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Prosody as a determinant of the syntactic status of *I think*

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Parenthetical *I think* as in (1a) is a frequent comment clause in English that is syntactically subordinate to the main clause (see, e.g. Biber et al. 972-982). In initial position it fills the typical position of a matrix clause, but recent studies suggest that – with (1b) or without (1c) a complementizer (*that*) – it is unclear syntactically whether *I think* is a comment clause or a matrix clause (see, e.g. Dehé and Wichmann (2010b)).

(1) a. Lord Scarman, *I think*, was right.
b. *I think* that Lord Scarman was right (ICE-GB s1b-033)
c. *I think* Lord Scarman was right

According to Dehé and Wichmann (2010) in the matrix clause I has prosodic prominence, whereas prominent *think* is related to comment clause function. Thus, when a syntactic matrix clause is reinterpreted as comment clause, prosody overrides syntactic structure. However, in medial position (as exemplified in (1a), *I think* remains a comment clause even if *I* is stressed: In this case, syntax seems to override prosody. Thus there appears to be a continuing transfer of information between both prosody and syntax.

In order to examine the interrelation between prosody and syntactic hierarchy in sentences introduced by *I think* we draw on the Buckeye Corpus (http://buckeyecorpus.osu.edu/) for auditory and acoustic analyses. For this purpose, we (i) investigate the correlation between prosody and presence or absence of that, (ii) describe the intonation patterns of *I think* and (iii) measure acoustic movements in their relation to the range of pitch in the phrase.

References: • Dehé, N. and A. Wichmann (2010): Sentence-initial I think (that) and I believe (that): Prosodic evidence for use as main clause, comment clause and discourse marker. In: *Studies in Language* 34(1), 36–74.