

Tikrit University College of Education for Humanities

English Department

Intonation and L2 Discourse

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The Use of Intonation in L2 Discourse

TONE CHOICE IN L2 DISCOURSE

Research in L2 discourse suggests that learners of En level of proficiency encounter problems in applyin Wennerstrom (1994, 1997) reports that Japanese, Thai speakers tended to use low, falling tones at boundaries bet propositions where NS hearers would anticipate rising or m Pirt (1990) reports similar results in a study of Italian comparison of the tone choices of native and nonnativ parallel readings of a scripted dialogue, Hewings (1995 preference for the use of falling tones in the discourse of learners from Korea, Greece, and Indonesia. This wa problematic in situations where native speakers chose ri "socially integrative" (p. 262) purposes. Hewings repor contradicting a previous speaker, NS informants uniforml tone to avoid the appearance of overt disagreement th inferred from a falling tone. He suggests that the use of fa nonnative speakers in this context can give the impression rudeness or animosity. This potential for misunderstanding the speaker's intent personal level can seriously damage teacher-student relatio classroom. Tyler and Davies (1990) found that a Korean tion and interpretation of intonational cues contributed to cation failure between the ITA and an undergraduate problem remained unresolved, and the interaction clo student muttering, "I've been reamed" (p. 398). At an level, Tyler, Jefferies, and Davies (1988) show that the inappropriate falling tones in ITAs' presentations cont obfuscation of the discourse structure and helped create a " entiated, structure" (p. 106). Hinofotis and Bailey (1980) als monotonic intonation patterns that characterized ITAs' pre complaints from students that ITAs were boring and that it to concentrate in their classes. The study described here sought to define more precisely the role tone choice in these perceptions of ITAs' discourse. I first conduct microanalysis of the complete pitch structure of classroom presentati by 12 NS TAs and ITAs and then compared ITAs' tone choices with baseline NS data. The study's qualitative, interpretive design was consi tent with the investigations of ITA discourse conducted by Tyler, Dav and their associates (Tyler, 1992, 1995; Tyler & Davies, 1990; Tyl TONE CHOICE IN ITA

COMMUNICATION 235 This content downloaded from 200.144.199.16 on Thu, 15 Aug 2019 20:37:06 UTC All use subject to <https://about.jstor.org/terms> Jefferies, & Davies, 1988), based on the principle that speakers' linguistic choices could be interpreted meaningfully only within the situated context of the interaction, taking into account the surrounding linguistic and nonlinguistic setting of the discourse (Brazil, 1997; Gumperz, 1982).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK Intonation and Common Ground The analysis and description of tone choices followed Brazil's model of intonation in discourse. Central to Brazil's model is the principle that the communicative value of intonation deriv assumptions participants bring to the interaction. In any give the worlds of the speaker and hearer will intersect to differi The extent of shared background, or common ground, assume speakers may be initially unknown, as in the case of two stra strike up a conversation, or may be considerable, as in t discussion between family members. Even two strangers certain amount of common ground for granted in their sh edge of the world and their immediate context. Tone choice summarizes the common ground between s any particular moment in the interaction. Falling tones (inclu fall and rise-fall final contours) indicate a speaker's assumptio matter of the tone unit is a new assertion, in some way world the hearer, and unrecoverable from the prior context. Rising and fall-rise final contours) signify that the speaker assum matter is part of the shared background between participant with the current world view of the hearer. This informa recoverable from the preceding discourse or prior knowle to be common ground at that time. This binary opposition is below: 1. // A we have SEven ions we have to TEST for// i i'mjust gonna COver our POsitive ions// ! the SOdium poTAssium and aMMOnium//3 3Transcription conventions are as follows:

// // tone unit boundaries UPPERCASE prominent syllables indicating stressed or salient wor UPPERCASE tonic syllable carrying the tone choice or tonal pitch m with the tone unit L^ ~

~falling tone associated with the tonic syllable, indicating that the content of the tone unit is in some way world-changing to the hearer is^ ~ rising tone associated with the tonic syllable, indicating that the content of the tone unit agrees in some way with the current world view of the hearer.

In this extract from a chemistry lab, an NS TA is helping the students put together a scheme or checklist of what to look for when they are given an unknown chemical compound to identify. The students have covered this material in previous labs, and most have come to this lab with their scheme already drafted. The TA begins by indicating his assumption of this agreed, shared background through his use of a rising tone in "we have seven ions we have to test for." In contrast, in the second tone unit, "I'm just gonna cover our positive ions," he uses a falling tone to assert or tell the students that he will be discussing only positive (not negative) ions during the presentation. The final tone unit refers back to "positive ions," and the TA again chooses to emphasize common ground. The students have been working with sodium, potassium, and ammonium since the beginning of the semester, and he uses a rising tone to project his expectation that this group of ions is familiar to the students from their previous lab work.

Tone Choice and Convergence

Through tone choice, participants continuously negotiate toward a state of convergence, or roughly mutual understanding of the discourse message, by linking each new utterance to the world or context of the hearer (an additional level of tone choice with a rather different function is discussed below). This notion of confluence includes a movement toward social convergence; that is, speakers can decrease the affective distance between themselves and their hearers by projecting a broader common ground that is more inclusive of the hearer. In Example 1 above,

by intentionally highlighting the students' prior knowledge, the TA shifts the perspective of the presentation from that of a speaking I to that of a participating we. Conversely, speakers can exploit the tonal system to project a temporary withdrawal from the here-and-now negotiation with the hearer. The use of a final, level tone presents the matter of the tone unit as neither shared nor new to the participants but as simply a language specimen. Typically, this neutral tone is used for semiritualized or routinized language that is generic rather than specific to a given interaction. Characteristic examples from the classroom include the reiteration of well-established procedures (e.g., // - stop WRITING// ! put your pens DOWN// 4 look this WAY//) or of immutable truths that are nonnegotiable.

2. // - the SQUARE of the hyPOTenuse// 4 of a RIGHT angled TRIangle// // - is equal to the SUM of the SQUARES// I on the OTHER two SIDES// (Brazil, 1997, p. 138) Common features of unplanned discourse such as hesitation phenomena and fillers may also result in a momentary disengagement from the interaction as the speaker briefly focuses on language production (e.g., // AND// UH// 4 so we HAVE ...//).

Tonal Composition The particular combination of rising, falling, and level to given piece of discourse establishes its tonal composition (The A combination of largely falling and rising tones is term discourse; that is, the speaker makes tone choices for the bene hearer, selecting falling or rising tones based on whether t believes the content of the tone unit is either world-ch common ground; thus choices are directly oriented toward state of convergence with the hearer. The tonal system also allows the speaker to make choices tha minimal involvement with the hearer and indicate a tempo drawal from the context of the interaction. This alternative selection of a combination of falling and level tones creates oblique discourse, or an orientation by the speaker toward the language sample itself and away from the hearer.⁴ A typical condition under which a

teacher may temporarily shift from a direct to an oblique orientation is shown in Example 2 above, where the teacher is reiterating a well-established formula. An utterance presented in this manner can be glossed as "these are not my words addressed particularly to you on this occasion; they are rather a routine performance whose appropriateness to our present situation we both recognize" (Brazil, 1997, p. 136). An orientation change from direct to oblique may also occur when speakers are focused on the language sample due to momentary problems with linguistic coding or because the speakers are "reading out" information, and the change reports nothing more than "this (linguistic item) is what is written here" (Brazil, 1997, p. 135). The latter condition is illustrated in Example 3. In this physics presentation the TA follows his opening remarks to the students, "so you guys had problems with the prelab.

right" with a series of falling and level tones, indicating a temporary shift in his focus away from the students to reading out the question from the textbook. 3. // I so you GUYS had PROBLEMS// S with the PRElab// A RIGHT// " AND// 4 the FIRST question WAS uh// I QUESTION ONE was// 1 for the example on pages four and FIVE// 4 FIND out TORQUES// L for an AXIS at x equals ZERO// In summary, the discourse of teaching is generally characterized by a specific tonal composition (Brazil, Coulthard, & Johns, 1980; Sinclair & Brazil, 1982). Teachers are likely to choose a direct orientation, or a co- occurring selection of rising and falling tones, in order to project maximal involvement with their students. More specifically, teachers can be expected to exploit the converging functions of rising tones to foster an interactive teaching style and promote a positive affect in the classroom. Finally, teachers may select obliquely oriented, or neutral tones if momentarily distracted by extralinguistic concerns such as board work or with the kinds of routinized language shown in Examples 2 and 3 above.