

11. Intonation in semantic system networks

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11.1 Introduction: Inspirations

‘If I have seen further’, wrote Sir Isaac Newton to Robert Hooke in 1676, ‘it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.’ I have written quite extensively on intonation, but it is only on account of the giants who came before me. My giants are Halliday, Pike and Robin Fawcett.

Halliday (1967, 1970, 1985; see also Halliday and Greaves 2008) was my first inspiration. He showed how intonation belonged to the rest of phonology as the top rank of the phonological rank scale; how intonation belonged to the rest of language through its relations with grammar, discourse (‘speech acts’) and the expression of attitude (‘key’); but crucially also how intonation manifested people’s organization of information. He set up a formal distinction between three subsystems of intonation: tonality, tonicity and tone: I was able to contribute the notion of information *status* (in tone) to his information *unit* (tonality) and intonation *focus* (tonicity).

Pike (1945, 1967) was my second inspiration. He produced a comprehensive description of the intonation of American English and located intonation within a phonological hierarchy, which stretched, however, beyond clauses and sentences to paragraphs and whole discourses. What I appreciated in Pike was the depth of detailed description of intonation and the breadth of intonation’s work in whole discourses.

Pike's view of the meaning of intonation was heavily geared towards the expression of attitude; it was not, however, related to grammar and information structure. Halliday's much more rounded view of the functions of intonation, however, lacked the dimension of larger units of discourse. But there was also another factor in Halliday's model that I found perplexing. When teaching from Halliday (1970), I could not help being struck by the different kinds of 'meaning' that intonation was said to convey. 'Statements', it seemed to me, belonged to a quite different kind of meaning to 'dependent clause'; both these 'meanings' were quite different in kind from notions of 'forcefulness' or 'reservation'; new and given information were of a different order again; likewise, 'unit of information'. This 'over-broad' inclusiveness of grammar was a principal complaint by Crystal (1969).

Hence, in my appraisal of Halliday (1970), Fawcett's concept of categories, or 'slices', of meaning appealed to me (Fawcett 1980). Fawcett divided up the three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, textual) as ten separately identifiable categories of meaning or 'semantic system networks' (Fawcett 1980: 26–34; 2014: 327), as follows: experiential, logical relationships, negativity; interactional, affective, modality; thematic, informational; discourse organizational and metalingual (Fawcett 1980: 58). Not all of them are relevant for an explication of the functions of intonation, but this finer set of distinctions gave me clues to discovering the categories that **are** relevant. I eventually found it useful to present the functions of intonation in terms of six 'slices' of meaning, or roles in discourse. Hence, Robin Fawcett was my third giant!

To be more explicit, all ten semantic networks operate in every spoken utterance, and because speech is involved, intonation systems operate too. Fawcett (1980: 26–34) provided an explanatory introduction to the ten kinds of meaning; so, if Ike still likes Ivy (Fawcett's fictional characters with invented dialogue), we may have

(1) Ike likes Ivy

in which an affirmative (negativity) proposition (experiential) is stated (interactional), and in this instance, without linkage to any other logical relationship, or personal evaluation, modality, marked theme or

additional information, and with no hint of discourse organization or a metalingual dimension. (The ‘metalingual’ function relates to when a speaker comments on the message, such as *to put it bluntly, as it were, the next point is ...*, etc.).

In this case, *Ike likes Ivy* is likely to be intoned as:

(1a) | Ike likes \Ivy |

Other possibilities illustrating alternative choices in the ten semantic networks would include (with a token display of intonation):

(2) | although Ike likes \Ivy | (logical relationship expressed)

(3) | Ike does nt like \Ivy | (negativity expressed)

(4) | does Ike like /Ivy | (polar question expressed)

(5) | Ike really likes \Ivy | (affective expressed)

(6) | Ike may like \Ivy | (modality expressed)

(7) |\Ivy is who Ike likes | (marked theme expressed)

(8) | yes Ike \does like Ivy| (redundancy expressed)

(9) | Ike likes \Ivy as you know | (metalingual comment expressed)

(10) |\now | Ike likes \Ivy | (discourse organization expressed)

Intonation is naturally involved in all ten networks simply on the basis that they are all realized in spoken utterances. But choices within intonation systems are critical only within some of these networks. There is no difference in the intonation systems that operate in the networks of negativity, modality, and the informational from those that operate in the thematic network. That is, negativity, modality and the informational are not essentially expressed intonationally unless they are expressed in the thematic:

- (3a) | Ike \does nt like Ivy | (negativity expressed thematically)
- (6a) | Ike \may like Ivy | (modality expressed thematically)
- (8a) | \yes | Ike \does like Ivy| (redundancy expressed thematically)

as well as (7) above; marked theme in each case.

I originally categorized the functions of intonation according to the remaining five networks, apart from the metalingual (although I *now* see that the metalingual network does have an intonational equivalent; see later.) I also added a sixth dimension to the functions of intonation, by referring to spoken genres of discourse, which Halliday and Fawcett did not recognize, although Pike did. The semantic system networks which directly relied on intonation for part of their realizations, I designated as follows:

1. Information organization (experiential, logical relationships, and theme including negativity, modality, and the informational)
2. Communicative functions (interactional)
3. Attitudinal expression (affective)
4. Discourse organization
5. Genres

For applied linguistic purposes, I also held a separate function for the disambiguation of syntactic ‘minimal pairs’, strings of words that belie different syntactic forms like defining and non-defining relative clauses; semantically, this function belongs to ‘information organization’, but would be lost without explicit attention. What I also discovered was that each function or network drew upon different parts of the whole intonation system, which I will show in the conclusion.

Many readers will already be familiar with Halliday’s model of intonation, but might be less so with the innovations induced by Fawcett’s semantic system networks as applied in Tench (1990, 1996, 2003, 2011, 2015). So here is a review of how Fawcett (2014) and Tench present the intonation systems of English. We start with those functions that operate at clause level.

11.2 Intonation at clause level

11.2.1 Information organization

This first function of intonation relates to the speaker's own perception of their organization of information. All three sub-systems – tonality, tonicity and tone – are involved. Tonality – the segmentation of discourse into individual units of intonation in sequence – represents the speaker's perception of the number of units of information. In (1a) above, the speaker perceives the total message as one single piece of intonation. There is the possibility of systemic choices; if, instead of the response in (1a), the speaker perceived the message as two units of information, the possibility of a different segmentation is available, as for example:

(1b) | Ike | likes Ivy |

In this case, the speaker wishes to highlight the theme before stating the rheme, organizing the message as two separate pieces of information.

However, there is good reason for simple, single, straightforward clauses that do not exceed five stresses to be realized as a single intonation unit. We use clauses to convey information in syntactic terms in order to represent a situation like (1) and we use intonation units to convey that very information in phonological terms. Clauses and intonation units are thus typically co-extensive. This typical co-extensiveness is captured in the term 'neutral tonality'. Cases like (1b), where an intonation unit is not coextensive with the whole clause, are referred to as 'marked tonality'.

Tonicity refers to the system that operates over the location of the tonic syllable, which in English is found with 80% probability on the final lexical item of the unit. Such a case is known as 'neutral tonicity', usually indicating 'broad focus'. 'Marked tonicity' is thus the location of the tonic syllable on either a non-lexical (or grammatical) item or on a non-final lexical item. This usually means that the focus of information is narrow, because part of the information within the unit is not new, but 'old', or 'given'. For instance, a person might wish to amend the information given in (1a), as follows

(1c) | \Ike likes Ivy | (not Mike, as you thought, with *liking Ivy* as given information)

or even as

(1d) | Ike \likes Ivy | (not dislikes, as you thought, with *Ike* and *Ivy* as given information)

(1c) and (1d) are utterances of one intonation unit, but with marked tonicity; the focus is narrowed to *Ike*, and *likes*, respectively. (This shifting of the tonic to any position in the clause/intonation unit is a feature of English intonation that is not replicated in every language.)

The tonic segment is usually preceded in the intonation unit by a stretch of sound known as the pre-tonic segment. I say ‘usually’, because there are often occasions when the tonic syllable actually occurs first as in (1c) and in the first unit of (8a):

(8a) | \yes | Ike \does like Ivy|

Tonality reflects the experiential function, tonicity at least one aspect of the thematic (‘textual’) function. Tone also reflects textuality in the sense that it represents the speaker’s perception of the status of information – the relative importance of each successive piece of information. Halliday (1967) drew attention to differences between *major* information signalled by a falling tone and *minor*, signalled by a low rising tone. Fawcett (2014) helpfully suggests calling minor information *supplementary*, such as a comment, as instanced in

(12) | Ike likes \Ivy | as a matter of /fact |

The fall in the first unit designates that piece of information as the major piece, and the rise in the second as relatively less important, thus minor or supplementary.

A rising tone also indicates incompleteness and, with this meaning, precedes a unit with a falling tone. Compare (13) as a major piece of information, with an identical wording but rising tone with (13a) which leaves the listener with the distinct impression that more is to follow.

(13) | this is my first visit to \Cardiff|

(13a) | this is my first visit to /Cardiff|

Besides the fall and the rise options, there is a third option, the fall-rise. At this point, I need to refer to what Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) have called the ‘dissociation of associated pairs’, or ‘deconstrual’, to explain the development of the fall-rise in English, which is another feature of English intonation which may well not exist in every language.

Falls are associated with major information; this particular relationship between a particular form (falling tone) and a particular meaning (major information) is an ‘associated pair’. Similarly the relationship between rises and incomplete information is an ‘associated pair’. Historically, it appears that English speakers managed to combine the two forms to produce a complex form, a fall followed immediately by a rise, which can be articulated on a single syllable if need be. The complex form combined the two meanings: a major piece of information which is actually conveyed in the lexicogrammatical wording, and a sense of incomplete information implying that there is more to follow – or, to be more strict, there is additional information that is not explicitly conveyed by the lexicogrammar, but is implied, and that the addressee is expected to understand.

If, for example, you are asked *Is this your first visit to this part of the world?*, you might reply as in (13b):

(13b) | this is my first visit to \Cardiff|

This combines the sense of major information and the expectation of additional information, and would imply that there *is indeed* additional information, if you have already visited another place in Wales.

The sense of implication of additional, though not verbalized, information lies behind the use of fall-rise in another context. The preceding example involves the meaning of the whole clause, but a fall-rise can accompany just the theme of a clause, too, as in

(14) | my \first visit | was to
 Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlantysiliogogoch|

In this case, the theme is highlighted, as if the speaker wished to say something like *the instance of my first visit to Wales was my visit to...*

Thus the total tone system to signal status of information is as follows:

fall	: \ = major information	this is my first visit to \Cardiff
(final) rise	: / = minor information	this is my first visit to \Cardiff this /year
(non-final) rise	: / = incomplete information	this is my first visit to /Cardiff ...
(final) fall-rise	: \ / = implication	this is my first visit to \Cardiff
(non-final) fall-rise	: \ / = highlighting of theme	my \first visit ...

Intonation has a particularly significant role in the disambiguation of identically worded clauses in English. Whereas other languages may have surface grammatical markers to indicate different syntactic patterns, in English, intonation occasionally distinguishes between lexicogrammatical patterns which happen to have identical strings of wording. For instance, in the string *she dressed and fed the baby* (Halliday, 1967), *dressed* is either intransitive, or transitive (along with *fed*) with *the baby* as complement. This ambiguity is resolved however in the spoken form:

- (15) | she \dressed | and fed the \baby | (*dressed* = intransitive, i.e., “she dressed herself”)
- (16) | she dressed and fed the \baby | (*dressed* = transitive, i.e., “as well as feeding, she dressed the baby”)

I conceded above that it is possible simply to classify such cases as the speaker’s organization of information: (15) has to be interpreted as two distinct events; (16) can well be interpreted as a single event (e.g. getting the baby ready before going out). Moreover, (15) bears neutral tonality in that each clause is accompanied by a separate intonation unit; (16) has marked tonality by having two clauses within a single unit.

However, it is not only cases of complementation that sometimes need disambiguating, but instances of defining and non-defining

clauses and apposition, report clauses and certain verb groups (e.g. *he came to hear about it* and *he came|to hear about it*) are listed in Halliday (1967), Crystal (1975) and Tench (1990, 1996). And it is not only cases of tonality contrasts that are implicated, but tonicity and tone too, as in the following examples:

- (17) | he didn't come because of the \underline{money}| (negative domain = *because of the money*; implies that he did come)
- (18) |he didn't \underline{come} | because of the \underline{money}| (negative domain = *come*: states that he did not come).
- (19) | it's the \underline{baker} Mr Jones | (or: | it's the \underline{baker}| Mr /Jones |) (*Mr Jones* = vocative)
- (20) |it's the \underline{baker} | Mr \underline{Jones} | (*Mr Jones* = apposition)
- (21) |I want some /green | /white | and \underline{orange} flags| (list, i.e. three different kinds of flag)
- (22) |I want some green white and \underline{orange} flags| (adjective sequence, i.e. one kind of flag with three colours)
- (23) |I \underline{asked} myself| (*myself* = reflexive pronoun)
- (24) |I asked my\underline{self}| (*myself* = emphatic pronoun, i.e. 'I did the asking')

All these cases of disambiguation via intonation system involve contrasts in the propositional content of the messages.

11.2.2 *Communicative functions*

A second role of intonation that relates to the clause is Fawcett's interactional component. As is well known, a falling tone typically signals a statement, a *wh*- question, a command or an exclamation, and a rising tone a polar (*yes/no*) question, as in (25):

- (25) | is this your first visit to /Cardiff |

The falling tone appears to signify that the speaker is confident (Fawcett 2014) of the validity of the proposition, whereas the rising tone signifies that the speaker is uncertain, but willing to defer to the supposed superior confidence of the addressee. In (13), the speaker knows, and tells; in (25), the speaker does not know, defers to the supposed knowledge of the addressee, and asks.

It might then be asked why, typically, *wh*-questions are accompanied by a falling tone if they represent an asking for information. The answer is that the speaker is confident about parts of the proposition, and especially the process signalled by the verb, but is uncertain about one participant or circumstance in the proposition. For instance, in (26):

(26) | where are you \staying in Cardiff |

the speaker knows that *you are staying in Cardiff*, (actor/process/circumstance) but not the precise location; similarly in (27):

(27) | when did you arrive |

the speaker knows that *you arrived* (actor/process), but not the circumstance of ‘point of time’. Compare these again with (25), in which the speaker indicates lack of any knowledge about the validity of the proposition.

I call the case of the speaker knowing and telling ‘the speaker’s *dominance*’ and the case of the speaker not knowing and asking ‘the speaker’s *deference* to the addressee’ (Fawcett 2014: ‘confident’/‘deferred’). Dominance is paired with falling tones, deference with rising. At this point, we can again refer to the notion of ‘dissociation of associated pairs’ as another instance of semogenesis, language’s inherent capability of providing new meanings. English speakers can dissociate the rising tone from a polar interrogative and allow it to accompany a declarative clause, producing a ‘hybrid’: a kind of statement but with deference to the addressee, as in (28):

(28) | this is your first visit to /Cardiff |

What this amounts to is a *query*, which might possibly be the result of a mis-hearing, or surprise (or even disbelief) at what one has heard. Likewise, speakers can ‘dissociate’ the falling tone from a declarative/imperative/exclamative clause and allow it to accompany a polar interrogative, producing a different ‘hybrid’: a kind of question but with speaker dominance, as in (29):

(29) | is this your first visit to \Cardiff|

What this amounts to is a kind of question in which the speaker indicates confidence in knowing the answer (*I’m pretty sure that this is in fact your first visit to Cardiff*); it is still intended as a kind of question, but it is a *conducive* question – Halliday (1970: 27) calls it a ‘forceful’ question – in that it conduces, or constrains, the addressee to a specific, and expected, answer.

However, most polar interrogatives are accompanied by a rising tone, which is thus the neutral tone for *yes/no* questions. The falling tone is the neutral tone for statements, commands, *wh*-questions and exclamations. Rises that indicate incomplete or minor information in intonation units (and clauses) are dependent on other units; if a unit with a rising tone – especially if it accompanies a declarative clause – closely precedes or follows (usually with minimum or no pausing) a unit with a falling tone, then it is usually perceived as being dependent on that unit. Rises that indicate deference occur in independent units of intonation usually – though, as we have seen, not always – accompanying a polar interrogative clause. The crucial matter is the perception of dependence, or independence; most of the time such perception is unproblematic.

One other point is worth noting in connection with intonation’s role in the interactional network, which is of particular interest to language teachers. In the language teaching profession, we have become used to recognizing a much wider range of communicative functions (discourse functions or speech acts) than just the traditional five (statements, two kinds of question, commands and exclamations). Following a categorization of communicative functions found in Leech and Svartvik (1994), there is a wide range of functions that can be labelled *information/reality/belief* e.g. answers, reports,

denial, agreement, disagreement, hypothesis, doubt, etc; a second wide range labelled *influencing people* (known to others as *suasion*) e.g. requests, pleas, demands, coaxing, advice, suggestion, etc; and a third wide range labelled *social interaction*, e.g. greeting, farewells, thanking, acknowledging, regrets, apologies, etc. In a study reported at length in Tench (1990: 318–381), I discovered that in whatever category any communicative function belonged to, a fall represented speaker dominance, i.e. the speaker knows and tells, or the speaker assumes authority in influencing the addressee's action, or the speaker expresses primarily their own feelings in social interaction; and a rise represented speaker deference, i.e. the speaker does not know and asks, thereby deferring to the presumed superior knowledge of the addressee, or the speaker leaves the final decision for action to the addressee, or the speaker considers primarily the *addressee's* feelings in social interaction.

Just a couple of examples will have to suffice, one from *suasion* and one from *social interaction*. *Shut the door* with a fall sounds like a command, with the speaker assuming that they have the authority to expect the addressee to comply (as, for instance, a parent towards their child) as in (30), but (31) sounds more like a request or a plea, expressing perhaps merely the speaker's wish or hope that the addressee will comply:

(30) | shut the \door |

(31) | shut the /door |

One might even 'hear' a trace of *please*, or *will you?*, which, if verbalized, would have been accompanied by a rise:

(31a) | shut the /door will you |

A neat example from *social interaction* is the expression of *thanks*. (32) simply expresses the speaker's feeling, but (32a) acknowledges the (feelings of the) supplier of the goods/services.

(32) | \thank you |

(32a) | /thank you |

Knowles (1987: 195) confirms this very example.

Thus, rising tones in independent intonation units signal speaker deference. Falling tones represent both speaker dominance and major information and thus act as a kind of default case. In other words: expect a falling tone, unless there is good reason for an alternative (speaker deference, incomplete or minor information, or the ‘implications’ of fall-rises).

11.2.3 *Attitudinal expression*

A third function operating at the level of clauses constitutes what Fawcett called the ‘affective’ network. This is often also designated the *paralinguistic* function of intonation. I do not intend to go into much detail here as the account of intonation’s role in attitudinal, paralinguistic, expression is well known. For a survey of descriptions and a critical review, see Tench (1996: chapter 5). Suffice it to say that attitude is expressed through *degrees* of falls, rises and fall-rises: not that each attitude has one particular manifestation; rather, strengths of feeling correspond to degrees and kinds of pitch movement. Thus, whereas (28) represents a query, a higher rise represents, perhaps, greater surprise. And whereas (25) represents a plain question, a rise that did not rise far, say to mid-low pitch only, represents a sense of a non-committal or low degree of interest. Similarly, a fall from a higher than normal pitch level suggests strength of feeling, and a fall from a lower than normal pitch level suggests mildness.

On the matter of forms, two other points need to be made. On the one hand, an intensification of feeling in falls can be signalled not only by a higher than normal pitch movement (Halliday’s 1+), but by a complex rise-fall, (∧, Halliday’s 5); the latter’s meaning is even stronger than the former’s. On the other hand, routineness (even boredom) can be signalled by a mid-level tone (–), enabling the speaker to opt out of choices of either the system for indicating status of information or the system for indicating dominance or deference. Thus the tonal resources for the expression of attitude include high and low varieties of falls, rises, fall-rises and rise-falls as well as the additional contribution of the level tone. It is for this very reason – the variation

in degrees and kinds of pitch movement on the basic tone choices – that this resource is referred to as *secondary* tones.

This secondary, or paralinguistic, resource extends to variations in the pitch levels and movements in the pretonic segment too. For instance, a high level pretonic before a fall conveys a sense of insistence, but a low level pretonic before a fall suggests a highlighting of the focus (Tench, 1996) by downplaying given information. I now recognize that this low level pretonic before a fall (and a high level tonic before a rise) actually signals what is given information in cases of narrow focus. Thus (33) can only mean that reference to first visits to any country is already given:

(33) |__ this is my first visit to \Cardiff|

Here, there is a narrow focus on *Cardiff*, which happens to have the tonic in its neutral position. The difference between (13) and (33) is in the pitch of the pretonic; (13) if it represents broad focus, i.e. all the information is new, would have a pretonic pitched at roughly mid-level, whereas (33) with its lower than ‘neutral’ pretonic pitch indicates that the information it covers is given.

The difference between (13) and (34) can be illustrated too:

(34) |˘this is my first visit to \Cardiff

where the higher than ‘neutral’ pretonic pitch conveys a sense of insistence in addition to the status of the information as major.

This leads me on to a relatively recent case of innovation in intonation, not acknowledged by Halliday or Fawcett. It involves both the low level pretonic pitch and a mid-pitched level tone; there is a modest jump up in the pitch of the voice from the end of the low pretonic to the beginning of the mid level tone. The pattern



occurs in cases of routine listing, as in (35):

(35) | _ he's been to -Canada | _ and the US-A | _ he's been to Singa-pore |
 _ and . Australia | ...

Listing is usually indicated by a rise, as a piece of information that is incomplete; the final item in the list is then signalled by a fall. In (35), the idea of listing is indicated by the rise in the pitch between the pretonic and the tonic. Routineness is conveyed by the level tone. The low level pretonic contributes the sense of 'same, old information'. Thus, a relatively new intonation pattern has been created from meanings related to intonation forms associated with other patterns. This has been described in greater detail in Tench (1997, 2003). The pattern is now well established in British (including RP), American, and Australian accents and in the speech of many who use English as a second language.

11.3 Discourse organization

This function of intonation operates above the level of the clause and is semantically related to the equivalent of paragraphing in the written mode. In the same way as a writer organizes their total message into a series of topics contained in paragraphs, a speaker uses certain features of intonation to indicate what I have called 'phonological paragraphs'. This phonological paragraphing is most distinctly heard in newsreading, where a script, organized in written paragraphs, is read aloud. The newsreader does not 'tell' you when one news item finishes and the next one begins, except by intonation. A new 'paragraph' (||) is signalled by a relatively high pitched onset syllable and baseline (1) in the first intonation unit; the onset syllable and baseline of each successive intonation unit is pitched lower (↓, J). The degree of falls is successively lower too; the final pitch is not only lowest of all in sequence, but is also accompanied by a slackening of pace in the final unit and followed usually by a distinctly longer pause. The next unit will be the beginning of a new paragraph and set at a noticeably higher baseline.

Phonological paragraphs have also been called 'paratones' (on the analogy of 'paragraph'), 'paraphones', 'pitch sequences' and

‘increments’; see Brazil (1975, 1978), Coulthard and Brazil (1979), Lehiste (1979), Brown and Yule (1983), Couper-Kuhlen (1986), O’Grady (2010), Iwamoto (2014) and Fawcett (2014). It was Brazil who first drew attention to semantic options of a systemic nature at this paragraph level; he called it ‘key’ (not to be confused with what Halliday called ‘key’: variations in degrees and kinds of tones for affective meanings). The usual (neutral) pattern of declination of the baseline within a phonological paragraph, as described above, can be disturbed for effect. In the (constructed) discourse below, the first two phonological paragraphs follow the neutral pattern. In the third, the onset pitch and baseline of the second unit drops to low rather than to mid, to signal ‘expected’ (Wales hardly ever beat England!), but the onsets and baseline of the third and the fourth jump to high, to signal ‘contrastive’ (Wales do not normally expect to beat Russia and pessimistic supporters would not have been sure about Slovakia either!). The fourth paragraph begins with the neutral pattern, but a series of high onsets and baselines express the ‘unexpectedness’ of their eventual achievements. Note the low pitched falls (.) at the end of the paragraphs, compared to neutral falls (\) and high falls (^).

- (36) ¹|| 1 in the 2016 Euro /Championships | 1 Wales reached their first major football /tournament | 1 for fifty years ²|| 1 They were grouped with / England | 1 /Russia | and 1 Slo\vakia. ³|| 1 they played /England | 1 and \lost | 1 but they beat both /Russia | 1 and Slo\vakia. ⁴|| 1 they moved to the /second round | 1 and beat Northern \Ireland | 1 but their \biggest shock | 1 was in beating \Belgium | 1 to reach the semi\finals ||

11.4 Metalingual function

‘Metalingual’ meaning ‘occurs when the performer stands back from his [*sic*] message, so to speak, (as in that *so to speak* and *if you see what I mean*) and comments on it in some way’ (Fawcett 1980: 33). Many of these comments are formulaic, and as such are performed with speed, but are also performed in an intonation unit pitched at a low baseline, indicating that they are not part of the main message. It is as if a speaker switches to a low phonological paragraph, before resuming their main message. That low ‘paratone’ typically takes the

‘incompleteness’ rise if it occurs before or in the middle of the main message, and takes either a rise or a level tone if it is used in final position:

(37a) || J to our great sur/prise | 1 Wales reached the semi\finals ||

(37b) || 1 Wales \Vreached | J to our great sur/prise | the semi\finals ||

(37c) || 1 Wales reached the semi\finals | J to our great sur/prise ||

(38) || 1 Ike has fallen for \Ivy | J would you be-lieve it ||

Also a speaker might provide additional information to aid the listener in processing the main message; this is also performed with a low paratone and a rise. Non-defining clauses are also called ‘adding clauses’, precisely for this reason:

(39) || \Ike | J who has fallen for /Ivy | is a changed \man ||

Crystal and Davy (1975: 105–106) provide many examples of such additional information with appropriate notes at relevant points in the transcripts they provide. Again, it is as if the speaker chooses to interrupt their main ‘paragraph’ with a low one, to indicate supplementary information that they intend for the listener’s benefit. The speaker is standing back, as it were, with an awareness of the listener’s needs.

A third instance of metalingual meaning is the relatively recent phenomenon of the so-called ‘high rising terminal’. This intonational innovation has received a great deal of attention; for a review, see Tench 2003. What excited that attention was the high rising tone in a declarative clause, which seemed to mean ‘do you realize the significance of what I am saying?’, or ‘are you following me?’: a clever way of giving information and at the same time seeking verification that the listener has understood its significance. What surprised me in much of that comment was the lack of attention to the shift upwards in the pitch of the baseline of the intonation unit concerned. What was labelled the ‘high rising terminal’ is different from

(28) | this is your first visit to /Cardiff |

which is a query, a means by which the speaker can check that they have understood what the addressee has said. But a speaker can also check that an addressee has understood the significance of what they themselves are telling them.

(40) || 1 I don't know \what's going on | 1 but /like | 1 that new man in the /
office |(= 'do you know who I mean?') J has already \fallen for Ivy ||

See Tench (2003, 2011: 184–185) and Bradford (1997) for further examples and discussion. In these instances, the speaker is again standing back from the message and interrupts their main paragraph with a new one containing the verification act with the high onset and baseline of a new paragraph, and then reverts to the previous flow of the main paragraph.

Fawcett's identification of a metalingual function was crucial in discovering this function of intonation.

11.5 Genres

The final function of intonation I want to describe is related to a discourse as a whole. It was not acknowledged by either Halliday or Fawcett, but it was by Pike. Different genres have a different 'sound'. If you switch on the radio at random, you can tell almost immediately what kind of language event is taking place, even if the actual wording is muffled or unclear – as it might be against excessive noise interference. The 'sound' of news reading is noticeably different from other monologues; quite different, for instance, from a weather forecast, or a narrative, or poetry, or a racing commentary, or prayer, or an informal conversation, and so on.

The distinctive 'sound' of a genre is its 'prosodic composition'. Intonation is a vital contributor to prosodic compositions by way of length of intonation units, proportions of falls and rises, degree of variety of tones and pretonic patterns. Other 'paralinguistic' features include variations in tempo, loudness and pitch; degree of rhythmicity, resonance and tension; and the possibility of vocalizations like whisper, huskiness and creaky voice. All of these 'paralinguistic'

features typically characterize a whole intonation unit or, indeed, a sequence of them. ‘Prosodic composition’ then refers to the totality of such features characterizing a whole discourse.

Three examples will have to suffice. What is it that makes prayer sound like prayer? Look at the following transcript of a well known prayer as recorded on radio; notice that each intonation unit, except the final one, contains a level tone (Tench 1990: 504).

- (41) our * -father* (*tremulous voice)
 - which art in -heaven
 - hallowed be thy *-name* (*tremulous voice)
 - thy kingdom -come
 - thy will be -done
 . in earth . as it is in -heaven
 - give us this -day
 . our daily -bread
 - and forgive us our -trespasses
 - as we forgive -them
 . that trespass against -us
 - and lead us not into temp-tation
 - but *deliver us* from -evil (*tremulous voice)
 - for thine is the -kingdom
 . the power and the -glory
 - for ever and -ever
 - a men

The pretonic pattern is usually level too, but at a slightly higher pitch than the tone itself. The only significant pitch movement is in the final unit: a fall to signify completion. Also each intonation unit is followed by a pause of stressed syllable length (symbolized by –), except where a clause is not completed (cf. lines 5–6; 10–11; 14–15), in which case the pause is much shorter (symbolized by .). (The items in the right bracketed column indicate paralinguistic features that relate either to the whole unit or to the part marked off by *.)

In case it is argued that these characteristics are caused by the ‘choral’ effect of a congregation speaking in unison, I could add a second example, said by the same minister, by himself, impromptu, at the beginning of the service (Tench 1990: 505). Exactly the same characteristics prevail. Our cultural conception of this particular kind of spoken discourse includes this peculiar, distinctive, prosodic composition. (Try saying the prayer with a variety of tones, etc, and you lose the sense of the ‘sound’ of prayer; to some, such substitution might even suggest a mocking of prayer.)

A second example of distinctive prosodic composition is the ‘sound’ of ghost stories, at least in British culture. The scene is set with a series of low pitched baselines in successive intonation units, before a loud and high pitched unit that is intended to startle the listener! (Try saying the news with this prosodic composition!)

(42) || _ it was a dark dark night | _ and there was a dark dark lane | _ with
a dark dark house | _ and in the this dark dark house | _ there was a
dark dark cellar

Finally, the third example is ‘calling’ over a distance, referred to sometimes as ‘stylized’ intonation. The prosodic composition consists of an optional low pitched prehead followed by an onset, baseline and tonic all set high, with a step down to a level mid pitch in an obligatory tail; in order to create a tail in the case of a tonic with a single syllable, the vowel is lengthened to accommodate the level mid pitch.

(43) | _ where are –you |

(44) | I–ike |

For further reading on the genre function of intonation, see Tench (1990: 476–514), Crystal and Davy (1969, 1975) and Johns-Lewis (1986).

Final note

This classification of intonational meanings in the semantic system networks in English discourse has one other interesting feature, which is worth drawing attention to: each network is associated with a particular subsystem, or subsystems, of the total intonational system for the language:

- 1 the organization of information and the disambiguation of syntactic “minimal pairs” involves **tonality**, **tonicity** and **tone** (status of information);
- 2 the communication of speech acts involves **tone** (dominance/deference);
- 3 the expression of attitude involves **secondary tone** (variations);
- 4 discourse organization involves **paratones** (phonological paragraphing);
- 5 metalingual meaning involves **contrasting paratones**;
- 6 the identification of genres involves **prosodic composition** (including intonation).

Such a neat distribution of the intonational resources is most satisfying intellectually and suggests a particular merit of the model of intonation that I have presented. Thus my debt to Robin Fawcett is real. We worked together on the probabilities of intonational systemic choices (see Fawcett 2014) and he has managed to get to print before me on the relationship of intonation and punctuation.

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