Information structure in Javanese conversational sequences
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This paper will examine how information-giving, given information, and the response to it, are realized in prosodic features of Javanese dialogue. I will argue that pause, delay, and intonation are deeply related to the understanding of the information structure of Javanese dialogue: this based on data from adlib scenes in an artistic performance called wayang kulit (‘shadow puppet play’), in which the puppeteer conducts spontaneous dialogue with his accompanying musicians and his audience.

As Javanese is a language where the colloquial style does not necessarily have rigid grammatical structure, focused information in a Javanese sentence sequence can be just uttered as simply as (1):

(1)  A:  Kowe?
     you
     ‘You?’  (What are you going to order?)
B:    Soto ayam.
     soup chicken
     ‘Chicken soup. (I am going to have chicken soup.)
C:    Aku  gudheg.
     I  gudheg
     ‘I (take) gudheg.’ (As for me, I will have gudheg.)

In this kind of conversation sequence, intonation and pause plays a crucial role. I will show how Javanese dialogues actually convey connotation and intention using this prosodic device, especially in managing pause, intonation, and delayed response.

I will also describe the function of the particle ‘iya’, by classifying it based on the length and rising and falling intonation. The particle ‘iya’, which is used for back-channeling and interjection, as well as for fillers, should also be studied in the framework of information structure. A conversation sequence sample (2) shows a parallelism in which the particle ‘iya’ is used.

(2) (being asked whether the puppeteer is tired or weak)
Puppeteer:    Dong  iya  iso  lemaas
     sometimes  iya  can be  weak
dong iya iso ora pathi lemaas
sometimes iya can be not so weak
‘Sometimes I can be weak, other times I can be not that weak’.

(….PAUSE) Dong iya iso kaku
sometimes iya can be stiff
‘Sometimes I can be stiff.’

(.) Ngene.
Like that

Audience: LAUGH

In this sequence, the puppeteer slowly transforms his response to a question into a joke, using parallelism. The final syllable of the end-of-sentence words, that is, the focused adjectives, lemas ‘weak’ and kaku ‘hard, stiff’ is lengthened and high-pitched, with its final syllable raised.

I will argue that the delay, pause, intonation variation, and parallelism in conversation sequences, and the combination of them using ‘iya’, are linguistic strategies which the wayang kulit puppeteer uses in order to elicit laughter from the audience.