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Exploring The Role of Prosody in Academic English Speaking Among Non-English Major Students

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Abstract. Prosody plays a significant role in spoken communication by facilitating meaning construction, communication effectiveness, and listener engagement in academic English-speaking contexts. However, previous studies have predominantly focused on English-major students, while limited attention has been given to non-English-major students from technology-related disciplines. Therefore, this study aims to explore how non-English-major students employ prosodic features in academic English speaking. This study adopted a qualitative case study approach involving 44 undergraduate students from Information Systems, Information Systems and Technology, and Information Technology programs at Universitas Siber Indonesia. The primary data consisted of students' English dialogue video recordings produced as part of their academic speaking assignments, from which five recordings were purposively selected for detailed analysis. Data were analyzed through qualitative prosodic analysis focusing on five prosodic features, namely intonation, stress, rhythm, pausing, and pitch variation. The findings revealed that students actively employed all identified prosodic features during their speaking performances. Among these features, intonation, stress, and pausing emerged as the most dominant prosodic resources used to express meaning, emphasize important information, and organize ideas during communication, while rhythm and pitch variation contributed to maintaining conversational flow and listener engagement. These findings indicate that prosody serves as an important communicative resource in academic English speaking and highlight the need to integrate prosodic awareness into English-speaking instruction for non-English-major students.

Keyword: Prosody; Academic English Speaking; Non-English Major Students; Qualitative Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of prosody in spoken language has been widely acknowledged in contemporary linguistic research, particularly for its role in enhancing intelligibility, signaling discourse structure, and supporting real-time comprehension (Degano et al., 2024). Recent studies have demonstrated that prosodic features—such as intonation, stress, pitch variation, and rhythmic patterning—play a crucial role in organizing spoken interaction and guiding listener interpretation across communicative contexts (Szczepek Reed, 2020; Wagner & Watson, 2021).

Nevertheless, despite this growing body of research, the contribution of prosodic patterns to meaning construction in spoken academic discourse. Previous studies have examined prosody from various perspectives, including its role in speech intelligibility (Pickering & Baker, 2023), listener processing (Saito & Plonsky, 2023), and discourse organization (Xu, 2023). However, relatively limited attention has been devoted to investigating how prosodic features interact with discourse-level meaning construction in authentic spoken academic contexts.

Most existing studies focus primarily on isolated prosodic phenomena or pronunciation-related outcomes, leaving the relationship between prosodic patterning and the construction of academic meaning insufficiently explored. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining how prosodic resources function as meaning-making mechanisms in spoken academic English, especially with regard to how prosody operates beyond surface-level emphasis to shape coherence and argumentative flow (Shan, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, prosody can be understood as a system of suprasegmental features that includes intonation, stress, rhythm, pitch movement, and pausing, all of which contribute to the organization and interpretation of spoken discourse (Xu, 2023; Wagner & Watson, 2021). Prosody plays an important role in spoken communication by helping speakers convey meaning, emphasize information, and organize discourse. According to (Wennerstrom, 2001), prosody functions as a framework through which speakers communicate meaning during interaction. Since prosodic features are realized in spoken discourse, video-recorded conversations and presentations provide authentic data for examining how intonation, stress, rhythm, and pausing contribute to meaning construction in Academic English Speaking.

The concept of meaning construction in discourse emphasizes that meaning is not transmitted solely through lexical and grammatical choices (Tyler, 2022). Within spoken communication, prosody contributes significantly to this process by indicating information structure, speaker stance, and discourse coherence. As a result, listeners rely not only on what is said but also on how it is said to interpret communicative intentions.

Furthermore, discourse organization theory suggests that spoken discourse is structured through signaling devices that help listeners identify topic shifts, argument development, and discourse boundaries (Szczepek Reed, 2020). In academic settings, where information is often conceptually dense and hierarchically organized, prosodic cues become particularly important for maintaining coherence and facilitating comprehension.

Although prosody has been widely studied in English language learning, most previous research has focused on English-major students and pronunciation-related aspects (Hincks, 2016; Coutinho et al., 2016). Limited attention has been given to non-English-major students, particularly those from technology-related disciplines. Furthermore, few studies have explored the role of prosody in meaning construction during academic speaking activities.

Therefore, this study investigates how non-English-major students employ prosodic features in academic English speaking. Departing from approaches that conceptualize prosody as an auxiliary or supportive layer of speech, this study positions prosody as a constitutive resource in academic communication (Klimczak-Pawlak & Waniek-Klimczak, 2023). In academic speech settings—such as English dialogue—speakers rely on prosodic cues to foreground key arguments,

manage information density, and signal transitions within complex argumentative structures (Pickering & Baker, 2023;Tyler, 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in its investigation of prosodic features among non-English-major students from technology-related disciplines, namely Information Systems, Information Systems and Technology, and Information Technology programs. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on English-major students and emphasized pronunciation accuracy, fluency, or speech assessment, this study examines how prosodic features are employed in authentic English dialogue recordings produced as part of academic speaking activities. Furthermore, the study extends existing research by exploring prosody as a communicative resource that supports meaning construction and communication effectiveness in academic English-speaking contexts.

Prosodic features such as intonation, stress, rhythm, pausing, and pitch variation can be systematically examined through recorded spoken interactions. Based on (Crystal, 2008), speech recordings, whether audio or audiovisual, provide primary data for analyzing prosodic characteristics. Similarly, (ten Have, 2026) argues that video recordings offer rich spoken language data that enable researchers to investigate prosodic phenomena in authentic communicative contexts. Therefore, video-based conversations constitute a valid and reliable source for examining the role of prosody in spoken communication. In doing so, the study contributes to recent discussions on spoken academic English and multimodal meaning-making, highlighting prosody as a central component of effective academic communication rather than a peripheral feature (Csomay & Petrovic, 2023 ; Saito & Plonsky, 2023).

This study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do non-English-major students employ prosodic features in academic English speaking?, and (2) What communicative functions do prosodic features serve in supporting meaning construction during academic English-speaking activities?

METHOD

This study was designed to investigate how non-English-major students employ prosodic features in academic English-speaking contexts. Given the exploratory nature of the research and its focus on understanding spoken language phenomena in authentic educational settings, a qualitative case study approach was adopted. The study examined students' English dialogue video recordings to identify the occurrence and communicative functions of prosodic features, namely intonation, stress, rhythm, pausing, and pitch variation. Through detailed analysis of naturally occurring speech, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of prosody in supporting meaning construction and communication effectiveness among students from technology-related disciplines.

Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative case study approach to investigate how students who are not majoring in English use prosodic elements in their academic English speaking. A qualitative method was deemed suitable since the research intended to gain a comprehensive insight into how students employ prosody in spontaneous spoken exchanges. The case study approach allowed the researcher to explore prosodic elements within a particular educational setting and to analyze how prosodic aspects help in meaning creation and communication efficiency in academic English-speaking tasks.

Data Source of Research

The study included 44 undergraduate students who were enrolled in Joint Class of event semester 2025-2026 academic year at Universitas Siber Indonesia, South Jakarta. These students were chosen due to their consistent involvement in English-speaking activities as part of their English language course. They must do in pairs of English dialogue assignment.

The main data source was formed by students' video recordings of English conversations created during academic speaking tasks in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Out of all the recordings submitted by participants, five videos were intentionally chosen for in-depth analysis due to audio clarity, interaction quality, dialogue performance completeness, and alignment with the research objectives.

Instrument of Research

The main tool in qualitative research was the researcher, who was in charge of gathering, evaluating, and interpreting the data. A Prosodic Observation Checklist was used as the primary research tool to aid in the analytical process. The checklist, which concentrated on five analytical categories—tonation, stress, rhythm, stopping, and pitch variation—was created using well-established prosody theories.

Additionally, field notes were used to record contextual information, interactional patterns, and significant observations found during repeated inspections of the recordings, while students' English dialogue video recordings served as the main source of spoken language data. A thorough analysis of students' prosodic performance in academic English-speaking environments was made possible by these tools.

Data Collection

Data were gathered during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year from undergraduate students that accomplish the English dialogue video-recording assignments. As part of their regular English-speaking assignment, students were obliged to develop and submit dialogue videos on academic and contemporary issues.

Following the submission process, the researcher analyzed 22 video recordings, because the assignment must do in pairs, and selected five videos using purposive sampling. The selection criteria included audio quality, interaction clarity, discourse completeness, and relevance to the study's aims. The selected videos were then verbatim transcribed to allow for a more complete evaluation of prosodic aspects.

During the review, field notes were also kept to document contextual information and emergent observations about the students' speaking performances. These techniques ensured a systematic collection of data relevant to the research aims.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study of prosodic analysis was used to examine the gathered data. The study concentrated on locating and analyzing how prosodic elements—specifically, intonation, stress, rhythm, pause, and pitch variation—were used in students' English-speaking performances.

The analysis was conducted through five stages. First, the selected video recordings were transcribed verbatim. Second, the researcher repeatedly reviewed the recordings and transcripts to achieve data familiarization. Third, prosodic features were identified and coded according to the established analytical categories. Fourth, the coded features were categorized based on their communicative functions, including expressing meaning, emphasizing important information, maintaining speech flow, organizing ideas, and engaging listeners. Finally, patterns emerging across the five recordings were compared and interpreted to develop a comprehensive understanding of how non-English-major students employed prosodic features in academic English-speaking contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings presented in this section are derived from the qualitative analysis of five purposively selected English dialogue video recordings produced by non-English-major students. The analysis

aimed to examine the employment of prosodic features in academic English-speaking activities, with particular attention to intonation, stress, rhythm, pausing, and pitch variation. To ensure a systematic presentation of the findings, each recording was analysed separately using a prosodic coding framework. The individual analyses were then synthesized through a cross-case comparison to identify dominant prosodic patterns and recurring communicative tendencies across the recordings. These findings provide empirical evidence regarding the ways in which non-English-major students utilize prosody to support spoken communication in academic contexts.

1. Analysis of Video Recording 1: Student Life in the Age of AI

Table 1 Prosodic Features on Video Recording 1

Prosodic Feature	Observation Level
Intonation	High
Stress	High
Rhythm	Moderate
Pausing	Very High
Pitch Variation	Moderate-High

The coding results indicate that intonation, stress, and pausing were the most prominent prosodic features observed in Video Recording 1. Students frequently employed rising and falling intonation patterns to manage interaction and convey meaning. Stress was used to emphasize important concepts related to artificial intelligence and student life. Pausing appeared regularly as students organized ideas and planned responses during the discussion. Although rhythm and pitch variation were also identified, their occurrence was comparatively less frequent. Overall, the findings suggest that prosody played an important role in supporting communication effectiveness and interactional management.

2. Analysis of Video Recording 2: Student Life in Task Priority

Table 2 Prosodic Features on Video Recording 2

Prosodic Feature	Observation Level
Intonation	High
Stress	High
Rhythm	Moderate-High
Pausing	Very High
Pitch Variation	Moderate

The coding results reveal that intonation, stress, and pausing remained dominant throughout the presentation. Unlike the dialogue recordings, the presentation format resulted in more structured use of intonation and rhythm. Falling intonation was frequently employed to deliver explanations and conclusions, while stress highlighted key information presented to the audience. Pausing served as a strategy for organizing information and transitioning between presentation points. Pitch variation appeared less frequently, reflecting the formal and informative nature of the task.

3. Analysis of Video Recording 3: Balancing Gaming and Studying

Table 3 Prosodic Features on Video Recording 3

Prosodic Feature	Observation Level
Intonation	High
Stress	High
Rhythm	High
Pausing	High
Pitch Variation	Moderate-High

The coding results demonstrate that all prosodic features were actively employed during the discussion. Intonation and stress were used to support argumentation and opinion sharing, while rhythm reflected smooth conversational exchanges. Compared with Video Recording 2, pitch variation appeared more frequently due to the interactive nature of the discussion. Pausing was observed as students formulated responses and organized their thoughts before speaking.

4. Analysis of Video Recording 4: AI Tools for Students: Helpful or Too Risky?

Table 4. Prosodic Features on Video Recording 4

Prosodic Feature	Observation Level
Intonation	High
Stress	High
Rhythm	High
Pausing	High
Pitch Variation	Moderate-High

The coding analysis indicates a strong use of intonation and stress throughout the discussion. Students frequently emphasized key concepts related to artificial intelligence, educational benefits, and potential risks. Rhythm remained relatively stable due to effective turn-taking between speakers. Pitch variation became more noticeable when students expressed agreement, disagreement, and evaluation of different viewpoints. Pausing functioned as a cognitive strategy for planning and developing arguments.

5. Analysis of Video Recording 5: Fake News or Misinformation?

Table 5 Prosodic Features on Video Recording 5

Prosodic Feature	Observation Level
Intonation	High
Stress	High
Rhythm	High
Pausing	Very High
Pitch Variation	Moderate-High

The coding results reveal that intonation, stress, and pausing were the most dominant features in this recording. Students employed intonation to differentiate questions, explanations, and

evaluations of information. Stress was used to emphasize important concepts related to misinformation and digital literacy. Pausing occurred frequently during the explanation of complex ideas, while pitch variation contributed to listener engagement. Rhythm remained relatively stable throughout the interaction.

Following the individual analyses of the five video recordings, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns in students' use of prosodic features across different academic English-speaking tasks. This analytical stage aimed to synthesize the findings from each recording and determine which prosodic features were most consistently employed by non-English-major students. By comparing the occurrence and prominence of intonation, stress, rhythm, pausing, and pitch variation across the recordings, the researcher was able to identify common communicative tendencies and establish broader patterns of prosodic use in academic speaking contexts.

Table 6 Summary of Prosodic Coding Across Five Recordings

Video	Intonation	Stress	Rhythm	Pausing	Pitch Variation
V1	High	High	Moderate	Very High	Moderate-High
V2	High	High	Moderate-High	Very High	Moderate
V3	High	High	High	High	Moderate-High
V4	High	High	High	High	Moderate-High
V5	High	High	High	Very High	Moderate-High

The results presented in Table 6 indicate that all five recordings demonstrated the use of the identified prosodic features. Intonation and stress consistently appeared at a high level across all recordings, while pausing was observed at high to very high levels. Rhythm and pitch variation were also evident, although their prominence varied depending on the topic and interactional context. Overall, the findings suggest that prosodic features were actively employed by non-English-major students during academic English-speaking activities.

Table 7 Frequency of Dominant Prosodic Features

Prosodic Feature	Frequency	Percentage
Intonation	5	100%
Stress	5	100%
Pausing	5	100%
Rhythm	4	80%
Pitch Variation	4	80%

As shown in Table 7, intonation, stress, and pausing emerged as the most dominant prosodic features, appearing in all five recordings (100%). Rhythm and pitch variation were also frequently observed, with occurrences in four recordings (80%). These findings indicate that students primarily relied on intonation, stress, and pausing to facilitate communication, emphasize important information, and organize spoken discourse during academic English-speaking activities.

Discussion

1. **The Employment of Prosodic Features in Academic English Speaking among Non-English-Major Students**

   The findings revealed that non-English-major students actively employed various prosodic features during academic English-speaking activities. Among the identified features, intonation, stress, and pausing emerged as the most dominant prosodic resources across the five video

recordings selected. This finding suggests that students utilized prosody not only as a linguistic component of speech but also as a practical resource for managing communication and facilitating interaction.

The consistent use of intonation indicates that students relied on pitch movement to distinguish between questions, explanations, and opinions. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing the importance of intonation in enhancing comprehensibility and communication effectiveness in spoken English (Hincks, 2016). Through rising and falling intonation patterns, students were able to signal communicative intentions and guide listeners' interpretation of spoken messages.

Similarly, stress was frequently employed to emphasize key concepts and important information related to the discussion topics. The findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that stress contributes significantly to listener comprehension by highlighting essential elements within spoken discourse (Coutinho et al., 2016). In the present study, students used stress to draw attention to technical terms, central arguments, and important ideas discussed during academic speaking activities.

Pausing also emerged as one of the most prominent prosodic features. The frequent occurrence of pauses suggests that students utilized pausing as a cognitive and organizational strategy during speech production. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that pauses provide speakers with opportunities to plan utterances, organize ideas, and maintain coherence in spoken communication (Klimczak-Pawlak & Waniek-Klimczak, 2023).

Although rhythm and pitch variation appeared less frequently than the other features, they remained important components of students' speaking performances. Rhythm contributed to maintaining conversational flow, while pitch variation helped express attitudes, emotions, and levels of engagement during interaction. Overall, the findings demonstrate that non-English-major students were able to employ multiple prosodic resources to support communication in academic English-speaking contexts.

2. The Communicative Functions of Prosody in Supporting Meaning Construction

The findings further revealed that prosodic features served important communicative functions in supporting meaning construction during academic English-speaking activities. Rather than functioning solely as pronunciation-related elements, prosodic features enabled students to organize discourse, emphasize information, and facilitate listener comprehension.

Intonation played a significant role in expressing meaning and managing interaction. Through variations in pitch movement, students signalled questions, explanations, agreement, and evaluation. These functions helped listeners interpret speakers' intentions more effectively and contributed to the construction of meaning throughout the interaction. This finding supports the view that prosody serves as a crucial meaning-making resource in spoken communication.

Stress functioned primarily as a mechanism for highlighting important information. By emphasizing specific words or phrases, students directed listeners' attention to key concepts and central arguments. Such emphasis contributed to clearer communication and improved comprehensibility, particularly when discussing academic and technology-related topics.

Pausing supported meaning construction by helping students organize ideas and structure spoken discourse. The use of pauses enabled speakers to separate ideas, indicate transitions, and formulate responses before continuing their speech. Consequently, pausing contributed to discourse coherence and communication effectiveness.

Furthermore, rhythm and pitch variation enhanced listener engagement and maintained conversational flow. Rhythm facilitated smooth interaction through balanced turn-taking, whereas pitch variation allowed speakers to convey attitudes, evaluations, and interpersonal

meanings. Together, these features enriched the communicative quality of students' spoken performances.

Taken together, the findings indicate that prosody functions as an important communicative resource in academic English speaking. Through the combined use of intonation, stress, pausing, rhythm, and pitch variation, students were able to construct meaning, organize discourse, and maintain effective communication despite being non-English-major learners. These findings extend previous research by demonstrating that prosody plays a significant role not only in pronunciation and fluency but also in meaning construction within authentic academic speaking contexts.

To further understand the role of prosody in academic English speaking, the identified prosodic features were interpreted based on their communicative functions. The relationship between prosodic features and their communicative roles

Table 8 Communicative Functions of Prosodic Features

Prosodic Feature	Communicative Function
Intonation	Expressing meaning and managing interaction
Stress	Highlighting important information
Pausing	Organizing ideas and planning utterances
Rhythm	Maintaining speech flow
Pitch Variation	Engaging listeners and expressing attitudes

As shown in Table 8, each prosodic feature contributed to communication in different ways. Intonation primarily supported meaning expression and interaction management, whereas stress functioned to emphasize important information. Pausing facilitated idea organization, while rhythm and pitch variation contributed to conversational flow and listener engagement. These findings suggest that prosody serves as a multifaceted communicative resource in academic English-speaking activities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of prosody in academic English speaking among non-English-major students from technology-related disciplines. The findings revealed that students actively employed various prosodic features, including intonation, stress, rhythm, pausing, and pitch variation, during academic speaking activities. Among these features, intonation, stress, and pausing emerged as the most dominant prosodic resources across the five analyzed video recordings. These findings indicate that prosodic features play an important role in supporting communication, organizing spoken discourse, and facilitating interaction in academic English-speaking contexts.

The study further demonstrated that prosodic features contribute significantly to meaning construction during spoken communication. Intonation helped express communicative intentions, stress highlighted important information, pausing supported the organization of ideas, while rhythm and pitch variation enhanced conversational flow and listener engagement. These findings suggest that prosody functions not merely as a pronunciation-related component but as an essential communicative resource that supports effective academic speaking.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence of how non-English-major students from technology-related disciplines employ prosodic features to construct meaning in authentic academic English-speaking activities. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating prosodic awareness into English-speaking instruction and provide insights for educators seeking to improve students' communicative competence in academic

contexts. Future research may further explore the role of prosody in diverse academic speaking settings to enrich current understanding of prosodic use in English language learning.

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