Finding a piano cow in an octopus apartment? Or how prosody affects conceptual combination

How do we understand combinations of words we've never encountered before? There is already an abundance of empirical and theoretical research on how people understand novel nominal compounds (i.e., conceptual combination) and this work highlights a range of factors that influence how novel combinations are processed and interpreted. Despite this, there has been no consideration of how prosodic information might influence the processes involved. Similarly, while there is a wealth of research on prosody, it has had very little to say about possible effects on conceptual combination. I will present some recent experimental work that shows how prosody affects the time course of conceptual combination. Crucially, the role of prosody depends on the type of interpretation a person generates and the demands of the specific task being carried out. I will describe how these findings pose problems for existing models of conceptual combination and introduce some broad theoretical considerations for research into language processing more generally.