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Abstract

This paper aims to establish the prosodic behaviour of speech acts following Searle's nomenclature (1989). It also provides a description, together with its corresponding marking, of how certain intonational patterns render a given speech act different, one whose illocutionary and perlocutionary force turn out to be different. To this effect, the author conducts an auditory analysis of recorded material extracted from the TOEFL language test.

Key words: *- speech acts - tones - pitch accent*

Resumen

El presente artículo tiene como propósito determinar la conducta prosódica de los actos de habla siguiendo la nomenclatura de Searle (1989). Además, se presenta una descripción, junto con su marcación correspondiente, de cómo ciertos patrones entonacionales convierten un acto de habla determinado en otro cuya fuerza ilocucionaria y perlocucionaria resulta ser distinta. Para dicho fin, el autor realiza análisis auditivo de grabaciones correspondientes al examen internacional de inglés TOEFL.

Palabras clave: *- actos de habla - tonos - acentos tonales*

1. Introduction

This investigation is mainly concerned with establishing the behavior of both direct and indirect speech acts, in conjunction with the intonational mechanisms used to convey a given speech act. Firstly, a brief review of the speech act theory will be provided, which in turn will serve as the working framework for the analysis of utterances, and secondly, I shall undertake a brief discussion of the treatment of words in of their 'phonological size', which leads to a description of the 'nuclear tone approach'.

Impressionistically, my claim is that prosody –more specifically intonation– plays a part in distinguishing the illocutionary force of utterances. To put it differently, the prosodic/intonational contour, i.e., nucleus placement, pith range and pitch direction, is a major instrument signalling the illocutionary force of utterances. Also, spin-off findings as to whether the prosodic behaviour of the corpus material conforms to the well-established patterns of intonation will be provided. Lastly, attempts will be made in order to establish how intonation changes the illocutionary force of a given utterance.

The corpus comprises short two-exchange dialogues taken from official TOEFL practice material (Test of English as a Foreign Language).

For the purpose of my analysis, real speech was not selected, for this usually comprises a number of hesitations, false starts, etc., which would have made the study more difficult to conduct. In lieu of unrehearsed speech, this quasi-spontaneous style was preferred on the following grounds:

> • Utterances are most often well-structured.
> • Utterance are, for the most part, free of unnecessary hesitations or false starts.
> • A strong degree of spontaneity is always present in the phrasing of the scripts.

2. Searle's classification of speech acts

Speech acts can be loosely described as actions of speaking whereby the speaker sends a message to a hearer with an intention. At times, the message sent depends solely on the wording, e. g.

> (1) *I promise I'll be back*
> (2) *I pronounce you husband and wife*

In speech act analysis, three elements are most often distinguished; namely, the locutionary factor, which is the sheer act of phrasing a communicative act, the illocutionary factor, which is the act performed through the making of the utterance proper, and the perlocutionary factor, which deals with the particular effect that a given has on the speaker.

On another level, there is no clear-cut correspondence between the structural form of the utterance and the illocutionary force it aims to convey. Consequently, the very same illocutionary form can be reached by dint of diverse morphological or syntactic patterns. Conversely, the same grammatical pattern can be used to convey various illocutionary forces, e.g

> (3) *Stand up*
> (4) *Make yourself comfortable*
> (5) *Try it*

In the above examples the imperative is used to convey three clearly different purposes; namely, an order, a wish, and a challenge respectively.

Similarly, what may seem to be an assertion might well be used to convey a warning if worded by a bank robber awaiting the right time for their strike, e.g.

> (6) *There are two policemen around*

This is known as an indirect speech act, and as stated earlier, I shall examine the prosodic behavior of both direct and indirect speech acts.

Searle provides a classification of speech acts whose subclassification can surely be furthered on:

> **2.1. Representatives** are speech acts that represent some state of affairs in varying degrees of truth with respect to the proposition: state, believe, conclude, deny, report.
>
> **2.2. Commissives** are speech acts that commit – in varying degrees – the speaker to some future course of action: promise, pledge, vow, swear, threat.

2.3. Directives are speech acts whose intention is to get the addressee to carry out some action: command, insist, dare, request, challenge, ask, request.

2.4. Declaratives are speech acts that themselves bring about a state of affairs by phrasing the utterance; thus changing the external reality: marrying, naming, blessing, arresting,

2.5. expressives are speech acts that indicate the speaker's psychological state or mental attitude towards/about a state of affairs: welcome, deplore, greet, thank, congratulate, apologize.

3. Sentence Accent

The treatment of words in terms of defining which is 'greater in size' goes back to the 16th century. However, it is in the 20th century when the most important schools of thought developed. In this work, I shall follow the 'tone-group' aproach, according to which the contour is divided into its different components. The unit of analysis within this approach has been given various names, viz. 'sense group', 'tone-unit', 'intonation unit', 'intonation group', etc.. Nevertheless, we have not yet come across a fully satisfactory definition for this concept. Jones explains that *"a few words in close grammatical connexion, such as would be said together in giving a slow dictation exercise"* make up an intonation group.

Personally I take the stand that an intonation group may well be made up of a single monosyllabic word, e.g.

> (7) *A: You're likely to fail your exam*
> *B: 'WHA T*

Some words in English are more likely to take an accent than others. The group of 'accentable words' comprises main verbs, adverbs, nouns, adjectives, demonstrative pronouns, etc. . This group has often been referred to as 'content/lexical words" , while the group of 'unaccentable words' mainly consists of auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, relative pronouns and articles; this group has been traditionally termed 'form/grammatical words'.

3.1. Elements of the intonation Group

This unit might consist of four different parts: nucleus, tail, head, and pre-head; the nucleus being the only compulsory element. In the examples provided to illustrate each of the different parts, the elements being discussed have been underlined.

> **(i) Nucleus:** As was stated above, the nucleus is the only mandatory element in an intonation group. It performs the function of pitch-initiator whereby there is normally a change of pitch direction. Besides, The nucleus tends to fall on the last content word of the intonation group, e.g.

(8) *She studying eng^<u>NEE</u>Ring*

> **(ii) Tail:** The stretch following the nucleus containing prominent syllables, e. g.

(9) *GET <u>them</u> to me*

> **(iii) Head:** It extends from the first accented syllable up to (but not including) the nuclear accent Yet again, we way or may not find heads in an intonation group, e. g.

(10) I <u>hope</u> *you can <u>get</u> them in TIME*
(11) It way *in the CAR*

(iv) Pre-head: The pre-head consist of all the unaccented syllables preceding the first accented syllable either the head or nucleus, e. g.

(12) *It <u>was the</u> FIRST time*
(13) <u>*There's a marvellous*</u> *CAStle in that city*

Different schools of thought have developed in an attempt to satisfactorily account for multifarious nature of intonational patterns. The two most prominent ones will be described below:

3.2. The focal model

The focal model is one of the main approaches to nuclear accent placement apart from the traditional, the syntactic and the semantic. When analyzed in depth, we find that they overlap in concepts which are sometimes re as characteristic of a given approach.

Although the notion of focus is constantly alluded to in the literature, few definitions have been attempted <u>EADY ET AL. (1986: 233)</u> state that 'linguistic focus is (...) the tendency to accentuate or highlight a portion of a sentence for reasons related to meaning. Such a definition is preceded by <u>HALLIDAY'S (1967)</u> concept of 'points of information focus' and <u>BOLINGER'S (1972b)</u> stance that '(A)ccented words are points of information focus'.

As can be inferred from the above paragraphs, focusing and accentuation are inextricably linked. For instance, for Gussenhoven focus marks semantic const, yet he does not entirely disregard syntactic constituents. Moreover, he claims that the position of the nucleus is defined according to focus. The chief advantage of the focal model is that it takes contextual and pragmatic aspects into account Hence my preference for this approach, together with the traditional one, in the analysis of my own corpus.

<u>LADD (1979)</u> enriched the concept of focus by stating that this can be broad and narrow. The former occurs when there is focus on the whole sentence, the latter, when only part of the sentence is in focus.

Lastly, I will subscribe to Gussenhoven's view that focus is a universal concept.

One of the most evident advantages that the focal model enjoys over the other models, which –for brevity's sake– have not been explained, is that it takes con and pragmatic elements that make it possible to account for obscure or ambiguous surface patterns.

(14) *[I don't usually go shopping for clothes]* FOCUS
(15) *A: Are they any good?*
     B: VEry [FOCUS] good

3.3. The Traditional Model

The Traditional Model is centred on the distinction between the so-called content or lexical words, and function or structure words where the former group comprises nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and the latter is made up of pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and so on (LYONS, 1977). Such a distinction is closely intertwined with the concept of accentability, for it has been found that lexical words are by far much more accentable than function words, thus constituting the unmarked prosodic version for an utterance. Likewise, it has been

discovered that within the group of lexical items nouns are, yet again, much more accentable than the other categories comprising this group.

Consequently, a widely used accentuation rule has been coined: the LLI rule (last lexical item), meaning that foreign students of English can 'predict', in most cases, where the nuclear accent will fall. Data provided by CRYSTAL confirms this view- (1969: 267) where tonicity was primarily restricted to the main lexical classes; namely nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, in that order.

Exceptions found to the above rule have been accounted for in the form of subrules:

- Nouns + to infinitives: I have some `letters to write
- Nouns +final relative clauses: Where's the `money I lent you?
- 'Event sentences':   My `car broke down
- Final approximatives: She's `twenty, or so
- Final time/place adverbials: What are you `doing now?

4. Procedure

For the purpose of this analysis, twenty two-exchange dialogues were randomly selected, which were marked auditorily following the aforementioned nuclear-tone approach. Special attention was paid to nucleus placement, pitch range and direction.

5. Findings

5.1 Directives

As for the direct directives, all the examples found in this category do certainly conform to the LLI rule:

(16) `Don't forget to put your um0^brella in the car
(17) Would1 you have some free time to `look at this pro0 posal for me?
(18) You1 ought to see a doctor about that ^cough
(19) `Could you bring my calcu0 lator back?

It is noteworthy to point out that in the cases above, mid pre-nuclear tones were used. As I see it, the use of such tones can be associated to a softening effect on the part of the speaker, for the use consecutive pre-nuclear falling tones would have rendered a more businesslike and distant attitude.

However, in the case of indirect directives, a fair number of examples was found where prosody plays a part in changing what seemingly belongs to a different speech act into a directive:

(20) 1 `m sorry to ᴱbother you about 0 this, | but `that music's 1really^loud
(21) 0Shouldn't `someone `pick up the clothes from the 0 cleamer's?
(22) 0Are you sure you cor 0 rected `all the 0 typing errors?
(23) If you 0wouldn't 1mind
(24) ^Look at this mess. | And the^guests will be here^ soon

Some of these examples vary according to the degree of forcefulness of the demand expressed in the utterance, thus using consecutive falling tones when a strong demand is being made, as in 24. Conversely, either mid or rising tones are used when a soft request is phrased, as in 20, 21, and 22.

I must admit that both 21 and 22 might have been predicted in their intonational contour, yet 20 and 23 feature mid tones and rising nuclear accents in an effort to make the utterance softer.

5.2 Commisives

Only 2 examples were found in this category, both of which are indirect in form, yet one seems to be slightly more direct than the other in that there is an evident commitment to a future action:

In both cases consecutive falling tones can be observed signalling a stronger degree of commitment

(25) *Ididn't^ realise you could^hear it*
(26) *^I'll make sure the house is^spotless;*

As for example 25, speaker B commits herself to turning down the music using a seemingly representative, in 26 an evident commitment is being conveyed both through the form and content.

5.3 Representatives

As expected, this category groups a much larger number of examples, for this is – as most speech act theorists claim – is the most widely used speech act in human language. Consequently, a few representatives were analysed prosodically, eg.

(27) *`George is going to0 work in New^ York in the summer*
(28) *You0 want to make a good im^pression*
(29) *I `think the whole 1class is going on a ?field trip next Friday*
(30) *I'm not so^sure,|not 1everyone has paid the transpor^tation fee*
(31) *`Janet 0 said she',s `coming to my `gradu^ation*

In virtually all cases, the LLI rule –and exceptions to it – applies, which means that nuclei are placed where a competent foreign learner would anticipate, and the use mid or rising prenuclear tones being the only minor deviation.

As far as declaratives goes, no examples falling into this category were found, for the material used in this paper features academic settings rather than ritual ones.

5.4 Expressives

Not very many examples were found fitting this category: 2 indirect (introduction to) apologies, I indirect utterance denoting frustration, and I denoting anger:

(32) *`Look |I'm `sorry to0 1bother you about this |...*
(33) *^Look at this^note from the^landlord*
(34) *I `can't seem to get the^copy machine to work*
(35) *`I don't know how to 0put this| ...*

In 33, three consecutive failing tones are used giving the utterance a stronger emphasis. Nevertheless, in both 32 and 35, mid an / or rising NUCLEAR accents are used to convey a softened and appeasing tone. Yet again, nuclei were placed where LLI would anticipate.

6. Conclusions and projections

Undoubtedly, results coming from the present paper could be much more revealing if a larger corpus was used. However, I am of the opinion that the present investigation could be used as a stepping stone to a more elaborate study. Broadly speaking, these are some of the conclusions emerging from this investigation:

(i) Nearly all the utterances do conform to what the so-called LLI rule states and its corresponding exceptions in that the nuclear accent does fall on the last lexical item.

(ii) Pitch direction of the nuclei also goes by the generalizations on the relationship between structure of the utterance and its prosodic contour.

(iii) It was found that intonation does play a part in making directives and expressives more or less forceful, or more or less softening.

(iv) The utterances analysed in this paper were found to be in broad focus, i.e., the information conveyed was treated as all-new material.

(v) Pre-nuclear tones were found to stand for various effects, viz., forcefulness markers, softening effects, and so on.

(vi) Further studies need to be conducted including declaratives.

(vii) Intonation was found to be heavily responsible for turning an utterance whose structure would be interpreted as belonging to class X into the one that speaker A actually meant, and speaker B understood.

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