ABSTRACT

A quantitative non-experimental study was conducted to examine the natural development of prosody indicators and their relationship to comprehension within the real-life sociocultural context of the classroom. Participants included 19 first, second, and third grade students who were assessed using the Developmental Reading Assessment Two K-3 (DRA2) at the middle and end of the school year. Testing sessions were audio recorded and reading samples were analyzed using Praat spectrographic software. Five prosody indicators were examined: intersentential pause duration, intrasentential pausal duration, number of intrasentential pauses, sentence-final pitch duration, and intonation contour. The DRA2 Scoring Continuum was used to establish surface and deeper level comprehension scores. In addition to student participants, 10 adults from students’ sociocultural learning context were audio recorded reading the texts to compare student and adult intonation contour. Statistical measures were utilized to assess differences between grade levels, to evaluate trends across time, and to analyze the relationships between prosody and comprehension. The findings indicate that between the middle and end of first grade, students are decreasing their decoding errors. Once there is a decrease in decoding errors, students’ reading rate continues to increase across the grades and they become more adult-like in their reading. By the end of third grade, students have achieved their highest levels of deeper comprehension while surface comprehension has remained largely the same from first to third grade.