

Phonetic features in the interactional management of song-like laughter

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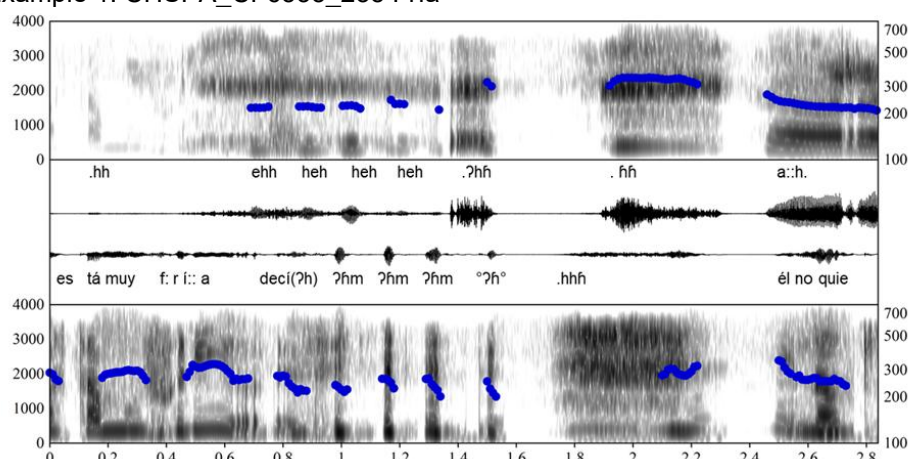
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Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff [1] note that “laughter can be an achieved product of methodic, co-ordinated processes, with the occasion of laughing together oriented to, produced, extended, as an event in itself” (p.159). In this paper, we show how some of the phonetic variability that has been observed for laughter (e.g. [2]) can be reframed as structured phonetic detail, which participants in conversation use to coordinate and adjust their laughter as it unfolds in time. This paper offers a broadly generalisable framework for understanding the internal organisation of laughter in conversation, mirroring some of Schegloff’s [3] arguments that turns at talk have recognisable ‘beginnings’, ‘middles’, and ‘ends’ that contribute to the management of turn-taking and the organisation of social actions through talk. Building on [4] we show how laughter bouts have an internal structure organised into four consecutive components:

Initiating pulse	Exhalation sequence	(Glottal reset)	Inhalation
Voiced or voiceless Usually single loud pulse Typically glottal, may have oral initiation Explosive onset with turbulent airflow	Voiced or voiceless Usually multiple pulses Oral, nasal, or oronasal airflow Variable loudness Variations in jaw opening Melodic and rhythmical structure	Phonation reset Glottal clicks or “afterpulses” and other transitory sounds	Mostly voiceless; sometimes voiced Glottal friction; sometimes oral (e.g.: .s, .ŋ, .t...)

Using the qualitative methods of Interactional Linguistics and a parametric phonetic analysis combining auditory and acoustic techniques, we examine the phonetic details of song-like laughter in four corpora of natural conversation in English (CallFriend), Spanish (CallHome Spanish), German (Lindenstrasse), and Finnish (PECII). We show how participants use these details to manage its unfolding in real time, projecting its ending and the transition back to talk in a coordinated manner (in the case of Ex. 1, with a roughly simultaneous return to talk at 2.5 seconds), and reflect on the affordances of each phase for local management, including rhythm, pitch, and loudness — prosodic features also present in speech.

Example 1: CHSPA_CF6535_235 Fría



[1] Jefferson, G., Sacks, H., & Schegloff, E. (1987) Notes on laughter in the pursuit of intimacy. In G. Button & J. R. E. Lee (Eds.), *Talk and social organisation*. Multilingual Matters. 10.21832/9781800418226-008 // [2] Bachorowski, J. A., Smoski, M. J., & Owren, M. J. (2001) The acoustic features of human laughter. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 110(3 Pt 1):1581-97. 10.1121/1.1391244 // [3] Schegloff, E. (1996) Turn organization: one intersection of grammar and interaction. In: Ochs, E., Schegloff, E. A., Thompson, S. A.,

eds. *Interaction and Grammar. Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge University Press; 1996. // [4] Chafe, W. (2007) *The importance of not being earnest: The feeling behind laughter and humor*. John Benjamins Publishing. 10.1075/ceb.3