

INTRODUCTION

I suspect that if you ask a group of ESL/EFL teachers to recall their training in phonology, or the sound system of English, you would find few of them who remember specific instruction in the area of English intonation. Most of what we know, we have picked up along the way. We find we have collected an ad hoc assortment of rules related to grammatical categories and a host of ill-defined patterns that we believe express certain attitudes or emotions. It is little wonder that many teachers and teacher trainers, while recognizing that intonation is crucial for communicative competence, approach this area of language development with a sense of unease, if at all.

The purpose of this book is to provide an accessible introduction to **discourse intonation** for ESL/EFL teachers. The originator of the discourse-pragmatic model presented here, David Brazil, was first and foremost a teacher. He was recruited as a researcher at the University of Birmingham, U.K., to work with a group of discourse analysts. During that time, he wrote a number of research papers and several manuscripts, including *The Communicative Value of Intonation in English* (1985/1997), which forms the basis for the description of the model presented in this book. In addition, he conducted a number of workshops for the British Council in which he focused on the pedagogical applications of the model.

Although we are in an era of excellent English language training books for teachers, intonation has remained what Wrembel (2007, p. 189) refers to as the “problem child” from a pedagogical perspective. The reasons for learners’ difficulties in this area have been discussed in the literature for some time (Clennell, 1997), and they continue to be reiterated today. Some of the reasons include: the need for a focus on the pragmatic function of intonation (Reed & Michaud, 2015), more innovation in teaching materials (Pickering, 2004), and a lack of confidence and training in this area that handicaps teachers in the classroom (Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2012; Macdonald, 2002). Yet, as Mennen (2007)

notes, we cannot afford to neglect the teaching and learning of intonation in the L2 classroom if we wish to give our learners every chance of success:

Given that we derive much of our impressions about a speaker's attitude and disposition toward us from the way they use intonation in speech, listeners may form a negative impression of a speaker based on the constantly inappropriate use of intonation. (p. 54)

Therefore, this text is a practical introduction to teaching intonation using Brazil's model. The chapters are organized to familiarize readers with the different parts of the model and the ways they can be used effectively in the classroom to teach this important linguistic system. Chapters 2–5 describe the four systems that make up the model: tone unit structure, prominence, tone choice, and key and termination choice. Chapter 6 focuses in more detail on speakers' choices of tone, particularly in asymmetrical interactions in which there is some kind of power differential, such as that between teacher and student. Chapters 7 and 8 then examine how discourse intonation choices impact cross-cultural interaction, particularly between speakers of different Englishes—that is, between speakers of General American English, for example, and those of New Englishes such as Indian English or those in an English as a lingua franca context. Chapter 9 examines evidence regarding the teachability and learnability of intonation, and Chapter 10 concludes the presentation.

Important terms and concepts are boldfaced and appear in the glossary. All chapters include a Check Your Learning section and activities for discussion or that are hands-on. Chapters 3–9 also include sections specifically focused on implications for instruction. Examples that have corresponding sound files are identified by the ear icon and the number of the file (e.g., SF 2.1, 2.2) and are available at www.press.umich.edu/elt/compsite/DI.

Preliminaries

This book assumes that readers have taken an Introduction to Linguistics course or have some basic familiarity with the concepts that would be covered in such a course, particularly as they relate to the intonation system of English. That said, pronunciation textbooks often vary in the particular terms they use. For example, the term **intonation** is narrowly defined in English as the use of pitch structure over the length of a given utterance. It can also be defined more broadly as concerning not only pitch structure but also rhythm and stress patterns. This corresponds to the definition of **suprasegmentals**, which contrasts

with **segmentals** and refers more generally to **pitch**, stress, volume, and pause patterns (see Figure I.1). This book also uses the term **prosody**, or **prosodic system**, interchangeably with both **intonation** and **suprasegmentals** to reflect this broader focus.

Readers may also not be familiar with the term **discourse-pragmatic** as it is used here. It defines an approach to the intonation system in English that focuses on its role in text structure, as opposed to sentence structure, and describes the intonation choices that speakers make as conventionalized responses to the specific linguistic and social contexts of a given interaction.

In addition to these definitions, several foundational concepts are briefly outlined to provide a framework for what will follow. It will undoubtedly be the case that some readers will be more familiar with some of these concepts than others.

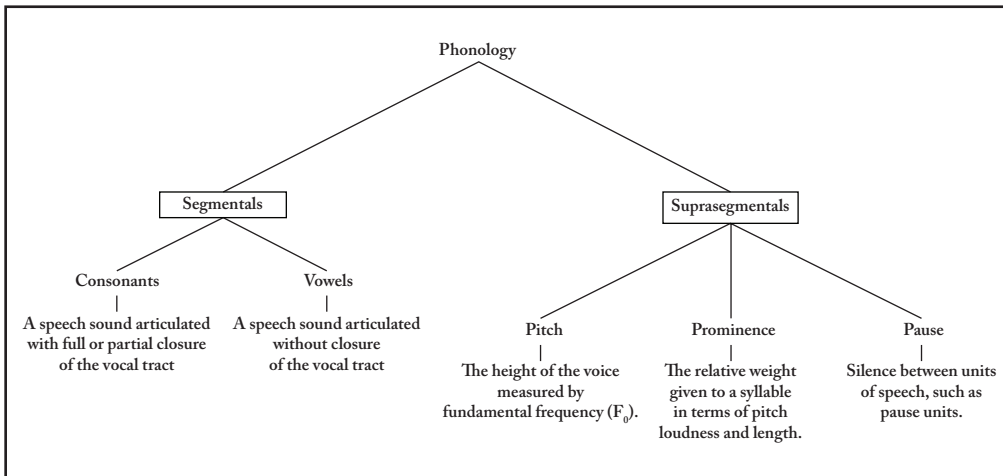
Intonation as a Grammatical System

Intonation in any given language or dialect has two important characteristics: First, it operates within a standard set of conventions or recognized norms that are shared between speaker-hearers of that language or dialect; and second, speaker-hearers within that speech community have unconscious (or tacit) knowledge of those conventions even if they are unable to verbalize them consciously. Let's briefly consider another linguistic system—syntax (sentence structure)—as an example of a grammatical system. If we are competent speakers of English, we know that a grammatical sentence has a specified order of components and that certain elements of the sentence appear before others—for example, *a white dog* vs. **dog white a*. In addition, we may also know the English language rule or convention that applies here, which is that of a well-formed noun phrase: an article (*a*) is followed by an adjective (*white*), which is followed by a noun (*dog*) as opposed to, for example, a well-formed sentence of French, in which a different noun phrase order applies. Regardless of whether an English speaker can verbalize this rule consciously, (s)he understands tacitly that **dog white a* is an ungrammatical sentence.

Intonation is the grammatical system that includes our use of pitch, pause, and **prominence** (or sentence stress) and is a sub-field of the phonological system of a language. The sub-field is called **suprasegmentals**, or **prosody**, and its place in the sound system (or phonology) of English is highlighted in Figure I.1.

The conventions that apply to this linguistic system address how we group our words together in prosodic units, how we understand turn-taking cues in conversation, and how we assess if someone might be signaling to us that they are feeling angry or sad. However, there are complications that arise when we try

Figure I.1. Sound System of English



to describe this system. First, as we said, these conventions are usually entirely tacit. Competent speakers will follow these norms but may find it impossible to consciously recreate the specific intonational cues or signals that are being used. For example, we may recognize when a speaker sounds odd or strange but find it difficult to “unpack” the reasons for our perception, particularly with regard to pitch.

Second, unlike syntax, whose units of description (verbs, nouns, adjectives, and so on) we inherited from Greek and Latin scholars and which have remained essentially unchanged for hundreds of years, descriptions of intonation have been far less uniform. Historically, there has been far less agreement as to both (1) how best to describe the building blocks that make up the system and (2) how exactly intonation interacts with other linguistic systems such as syntax and semantics to signal conventional meanings to speakers. This book presents one system, Brazil’s Discourse Intonation, which has been used successfully in English language classrooms for the last 25 years and appears in currently available textbooks by Cauldwell (2013) and Gorsuch et al. (2010).

Pragmatic Approaches to Intonation

It is axiomatic to say that we use language to communicate with each other. However, when we think carefully about how that communication takes place effectively, we find that it relies on some assumptions that are so implicit that we rarely think about them. When we engage in normal interaction with

another speaker-hearer, we assume that they are designing their conversational contribution to be as cooperative as possible and encourage successful communication. This means that we come to a given speech event assuming that the person we are addressing is both following the norms or conventions that we would expect and expressing them in the way we would expect. In communication with speaker-hearers from outside our speech community, however, both these assumptions may be incorrect. Let's look at the example of turn-taking conventions in conversation.

In General American English (GAE), there is a norm in conversation referred to as “the no gap, no overlap” rule. If one speaker finishes a turn and two speakers then begin to speak at the same time, one will yield to the other. Any long gap between turns or considerable overlap between speakers is dispreferred (Sacks, Schlegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). This does not hold for all speech communities, however. Reisman (1974) describes his experience in a Lapp (or Saami) community in northern Sweden where long “conversational gaps” were the norm:

We spent some days in a borrowed sod house in the village of Rensjoen Our neighbors would drop in on us every morning just to check that things were all right. We would offer coffee. After several minutes of silence the offer would be accepted. We would tentatively ask a question. More silence, then a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’. Then a long wait. After five or ten minutes we would ask another. Same pause, same ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Another ten minutes, etc. Each visit lasted approximately an hour During that time there would be six or seven exchanges. Then our guests would leave to repeat the performance the next day. (pp. 112–113)

Such differences in conventions can also be seen across varieties or dialects within languages. Within General American English, Tannen (1981) talks about the opposite situation of the Sweden example in her discussion of “machine gun questions” used by the New Yorkers in her dinner party data. These are described as questions uttered quickly and overlapping or “latching” immediately onto someone else's turn, which made the non-New Yorker participants feel interrupted, rushed, or otherwise uncomfortable.

The importance of establishing cooperation and rapport-building between interlocutors and how that can be expressed differently (but systematically) between speech communities is an excellent example of the pragmatic importance of intonation. In GAE, there are systematic intonational cues or signals used by the speaker and understood by the hearer to indicate a range of com-

municative functions, including highlighting information (see Chapter 3), indicating [dis]agreement, or expressing social distance (see Chapter 6). As none of us speaks in a monotone, pitch movements will always be present, and hearers will always interpret them. When communication crosses speech communities, such cues can be easily misunderstood.

Intonational Variation in Varieties of English

English is a global language comprised not of one monolithic variety but of many different ones. We are used to hearing systematic differences in the lexical, syntactic, and phonological features (including intonational ones) of different dialects within one variety (such as Southern U.S. English vs. General American English) and different traditional varieties (such as British English vs. Canadian English). However, most of us are less familiar with the systematic differences that occur in Indian English or African English, and even further, with the potential systematic features in interactions between speakers of **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**. From a historical perspective, we can trace the development of different continental varieties of English through “dispersals or diasporas” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 5). The first dispersal came with the migration of U.K. immigrants to the new world, namely the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The second was the result of colonization in Asia and Africa. We can also think of the growing number of speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL) across much of the rest of the world as an additional dispersal of English as a Lingua Franca.

In the field of World Englishes, this division has been codified by Kachru (1985). The model comprises three major groups of English: Inner Circle Englishes (varieties of English resulting from the first diaspora); Outer Circle Englishes (varieties of English resulting from the second diaspora); and Expanding Circle Englishes (varieties of English used in territories where English was taught as a foreign language and is increasingly the lingua franca). Although these categories are not unproblematic (see Jenkins 2009 for an excellent discussion), for the purposes of this volume, I retain the overall structure proposed by Kachru. I have, however, chosen to label them **Traditional Englishes** (i.e., first diaspora varieties such as U.S., Australian, and Canadian Englishes), **New Englishes** (i.e., second diaspora varieties such as African and Indian Englishes), and **Emerging Englishes** (i.e., sometimes described as Global Englishes in a Lingua Franca context). I have chosen these terms in order to avoid any negative associations that have become connected with Kachru’s original terms over

time. Although Kachru did not intend any notion of superiority to be inherent in his use of the term *inner circle*, the label casts a long shadow for both teachers and students in the English teaching profession with its strongly implied “gate keeping” function (Higgins, 2003). The term *traditional Englishes* adequately reflects the historical weight from which these varieties continue to derive their heft in most teaching contexts, without countenancing their historical privilege. Both new Englishes or *new varieties of English* (Kandiah, 1998) and *emerging Englishes* (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006) are also more neutral terms to describe additional varieties that have often been disenfranchised in the past. The audio recordings accompanying this book reflect these multiple varieties and include examples from speakers of U.S. English, U.K. English, Indian English, and ELF.

A Final Note

The primary focus of this text is to lay down an approach to intonation that can be applied in an ESL/EFL context; a secondary goal is to demystify a linguistic sub-system that has often been marginalized or considered too variable to describe in the same way as we would other sub-systems in language such as syntax and morphology. Because of our unfamiliarity with intonational structures in language, it can be all too easy to get lost going down the theoretical garden path and decide that this is not an area that, as teachers or students, we are comfortable including in our classrooms. It is certainly true that there may be some initial “front end” work as we learn to navigate the system; however, I hope that this text will demonstrate that this is both an approachable and fruitful task.

Chart of Transcription Symbols

// //	Unit boundaries
CAPS	Prominence
<u>UNDERLINE</u>	Tonic syllable
High key	↑
Mid key	⇨
Low key	↓
Rising tones	↗ (r+); ↘↗ (r)
Falling tones	↘ (p); ↗↘ (p+)
Level tone	→ (o)