The form and function of extra-sentential elements[*]

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Extra-sentential elements have been described as being both syntactically and prosodically independent from the phrase to which they are appended. It is commonly assumed that their prosodic independence follows from their syntactic independence. This paper argues that since extra-sentential elements do not form a single syntactic class, their common properties are better explained in terms of their role in the information structure of the discourse. All members of the class of extra-sentential elements accomplish a similar functional role and all of them share a specific prosodic form that helps to optimise the communicative relevance of the utterance by minimizing the effort required to process it.

1   INTRODUCTION

Altering the normal order of words and clauses is a basic strategy in the organisation of discourse, which in classical rhetoric is exemplified by a number of related figures of speech grouped under the collective term 'transposition'. For instance, *anastrophe*, as in 'Glistens the dew upon the morning grass', or 'She looked at the sky dark and menacing', or 'Troubles everybody's got' implies an alteration of the normal syntactic order (Matthews 1997, Silva Rhetoricae on-line). Another figure of speech which was commonly used in classical literature is that of *hysteron proteron* ('valet atque vivit', 'he is well and lives', or, in conversational English, 'put your shoes and socks on – not in that order, of course!') which involves the transposition of the temporal order of related events (Silva Rhetoricae on-line).