

# A History of Speech Prosody Meetings.

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The first international meeting on Speech Prosody that I ever attended was a three-day seminar on *Intonation and Discourse* organised by the *British Association for Applied Linguistics* in Birmingham in April 1982. I remember at this meeting David Crystal saying that he had been looking forward to a conference on intonation ever since ‘O’Connor’s aunt”.

Strangely enough, the second meeting was held just two weeks later in Paris: a workshop on Prosody organised by the *European Association for Psycholinguistics*. And then, after that, nothing for more than ten years...

Before the next prosody meeting, the 12th *ICPhS* meeting was held in Aix-en-Provence in August 1991 and, as a member of the local organising committee, I was helping put together the (five volume) proceedings of the conference.

I was struck by the large number of papers on the topic of Speech Prosody - I counted more than 20% of the papers which were directly related to this topic.

On the opening morning of the conference I was impressed to see all the big names in Speech Prosody coming together under the same roof: Gunnar Fant, Eva Gårding, Hiroya Fujisaki, Ilse Lehiste and so many others!

Improvising hastily, I found a sheet of paper and attached it to a wall, asking people to put their name down if they would like to attend a meeting on “International cooperation in the field of prosody and intonation” later that week. I asked Mario Rossi, the conference chairman, to announce the meeting before one of the plenary session. As the conference progressed, I saw the list of names on my piece of paper gradually get longer and longer. I remember thinking that that piece of paper, signed by all these renowned prosodists, was going to be a wonderful souvenir! Unfortunately, someone else had the same idea and on the day announced for the meeting, the paper disappeared. If the person who took the list is present at this meeting, please return it discretely to me and all will be forgiven!

When I arrived at the lecture hall we had booked for the meeting, it was already full: over 100 people turned up, no doubt wondering what to expect. As it happened I had no more idea than they did. I managed to improvise a dialogue with the audience, asking them for ideas. Among suggestions made then were: setting up an international organisation - organising conferences on prosody - setting up a prosody mailing list.

In 1991, our lab had only just set up an internet connection and we didn't yet have personal email addresses, but France was a little behind other countries for that: most people in the room that day seemed to have internet. To my relief, George Allen volunteered to set up an email list for prosody and this list was a valuable resource for many years, although the fact that it included both literary prosody (versification) and speech prosody was slightly confusing for some people. There would be a flurry of engineers signing off the list after a posting on mediaeval versification, followed by an equally urgent flurry of linguists quitting the prosody ship after an engineer had posted something on hidden Markov models for speech recognition. We eventually decided to replace the list by one specifically devoted to *Speech Prosody*.

In the years following this meeting, ICSLP (*International Conference on Spoken Language Processing*) and ESCA (*European Speech Communication Organisation*) organised some more workshops on prosody (Lund 1993, Yokohama 1994, Athens 1995, Krakow 1999) and workshops on prosody also became a regular feature of the *ICPhS* meetings (Stockholm 1995, San Francisco 1999). There were a number of other prosody workshops, too. Here is a partial list; I have not included here theory-specific workshops such as the various ToBI workshops etc., but even apart from these, this list is certainly incomplete. I would be grateful if you could send any additional references to [djhirst@me.com](mailto:djhirst@me.com).

## **List of meetings on Speech Prosody before the 2002 conference.**

- 1982 British Association for Applied Linguistics seminar *Intonation and Discourse*. Birmingham, April 5-7.
- 1982 European Association for Psycholinguistics workshop *Prosody Workshop*. Paris, April 21-23.
- 1991 ICPhS, informal meeting *International Cooperation in the field of Prosody and Intonation* Aix-en-Provence August 19-24.
- 1993 ELSNET/ERASMUS Summer School *Prosody: the Interface between Speech and Natural Language*, London July 12-23.
- 1993 ESCA *Workshop on Prosody* Lund, September 27-29.
- 1994 ICSLP satellite meeting: *International Symposium on Prosody* Yokohama, September 18-22.
- 1995 ATR workshop *Computational Approaches to Processing the Prosody of Spontaneous Speech*, Kyoto April 12-14.
- 1995 HCM workshop *Dialog and Discourse Prosody* Stuttgart, February 13.
- 1995 ICPhS workshop *Prosodic Annotation* Stockholm, August 13.

- 1997 ESCA workshop *Intonation: Theory, Models and Applications* Athens, September 18-21.
- 1998 VMC/ELSNET/MATE workshop *Prosody and Meaning* Prague November 13-14.
- 1999 ESCA workshop *Dialogue and Prosody* Veldhoven September 1-3.
- 1999 ICPHS workshop *Intonation: Models and ToBI labelling* San Francisco, August 1.
- 2000 ISCA workshop *Prosody 2000: Speech Recognition and Synthesis* Krakow, October 2-5.
- 2001 Institute of Linguistics OTS workshop *Prosody in Processing* Utrecht, July 5-6.
- 2001 LSA Summer Institute workshop *Topic and focus: a workshop on intonation and meaning* July 20-21.
- 2001 ISCA workshop *Prosody and Speech Recognition* Red Bann NJ, October 22-24.

Despite this welcome increase in the number of meetings, there was still something missing. From one meeting to the next there was no way of telling when or where the next meeting would be held. Each meeting was organised as a separate event with no co-ordination. This made it hard for potential participants to plan to present a paper on prosody. It was particularly true for doctoral students, who had no way of knowing if there would be an appropriate meeting somewhere where they could present their research before the end of their thesis preparation.

In September 1999, ESCA and ICSLP decided to combine and were renamed ISCA (*International Speech Communication Association*). ISCA decided to set up *Special Interest Groups* to promote research on specific topics of speech communication or for specific languages.

With the availability of internet, it was now quite easy to contact a large number of specialists on Speech Prosody, asking if they would agree to support the creation of a Special Interest Group on Speech Prosody (SProSIG). The response was enthusiastic - 72 established researchers in the field from 23 different countries agreed to support the SIG and in January 2000 the group was recognised by ISCA.

The next step was to organise a meeting. Rather than call it a workshop, we decided to call this an *International Conference* to mark the fact that, unlike most previous meetings, this was not limited to a specific topic, but open to any aspect of speech prosody. We also hoped that it would become a regular event, but of course we had no idea if this would work.

- 2002 *First International Conference on Speech Prosody* Aix-en-Provence, April

The meeting was a success with 152 submitted papers plus 6 invited keynote speakers, 12 invited co-speakers. It was attended by 317 people.

Of course the question everybody asked was: would it last? The list of Speech Prosody meetings speaks for itself:

2004 Nara, Japan

2006 Dresden, Germany

2008 Campinas, Brazil

2010 Chicago, USA

2012 Shanghai, China

2014 Dublin, Ireland

2016 ?????

A modification of the constitution of SProSIG in 2010 added a *Permanent Advisory Committee*, consisting of the founder officers of SProSIG (Daniel Hirst, Nick Campbell, Bernard Bel), the current elected officers (currently Keikichi Hirose, Yi Xu, Mark Hasegawa-Johnson, Hansjörg Mixdorff) as well as the chair and co-chair of the last 5 conferences.

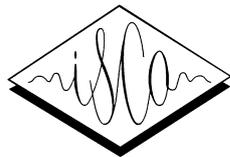
At the last meeting in Shanghai (2012), the PAC decided to nominate Hiroya Fujisaki as *Honorary Advisor* to the PAC.

The 2011 board meeting of the International Phonetic Association resolved to co-sponsor the Speech Prosody Special Interest Group - this resolution was adopted formally in October 2012.

The Speech Prosody SIG is, consequently, now officially affiliated with both ISCA and IPA. This, I think, is excellent news, since I believe Speech Prosody is too serious a matter to be left in the hands of just engineers...

... or just linguists.

We really need each other, and Speech Prosody is a way to bring us all together!



(a) ISCA



(b) SProSIG



(c) IPA