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A forgotten English tone: an alternative analysis

Anthony Fox's discussion in the last issue of the pitch contour normally referred to as a 'calling' intonation seems to me to be a misleading analysis. I say 'seems' because I am not absolutely sure what his theoretical position is in this matter: it is unclear from his remarks how he sees the relationship between this contour and the tones normally recognised in a 'nucleus' model of intonation. He describes the contour as 'a high level nucleus stepping down to a high-mid level pitch', and shortly after talks about 'this tone'. Well, does the tone consist of the first element only (as the term 'nucleus' would imply) or does it contain the second as well (as his cross-reference implies)? If the first, then the grounds for this being a new tone type vanish, as presumably one could treat it as an exponent of the category of level tone; if the second (i.e. a kind of 'compound' tone, as some would put it, in this case consisting of level + level), then the criteria for this analysis seem to be in conflict with those used for the establishment of other 'compound' tones.

There are two main reasons why this contour cannot be analysed as a single compound tone, or its first element as a simple nuclear tone. Unlike all other nuclei in English, the distribution of prominence is unstable throughout the contour: there is a free variation which allows ˉ - , - ˊ and ˉ ˊ . This is primarily due to the potential of either element to be increased in duration for as long as one likes, and without there being any interdependence between the elements (the first can be longer than the second and

vice versa). In the mountains, a call of this type can last as long as one has breath (i.e. a performance restriction), with no essential change in meaning being introduced as length increases. (Presumably echoes would be treated as paralinguistic!) No other tone in English allows this formal flexibility while maintaining a stable semantic interpretation.

Secondly, unlike other compound tones, the insertion of further stressed syllables between the first and second elements requires the repetition of the initial prominence, as the following set of examples shows:

¯lunch is _ready (Fox's example)

¯lunch for the ¯children is _ready (where 'children' has the same general pitch-level and loudness - and usually duration - as 'lunch'; to have 'children' on a high pitch with weak stress is most unlikely, and to have it on a low pitch - the pitch of 'ready', for instance - is impossible)

¯lunch for the ¯children and the ¯ladies is _ready

etc.

What this suggests, in other words, is an analysis in terms of prosodic features (in the sense of Crystal, 1969, p. 140,ff. and earlier references ~~referred to~~ there), the relevant systems being rhythmicality and pitch-range. There must be a regular rhythm for polysyllabic stretches of the type illustrated above: irregularity produces a very odd effect, more like a drunken Gregorian chant than anything else. The monotone feature in the pitch-range system would account for the stretch of utterance up to

the final tone (cf. above, where a pitch drop is inadmissible). The final tone would then be treated as the nucleus of the tone-unit in the normal way. In this connection one should note that the 'information distribution' of the utterance clearly indicates that 'ready' is the new information and should be treated as nuclear. The exponent of nucleas would of course be level.

How then does one deal with monosyllables and single words of the 'Johnny' type? I would argue that it is misleading to consider this type of example as a paradigm case, to which other kinds of example can be related. The vocative may be the most frequently used instance of a calling pattern, but in typological terms it is far outnumbered by the other grammatical structures which can also take this pattern. In other words, any 'rule' has to be based on the 'lunch is ready' type of example rather than the 'Johnny' type. In order to incorporate 'Johnny' et al into the description, then, two solutions are open to the analyst. The chicken way out is to treat this category of example as being intonationally idiomatic, a structure which is acquired independently of the tonal system and which cannot be described in terms of it - cf. other, clearer cases of this kind, such as the singsong 'You're a dirty rascal' intonation of children. Alternatively, one can analyse 'Johnny' (or the 'Jo-ohn' type, which is of course phonologically disyllabic) as a case of a final level tone preceded by an extra-prominent syllable (where duration and loudness are the primary exponents). It should be noted in this connection

that a pitch drop is <u>not</u> the crucial feature for defining a 'calling' pattern. The switch from high to mid is but one possibility. There are as many acceptable pitch drops between high and mid as there are perceptible pitches; it is possible to have a calling contour with the two elements being at the same level; and of course the second element may be higher than the first, though this is rarer. This solution seems more elegant than the 'idiomatic' proposal, and it has the advantage of descriptive economy: no new categories are required, and the 'calling' data can be accounted for without altering the definitions or descriptive status of any of the other categories specified by the thepry.

Two further points arise out of Fox's article. First, the postulated difference in semantic degree between a vocative with this contour and one with a high rising tone is surely misleading, as it arbitrarily selects but one possible meaning of the high rise on vocatives (it excludes, for example, the anxious query sense, as when ''John' means 'Are you still in the room or has the monster got you?', which has no correlate in the 'calling' pattern). But I am unhappy about many of the vocative meanings given. For instance, the meaning of ˇ as 'neutral' does not apply to its use at a high pitch-level, where the sense is more warning or anxious (i.e. a genuine difference in semantic degree from the sense of high rise just noted - cf. Quirk & Crystal, 1966, for formal evidence on this point). There is the regrettably normal absence of any reference to kinesics for the interpretation of the ˆ, where

the 'reproachful' sense can easily be turned to 'admiring'(etc.) with the use of a smile. And the split low rise ceases to be intimate if the rising element is narrowed (and sometimes increased in loudness simultaneously), for here it takes on the implication of 'I'm warning you!'

Finally, it is important to note that there is a genuine high-mid falling tone in English which is part of the normal tonal system, and which has perhaps greater cause to be labelled 'forgotten' than the calling contour. This is the tone of non-committal or routine comment or agreement used very frequently in conversation and discussion on a word like 'really' or 'yes' while someone else is speaking indicates that one wishes the speaker to continue and is generally happy with the way the conversation is going, but one is nonetheless reserving judgment and not committing oneself to full agreement with what is being said.

I am glad this issue has been raised, for it has indeed been neglected; but descriptive decisions must not be made in isolation; they must rather bear in mind the criteria on which the remainder of a description has been based. It is the methodological importance of this principle which has prompted me to spend so much space on what many people would consider to be a relatively minor matter.

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