AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF TORONTO ENGLISH SENTENCE INTONATION

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Pairs such as English teacher (N + N) "a teacher of English" and English teacher (Adj + N) "a teacher from England" can be differentiated by their intonation patterns, the former bearing a falling melodic contour on the stressed syllable of its first element, the latter showing a general falling contour.

Applying this mechanism to other syntactic categories and to more complex structures, a relatively simple intonation grammar can be built. This grammar generates from the sentence syntactic structure and the type of grammatical categories involved, a sequence of melodic contours, described in terms of features of slope, height and duration, and located on the (primary) stressed syllables of each unit.

Since this theory was essentially developed from British English data, an attempt has been made here to check its validity for Toronto English sentences. Thirty declarative sentences containing from 2 to 9 minimal stressable units were read by 5 Toronto born speakers. Most of the syntactic structures involved were of the type NP + (VP + NP) with different expansions of the verb and noun phrases.

The instrumental analysis of the recorded sentences gave different sequences of melodic contours which were compared to the sequences predicted by the theory. It was found that the experimental results agree with the theoretical sequences in 93% of the cases. The results were particularly satisfactory for the contrast rising-falling related to couples of categories such as Adj + N, N's + N, Adv + V, as opposed to groups such as V + N, N and N, etc., bearing falling contours on their stressed syllables.