How to Run a Speech Prosody Conference

Daniel Hirst, Bernard Bel, Nick Campbell, Keikichi Hirose, Hansjoerg Mixdorff, Ruediger Hoffman, Plinio Barbosa, Chilin Shih, Mark Hasegawa-Johnson

The goal of this document is to help you run a successful Speech Prosody conference. This document was first suggested by Hiroya Fujisaki to Mark Hasegawa-Johnson after the completion of Speech Prosody 2010. It is intended to be a living document, edited as necessary by each conference organizer in order to pass on tips and advice to the next organizers.

At present, however, some of the information is dated. Conference organizers are recommended to contact recent past organizers for data and advice.

Revised, January 8, 2019

I. Scientific Aspects of Conference Planning

I.A. The Conference as an Institution

Speech Prosody is, by design, one of the most interdisciplinary of international conferences. We can not say "it is the most interdisciplinary conference in our field" because prosody can not be appropriately or accurately placed within any single "field." Of the current permanent advisory committee, about half are linguists or social scientists, and about half are engineers or computer scientists. Authors who have attended at least one Speech Prosody conference include representatives from departments of Speech Pathology, Neuroscience, Music, Mathematics, Anthropology, and Physics.

The classical Greek word προσῳδία meant "to be set to song or melody" (προσ ῳδία; in modern Greek, το τραγούδι). In music composition, "prosody" is the assignment of syllables to notes. Likewise, in speech planning and perception, prosody is the assignment of syllables to articulatory and acoustic instantiations, for the purpose of communicating all of the segmental, supra-segmental, and para-linguistic components of a spoken message. The study of prosody is the study of a process mapping from a message, including possibly linguistic, social, or other para-linguistic messages, to signals, either acoustic or articulatory.

I.A.1 Building the Speech Prosody Community

We have always managed to organize the conference in order to avoid parallel oral sessions. We believe that an interdisciplinary community is betrayed if authors from each discipline sort themselves into non-overlapping oral sessions. With all authors attending the same regular oral sessions, several hours/day for four consecutive days, it becomes possible to observe interaction among the disciplines that would be otherwise impossible.

Speech Prosody encourages publication by young authors, authors working on under-resourced languages, and others who may not have the funds to create large state-of-the-art experimental systems, therefore the acceptance rate is usually high. Typically, the acceptance rate is around 88% (2010: 87.2%). There have been typically 180-300 submitted regular manuscripts, resulting in 160-270 accepted regular papers. One concern that sometimes comes up is whether this acceptance rate is hurting us in some way, for example regarding indexing, but the benefits currently outweigh the downside.

I.A.2 The Speech Prosody Permanent Advisory Council

In 2010, SProSIG adopted a new constitution. One of the terms of the new constition established a Permanent Advisory Council (PAC) for the Speech Prosody conference. The council includes three permanent members (the founders of the organization: Daniel Hirst, Nick Campbell, and Bernard Bel), the 3-5 SProSIG officers (three according to the constitution, but a tie put four on the board in 2010, and a near-tie put five on the board in 2018), and two of the organizers from each Speech Prosody conference (organizers serve on the PAC for ten years, beginning at the conclusion of the conference that they have organized).

I.B. Review Policy

Speech Prosody papers are four pages in length with one additional page only for references (page limitation not applicable to keynote speakers). The purpose of the four-page limit is reviewing: reviewers will evaluate, and the program committee will accept or reject, the entire four-page paper.

In order to cope with "split judgment" by reviewers, it is recommended to assign three (or more)

reviewers to a paper. This means you will need many qualified reviewers. For this, obtain reviewer list from former Speech Prosody organizers well beforehand, and recruit new reviewers. The Permanent Advisory Council may be able to help with this. It is important to select qualified reviewers to avoid low quality reviews, and it is recommended to notify reviewers that reviews without any comments are not acceptable.

I.B.1. Review Criteria

There are five primary review criteria for Speech Prosody: Significance, Correctness, Originality, Readability, and Relevance (SCORR). "Significance" is an estimate of the likely impact the paper will have upon the field of speech prosody. "Correctness" is the lack of errors in scientific background or experimental design. "Originality" is the degree to which the paper proposes and tests new ideas. "Readability" measures the professionalism of the manuscript presentation, and the degree to which a reader can easily understand its content. "Relevance" is the degree to which the paper addresses problems relevant to the study of speech prosody. We have had trouble, in the past, with reviewers who use a very narrow definition of the word "prosody" (e.g., "prosody" = "intonation and rhythm"), and hence give very low "relevance" scores to very good papers. The program committee has the right to ignore any reviewer evaluation, but by doing so, you waste the energy and time of your reviewer. It may be wiser to ensure that your reviewers are properly informed, in advance, by providing them with a few sentences defining "relevance," such as the degree to which the paper addresses problems relevant to the study of speech prosody, understood in a broad sense to includes interdisciplinary topics.

Plagiarism (copying of another's work without proper explicit and detailed citation) is cause for immediate rejection of any manuscript submitted to Speech Prosody. Self-plagiarism is also cause for immediate rejection. Examples of self-plagiarism include the submission to Speech Prosody of a manuscript that has been previously published elsewhere, or that has been submitted for review to any other journal, conference, or workshop. An article is considered "previously published" if it's content is identical to that of another article submitted by the same authors, even if the wording is not identical. Every article submitted to Speech Prosody must contain significant original content, and the significance of the paper is evaluated based on its original content only. An article submitted to Speech Prosody may contain results or analyses that have been published elsewhere by the same authors, but only on two conditions: (1) the previous publication must be correctly cited, and (2) in addition to the previously published results, the article must contain significant original content worthy of publication in an ISCA conference.

I.B.2. Review Schedule

The review schedule depends on the length of time that it takes for visitors to obtain a visa to enter your country. Find out how long this takes. Set the announcement of paper accept/reject decisions to be far enough in advance of the conference so that everybody can get their visas, but not too much earlier. Call this time "T." For example, Speech Prosody 2010 was held May 11-14; it was determined that some visa requests might take fourteen weeks, therefore accept/reject decisions were announced on T = January 15.

Special session proposals should be submitted no later than T minus 12 weeks. Special session proposals should be reviewed by the organizing committee, who should select about three special sessions (depending on your planned conference program). The list of special sessions should be announced by T minus 10 weeks, so that each author can choose whether to submit his or her paper to a special session or a regular session.

Authors should submit their manuscripts at T minus 6-8 weeks. Manuscripts should be sent to reviewers no later than T minus 5-7 weeks. Reviews should be due no later than T minus 2-3 weeks. From T minus 3 until T minus 1 week, you will vigorously pursue tardy reviewers, and acquire backup

reviews as necessary, so that by T minus 1 week, you have all the reviews you need to make final accept/reject decisions.

Final accept/reject decisions are made at a review meeting, attended by all members of the organizing committee, some time between T-1week and T.   It is usually helpful if organizers of special sessions can attend this meeting, perhaps by teleconference.   Manuscripts should be divided among members of the organizing committee, so that, before the committee meeting, at least one member of the committee has read the reviews of every submitted manuscript.   It is important that every review is read by at least one member of the organizing committee: If a reviewer proves that a paper is plagiarized, or is otherwise dishonest, then the paper should be rejected, even if its average review score is high.

Papers are accepted based primarily on review score.   Reviewers are asked to score each paper on a numerical scale between 1 and 5.   Reviewers are also asked to evaluate the confidence with which they rate each paper.   Several types of average are therefore possible: raw average, confidence-weighted-average, Z-normalized average (each reviewer's scores are normalized to zero mean and unit variance prior to averaging across reviewers), and Z-normalized confidence-weighted average.   Of these, the raw average is most useful, but the other averages can also help to determine borderline cases. In 2010, the cutoff for acceptance was 2.6.   Conference organizers are allowed to choose papers whose average review score is alightly below the cutoff (between 2 and 2.6), but which merit inclusion because they address under-resourced languages, because they are salient to the theme of the conference, or for some other reason.

By the time of your review meeting, you should know how many oral sessions you will have at the conference, and therefore, how many papers can be accepted for oral presentation.   This number should be roughly 34-36 papers (around 12%), in roughly 6 oral sessions.   Generally, the top-reviewed papers are accepted for oral presentation.   In 2010, papers with average review score of at least 4.1 were accepted for oral presentation.

Manuscripts submitted to a special session are reviewed separately, by the special session organizers.   The special session organizers should also be given a list of top-rated papers that seem relevant to their area, so that they can choose any of the regular papers that they wish to include in the special session.   Conversely, papers rejected from the special session may be accepted to the regular conference (usually for poster presentation) if their average review score is above the conference acceptance threshold.

I.C. Scientific Committee

Members of the Scientific Committee review papers.   They are also encouraged to give you advice on the conduct of the conference, but they rarely do so.

If you have, say, 300-350 manuscripts, and if each should be reviewed by three reviewers, then you will need 900-1050 reviews.   If each member of the Scientific Committee is willing to review eight papers (an optimistic assumption), then you will need 113-132 people on the Scientific Committee.

Scientific Committees from 2008 and 2010 are included as attachments to this document.   Each person agreed, in 2008 and 2010, to review papers in certain topic areas.   At least one year prior to the conference, determine the topic areas that will be listed on the call for papers.   Send e-mail to all of the members of the previous Scientific Committees, asking if they are willing to serve again.   Find out how many people you have in each topic area.   If the number of reviewers in any topic area is insufficient, recruit new members of the Scientific Committee from the faculty of appropriate research institutions.

The Technical Program Committee (TPC) will be formed of selected members of the Scientific Committee. It is recommended to launch the TPC as early as possible, since it is responsible for the paper submission procedure and paper selection process, and then for making the conference program including keynote speaker assignments, special session planning, and other special events of the program.   When selecting keynote speakers, regional, gender, and age balance should be taken into

account, together with their topics and approaches.

I.D. Call for Papers

The call for papers should include (1) the ISCA logo, (2) the name of the conference, (3) a short definition of the conference, (4) a list of topics on which papers are encouraged, and (5) important dates including at least the manuscript deadline and the conference date.   The 2010 call for papers is included as an appendix of this document.

I.E. Manuscripts

Manuscripts should be formatted according to the guidelines of the Interspeech conference. Style files are usually available on the Interspeech website; you can provide a copy of the style files on the Speech Prosody conference web site.   The style guidelines for Speech Prosody can be somewhat less restrictive than those for Interspeech.   Font must be no less than 10 point.   Professional citation standards must be upheld; some authors will not know what this means, so you may want to provide examples.

Manuscripts should be submitted in PDF format, with embedded fonts.   In 2010 we experimented with allowing Word-formatted manuscript submissions, and the experiment was a dramatic failure; several manuscripts could not be reviewed because fonts available on the author's computer were unavailable on the reviewer's computer.   Likewise, in 2010, we did not check PDF for embedded fonts until after the conference, therefore we were unable to publish any book containing all of the submitted papers.   You should create a batch job that automatically checks every submitted PDF document, in order to make sure that it has all of its required fonts embedded in the document file.   If not, you will be unable to publish the document, and some reviewers will be unable to read the document.

I.F. Manuscript management software

Authors should be permitted to upload their manuscripts to the conference website.   The Speech Prosody 2010 code is provided as an attachment to this document.   In the near future, it may be possible to perform this task through the SProSIG website.   Submission code should send an e-mail to authors when their manuscript is successfully submitted (the Speech Prosody 2010 code does not include this feature).

In 2010, four additional programs were used behind the scenes.   They are all provided as appendices to this document.   There is, first, a program that generates a candidate assignment of manuscripts to reviewers (the output of this program must be checked by a human being, of course). There is also a program that compiles review results (to compute the average review scores for each manuscript), a program that generates acceptance letters (to be mailed to authors), and a program that compiles the accepted abstracts into an abstract book.

I.G. Program

The conference program should span four days, typically in at the end of April, May, or beginning of June.   There has been quite a lot of variation in the way in which the oral sessions have been designed. The number of invited speakers has varied considerably (2002 : 18, 2004 : 12, 2006 : 3, 2008 : 5, 2010 : 5). Special sessions were introduced at the third conference in 2006. The 2008 conference introduced oral sessions which were neither invited nor special sessions.   The 2010 conference included three special sessions (two hours each), eight regular oral sessions (varying in length from one to two hours), five keynote sessions (one hour each), and eight poster sessions (two per

day, held simultaneously in the same room, but divided by topic).   All conferences since 2004 have followed the policy of allowing posters to be displayed for the entire day of their presentation, e.g., from 8am-6pm.   Coffee breaks are twenty to thirty minutes.   Lunch breaks vary from 60 to 90 minutes.

In principle, the program should be in a single track.   To ensure this, we need to assign most papers as poster presentations.   Unfortunately some sources of travel funds may be reluctant to send students to present posters, so it may be worth including a statement on the conference web-page; such as "Assignment of a paper to oral or poster session is not related to its quality; papers assigned to poster sessions are evaluated equally to those assigned to oral sessions."

I.H. Publications

You should aim to generate four publications as a result of this conference: (1) an abstract book, which will be given to everyone who attends the conference, (2) a USB drive or CD-ROM of the conference proceedings, also given to everyone who attends the conference, (3) an electronic package of the paper formatted for archiving at the ISCA website, and (4) a book, not necessarily printed, but at least as a pdf file.

The abstract book and conference proceedings book can be pretty easily published through any on-line micro-publishing agency, e.g., in the United States, lulu.com is convenient. In order to publish as a book, you will need PDF with embedded fonts.

Authors appreciate a CD-ROM or USB drive on which each manuscript has been embellished with the ISCA logo and conference information, including the ISSN, namely 2333-2042. In order to do this, you will need PDF with embedded fonts.

Archiving at the ISCA site requires creation of indices in a specific format. Please contact the ISCA Publication and Archive Committee for the current guidelines.

Producing a book of the proceedings has two merits: it can be a publication with its own ISBN, and it can be submitted for indexing. For details, please see *Indexing proceedings of ISCA-supported workshops*, by Mark Hasegawa-Johnson, available from the ISCA website. In the past, Speech Prosody has been indexed by Ei Compendex, under the title "Proceedings of the International Conference on Speech Prosody."

I.I. Paper Awards

It is very motivating for students to provide one or more Best Student Paper Awards, typically awarded at the closing. The TPC should make the selection plan well beforehand, and advertise the existence of awards on the conference homepage. The Permanent Advisory Committee (PAC) members will be happy to help with the selection process.

Generally the five top-reviewed student papers receive a "Best Student Paper" award. In 2010, there was an eight-way tie for this award, at an average review score of 4.67.   The winners were selected based on confidence-weighted and Z-weighted average review scores.

I.J. Contacting the ISCA Board

Be sure to contact the relevant ISCA board members early, first regarding the process of preparing Conference Proceedings for the ISCA Online Archive (the Publication and Archive Committee), and second regarding student scholarships for travel or best paper awards (although the latter are usually not monetary), handled by the ISCA Grants and Awards Committee or the Conference Committee.

I.K. Chances to Edit a Book

The call for special sessions should note that the possibility of an edited volume based on the special session papers, specifically in the Springer series: Prosody, Phonology and Phonetics.   More information on the book series can be found at https://www.springer.com/series/11951

I.L. Website

The website should be designed, if possible, so that after the conference it can be archived permanently at sprosig.org. For this simple html is preferable to advanced technologies. If this is not possible, at least the key information should be available in an easily archivable format, such as html or pdf, including the call for papers, schedule, keynote speakers names and abstracts, and committee memberships.

II. Hospitality Aspects of Conference Planning

II.A. Venue

By this time, you have already picked out a conference venue.   Make sure that the venue is available for the entire period of your scheduled conference activities.

II.B. Budget

SProSIG does not (currently) have any mechanism to insure the Speech Prosody conference in case of financial loss.   In all conferences to date, the financial risk of organizing the Speech Prosody conference has been borne fully by its organizers.   In practice, the conference has never either gained or lost any large percentage of the money invested, but since the total budget is necessarily large, individual organizers may be justifiably concerned to avoid even a small percentage loss.   In order to avoid loss, it is helpful (1) to budget early and carefully, (2) to seek sponsors.   In 2010, for example, the University of Illinois agreed several months in advance to underwrite about $10,000 of financial loss, and this loss was then computed into the budget for the purpose of lowering registration fees; no additional loss was incurred.

The budget should include funds for coffee breaks, for a reception on the first night of the conference, and for a banquet on the third night of the conference.   You should also plan to give a registration packet to each person attending the conference, including an abstract book, a CD-ROM of the conference proceedings, a map of the area around the conference venue, an advertisement for the next upcoming ISCA conference, a nametag, and possibly a conference bag.

As an example, the Speech Prosody 2010 budget is included as an appendix.

II.C. Registration Fees

There should be at least eight classes of registration, according to the following system: (student vs. non-student) X (ISCA member vs. ISCA non-member) X (early registration vs. late registration).

A student registration fee should be about half the price of a corresponding non-student registration fee.   Student registration fees should only be permitted to students who can upload a document proving that they are currently registered (at the time of registration) as a student at some educational institution.   Student registration should include the banquet.   Typically, about half of the registrants (about 150) will be students, and about half (about 150) will be full registrations.

The way to set registration fees, therefore, is as follows.   Decide how many people you expect to attend (about 300).   Determine the total cost of the conference.   Divide these numbers, in order to find the total cost per person of the conference.   An ISCA member non-student, registering before the early registration deadline, pays 4/3 of this cost.   An ISCA student member, registering before the early registration deadline pays 2/3 of this cost.

ISCA non-members pay a higher registration fee.   The excess fee should be sufficient to provide them with a one-year membership in ISCA, and to also cover the fees that you expect to pay in order to send this money to ISCA, including any secretarial, postage, and currency exchange fees that you expect to pay.   Student non-members should receive an ISCA student membership; regular non-members should receive an ISCA regular membership.   After the early registration deadline, and again after the conference, you will send to the ISCA Secretariat a list of all ISCA non-members who registered for the conference, and money sufficient to cover their ISCA registrations.

There is typically an early registration deadline, about two months before the conference, simply because it is helpful for the conference organizers to receive their registration fees a couple of months before the conference.   Late registrations are typically 10-20% more expensive.

II.D. Advertising the Conference

Advertise the conference by posting two e-mails each to mailing lists including the Linguist list, the Auditory list, the ISCA-pad, the IEEE Speech and Language Technical Committee mailing list, the Fonetiks list (FONETIKS-request AT jiscmail.ac.uk) and the speech prosody list.   About six weeks before the manuscript deadline, you should send the call for papers to each of these lists (some mailing lists, like the IEEE SLTC list, have a lead time of about one month between submission and publication; plan ahead).   Again, about one month before the early registration deadline, you should send an announcement of the conference to each of these mailing lists.

Some journals (e.g., Phonetica, Speech Communication) may be willing to publish an advertisement for the conference.

Social networks may also be useful.

II.E. Hotels for Guests

If possible, arrange special prices for guests at area hotels, and a budget option such as rooms in university guest houses.

If you are holding the conference in a hotel, be aware that your guests are internet experts.   In 2010 the conference was attended by 300 people, but only about 85 per night stayed in the conference hotel; others stayed in nearby hotels.

II.F. Transportation and Maps

Be sure that the web page provides detailed instructions, allowing visitors to make their way from any of the likely airports, train stations, or bus stations to the conference venue.   The web page should also tell visitors how much they should expect to pay in terms of taxi or subway fees in order to get from an international terminus to the conference venue.

II.G. Sponsorship and Exhibition

Sponsorship of Speech Prosody conferences has varied considerably from year to year.   In some years, organizers have been able to secure sponsorship from professional organizations, businesses, municipal organizations, and non-profit organizations.   The home university is often willing to provide some support.   Begin discussing any such sponsorship agreement early --- at least a year before the date of the conference --- so that the organizations you approach will have time to add this line item into their budgets for the coming year.   Be ready to discuss the specific benefit received by the organization you approach.   A university may be ready to sponsor the conference in exchange for publicity.   A municipal organization might be willing to support student travel scholarships, if it means that more students will visit the municipality.   Publishers may be willing to exchange publicity, e.g., the publication advertises the conference, and the conference advertises the publication.   You may be aware that larger conferences (e.g., Interspeech) often rent exhibition space.   Exhibitions at a conference the size of Speech Prosody are rare, not because we charge too much for exhibition space, but because companies have been unwilling to cover the travel and salary costs of a staff member to perform the exhibition.   It may be that there is an opportunity for virtual, unstaffed, or part-time exhibitions.

II.H. Conference Assistants

You will need students to staff the registration desk, and to carry microphones in oral sessions. In 2010, these Conference Assistants (Cas) were recruited internationally; in return for six hours of work some time during the conference, each student was given free registration at the conference.   In essence, the CA position became a kind of travel scholarship, helping students to attend the conference

who would otherwise have been unable to afford it.

Previously, these Conference Assistants have typically been recruited from the universities of the host country.   In this way, it may be possible to get a large number of students from your own university to be interested in prosody.

II.I.   ISCA travel scholarships

ISCA provides travel scholarships to students who attend ISCA conferences, including Speech Prosody.   Ask the ISCA travel-scholarship chair about this, at least a few months before the early registration deadline, then put the application instructions on the conference website.

II.J.   PAC Meeting

An SProSIG Permanent Advisory Council (PAC) meeting will be held at the lunch break (or other appropriate timings) during the conference.   For this, organizers will arrange a room/space at the conference venue, presumably with foods and soft drinks.

II.K.   Transferring Experiences

Experiences on operating Speech Prosody meetings are useful for coming Speech prosody meetings.   Organizers are strongly advised to make a report summing up the conference which they run, and submit it to PAC.