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Germani, Miriam P.; Rivas, Lucía I.

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# Discourse Intonation and Systemic Functional Phonology

## Entonación en el Discurso y la Fonología Sistémico Funcional

**Miriam P. Germani**

Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Universidad Nacional de La Pampa  
La Pampa, Argentina  
Email: miriamgermani@yahoo.com.ar

**Lucía I. Rivas**

Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Universidad Nacional de La Pampa  
La Pampa, Argentina  
Email: luciairivas@gmail.com

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### Abstract

This paper is a reflection on praxis which addresses the phonological stratum as an integral part of the language system. As EFL teacher trainers, we often find that students isolate the different meaning-creating components of language as a natural result of the way courses are organized at university level. It is in the spirit of helping students integrate the various aspects of language and context that we have set out to compare David Brazil, Malcolm Coulthard and Catherine Johns's Discourse Intonation model –which we have been working with for more than ten years– with the intonation approach in Systemic Functional Linguistics, by M.A.K. Halliday and William Greaves. We observe the theoretical similarities between the two approaches in order to see how they may supplement one another. Then, we analyse a conversation taken from a film following both theoretical approaches, and draw conclusions in the light of the comparison. Our preliminary results show that the two approaches explain the meanings conveyed with reference to different meaning-making resources. Brazil et al. explain the meanings at risk in the interaction according to the phonological systems they describe (prominence, tone, key and termination). Halliday and Greaves do so by referring to the phonological and lexico-grammatical strata in combination.

**key words:** intonation; tonality, tonicity and tone; discourse intonation; conversation; teaching

### Resumen

Este trabajo es una reflexión sobre la práctica que estudia el estrato fonológico como parte integral del sistema de la lengua. Como docentes de Profesorado de Inglés como lengua extranjera, a menudo observamos que los estudiantes tienden a aislar los diferentes elementos lingüísticos que componen el significado de la lengua como consecuencia natural del modo en el que se segmentan los contenidos en los cursos universitarios. Con el objetivo de contribuir a que los estudiantes integren los distintos aspectos del lenguaje y el contexto, nos abocamos a la comparación de los sistemas fonológicos propuestos por David Brazil, Malcolm Coulthard y Catherine Johns –que hemos seguido en los últimos años– y por M.A.K. Halliday y William Greaves. Exploramos las similitudes teóricas de los dos enfoques para evaluar sus contribuciones en vistas a una visión más integrada de la fonología. Por lo tanto, analizamos una conversación tomada de una película según ambos enfoques y llegamos a conclusiones a la luz de la comparación. Nuestros resultados preliminares muestran que ambos enfoques explican los significados transmitidos con referencia a distintos recursos de sentido. Brazil et al. explican los significados en juego en la interacción según los sistemas fonológicos que ellos describen (*prominence, tone, key y termination*). Halliday y Greaves lo hacen con referencia a una combinación entre los estratos fonológico y léxico-gramatical.

**Palabras clave:** entonación; tonalidad, tonicidad y tono; entonación del discurso; conversación; enseñanza



## Introduction

This paper is framed within the research project “Studies in Phonology: in search of an integrating approach”, which is being carried out at the Foreign Languages Department, National University of La Pampa, Argentina. The project aims at exploring the phonological component as an integral part of language. We study suprasegmental and paralinguistic features as seen by different theoretical approaches in order to observe the relationship between intonation and meaning. As EFL teacher trainers in charge of phonology classes, and given the intangible and elusive nature of spoken language, we aim at finding tools to help our students use and understand oral language and the meaning-making resources at play in interaction. For that purpose, we use as a corpus conversations taken from film scenes and from EFL textbooks for advanced learners—materials which are frequently used in the phonology classrooms for imitation and analysis. Even though these materials are not fully authentic, they resemble real-life situations; and the actors performing imitate—and sometimes exaggerate—features of spontaneous speech. This fact makes these resources suitable for teaching the oral language to students in an EFL environment.

The phonology syllabus at the institution where we work organizes the teaching of English phonetics and phonology along the four academic years. The courses integrate segmental and suprasegmental aspects, and the last two focus specifically on prosodic features. The approach is discursal, aiming at the exploration of the role played by suprasegmental features in the construction of meaning within situated text analysis. For this purpose, David Brazil, Malcolm Coulthard and Catherine Johns’s Discourse Intonation model was considered to be the most suitable and has been used for the last ten years. However, since students of English as a foreign

language (including Spanish speaking learners) lack the insights native speakers have of the English code, we frequently find it necessary to supplement Brazil’s approach with materials that will help learners to more fully understand the functions of intonation, the location of the nucleus and the effect of paralinguistic features on the message, among others.

As in most language teacher training colleges, in our programme the linguistic code is divided into subjects that deal separately with linguistics, grammar, phonology. This is suitable to study the system, but it frequently leads students to isolate the various components of language, thus preventing them from observing these elements as part of a whole. In the field of phonology teaching, this fact means that students often apply meaning labels on the basis of intonation alone, rather than consider intonation choices as aspects of meaning in combination with other linguistic elements or features of context. It is in the spirit of helping students to integrate the various aspects of language and context that we have set out to study Systemic Functional Linguistics and to compare it with Discourse Intonation. We consider that M.A.K. Halliday and William Greaves’ more comprehensive perspective will help students to see phonology as a stratum which contributes to build the meaning of an utterance together with other strata, and that each choice at the phonological level has an effect on, but is also conditioned by, the other levels.

In this particular work we explore the meanings expressed by intonation in a conversation taken from a film. We analyze it following the two different phonological approaches, those developed in Halliday and Greaves (2008) *Intonation in the Grammar of English* and in Brazil, Coulthard and Johns (1990) *Discourse Intonation and Language Teaching* and Brazil (1997) *The Communicative Value*



of *Intonation in English* to compare how they address the explanation of phonological choices.

### *Literature Review*

Having explored both approaches, we found more similarities than differences in their underlying bases. To begin with, both of them understand language similarly: they consider it as a system network with which human beings create meaning by selecting items from that system in a paradigmatic way, so that the choice of one element entails the rejection of the other/s. Thus language creates meaning by establishing contrasts. In addition, each system combines with other systems in a syntagmatic way, with each choice limiting and conditioning further choices in the horizontal chain. Both approaches consider phonology as a meaning making system within the wider context in which the text is situated.

The most important difference, then, springs from the fact that Brazil et al. (1980) consider the intonation system as separated from the grammar, while Halliday and Greaves (2008) integrate both systems into the same picture. But this fundamental difference is less significant when we observe that the former very often refer to lexico-grammatical choices in their explanations, though they do not delve into these choices as part of their system. Halliday and Greaves, on the other hand, view these choices as part of a comprehensive system that aims at observing interrelations among choices at different levels. We observe that differences in both perspectives are often limited to points of departure for the analysis, but that they seem to arrive at similar conclusions in terms of the meanings negotiated.

Halliday and Greaves' (2008) system analyses language in four different strata that represent different levels of abstraction, understanding that each superior stratum is realized in the one immediately below. These strata are, from top to bottom, the *semantics*,

the *lexico-grammar*, the *phonology* and the *phonetics*. Although there are necessary links and relationships among the different strata, the units of analysis for each stratum do not necessarily coincide with units at other strata. This means that every stratum has a particular descriptive framework. Brazil et al. (1980) argue that language can be segmented into hierarchically arranged sets of units corresponding to three independent linguistic levels of analysis: *grammar*, *discourse* and *phonology* and that when these three levels meet, the point of encounter has added significance. Earlier in the book, they state "We, however, see intonation as the carrier of context-specific, speaker-created meanings, which cross-cut the semantics of the language system" (p.46). We perceive here that while Halliday and Greaves (2008) emphasize the *interdependence* of the levels of analysis, Brazil et al. stress the *independence* of the systems, though they recognize the interactions among them.

Halliday and Greaves (2008) see intonation realizing *interpersonal*, *textual* and *logical* meanings, as *proportional* meanings in the grammar, depending on the lexico-grammatical environment. In the same way, Brazil et al. (1980)

[...] see the description of intonation as *one aspect* of the description of interaction and argue that intonation choices carry information about the structure of the interaction, the relationship between and the discourse function of individual utterances, the interactional 'given-ness' and 'newness' of information and the state of convergence and divergence of the participants. (p.11 emphasis added)

As previously stated, these authors do not link the meanings of intonation to the grammar, but to the environment or the context in which utterances are said. In Halliday and Greaves' terms, they bypass the grammar and go directly



from the phonology to the semantics. Halliday and Greaves raise the question of the risk of doing this and explain that “the lexicogrammar is the theoretical construct that enables us to explain the semogenic (meaning-making) power of language as a whole –provided that we present it in a comprehensive account” (p.51).

At the phonological stratum, Halliday and Greaves (2008) recognize three systems: *tonality*, *tonicity* and *tone*, which have implications in the meanings derived from intonation and which realise systems in the grammar. For Brazil et al. (1980) the intonation systems are *prominence*, *key*, *tone* and *termination* and they are independent from any grammatical system. However, they make the following concession:

Of course most utterances are susceptible to clause analysis and both the theme/rheme structure of English clauses and typical cohesion devices mean that there is a tendency for items which are likely to be made prominent to occur at the end of the clause, and thus increase the plausibility of Halliday's explanation. (p. 46)

Halliday and Greaves (2008) define the highest phonological unit as the *tone unit*, which manifests decisions as regards the system of tonality. This unit functions as the realization of the *information unit*, a unit of the lexico-grammar stratum. Both units organize the flow of discourse, the former at the phonological level and the latter at the grammatical level. Though the authors postulate a one to one correspondence between these two units, they posit that boundaries do not necessarily coincide exactly, since the tone unit consists of a certain number of feet coinciding with their boundaries, whereas the information unit is usually coextensive with the clause. For Brazil, (1997) the *tone unit* is “a stretch of language that carries the systematically-opposed features of intonation” (p.3), and its boundaries

are established by the system of prominence. He understands this unit as a unit of thought. Hence, the tone unit carries information load which shows the speakers' parcelling of their message. He states that tone unit boundaries are not really important, since the information is concentrated in the *tonic segment*, that is, between the onset (first prominent syllable) and the tonic (last prominent syllable).

With respect to tonicity, Halliday and Greaves (2008) state the advantage of dealing with this system from the point of view of the lexico-grammar. They relate the tonic syllable to the concept of focus of information. The placing of the tonic signals the element that is *new*, “either the entire new or the culmination of the new” (p.57). Elements preceding the tonic may be given or new, depending on the scope of focus signalled by lexico-grammatical features. They claim that the phonology does not determine the given/new status of information. On the other hand, Brazil et al. (1980) consider that phonological choices in the system of prominence, rather than in the grammar, single out the informing matter, though they concede that “all else in the tone unit is presented as recoverable because it is grammatically or semantically predictable” (p.41)

For Halliday and Greaves (2008) the tone system consists of five simple tones which realise a single focus and two compound ones realising a dual focus; all these constitute the seven primary tones in the system. These may be preceded by *pretonic* elements whose “contour patterns are tied to those of the Tonic, in the sense that the range of possible patterns of Pretonic depends on which Tonic is chosen. Each type of Tonic has a different set of Pretonic possibilities” (p.43). Brazil et al.'s (1980) system is similar as regards the five simple tones, as they recognize basically the same pitch movements. Moreover, if there is a pretonic element, Brazil explains it as the speaker's choice in the system of *key*, which is



realised on the onset syllable. This system shows paradigmatic selections in pitch level –high, mid and low– which are independent from the tone, and which have a separate set of meanings.

In the Systemic approach, tone choices realise meanings of the interpersonal metafunction, “expressing the attitudes of the speaker towards the listener and towards the content of his or her own message” (Halliday & Greaves, 2008, p.50). These are systematised as *KEY*, a system in the lexicogrammar realised in the phonology. Within this system, the meaning expressed by the phonological choices will depend on the way in which they combine with the lexicogrammatical mood choices, giving origin to a wide range of possibilities; that is to say, tone 1 with a declarative mood has a different meaning from the same tone in combination with an interrogative mood. In the Discourse Intonation approach, tone choices have abstract meanings which hold for every occasion the tones are used, independently from other linguistic choices. Unlike the other approach, the basic meaning distinction is between falling and falling-rising tones, the other three choices seen as marked options showing an increment in meaning. Meanings are also interpersonal since they manifest the speakers’ concern about the information value of their message for the listeners. Hence, they will present information as new, stating a *divergent* stance, when using *proclaiming* (falling) tones, and as shared, with a *convergent* stance, when using *referring* (rising) tones. In addition, tones also manifest the symmetry/asymmetry of the relationship between the interactants, with rising-falling and rising tones showing the increment of meaning that marks the speaker as linguistically *dominant*. The level tone indicates that the speaker is stepping outside the negotiation of meaning, and thus outside the interpersonal function.

The last of the systems that Brazil et al. (1980) deal with is the system of *termination*, that

is, the choice of pitch level –high, mid and low– on the tonic syllable. This brings about different meanings which are independent from all other phonological or linguistic choices. Halliday and Greaves (2008) also perceive differences with respect to the pitch level of the tonic (high, mid and low). These are what they call the *direct secondary tones*, “since they are directly related to the primary ones: they are just more finely specified variants within the given primary tone” (p.164).

## Method

For the purpose of this paper, we have selected a conversation taken from a scene of the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Polygram Film Entertainment, 1994) which has been transcribed following Halliday and Greaves’ (2008) framework (see Appendix). We have used the computer program for sound analysis Praat (<http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>) to ascertain the pitch choices we perceived auditorily. The analysis that follows has been organized alternating Halliday and Greaves’ approach (i) with that of Brazil et al. (ii) with the intention of making similarities and differences explicit for each exchange. After each set of explanations, a comparison follows, where we briefly discuss our views. Praat acoustic graphs illustrate the first exchange.

## Analysis and Discussion

The selected scene takes place at a wedding party in which six guests sit at a table occupying previously assigned places. Not all the interactants know one another, so they engage in some small talk while waiting to be served. Following Brazil et al. we could say that the conversation is linguistically symmetrical since all the participants have the same rights as regards speaking roles. They all assert dominance at different times by making use of some of the phonological resources at their disposal. In Halliday and Greaves’ terms,





we could contextualize the conversation taking into account the Field –small talk–, the Mode –spoken spontaneous – and the Tenor –informal, shared power.

a) First exchange

Alistair: // 1- ^ there are / four / hundred /  
different kinds of \*/ **tea** //

// 1. ^ and / that's not in/cluding all  
these / so-called \*/ **fruit teas** //

// 1. ^ I-I took Ve/ronica out to /  
India at \*/ **Christmas** //

// 1. ^ to / look at the plan\*/tations //

Charles: \*/ 1. **Excellent** //

(i) The first speaker is Alistair, who proposes the topic for the conversation. He produces the longest move in the whole interaction, and his contribution consists of declarative clauses. Though he does not name the following speaker, he directs his eye gaze to Charles, the only other male participant. His first two tone units match two clauses in a paratactic relation, thus tonality is unmarked. The last clause has been divided into two tone units, making tonality a marked choice. The second unit, which is a non finite clause, displays tone concord (tone 1.) with the finite clause, integrating their meaning into one piece of information. Tone choice is neutral throughout. Charles acknowledges the information received with a minor clause with declarative key and unmarked tone.

(ii) Alistair uses high key in the first tone unit to start the conversation and he uses a succession of proclaiming tones in additive mid key, which present information as new from a divergent stance, showing his knowledge of the subject. He ends his turn with mid termination, expecting a passive contribution on the part of the next speaker, that is, a mid key answer that expresses agreement on the topic. Charles complies by means of an evaluative term.

Comparison: As regards tone meanings, Halliday and Greaves state that the function of declarative clauses is to present information and the unmarked tone for this function is tone 1. This coincides with the meaning expressed by proclaiming tones in Discourse Intonation. As regards pitch level, this last approach relates a high onset with the presentation of a new topic, independent of the tone used, a choice not considered by the first approach. The unifying effect of tone concord in Halliday and Greaves is explained in Brazil et al. through additive mid key.

b) Second exchange

Alistair: // 1+ 3 ^ I be/lieve you and \*/ **her** /  
went there \*/ **once** //

Charles: // 1. that's \*/ **right** //

(i) The third contribution by Alistair shows unmarked tonality and a compound tone 13, with major focus on the first part of the projected clause, the agent, and an addition of strong declarative key, showing a contrast as regards the people involved. Charles again acknowledges in the same way as in the previous exchange, with tone 1.

(ii) Alistair addresses Charles directly using two tone units. The first one, proclaimed and divergent, states his belief; and the second one is referred to, pointing backwards to his previous turn and using the dominant version to transfer control of the discourse. Charles answers as expected, on a mid key with a proclaiming tone, confirming that Alistair's belief is right.

Comparison: In this exchange, the explanation for the compound tone, giving more weight to the information on the first part, matches the explanation for the use of proclaiming followed by referring, as this last tone has less information value because it presents information as shared. However, there are discrepancies as regards tonality, as Brazil et al. consider each pitch movement as a separate unit.



c) Third exchange

Veronica: // 1. Charles was \*/ **vile** // 1+ ^ he in/  
sisted on / cracking \*/ **jokes** //

// 1+ all the / time I was \*/ **ill** //

Charles: // 4. ^ just / trying to / cheer you \*/ **up**  
Ve //

(i) Veronica starts her participation in the conversation with a topically related declarative clause, using neutral tone 1. Her second clause consists of two tone units, thus tonality is marked. However, the tone concord presents the two information units as if they were only one, the resource of tone concord being exploited as it would otherwise be an inordinately long tone unit (Halliday & Greaves, 2008:134). This second independent clause has strong declarative key with tone 1+, the same tone as the previous clause, manifesting the logical-semantic relation of enhancement, spelling out what she means by “vile”. Charles intervenes with a declarative clause with tone 4, tonality and tonicity unmarked. His key is one of *reservation*, and in this case it stresses a contrast in the point of view of the two participants with respect to Charles’s behaviour. While Veronica evaluates it as “vile”, he qualifies it as “cheering you up”.

(ii) Veronica starts her contribution with a mid key, adding to the topic of conversation, and she uses proclaiming tones in the three units to tell her interlocutors about Charles’s behaviour at the time in question. She ends up with a high termination manifesting her expectation of an active, involved answer in high key. Charles takes the floor to offer an explanation. However, he does not comply with the expectation set up by the previous termination, showing that he does not agree with Veronica’s point of view. He tempers this attitude by means of a convergent non-dominant referring tone, presenting his utterance as shared, which suggests that he expects the participants to understand “cracking jokes” as

“cheering up”. His termination is mid to express his expectation of agreement.

Comparison: The interpersonal relationship described as *strong* in one approach may be associated with the expectation expressed by a *high termination* in the other approach, namely an active participation on the part of the interlocutor. As regards Charles’s intervention, his *reserved* interpersonal key matches the non-compliant behaviour in the second approach.

d) Fourth exchange

Nicky: // 5. ^ oh you’re \*/ **that** ve/ronica //

Veronica: // 1. which Ve\*/ronica // 2. **Charlie** //

(i) Nicky reacts with a strong interpersonal key, tone 5 on a declarative, with tonality unmarked but marked tonicity to de-accent the last noun, which is repeated. Veronica steps in with a lexical question; tonality, tonicity and tone are neutral. Then she nominates her intended addressee with a querying key on the vocative.

(ii) At this point, Nicky intervenes by breaking pitch concord, with high key and termination and a divergent, dominant proclaiming tone (p+). In this way she openly expresses her surprise at meeting “that Veronica”, with a tone that implies the information is presented as *doubly* new, i.e. new for both listener and speaker. She simultaneously selects Veronica as the next speaker and expects confirmation. Veronica takes the floor with a proclaiming questioning move that initiates a new exchange seeking information. Then she selects her next interlocutor by means of a dominant referring tone on the vocative, which is accompanied by a high termination, demanding an involved answer from Charles.

Comparison: The *strong* interpersonal key matches the *dominant* stance, both explanations pointing to the exclamative force of Nicky’s utterance. The neutral tone choice for Veronica’s lexical question can be related with the *seeking*





information meaning. The querying key on the vocative matches the dominant effect of the rising tone, which demands an answer.

e) Fifth exchange:

Charles: // 2. ^ re/member Bom\*/**bay** //

Nicky: // 4. ^ when / Charles and \*/ I were going / out //

// 4 ^ he / told me he'd / had this / interesting / journey round \*/ **India** with //

// 1+ vomiting ve\*/**ronica** I... // 1- ^ I / think that was \*/ **it** //

(i) Charles answers with another question, querying about their shared experience, using the same intonation choices as Veronica's. Nicky takes the floor to explain what she meant by "that Veronica". She produces a long declarative statement with marked tonality (one clause, three tone units), with the first two units with tone 4 and 4, the unmarked tone choice to show a hypotactic dependency, which is highlighted by the *contingent* effect of the second one (4). This clause ends with tone 1+, showing strong interpersonal key. Finally, she softens her accusation with a mild declarative key (neutral tone 1-) on her modalised statement.

(ii) Charles accepts the speaker role. However, instead of answering the question, he opens a new pair by asking with dominant referring tone, trying to remind Veronica of the situation. Nicky takes up the speaking role again to answer Veronica's question. She starts reporting what Charles had told her using referring tones on the first two units, making reference to the trip already mentioned in the conversation. Her last two units have proclaiming tones, the first one informing about Veronica's nickname and the last one expressing her belief that she remembered correctly. The low termination in the last unit closes the pitch sequence, manifesting her intention not to go on.

Comparison: The effect of the falling rising tone on the first two units is explained in the first approach by stressing the dependency status of these on the third unit which has falling tone. In the second approach, this is shown by the lower informative value of the referring tone in comparison with what is proclaimed. Brazil et al. relate the low pitch on the last tonic with the closure of the topic, as a choice independent from tone.

f) Sixth exchange

Charles: // 1. ^ I... I / don't remember / ever \*/ **mentioning** it //

// 4. maybe \*/ **maybe** I / did //

Martha: // 1. ^ oh \*/ **come** on / Charles //

// 1+ ^ I / don't think I've / ever been \*/ **out** with / anyone less dis/creeet //

(i) Charles goes on justifying his behaviour using neutral tone 1 in his declarative statement. The awkwardness of the situation is manifested by his hesitant beginning. Then he admits the possibility of having been indiscreet with a modalised declarative expressing reservation with a 4 tone. The marked tonicity falls on the modal, stressing this defensive attitude which adds to the hesitant repetition of the term. Martha joins in the conversation with a summoning exclamation with vocative key (tone 1.) and goes on with a plain accusation in a declarative clause with strong key. The tonicity is marked, with the tonic on the last element of the *new*. The rest of the unit is *given* as it has been presupposed in the conversation so far.

(ii) Charles starts his answer with a proclaiming tone, stating his opinion, and continues with level tone on "maybe" followed by a short pause, hence temporarily directing his attention to language organization (oblique orientation) and finishing his turn with a referring tone which acknowledges the possibility of the veracity of Nicky's words. Martha expresses her



disagreement by using divergent proclaiming tones in order to make Charles admit his lack of discretion. She finishes her move with a high termination, expecting confirmation of her opinion.

Comparison: We believe that the hesitant beginning of the two units is explained following the first approach by appealing to the lexicogrammatical choices and the use of pause, without considering tone choices. Following the second approach, we interpret pauses as a division of tone units, often marking incompleteness, and we consider the *level* tone –sustention of pitch– as an indicator of the speaker’s concern for the way in which the message is encoded rather than for the transmission of the message itself. Thus, hesitation is explained in terms of different choices by the two approaches.

#### g) Seventh exchange

Charles: // 2. ^ well I / think that’s / probably a / bit of an exagge\*/ration is it / not //

Nicky: // 4. ^ it is \*/ not //

(i) Charles continues defending himself with a declarative clause with querying tone 2, reinforced by the use of an appealing tag which, although it is out of the scope of focus, completes the rising pitch movement. Tonality and tonicity are unmarked. Nicky responds to Charles’s query with a negative short answer against his expectations, manifested by the tag. She uses neutral tone 4 to reinforce the contrast with her interlocutor’s opinion.

(ii) Charles seeks solidarity from the rest of the participants by using a dominant, convergent referring tone and mid termination on his answer. Nicky’s “It is not!” on a high key breaks pitch concord and shows contrast with Charles’s view. However, she softens the impact of her disagreement by choosing a convergent, non-dominant referring tone.

Comparison: The idea of contrast in Nicky’s turn is also manifested differently in the two approaches. While following Halliday and Greaves we consider it the result of the tone choice, following Brazil et al., we associate it to the choice of pitch level on the onset.

#### h) Eighth exchange

Martha: // 4. I remember you going / on about this / girl //

\*/ 2. Helena was it // 1. ^ whose / mother made a \*/pass at you //

Veronica: // 4. ^ I re/member \*/ this //

// 1+ ^ you / couldn’t / work it / out whether it would be / impo/lite not to ac/cept her ad\*/vances //

Nicky: // 1+ ^ that’s \*/ right // 1+ ^ Mrs \*/ Piggy // 1. Helena was / Miss \*/ Piggy //

// 1+ ^ so her / mother was \*/ Mrs Piggy //

(i) Martha’s contribution displays marked tonicity with tone 4 on the pronoun “I”, highlighting a contrast between the speaker and other interlocutors, and showing a hypotactic relation with what follows. The clause is interrupted by a query about the name of the girl, with tone 2, and she finishes it with tone 1 on the embedded part of the clause. Veronica enthusiastically joins in the comment with tone 4 underscoring a contrast with marked tonicity on the demonstrative pronoun and establishing the dependence of this clause on the next one which has a strong key on tone 1, showing her excitement. Though this last unit presents movements in the pretonic element, these are not given nuclear status, as the approach gives priority to clause structure, especially in cases where the fast tempo suggests the organization of the message in one piece of information. Nicky approves of this comment and



adds hers with strong interpersonal key on her very short clauses. All of them have tone concord with tone 1, neutral for declaratives, making them sound as one piece of information. The last two units, though showing a lexicogrammatical relation of hypotaxis in the wording, are presented as independent through tone choice.

(ii) Martha then takes the floor to add a further example of Charles's indiscreet behaviour. She uses a high-keyed referring tone on "I", expressing contrast, followed by a unit with dominant referring tone asking for confirmation about the girl's name and finally introducing a piece of information as new with a proclaiming tone and a mid termination suggesting that she expects agreement. Veronica agrees with her, using a falling rising tone to refer to what Martha said. She then uses a proclaiming tone to bring more information to the conversation. Her high termination states her expectation of confirmation on the part of the other participants. Nicky takes the turn to confirm, using high key and, in a series of four units with proclaiming tones, she provides more information on Charles's comments about his affairs.

Comparison: The tone choices in this exchange are similar to others already discussed. The two approaches have a different view with respect to tonality choices. While Halliday and Greaves consider the possibility of having pitch movement within the pretonic, Brazil et al. would understand those movements as tonic syllables. As the transcription was done following the first authors, those differences –that we could perceive in Veronica's second unit– are not reflected in our transcription or analysis.

#### i) Ninth exchange

Charles: // ^ I... I / think per/haps it was a... //

Helena's mother: // 1. ^ we've / both lost a / lot of \* / **weight** since / then //

Charles: \*// 1. **Ah** \*// 1. **great** \*// 1. **speeches** //

(i) Charles's next contribution is incomplete as he feels overwhelmed by the situation and is interrupted by Helena's mother –who identifies herself as one of the women being laughed at– with a declarative neutral tone 1. After this statement, an uncomfortable silence of almost 7 seconds follows, and Charles breaks it when an extralinguistic signal –a bell ringing– calls everyone's attention. He uses neutral declarative force (tone 1) on the minor clauses that end the interaction.

(ii) With a false start, interpreted as an incomplete tone unit, Charles tries to defend himself but he is interrupted by Helena's mother, who uses a divergent proclaiming tone to modify the previous speakers' view. An uncomfortable pause follows and finally, Charles is relieved by an abrupt change in the situation, when extralinguistic factors interrupt the conversation and he has the chance to change the embarrassing topic by using proclaiming tones for the last tone units.

Comparison: This last exchange shows elements in common between the two approaches as regards tonality and tone choices, which have already been discussed.

## Conclusion

Any analysis which is only phonological will necessarily be limited in its explanations, since meaning is built up from choices speakers make at different levels. Speakers make meaning through decisions on the basis of the step-by-step development of the interaction, making simultaneous choices as regards lexicogrammar, prosody, paralinguistic ways of expression, interpersonal relationships, discoursal and pragmatic meanings, and so on.

As EFL teacher-trainers, our main concern is to find ways to guide our students in their



acquisition of English. Our aim is to raise their awareness of the meaning-making possibilities the language offers. Since phonology is the area in which we work, we are constantly looking for methods that will help our students to understand and use phonology as a tool which combines with other linguistic, paralinguistic and contextual features in the negotiation of meaning.

In oral interaction, native speakers make many of these choices unconsciously, and also unconscious is their interpretation of the meanings conveyed. This paper reflects our attempt to integrate phonology with the other areas and to make their relationship explicit to help students understand and use them in the target language. Although Brazil et al. sometimes refer to lexical and grammatical notions for their explanations as regards phonological choices, they do not integrate them into a comprehensive system. On the other hand, Halliday and Greaves provide explanations geared towards an integral view, since their theoretical framework considers the language system as a whole.

As regards the use of tone, this difference in approach is seen with respect to the explanations for the use of the falling and the falling-rising tones. Halliday and Greaves relate the use of falls with the independent status of grammatical clauses, whereas the fall-rise is associated with the meanings expressed with dependent clauses. Brazil et al. consider that utterances with falling intonation have higher informative value than those with falling-rising intonation, without any link to grammatical features.

With respect to the division into tone units, Halliday and Greaves favour clause structure as the neutral choice, considering the phonology as a realization of lexico-grammatical choices. Brazil et al. base this division on the occurrence of marked pitch movements or pause, reflecting their view that intonation and grammar are two independent systems.

Finally, the analysis of interpersonal meanings vary in both approaches. Halliday and Greaves take into account the existence of neutral intonation choices for every lexico-grammatical category and assign additional meanings to variations from these unmarked versions. Brazil et al. associate interpersonal meanings with choices in *tone*, *key* and *termination*, i.e. pitch movement and pitch level, without making reference to lexico-grammatical patterns. Though we have found some correspondences in the explanations offered, we still lack sufficient data to arrive at a parallel view of both approaches.

This paper presents a preliminary analysis using both systems on a limited number of exchanges in one conversation. It is our intention to continue our exploration and to widen the amount of language samples to reach more representative conclusions.

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## Appendix I: Script

- Alistair:** // 1- ^ there are / four / hundred / different kinds of \*/ tea //
- // 1. ^ and / that's not in/cluding all these / so-called \*/ fruit teas //
- // 1. ^ I-I took Ve/ronica out to / India at \*/ Christmas //
- // 1. ^ to / look at the plan\*/tations //
- Charles:** \*/ 1. Excellent //
- Alistair:** // 1+ 3 ^ I be/lieve you and \*/ her / went there \*/ once //
- Charles:** // 1. that's \*/ right //
- Veronica:** // 1. Charles was \*/ vile //
- // 1+ ^ he in/sisted on / cracking \*/ jokes //
- // 1+ all the / time I was \*/ ill //
- Charles:** // 4. ^ just / trying to / cheer you \*/ up Ve //
- Nicki:** // 5. ^ oh you're \*/ that ve/ronica //
- Veronica:** // 1. which Ve\*/ronica // 2. Charlie //
- Charles:** // 2. ^ re/member Bom\*/bay //
- Nicki:** // 4. ^ when / Charles and \*/ I were going / out //
- // 4. ^ he / told me he'd / had this / interesting / journey round \*/ India with //
- // 1+ vomiting ve\*/ronica I... // 1- ^ I / think that was \*/ it //
- Charles:** // -1. ^ I... I / don't remember / ever \*/ mentioning it //
- // 4. maybe \*/ maybe I / did //
- Martha:** // 1. ^ oh \*/ come on / Charles //
- // -1+ ^ I / don't think I've / ever been \*/ out with / anyone less dis/creet //
- Charles:** // 2. ^ well I / think that's / probably a / bit of an exagge\*/ration is it / not //
- Nicki:** // 4. ^ it is \*/ not //
- Martha:** \*/ 4. I remember you going / on about this / girl //
- \*/ 2. Helena was it // 1. ^ whose / mother made a \*/pass at you //
- Veronica:** // 4. ^ I re/member \*/ this //
- // - 1+ ^ you / couldn't / work it / out whether it would be / impo/lite not to ac/cept her ad\*/vances //
- Nicki:** // 1+ ^ that's \*/ right // 1+ ^ Mrs \*/ Piggy // 1. Helena was / Miss \*/ Piggy //
- // 1+ ^ so her / mother was \*/ Mrs Piggy //
- Charles:** // ^ I... I / think per/haps it was a...
- Helena's mother:** // -1. ^ we've / both lost a / lot of \*/ weight since / then //
- Charles:** \*/ 1. Ah \*/ 1. great \*/ 1. speeches //





## Appendix II: Praat images

### Discourse Intonation and Systemic Functional Phonology: A Comparison

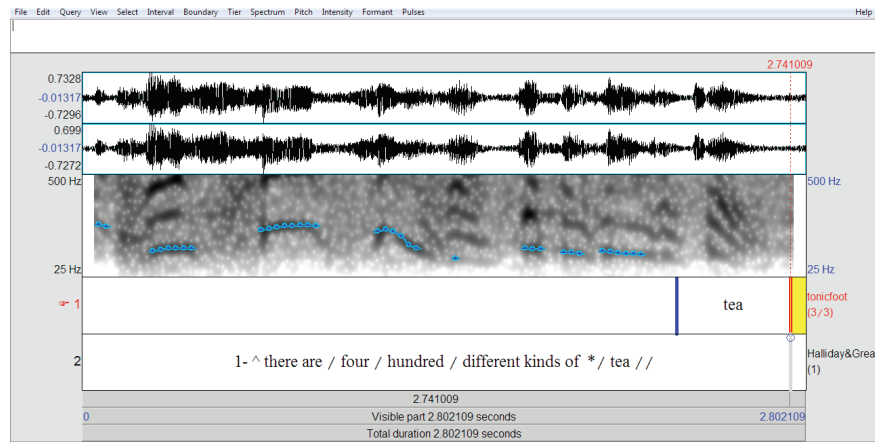


Figure 1

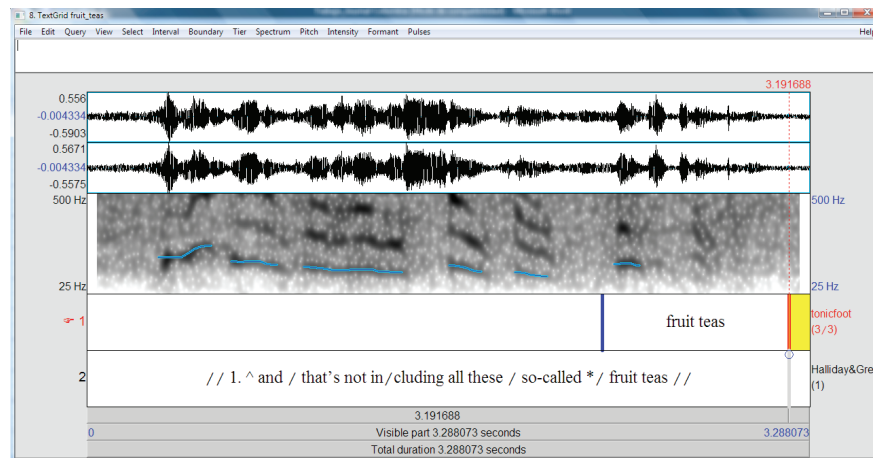


Figure 2

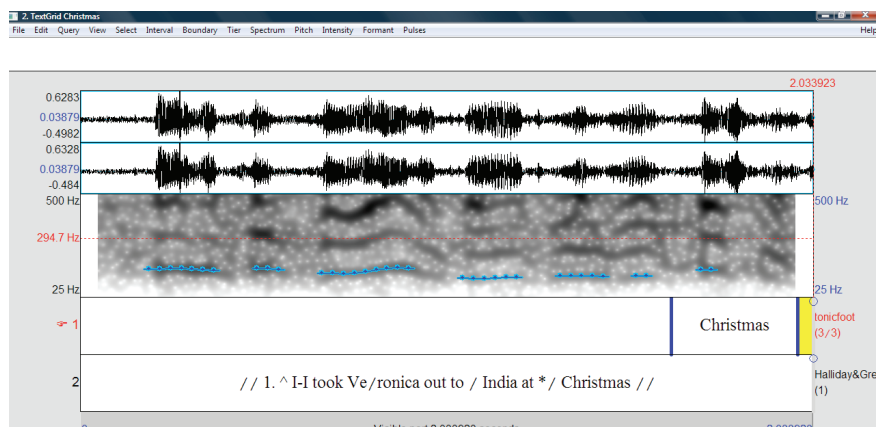


Figure 3



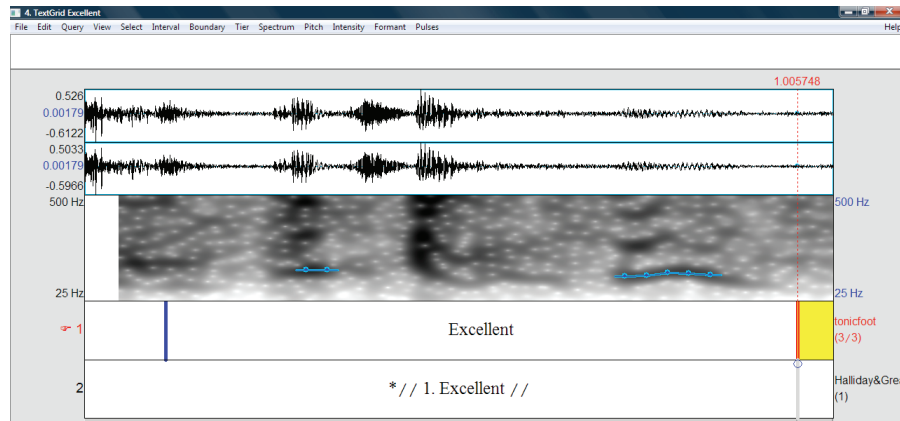


Figure 4

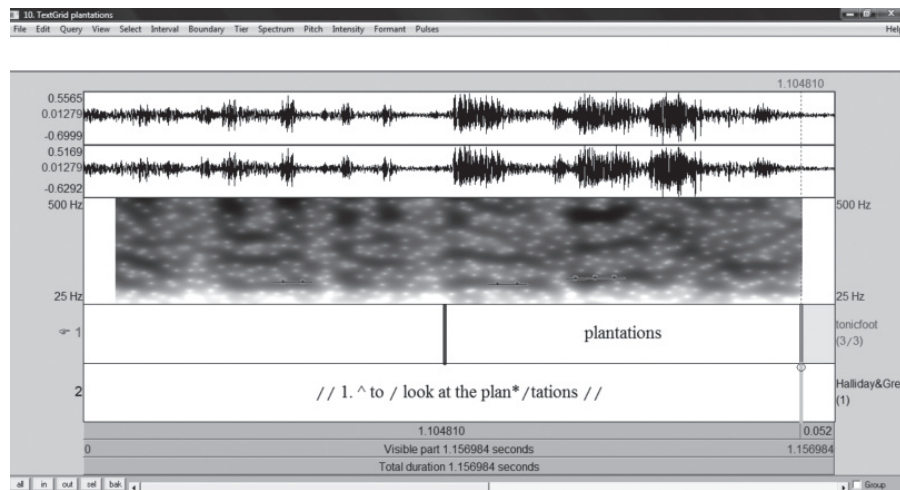


Figure 5

## THE AUTHORS

**MIRIAM PATRICIA GERMANI** is Professor of English for Secondary and University Education, National University of La Pampa, Argentina, and is an MA in English and American Literature, National University of Río Cuarto, Córdoba, Argentina. She is currently lecturing in English Phonetics and Phonology at National University of La Pampa. Her main interests lie in the area of intonation and its functions in spoken discourse. She has presented and published papers on this topic in Argentina, Chile and Brazil.

**LUCÍA INÉS RIVAS** is Professor of English for Secondary and University Education, National University of La Pampa, Argentina, and is working on her MA dissertation for an MA in Applied Linguistics, National University of Río Cuarto, Córdoba, Argentina. She is lecturing in English Phonetics and Phonology and Discourse and Pragmatics at the National University of La Pampa. Her main research interests lie in the area of intonation and spoken discourse, as well as in critical discourse analysis. She has presented and published papers on these topics in Argentina, Chile and Brazil.

