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Prosody and Interpretation

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——————————— • **Abstract** • ———————————

Prosody is a means for "reading with expression" and is one aspect of oral reading competence. This theoretical inquiry asserts that prosody is central to interpreting text, and draws distinctions between *syntactic* prosody (for phrasing) and *emphatic* prosody (for interpretation). While reading with expression appears as a criterion in major assessment instruments (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995), fluency research has focused primarily on syntactic prosody. This article presents lesser-known functions of emphatic (or expressive) prosody. Emphatic prosody in reading helps readers make their inferential thinking manifest. The intent of this article is to elucidate the differences between syntactic and emphatic prosody, and to discuss why this distinction is important for research and teaching. Prosody is appropriate when it guides listeners and readers to interpret using context. As readers become more competent at the imagined discourse demanded by print, specific questions can help readers connect prosody to meaning, and to refine interpretations. Some texts show demand for such questions. One implication of this inquiry is that we need text-based research to identify passages where emphatic prosody can help readers connect to possible interpretations. Other implications for future research include questions about the learning and development of emphatic prosody, and the nature of prosodic thinking during silent reading.

Prosody is the music of speech. It includes features of sound such as pitch, stress, duration, and loudness. Prosody is the *way* we say words and phrases beyond their phonemic and lexical qualities. Phrasing in spoken and written English is based on normative musical patterns for grouping words together (Armstrong & Ward, 1931; Schreiber, 1987; Wennerstrom, 2001). In published writing syntactic units are

separated by punctuation less frequently than one might expect. Sentences contain multiple phrases and readers are expected to infer reasonable phrasing for much of any prose text (Chafe, 1987; Olson, 1994; Saenger, 1997; Schreiber, 1991). Norms for syntactic prosody provide a point of reference for *emphatic* prosody, music that expresses special intent.

Syntactic prosody is one of the ways readers fill in the gaps they expect in printed language. Emphatic prosody is a tool for furthering this inferential thinking, and may be better categorized as an aspect of literary response and content area thinking (Dowhower, 1991) than as a component of oral reading fluency. In speech we use emphatic prosody to signal listeners that we want them to make inferences about our words. But beyond the expectation that readers should display *appropriate expression* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995; Samuels, Shanahan, & Shaywitz, 2000; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991) there is little definition for what makes emphatic prosody appropriate in reading. This inquiry is an effort to rethink the role of prosody in reading, and to suggest that when we call for expression as a matter of fluency, then fluency presupposes comprehension and interpretation.

If authors are judicious about using punctuation to mark phrases, they also tend to be wary of using graphic markers for emphatic prosody. They can use CAPITALS, *italics*, and **bold-faced** text to suggest special emphasis. But as a rule authors do not expect to cue readers this way for every idea, and readers do not expect this kind of pervasive guidance (unless reading comics or advertisements, where these cues are more common). As with syntactic prosody, readers of prose are expected to share with authors in compositional responsibility for supplying emphatic prosody. The cues just aren't always there in print. As with other deep structure, emphatic prosody falls under the umbrella of pragmatics and is largely a matter of implicitly understood social and cultural expectations readers bring to text.

Examples of how we expect appropriate expression from competent oral reading include:

- The reader is able to vary expression and volume to match his/her *interpretation* of the passage (Zutell & Rasinksi, 1991, emphasis added).

- [Readers] should vary their treatment of text in light of *purposes, knowledge, the content of the author's message*, and the accessibility of that message (Tierney, 1980, emphasis added).

- [W]ords are grouped in phrases, and *meaningful thought units* are indicated by appropriate pauses and inflections of the voice (Harris, 1947 emphasis added).

Since these descriptions assume special meaning beyond syntax, emphatic prosody is related to skills and strategies readers use to *think while they read*: e.g., visualization, questioning, summary, comparison, making connections to texts and experiences. The cachet of fluency is that fluent readers are supposed to be free to think about what they read (Stayter & Allington, 1991). Where syntactic prosody is a behavioral signal of basic reading skill, emphatic prosody is a tool for manipulating the thinking we do with text.

Positioning prosody under the heading of comprehension is not typical when studying reading, given its popular place as an aspect of oral reading fluency. But linguists know prosody for its integral role in semantics and pragmatics (Gussenhoven, 2002) and literary scholars assert its importance in response to literature (Addison, 1994). Considering prosody's interpretive function does not mean I will dispute its syntactic functions, but rather that I look beyond word-reading and phrase-chunking for other functions.

The skills of word recognition and comprehension overlap (Shanahan, 2006) as readers work toward competence. Shanahan (2006) also suggests one of the best things teachers can do to help readers become fluent is to teach them to actively seek for comprehension. Later in this inquiry I will consider how working with emphatic prosody can be part of the active hunt for comprehension and interpretation.

Some characterizations of fluency in recent years make it seem like a component separate from other aspects of reading (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement & National Institute for Literacy, 2003). In fact researchers on oral reading fluency have defined it primarily in terms of word recognition (Lipson & Wixson, 1997) and syntax (Schreiber, 1987), overlooking its reach into semantics and pragmatics. If as educators we continue to include expressive reading as a sign of higher competence among fluent readers, we should realize that up to now we have not actually described it. Practical techniques used for working with emphatic prosody should prove interesting to those who study comprehension, literary response, and content-area reading, as well as those who are interested in oral reading fluency.

There are specific moments in text where interpretation hinges on prosodic choice (Erekson, 2000; Erekson, 2003). Consider this passage from Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*:

"Now stop!" Max said and sent the wild things off to bed without *their* supper. And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all. [italics added]

When we stress the word "their" and raise its pitch, this passage highlights a previously tacit connection to a similar incident earlier in the book:

> [H]is mother called him "WILD THING!"
> and Max said "I'LL EAT YOU UP!"
> so he was sent to bed without eating anything.

With a specific decision to raise pitch and add stress, a reader can suggest the two incidents are parallel. This connection was not marked graphically, even though there are capitals and exclamation marks in surrounding phrases. Arguably, parallel structure is partly right there in the words: "without their supper" late in the book matches "without eating anything" from much earlier on. But emphasis makes this parallel noticeable and suggests its significance. Neither the words nor the prosody spell out a specific interpretation, but rather set the stage for inferential elaboration—which could go a number of viable directions:

1. Max might be acting out a vengeful turn as when an older sibling turns parental injustices on younger ones;

2. He might see his original loss of supper as a door to adventure;

3. He might have discovered some vestigial empathy for his mother's frustrations;

4. He might just be tired.

Any interpretation about intent or motivation also sends us back to prosody. We can look for ways to sound vengeful, hopeful, empathetic, or weary when we reread the words. When we use emphatic prosody, we do well to check whether our choices fit with what we know about the rest of the text and our life experiences. What do *you* think Max's intent was when he sent the Wild Things to bed without their supper? How does your interpretation match with the rest of the text and with your world knowledge? While the scope of this article does not allow for a full follow-through with Max and the Wild Things, we can see that a prosodic decision—even raising pitch and adding stress to one word—points us to context and suggests a need for inference.

The Importance of Emphatic Prosody

Emphatic prosody is vital both to literary response and to content-area reading. Typical thought structures of informational text, such as comparisons, sequences (e.g., lists), and cause/effect are often emphasized by prosody, especially when these structures are not spelled out in the features of the text. For example, when giving a presentation, third-grader Henry memorized a list of fish a shark eats and recited them in his presentation rehearsal as quickly as he could: "Hammerhead sharks eat tarpon-herring-jacks-and-grouper." The four types of fish he named sounded like

one word showing that he needed coaching to separate the items on the list, to read each as if it were its own phrase. Graphically, writers separate list items with commas (tarpon, herrings, jacks, and grouper) or with bullets and numbers. In the same presentations, David, another third-grader, emphasized the thought structure of comparison: "Phytoplankton make food with photosynthesis. *Zooplankton* are more like *us* because they eat food." In this reading, the signal words *but* and *by contrast* are not there in the text to show us the comparative thought structure but this reader showed us the comparison by raising pitch on two words. Informational text may show a demand for emphatic prosody and interpretation as well as literary text does.

Of course, if educators expect readers to think and interpret, then fluent reading with syntactic phrasing is still an expectation. But while researchers have presented knowledge about how readers learn to read in phrases (Chafe, 1987; Schreiber, 1987) and about how stress rhythms are correlated to other skills (e.g., Ashby, 2006; Weber, 2006; Whalley & Hansen, 2006; Wood, 2006), there is far less help with emphatic prosody. We know of general practices amenable to appropriate expression, including variations on rereading, choral reading, drama, and reader's theater (Dowhower, 1991) but beyond identifying settings there are three key gaps in knowledge about appropriate expression. First, reading researchers have not yet defined expression and how it works. Second, writers of assessment instruments assume they know what makes one musical choice more appropriate than another; i.e., they assume they will know it when they hear it (Rasinski, 1989). Third, researchers have said little about the demands of texts themselves, where specific passages may cry for effort with prosody. These assumptions will be addressed in this article first by clarifying functional differences between syntactic and emphatic prosody.

The Differing Functions of Syntactic and Emphatic Prosody

Discussing the different functions of syntactic prosody and emphatic prosody is a step toward dealing with the above assumptions. Syntactic phrasing is necessary but not sufficient for emphatic prosody—i.e., people might read fluently but not expressively (Cowie, Douglas-Cowie, & Wichmann, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Some seem to consider syntactic prosody as expressive enough (Shanahan, 2006) yet syntactic prosody serves primarily a grammatical function, organizing and unifying relationships between words. For example, even though word order is enough to differentiate a statement from a question, it is still typical for speakers to raise the pitch of the final word in a question, while the final word of a statement usually ends with low or falling pitch (see Figure 1). We rely on prosody in English to group words into meaningful syntactic sets.

That is my bike.   Is that my bike?

Figure 1. Examples of Prosody (Stressed syllables are represented by lines, unstressed syllables by dots. Relative pitch is represented by height of the lines and dots.)

Although punctuation and word order already group printed words together, we still use prosody to mark groupings when we read them aloud. In this way prosody helps us make meaning beyond the limitations of individual words.

Emphatic prosody, by contrast, often goes beyond syntactic meaning, involving figurative speech, intent, motivation, and feelings. For example, when my 3-year-old was helping get some items from the fridge, I said, "Get this one." When she reached for a different bottle, I said, "No, get *this* one." She made two more tries with nearby bottles and I again said the same thing, "No, get *this* one." Finally she looked to where my finger was pointing, picked up a bottle and asked, "*This* one?" "Yes, that one." Prosody was part of a problem-solving situation, and it prompted her to use context. The intent of the word *this* depended on information not in the word. Even though I knew what I meant, the talk was not successful until she looked for more context. When she needed context to succeed, she actively searched for the physical cue of a pointing finger. Even then she cross-checked her interpretation by using prosody to confirm the word *this* as the word to interpret.

Once when introducing McCloskey's (1952) *One Morning in Maine* to a group of second- and third-graders I said, "This is a story about a girl who lost her tooth, and lost her tooth." In the front row Evan countered, "Hey, you just said the same words twice." I asked for another try, adjusting prosody: "This is a story about a girl who lost her tooth, and...*lost* her tooth." With a pregnant pause and raised pitch, a few started to show signs of catching on. Finally, I repeated, "This is a story about a girl who lost her tooth, and...*LOST* her tooth." With this final version I opened my hands and looked down at them as if empty, providing physical cues as well as pause, high pitch, and now loudness to emphasize the word *lost* as special. When I provided this context, which everyone could see and hear, students turned to each other explaining what they thought I meant. I did not need to ask explicitly, "Will you please rethink the word 'lost' as a *double entendre*?" Prosody and gesture (both functioning pragmatically) emphasized the repeated word, and suggested a need for interpretation, even though it was not easy to get at first. The students' search for context was helped by physical cues. Emphatic prosody in speech implies special meaning, and listeners are supposed to

get involved in inferring that meaning. Emphatic prosody can point us to hyperbole, to irony (Milosky & Ford, 1997), or to understatement. Affective content also can be suggested by prosody, such as pleasure, irritation, curiosity, ambivalence, or detachment. Moreover, emphatic prosody serves discursive functions as it marks boundaries for turn-taking, authority roles, group membership, genres, and registers (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986; Wennerstrom, 2001).

In reading, when we hear appropriate emphatic prosody it is a physical, musical demonstration that we are working on understanding. Below I elaborate further on the assumptions mentioned above, sometimes referring to abstract examples and sometimes grounding discussion in recordings and analyses of prosody in elementary classroom sessions.

Emphatic Prosody: Appropriate for What?

Exploring functions of emphatic prosody from a classroom literature discussion yields understanding about when emphatic prosody is most appropriate. I have worked with students using two types of leading questions to represent the relationship between prosody and interpretation.

Type 1: Demonstrating prosody and then asking students for interpretation. What would it mean if I said the words this way?

Type 2: Starting with interpretation and then asking students for prosody. If we think the text means X, how should we say the words?

Both types of questions are ways of managing inferential thinking using emphatic prosody. For the first type, emphasis is a way of exploring a hunch—a less articulated sense that we may need to interpret, and that we can find our way by trying out voices to see how they match the words and context. For the second type, emphasis confirms our confidence in an existing inference. We do so by considering how well different kinds of emphasis match the text and participants' thinking.

The example below comes from a discussion of the nursery rhyme "Little Bo Peep" with students in a second- and third-grade multi-age classroom (Erekson, 2003).

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep
And doesn't know where to find them.
Leave them alone and they'll come home
Bringing their tails behind them.

The conventional illustrations give us a picture of a young girl in a frock with a shepherd's crook, yet she is mentioned only in third person by name and pronoun. I suspected there might be other characters narrating this rhyme, characters never depicted in the illustration, and wondered what would happen to this text if we started exploring this question with prosody. After reading the verse with the most typical sing-song voice, I asked these young students about my suspicion that the first two lines may be spoken by one person (not Bo Peep) and the last two lines by another. They inferred easily that people do not usually refer to themselves by name and by saying *her*. Through this line of questioning, we decided to talk about the rhyme as a dialog. Prosody entered into it when we talked about how the two characters in the dialog should sound.

The children automatically gravitated to affective prosody for the first character: angry, surprised, and sad. They *named* how the character should sound first; they acted it out in prosody after. This meant they were already thinking about which emotions would match the text before we got to enactments of pitch, stress, and loudness. In the next phase we acted out the "surprised" person. Rather than focusing on technical aspects of prosody, such as pitch and volume, I asked whether this voice matched what the rhyme said.

> Evan: Yes, because it's like when someone loses something, they want help.
> James: But why can't we just say the words in the 'nursery rhyme' voice?
> Evan: Because if you don't...If you say it that way, they might just sit there and not help.

The possible cry for help is unspoken in the rhyme, and Evan inferred not only the plea for help but also made a hypothetical connection to life experience. With this example for surprise, children then enacted angry and sad voices. For each of these, the interpretations stayed close to Evan's suggestion that the first character is looking for help.

We then moved to the last two lines, reciting again in typical singsong voice. I asked how this person's voice should sound. This time, rather than naming the prosody, the first student to respond actually acted it out. He offered dismissive prosody, even adding an "aw" before the lines began: "Aw, leave 'em alone and they'll come home." He took the question of a desired meaning, and matched prosody to it. Other students were asked to tell what it meant when he said the lines this way. One explained it meant the other person didn't really think lost sheep were a problem. Another even identified this character as an adult, because she

recognized the voice as one the adults often use to dismiss children. Others then tried different voices, and they again played mostly with affect: the next contributor tried to sound curt and annoyed, and the third (the other teacher) went for a patient and reassuring voice. Each of these three turns began with interpretations in prosody and then in discussion.

Since this work with children, I have used the same example with teachers and have found adults more willing to argue with my two-character premise. They suggest that all four lines could be Bo Peep talking to herself and that the entire rhyme is either internal thought or egocentric speech. It is one thing for someone to lose something and have others gossip about it; it is another for that person to lament her loss alone and find her own solution. Yet the questions remain the same: If she is telling herself she has lost her sheep, how should she sound? And if she is answering herself "leave them alone," what is that voice? There are plural answers to these questions, and the prosodic choices we try out will involve cross-checking the meanings of emphatic prosody with our world knowledge and the words of the text. Do the words contradict your meaning? What do you know about loss? What would it take to reconcile you to a solution that involved waiting instead of searching? What do you know about sheep, cattle, dogs, pigeons, hermit crabs, or other animals coming home?

Questions about prosody leave openings for multiple interpretations. For example, one teacher said:

> I think she could be talking to herself, and she's upset with herself because...Well, she's lost them *again*.

Her emphasis on *again* in the explanation played out when she acted it out with prosody, trying to sound annoyed with herself for "another blunder." Other teachers have played out the single-narrator voices with a lazy "whatever" voice, as if Bo Peep did not care for the sheep at all and was glad to be rid of them for a few hours. In each case, teachers have tended (like some of the children) to talk about their interpretation before enacting the prosody. Sometimes, because they were shy or unsure, they even deferred to other people to act out the lines. They knew how to describe what they wanted, and recognized the emphatic prosody when they heard it but did not feel ready to perform it.

This tendency to describe the voice first creates some hunches about the mental work of prosody. First, if people can describe emphatic prosody in words (and recognize it when they hear it) does it matter whether they actually enact it? Playwrights often put directive notes like this in the lines of drama, but are not always there to direct actors in exactly how to make a character say things with a perturbed, interested, distracted, or loving voice. There seems to be an assumption

that a person with any world experience just knows what these voices sound like. For actors, we expect them to enact emphasis in just the right way. But is this true for everyday reading? If we can access inference and interpretation by skirting around actual performance of the voices, then we have still comprehended. Second, if people describe emphatic prosody in words and can judge whether a voice is more or less appropriate, it suggests that schema for emphatic prosody may be linked to vocabulary—to descriptions of prosody. It is plausible that being asked to enact a voice may feel unnecessary if we already have a good word to explain it.

Explaining rather than performing voices could come from the discomfort of social risk—readers may be unused to using prosody as an active tool for forming and testing ideas. But one can imagine that listeners might understand an explanation without needing to hear the emphatic prosody. People generally expect listeners to activate an internalized schema for prosody when they describe it with a key word. The more common the emotion and its descriptors, the more people would expect others to catch the drift without prompting or discussion.

Consider less transparent motives for words like *forlorn, reticent, fervent, underwhelmed, trust, pining,* or *spite*. These are less common affective descriptors than *happy*, *sad*, and *angry* and involve shades of meaning that might demand more work with context. The more complex the interpretation, the more appropriate it may be to go to prosody first, which will be a tool for metacognition. It gives participants a concrete medium for talking about abstractions for which they may not have words.

Judging appropriateness of emphatic prosody is complex. When prosody has connections to conventional affects and motivation—ones others recognize easily—then people might reach agreement with little discussion. But if not, a judgment of appropriateness depends on questioning the voice. This is a second judgment, where affects and motives are not completely explained by a voice, and readers would need to look to context to assess fit between voice, motive, and words.

Appropriate Emphasis in Speech and Text

The similarity between emphatic prosody in both speech and text is that it is a means to push participants to think about context. When people speak with "appropriate expression" it is not the musical features that deliver the unspoken intent *he is trying to keep a secret* or *she is overjoyed to see you*. Rather, when these things are not stated explicitly in words, prosody puts listeners to work inferring the implied meaning. The appropriateness is determined by prosody's success at this work. If emphasis drives no one to look at context, to infer, to interpret, then it is not serving one of its key functions and may not be appropriate.

Emphatic prosody is a pointer. It serves a deictic function much as an index finger or the direction of someone's gaze does in conversation. It gets us circling around the content of the words, perhaps close to immediate context but often in wider circles. For example, in a noun phrase like "her red jacket," emphasis on her could point us to a person in the room, but it might also index a person present only in memory or in suggestion—as if the jacket belonged to someone not yet met. Emphatic prosody asks people to start working on inference, to imply, select, and interpret relevant context.

While stress and pitch can highlight definite words or syllables as significant, the music tells thinkers to go beyond lexical content and syntax to figure out what else is entailed in meaning. Almost any syllable in "her red jacket" could be emphasized with different effect (her *red* jacket; her red *jack*et). And the effect in doing so is not to express meaning but rather to raise questions: Where have I seen a red jacket? What other colors of jackets does she have? Didn't someone else say something about a jacket earlier? If this isn't a jacket, what is it? Who is she? Emphatic prosody at once focuses people on something specific and also leaves them with gaps to fill. The types of conversational questions asked immediately above are the same kinds of contextual questions to ask when interpreting text with prosody. So while a conversational interaction has clear differences from text transactions, the function of emphatic prosody tends to be similar in both types of discourse. It is supposed to point us to context and help us fill in gaps.

There is reasonable skepticism among researchers about whether specific speech music signifies meaning directly, such as an "ironic tone of voice." While there are normal patterns for syntactic purposes such as questions and statements (Armstrong & Ward, 1931), specific affects and intentions are innumerable and relate to each other in complex ways. A grammar of emphatic prosody would require an elaborate system of signs, and researchers are not sure this grammar actually exists. Where one recent study found statistically significant prosodic markers for ironic intent (Cheang & Pell, 2007), another found prosody alone is insufficient for listeners to discover irony (Bryant & Fox Tree, 2005). Listeners in the latter study were observed tuning in to additional context to figure out ironic intent. So while there may be some typical acoustic "moves" for outcomes such as sarcasm, those moves are still best interpreted in light of other information. Music does not carry irony on its own, but rather makes listeners suspect and begin to pursue it.

Emphasis functions similarly in text. While some prosody may be understood easily because of common usage, the discussion of "Little Bo Peep" showed that participants were interested in both making prosodic choices and also explaining the context that made their choice appropriate. The music did not carry

interpretation on its own, but pointed people in the discussion toward the most relevant context.

Text is inanimate and authors are often unavailable to offer extra pragmatic cues like gestures or physical proximity. Moreover, when reading something by another person, readers have little say in what the words and phrases are as they cannot adjust and repair wording as in conversation. So if prosody is used, how do readers know when to ask *themselves* to make inferences? Why would they even try to infer, if no other human is present about whom to infer intent and motives?

Since italics and other graphic elements *can* deliver emphatic prosody in text, one could take an autocratic view of text and assume that readers are not *supposed* to use emphatic prosody unless so directed in print. This may even seem generally appropriate for informational text, such as instructions for assembling a desk. A reader might not expect a need for emphasis to get at feelings and intentions from desk assembly instructions. But response to even the most utilitarian text is still discursively imaginative—that is, readers imagine not only the panels and bolts that make the desk, but also the narrators and authors who are telling about them. There are still gaps to fill.

For example, after a long struggle to assemble the desk, there is a moment when the reader moves back through the text and says out loud, "Oh! The '*hex*-headed bolt.' *That's* what they meant." Raising pitch and arranging stress emphasizes context by suggesting there were other types of bolt heads, and that the reader only now realized the significant difference. Emphasis added to the word *hex* is a sign that the reader already has been involved in inferential problem-solving. This is the inverse of the way prosody directs us to context in social speech. Rather than suggesting a move to context, prosody in reading often confirms suspicions and hunches already forming from context. Emphatic prosody presupposes the fact that a reader is actively engaged in comprehension and interpretation.

While none of the available studies on prosody consider its place in inner speech (collection of data is arguably tricky), the egocentricity of "Oh! The '*hex*-headed bolt'" leads me to suspect emphatic prosody in oral reading has some corollary in inner speech and silent reading. Emphatic prosody in inner conversation is directed at the self. Egocentric speech—speech to guide thinking and action—tends to be internalized as children realize they do not need to say the words out loud (Vygotsky, 1986). If emphatic prosody in reading has similar functions to egocentric speech—speech that guides thought—one would expect silent readers who know how to use emphatic prosody orally would also find some way to accomplish emphasis internally. Prosody is an aspect of oral reading that should provide clues about the nature of thought during silent reading.

When adding emphatic prosody to a mere diagram label in a set of instructions, the desk-builder also imagines a "they" behind the text. The reader might even imagine someone back at the factory as the narrator or author, not the more likely technical writer sitting in a row of word processors hundreds of miles from the production line. When curious word choice or grammar errors suggest the booklet was written by non-native writers of English, for example, imagination rebuilds the narrators to suit. Knowledge about the real manufacturing process may be trumped by a need to invent a discursive partnership. Emphatic prosody in reading belies the reader's sense that reading is a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1937), not merely receptive activity—whether the purpose of the text is aesthetic or utilitarian.

The same holds true for literary text (Addison, 1994). When enacting texts, competent performers act as if they are in discourse with invented figures, such as an implied reader and author, or a narrator and narratee (Addison, 1994; Iser, 1978). The actual characters in a text may be involved in this imagination as well, but readers risk overstating their influence because they are represented overtly in content. It is what is unwritten that is obviously easier to underestimate. Competent readers imagine not only the world *in* the book with its characters and settings, but also a world *of* the book (Apol, 2003) where the text's rhetorical functions live.

Conclusions

My first hope is that this article helps educators and researchers put emphatic prosody in a different place. While emphasis is not unrelated to oral reading fluency, it is perhaps better understood as a matter of interpretation or inferential comprehension. Still, those studying fluency might consider working the problem from both directions. Read-alouds and group discussions are perfect settings in early grades to examine the ways emphatic prosody can inform readers about motives, intent, and affect. This can all happen while readers are working on fluency through work on word identification, automaticity, and syntactic phrasing. Early readers should know what they are aiming for as they gain skill in independent reading. As Shanahan (2006) suggested, perhaps our best route toward fluency comes through a focus on comprehension. Emphatic prosody is not merely a decorative or dramatic voice; it is purposeful. Teaching fluency from both a top-down and a bottom-up perspective might help us keep the readers' sense of purpose parallel with their development of word identification skills. Over the past ten years fluency has become an ends unto itself in assessment and instruction (Goodman, 2006; Mathson, Allington, & Solic, 2006; Opitz, 2007; Rasinski, 2006). This article outlines a clear purpose and trajectory for oral reading fluency: emphatic prosody gives us tools for interpreting text. It is a means to an end.

Appropriate expression is a kind of indirect speech act (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1970), not simple or direct communication as the word *express* would imply—as if intentions were essential oils to be squeezed and bottled for delivery. Appropriately expressive readers do not spit out authors' intentions and affects, rather they use emphasis to think and help other people to think with them. It is a means for engaging minds, not for mere telling.

Independent readers use emphatic prosody to convey what they believe the words mean, and when they do so they must coordinate the interpretation themselves instead of expecting someone else to do so. In reading this entire social interaction is *imagined*. We may pretend characters, narrators, and authors intend for readers to think and feel a certain way, but it is truly we as readers who supply the unwritten emphasis. Prosodic guidance is not always given in print. And when the emphasis is in print, it may not fall on the words most interesting to interpret. The burden is thus on readers to substantiate prosodic decisions either socially or individually by looking at context both in the text and in their world.

Appropriateness is a situated judgment. For example, imagine an informational read-aloud where the best thing would be for the reader to stick simply to syntactic prosody and emphasize nothing. Also, sometimes just an entertaining voice may be more desirable than pointed emphasis. But if readers accept that texts demand inference then "appropriate expression" via emphatic prosody is a clear response to that demand.

Implications for Research

We face a curricular puzzle. If a competent prosodic voice is important to text response, then the push for silent reading in grades 3-5 puts a valuable aspect of comprehension under cover, just when educators want to know how readers think with literature and other content. Silent reading asks students to "hide their work" in a way that never would be acceptable to today's math teacher. But we can still ask questions about voice and prosody during and after silent reading. Passages may be revisited with the question "how should we say it" or "how did you say it in your mind" at almost any juncture. Guided reading involving these questions may help teachers stay in touch with students' silent reading.

The problem is that educators and researchers know fairly little about how the mind uses voice during silent reading. In informal reading interviews I find some people report they do not activate a voice at all when they read silently, while others say they always read with an internal voice. Those who say they do *not* will often recant when the process is talked out further. At first they may not understand that it is an imaginary internal voice, thinking only of subvocalization or lip-moving. Their flip-flop suggests some readers may be unaware of what they

have internalized as silent readers—they just do it. But what is the actual phenomenon of silent reading like, and how can we discover this for both competent and less competent readers?

Is the process of providing a voice in silent reading similar to that of inner speech? Vygotsky (1986) wrote that inner speech can become "telegraphic" as it matures—i.e., the amount of information is reduced to only what is absolutely necessary. If a parallel to silent reading holds true, one would expect competent silent readers to turn the imaginary voice on and off based on perceived need. Adolescents and adults often revert to egocentric speech when puzzled ("Where did I put my keys?"), so we might also inquire to see whether or how this kind of pressure works for text as well ("What did that mean?"). When reading comprehension breaks down, when and how do readers make decisions to backtrack and reread specific passages with a new voice?

These questions about silent reading also raise other questions. How do children grow a sense for emphatic prosody in reading? Who grows it and who does not? How difficult is emphatic prosody for English language learners or learners with phonological processing problems? We know emphatic prosody poses distinct difficulties for people with autistic spectrum disorders (Paul, Augustyn, Klin, & Volkmar, 2005; Wang, Lee, Sigman, & Dapretto, 2006). How does this affect reading comprehension? And there is just as little knowledge about emphatic prosody in oral reading for younger grades as there is about prosody in silent reading.

There is also a text-based line of research implied here. If teachers hope to teach inference and interpretation with the types of questions proposed above, they will do well to identify specific words, lines, or passages where prosody helps us move toward meaning. As educators, if we want to teach prosody as more than decoration, we will have to find openings in specific texts. Ability to recognize these demanding moments in text is part of our work as teachers when preparing text. If we do not have this skill in our repertoire, we need to see examples and also learn to identify demanding texts on our own. This means nothing less than being able to identify gaps that need to be filled by inference and interpretation, and figuring out whether prosody is one of the appropriate tools to help us think about the gaps.

We have many ways to help people think with text, and we teach these with strategies until they become skills (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). We use visualization and think-aloud to activate imaginative and metacognitive processes; we use diagrams to organize thoughts; we help students ask and answer their own questions; we foster and activate background knowledge. Each of these families of skills and strategies have been invited into the instructional repertoire by people who have figured out what competent readers do well. Competent use of emphatic

prosody is one of the skills of readers who can think and read at the same time. We need to know more about it.

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