CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Against the background of previous work in prosody, this chapter will present to what extent the study may have contributed to the clarification of certain issues and our total picture of Malay prosody.

The language under consideration in this study, i.e. the Malay language, belongs to the "Malayo-Polynesian or Oceanic-Eastern or Austronesian" family and falls within the western or Indonesian branch. This means that one cannot take for granted that it is completely analysable by following a model of analysis developed on the basis of English. Consequently, one is entitled to expect that the examination of the prosodic features in Malay discourse might benefit from an approach that is not phonologically prejudiced and less restrictive in nature.

The preceding chapters have attempted to deal with issues pertaining to the actual realisation of prosody in Malay connected discourse and the exploitation of the prosodic resources in realising several different functions. We have aimed to arrive at a realistic and insightful definition of Malay prosody: that is, the manifestations of prosodic
phenomena in actual discourse and the functions they perform in their domains of occurrences.

The findings show the advantages of corpus-based study. Many of the observations and findings described here would never have been noticed without the use of a sample of natural spoken Malay. Unlike the analysis of constructed sentences divorced of context, the analysis of connected discourse in the sample would not have been possible without an auditory analysis of the material. The observations made auditorily are corroborated by instrumental analysis.

Functionally, we have seen how Malay speakers use prosody to perform segmentative, informational and interational functions.

Formally, we have seen the recurrence of specific prosodic cues upon which speakers may draw for one purpose or another. The assignment of a combination of such prosodic parameters as pitch, loudness and duration to a particular syllable in an item of information contributes to the manifestation of the item as prominence. Likewise, the combination of a pause and a fall are sufficient clues for segmentation. There is also the fundamental opposition between forte loudness and piano loudness, high pitch and low pitch and allegro and lento tempo; combinations of forte loudness and high pitch as opposed to piano
loudness and low pitch, for example, contribute to the contextualisation of speaker activity at certain sequential locations as being of a particular type.

The difficulties encountered when trying to analyse Malay using a definition of the nucleus and its domain which was finely tuned for English have led to the abandonment of dividing stretches of discourse into tone groups. Chapter Six adopts a less restrictive approach to segmentation; division into segmented parts is based on the presence of prosodic cues which cause a break in the prosodic flow of utterances.

The two prosodic phenomena which have been identified as crucial in marking the boundaries in the flow of speech are pitch and timing (or tempo). The perception of coherence in timing is influenced by such parameters as tempo fluctuations, final syllable lengthening, anacrustic syllables and pausing between segmented units of speech. The perception of a break or discontinuity in pitch, which contributes to perceived unity among groups of words belonging together, is brought about by a slight change in pitch height and/or direction on unaccented syllables. Often, the movement of pitch on the accented syllables is followed by a pause. The presence of these cues is sufficient to cause a prosodic break in the stretches of Malay speech examined and contributes to perceived prosodic coherence among groups of words which belong together as one speech unit.
Prosodic segmentation is a potential correlate of almost any syntactic unit and can be employed by the speaker in accordance with his encoding strategy. The study shows that Malay speakers segment utterances into segmented chunks of various grammatical units, each playing its role in the development of the discourse, however small or insignificant.

Utterance chunking or phrasing is dependent on speaker choice such that it is the speaker who determines where to segment by pausing, decelerations and accelerations and changing pitch height at speech unit boundaries. Whether the speaker is expressing his opinion, making an assertion or a comment, or supporting his previous assertion, he is presenting information in chunks to suit his purpose.

One significant finding is the marked fluctuation of speech rate which interrupts the rhythmic flow of talk, thereby causing the realisations of separate chunks. The deceleration on the last lexical item caused by final syllable lengthening and the acceleration on the section immediately following it identified the former as the end of the previous talk and the latter the beginning. The prolongation of the final syllable may function to mark off the last lexical item as prominent or may serve as exponents of other systems, e.g. hesitation. In Malay, this prosodic break be it by virtue of a lengthening of a syllable, a shortening of a sequence of anacrustic
syllables, a speech pause or change in tempo is a reliable and sufficient criterion for marking boundaries.

When a break occurs before reaching the most prominent point, the break is usually marked by hesitation in the form of search syllable lengthening and/or fillers, the production of which can be brought about by the need to gain planning time. After overcoming the momentary coding problems, the speaker produces the subsequent stretch of speech at a noticeably faster rate.

It is observed that the speaker marks the unit so bound as incomplete by maintaining the level of the final prominent syllable, or producing a relatively high endpitch. What is interesting is the use of pitch phenomena as resources to indicate the status of the post-break talk. By matching the pitch height of the beginning of the subsequent talk with the end pitch of the prior talk, the speaker contextualises the former as a continuation of the latter. Even when the following unit begins with a filler, the pitch level of the filler matches the end pitch of the pre-break talk. Thus, although a break segments stretches of speech into divisible portions, these prosodically identifiable chunks are marked as belonging together by pitch height.
The notion of prosodic prominence has been examined within Halliday's framework which emphasises the significant role played by intonation in structuring information, its "accentual" function, associated with the distribution of prominence across an utterance. Instead of using the term nucleus, the thesis has adopted the term prominence whose realisation is brought about by a combination of pitch, loudness and length.

The study supports the observations made by Asmah (1980) as regards the notion that in Malay, prosodic focusing can be placed on any item and occurs at any position in an utterance, although the final position is its unmarked position.

As regards the function of prominence, the major preoccupation is to examine how speakers exploit prominence system as part of their communicative strategies to get their message across.

Examination of selected extracts has revealed that there is no absolute correlation between plus prominence and "new" and minus prominence and "given". What is certain is that the assignment of prominence to any item of information is determined by the speaker based on his on-going assessment of the hearer's informational requirement and his own interactive requirement.
The thesis has redefined the terms "new" or "given" so that they are not confined to the fact that "new" refers to information newly introduced and "given" refers to information anaphorically or situationally recoverable. A new item of information is information which the speaker chooses to foreground by assigning it prominence and given information is that which the speaker wishes not to highlight by not making it prominent.

The assignment of prominence is not restricted to items with factual content. Those without are also made prominent for the purpose of communicating information other than content. The non-content information is structured into the discourse to convey information of a social, pragmatic and interactional nature. Thus, the study interprets the term "information" broadly so as to include more than propositional content.

In examining the role of prosody within the framework of Conversational Analysis, it is observed that the speaker exploits prosody to signal the completion of turn-unit. In the data examined, the falling pitch which marks finality is effective in this regard. The split second change of speaker shows that interactional participants orient to these features. The Malay speakers also indicate the end of turn by a prosodic "fade-out", which is marked by a noticeable lowering of pitch span and diminuendo loudness.
In Malay, the prosodic parameters that contextualise an overlap as turn-competitive or otherwise are pitch, loudness and/or tempo. While a combination of high pitch and forte loudness contextualises an overlap as turn competitive, a combination of low pitch and piano loudness contextualises it as non-competitive.

As regards interrupted speech, one of the issues raised in the thesis is to what extent does prosody contribute to making the interruptee's subsequent talk as continuation of the previously curtailed talk or a restart. Examination of the corpus of data reveals that the post interruption is a syntactically and semantically appropriate completion of the prior curtailed talk. The deployment of pitch and loudness parameters to a post talk which fulfils the above criterion contribute to its hearing as a continuation or a fresh start. While the matching of the end pitch of the curtailed talk with the beginning pitch of the post talk contextualise it as a continuation of the former, the non-matching marks it as a fresh start.

We conclude that the definition of prosody as comprising auditory aspects of speech such as pitch, loudness and duration is insightful and allows not only the examination of their phonetic realisations in Malay spoken discourse but also their roles in selected systems. It is hoped that the examination of Malay prosody in connected discourse proposed here will in some way shed light on the prosodic resources available for the
speaker to exploit and the systems which exploit prosody in their realisation.