Preface of the main organizer

A foreword should be timeless, yes, that's right. But it should also reflect the thoughts and activities that shaped the moments in which it was written. In my case, the connection that reconciles both opposing requirements can be, for example, the term "exponential growth". Exponential growth in the form of the Corona pandemic determines our current everyday life. It depends on the status of the pandemic’s exponential growth when we can go where, what we can do, and who and how many people we can meet. The term "exponential growth" does normally not apply to the organization of an international conference. The workload in organizing a conference tends to grow linearly the closer the conference gets – normally. In the case of the TAI, there were often moments when I and certainly also many other members of TAI’s hard-working organization team thought that the dynamics of the Corona pandemic carried over to the conference itself and made the workload grow exponentially rather than linearly until the beginning of the conference. And yet we have managed that you, dear reader, can now read this text in the TAI Book of Abstracts, that we have an exciting program of social activities – both on site and in the virtual Virbela world – that we can hear four excellent international keynotes, and that over 150 registered linguists and speech scientists can exchange their latest data, conclusions, hypotheses and ideas in the form of over 80 posters and about 40 oral presentations. We owe this to the hard work of the entire organizational team and the Scientific Committee of the TAI, and I would like to take this opportunity here to thank each one of them for his or her great support!

Conducting a hybrid conference during a pandemic is also made possible thanks to modern communication technology, which is continuously becoming faster, better and more powerful. That is good in two senses. For one thing, modern communication technology helps us reduce our CO2 emissions by connecting us without us being physically in contact with one another. Sure, it’s not the same. But the experience and the interaction dynamics are getting better and better almost every month. For this conference, the saved flight miles alone mean about 290 tons of CO2 less in the atmosphere, not counting the transfer to and from the airport and all other travel-related energy consumption. Even if we subtract the energy from the servers that handle our digital communication, the balance is still overwhelmingly positive. In organizing the TAI, we are in fact very careful to keep the carbon footprint of the conference small. Our food, for example, comes from a caterer who significantly reduces its carbon footprint every year, and our awards are made of wood and recycled 3d-printed plastics. In addition, we did not include the usual USB stick in the goodie bag, but made all PDFs and conference information available online.

Secondly, modern communication technology is also a driving force for our research. People all around the world experience everyday through speaking machines how important tone and intonation are for successful and multifaceted communication. Modern communication technology brings us a multitude of new research questions. But it also confronts us with the task of accepting the challenges behind these questions. Speaking (or, more generally, multimodal communication) is important for humans, so important that it is almost perfectly integrated into our motor, physiological, cognitive, and receptive abilities; perhaps it even developed further in a co-evolution with these abilities. Anyone who researches speech is holding a tool of understanding in hand that is relevant to practically all situations and contexts of people’s daily life. Speaking and listening to speech happens everywhere; and I venture to make the admittedly bold assertion here that there is no stimulus in the world – especially no sound stimulus – that we humans do not directly or indirectly project onto the phonetics, phonology and syntagmatic structure of the languages we learn. This is the key scientific approach of our CIE Acoustics Laboratory, in which we research the production and
perception of hate speech and charismatic public-speaking skills as well as the right sound design for machines and musical instruments. In short, researching language and speaking is immensely important, much more important than is, unfortunately, currently perceived by the general public, the industry, and international research-funding institutions. In this respect, this foreword is also a cautious appeal that we should not leave it to machines, AIs and big-data collectors to do the research that helps solve people’s everyday issues with respect to language and speech matters. We can and we should make a relevant contribution. In this regard, the TAI sets accents in the form of two special sessions that deal with language learning and related interference effects in the context of globalization as well as with digital and multimodal communication signals – both, of course, with regard to tone and intonation.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that bringing together research on tone and intonation, which will hopefully succeed over many years on the basis of the new TAI conference series, can be a key to better understanding the prosodic form-function relationships as well as the production and perception of prosody as a whole. In this sense, the TAI forces us to think outside the box and to experience new sound and melody patterns, and that’s a good thing. Accordingly, it is nice to see that a substantial proportion of all TAI submissions - almost 20 % in fact – deal with the interplay of tone and intonation, either in relation to speech production or speech perception. Almost 400 authors from a total of 33 countries contributed to the TAI’s accepted submissions (acceptance rate being about 80 %). Moreover, reflecting the international spirit of the conference, the almost 140 accepted submissions come in roughly equal proportions from Asia, the Americas, and Europe. I don’t think we need more statistics in a foreword. Therefore, I would now like to end with my welcome note and once again thank everyone involved in the TAI for their courageous commitment. And because others always find better closing words than oneself, I declare the first TAI as opened with the words of the poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou. May her words also inspire the TAI conference!

“Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning.” – Maya Angelou

**Preface of Wentao Gu: The birth of the TAI conference**

TAI is the child of the *International Symposium on Tonal Aspects of Languages* (TAL) and the *Conference on Tone and Intonation in Europe* (TIE), both biennial conferences devoted to tonal prosody. TAL originated in 2003, when Hiroya Fujisaki, the Honorary Chair of the 2nd International Conference on Speech Prosody (SP 2004, Nara, Japan), proposed to organize the 1st TAL as a satellite event of SP 2004. It was held in Beijing, China, during 28-30 March, 2004, chaired by Maocan Lin. From then on, TAL was standardly attached to the biennial conference of Speech Prosody sponsored by the Speech Prosody Special Interest Group (SProSIG) of the International Speech Communication Association (ISCA). Its focus was on tonal aspects of languages, but it did not limit itself to tone languages. Following the tradition that SP and TAL be hosted on the same continent, switching between Europe and other continents, the 2nd TAL was held in La Rochelle, France, 2006, as a satellite event of SP 2006 in Dresden, Germany. In 2008 and 2010, this newly established series was interrupted, because neither SP 2008 (Campinas, Brazil) nor SP 2010 (Chicago, USA) could find an institution to host TAL. Fortunately, in May 2012, the TAL series was revived when Wentao Gu hosted
the 3rd TAL in Nanjing, China, as a satellite event of SP 2012 (Shanghai, China). With Wentao Gu’s efforts, the 3rd TAL was sponsored not only by ISCA, but also by the International Phonetic Association (IPA). The subsequent TAL events smoothly proceeded from then on, with conferences in Nijmegen, the Netherlands (2014), Buffalo, USA (2016), and Berlin, Germany (2018).

There was a parallel story in the tone and intonation community in Europe. During 9-11 September 2004, just six months after the 1st TAL, the conference on Tone and Intonation in Europe (TIE) was held in Santorini, Greece, as a grand finale of the eponymous European Science Foundation Network (2001-2004) convened by Carlos Gussenhoven and Tomas Riad. Its aim was that of “stimulating and coordinating research on the prosody of European languages and language varieties, with special emphasis on languages that combine lexical tone with an intonation system.” The network succeeded in bringing researchers together who worked in diverse traditions and on different language groups, and shortly after that conference a consensus was reached to create a biennial conference series in Europe. Accordingly, a standing committee oversaw TIE conferences in Berlin, Germany (2006), Lisbon, Portugal (2008), Stockholm, Sweden (2010), Oxford, UK (2012), Utrecht, the Netherlands (2014), Canterbury, UK (2016), and Gothenburg, Sweden (2018).

After the closing of TAL 2016, organizer Christian DiCanio raised a question about the future of the TAL series in an email discussion with the TAL Standing Committee. Carlos Gussenhoven, who was affiliated with the standing committees of both TAL and TIE, expressed the same concern in the TIE Standing Committee, and the idea of merging the two series was then initiated. The main motivation was to promote the joint presentation of phonetic and phonological research and to avoid conferences overlapping in our field. On behalf of the TAL Standing Committee, Wentao Gu started to negotiate with Laura Downing and other members of the TIE Standing Committee. After a number of runs of group discussion, the two committees decided to start a merger after holding the last event for each series in 2018.

The aim of the merger was to have a conference series that is more compact, more global, and more efficient for cross-disciplinary interaction, bringing together linguists and speech scientists sharing interests in tone and intonation of spoken languages in the world. After the merger, the new series would be a stand-alone international conference to be jointly sponsored by ISCA and IPA, and would differentiate itself from Speech Prosody and other prosody related conferences in focusing more on linguistic (instead of technological) aspects (including phonetics, phonology, typology, etc.) of prosody. Wentao Gu’s proposal of naming the new conference series as Tone and Intonation (TAI) was enthusiastically welcomed by all committee members, since ‘TAI’ echoes ‘TAL’ in its orthographic shape and ‘TIE’ in its pronunciation /təɪ/. After the successful closing of TAL 2018 (Berlin, Germany) and TIE 2018 (Gothenburg, Sweden), the two standing committees announced the plan of the merger, receiving evident approval from both communities. The 1st TAI conference was scheduled for 2020, and after the call for bids in 2019, a team chaired by Oliver Niebuhr from the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) in Sønderborg won the bidding. Due to the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, however, the 1st TAI had to be postponed until December 2021. From now on, the TAI conference will be held biennially in odd years, alternating with the Speech Prosody conference held in even years.

The standing committees of TAL and TIE have merged into a single committee, with the members largely from the organizers of the most recent TAL and TIE conferences. They are Amalia Arvaniti (Nijmegen, the Netherlands), Yiya Chen (Leiden, the Netherlands), Christian DiCanio (Buffalo, USA), Laura Downing (Gothenburg, Sweden), Wentao Gu (Nanjing, China), Carlos Gussenhoven (Nijmegen,
the Netherlands), Hansjörg Mixdorff (Berlin, Germany), Oliver Niebuhr (Sønderborg, Denmark), Tomas Riad (Stockholm, Sweden), Allison Wetterlin (Kristiansand, Norway), and Yi Xu (London, UK).

We welcome all researchers who are interested in tone and intonation of spoken languages to participate in the forthcoming 1st International Conference of Tone and Intonation (TAI 2021) at the SDU as well as in subsequent biennial TAI conferences, to deepen our understanding of tone and intonation in the structure of languages and in speech communication.

Wentao GU
On behalf of the Standing Committee of TAI