels for the long-term model, and to the segments labels for the short-term model.

## 6. Experiments

All the experiments are made on the MULTTEXT corpus [18] (a subset of EUROM1), which contains 5 languages (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish), and 10 speakers per language, balanced between male and female. This baseline corpus has been extended with recordings of Japanese speakers made using the same protocol than used for the MULTTEXT corpus. The Japanese corpus contains 6 speakers, also balanced between male and female (see [19] for more details about the Japanese corpus). Mandarin Chinese recordings are also added to the original corpus, thanks to Komatsu [10].

The three theoretical rhythmic classes are represented in this corpus : English, German and Mandarin Chinese are stress-timed languages; French, Italian and Spanish are syllable-timed languages, and Japanese is a mora-timed language. Moreover, Mandarin Chinese is a tone language and Japanese is a pitch-accent language.

For the learning phase, we used 8 speakers (4 for Japanese), and 2 (one male and one female) were used for the tests. The test utterances are approximately 20 seconds long.

### 6.1. Long-term modeling

The sequences of labels computed on each pseudo-syllable are modeled by multigram models. The correct identification rate is 41 % on the MULTTEXT corpus.

Table 1: Long term prosodic model ( $41,0 \pm 8,2\%$  (57/139))

	Eng	Ger	Man	Fra	Ita	Spa	Jap
Eng	7	-	3	1	4	-	5
Ger	5	12	2	-	1	-	-
Man	3	3	6	-	5	-	3
Fra	1	-	-	12	4	-	2
Ita	5	-	2	4	3	2	2
Spa	6	-	3	1	3	4	3
Jap	3	-	2	2	4	2	7

Those results show that only French and German are clearly identified. This model suffers from the relatively large number of labels regarding the limited database size.

### 6.2. Short-term modeling

The sequences of labels computed on each segment are also modeled by multigram models. The identification rate obtained with this method is 63 %.

Those experiments allow us to hypothesize that the most characteristic prosodic elements of languages aren't pseudo-syllable sequences but sequences of elements constituting them.

Table 2: Short term prosodic model ( $63,3 \pm 8,0$  % (88/139))

	Eng	Ger	Man	Fra	Ita	Spa	Jap
Eng	6	-	5	1	5	2	1
Ger	1	18	1	-	-	-	-
Man	4	2	12	-	2	-	-
Fra	-	-	-	16	1	2	-
Ita	1	-	1	2	13	2	1
Spa	2	-	-	1	7	9	1
Jap	-	-	1	-	5	-	14

### 6.3. Merging long and short-term components

The merging is addressed between the two systems described here-above. The merging technique is a weighted addition of the log-likelihoods. The identification rate obtained with this method is 71 %.

Table 3: Merging of short and long-term models ( $71,2 \pm 7,5$  % (99/139))

	Eng	Ger	Man	Fra	Ita	Spa	Jap
Eng	12	-	4	2	1	-	1
Ger	2	17	1	-	-	-	-
Man	1	1	18	-	-	-	-
Fra	1	-	-	14	4	-	-
Ita	-	1	1	2	10	3	3
Spa	1	-	1	1	6	9	2
Jap	-	-	-	-	1	-	19

Results show that most languages are well identified. Japanese is the only mora-timed language, and the only pitch-accent language in our corpus, therefore it seems natural that it is the most well identified language. Mandarin (i.e. the only tone language of the corpus) is also quite well characterized.

Considering rhythmic classes (represented in different strength of grey in the matrix), we can see that most confusion are across languages of the same rhythmic family. The rhythmic classes identification rate is 89%

## 7. Conclusions and perspectives

These experiments shows that it is possible to identify languages using prosody alone. The dynamic modeling allows to reach 71% of correct identification on a seven language discrimination task. Results tend to confirm the existence of the rhythmic classes of the isochrony theory, as confusions are mainly across languages belonging to the same family.

This method gives promising results, but further experiments have to be made, with different kinds of data (spontaneous speech for example) and we need to test our system on many more languages to confirm the linguistic classes hypothesis.

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