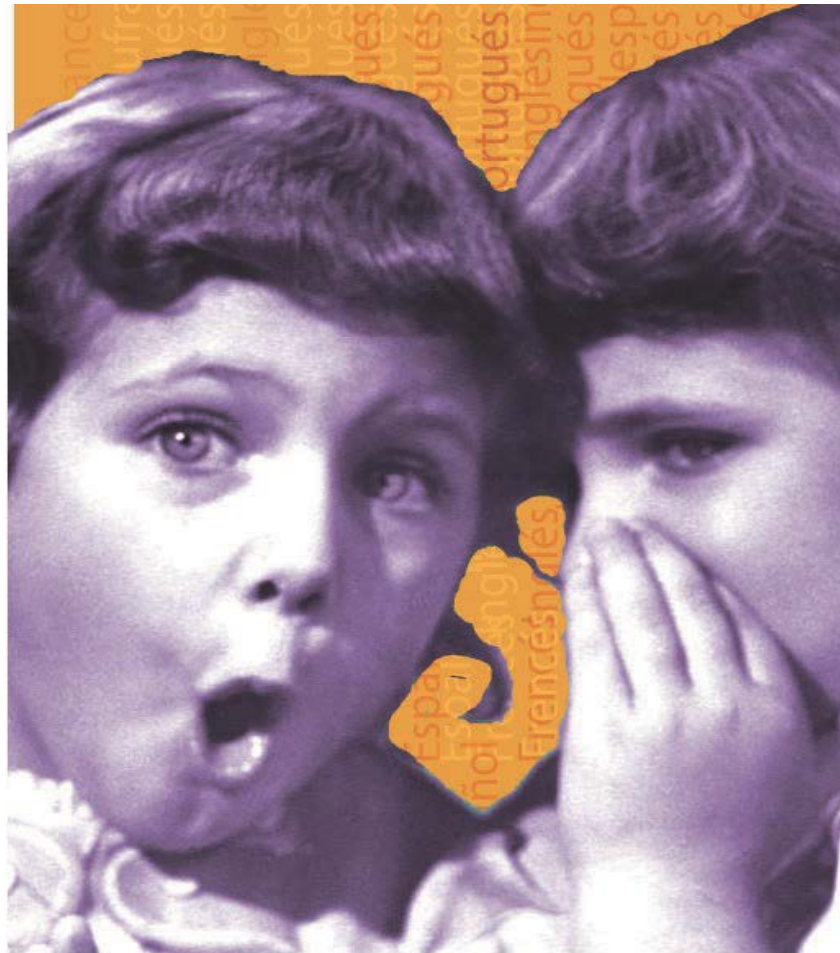**III Jornadas Internacionales**

Didáctica de la Fonética
de las Lenguas Extranjeras

Editora Gabriela Leiton

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE SAN MARTÍN — ESCUELA DE HUMANIDADES — CEPEL CENTRO PARA EL ESTUDIO DE LENGUAS

III Jornadas Internacionales de Didáctica
de la Fonética de las Lenguas Extranjeras
(alemán, español, francés, inglés, italiano y portugués)

Videoconferencia Inaugural: Prof. Alan Cruttenden

29 y 30 de agosto de 2014

Centro para el Estudio de Lenguas

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TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING THE PROSODIC CONFIGURATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL DISCOURSE

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Resumen

The instructional genre is, undeniably, one of the most common text types produced by teachers in the development of a lesson. Given that it is a highly informative genre, and as such, requires a careful consideration of the processing time of the audience, instructional discourse in the form of a lecture or systematization stage in a lesson involves a careful organization and sequencing of the information presented. This general patterning of the instructional text in terms of thematic structure and sequences of clause complexes (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004) is, in the oral medium, accompanied by matching choices of tonality, key and intonational sequences (Fox, 1983) which aid the audience in the search for relevance and order in the topics presented.
Because of its significance in the classroom, the prosodic configuration of this genre needs to be trained systematically as a professional skill to be mastered by teachers at both pre-service and in-service levels. The present paper discusses a possible theoretical framework for the teaching of the frequent patterns of tonality, tone and key that characterize the instructional genre and describes a selection of tasks that can be used to help teacher trainees and graduate teachers gain awareness of these patterns.

Palabras clave: instruccional, prosodia, sistémico-funcional, textual

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING THE PROSODIC CONFIGURATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL DISCOURSE

Introduction

One of the prevalent genres related to what is known as "teacher talk" is *instructional discourse.* There a number of manifestations of this genre in the professional life of a teacher, including *lectures* and on a smaller scale, the *systematization/presentation stages in the lesson.* A hybrid between oral and written language (Biber, 2009), instructional discourse requires a clearly signposted and sequential organization that can guide the audience towards an orderly understanding of the topic at play, both in terms of the presentation of information (*periodicity)* and of the connections between ideas (*conjunction*) . Part of this structuring then, lies in the choice of lexico-grammar, but an essential component of meaning lies in the selections made at the phonological level, through the systems of intonation, as a means of presenting "instructions" for the audience towards a preferred interpretation of the text. Therefore, in a teacher training context that introduces trainees to both methods for teaching and to the speech genres making up the instructional classroom activities, the need to monitor the use of prosodic resources becomes as important as the control of other linguistic resources.

The current presentation will attempt to describe some general tendencies regarding the textual organization of instructional discourse from a Systemic Functional Linguistic perspective, particularly in terms of *periodicity* and *conjunction* and the accompanying prosodic configuration from both a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL, henceforth) and a Discourse Intonation (DI) stances, based on the corpus analysed in Cantarutti (2013, forthcoming). It will later introduce a number of practical tasks and "tips" to help teacher trainees monitor their performance of intonation in their employment of instructional discourse, which could also be applicable to other groups of students who need to develop presentation skills.

Instructional Discourse: Organisation and Structure

From a Systemic Functional Linguistic perspective (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004 and others), a genre can be defined as "staged, goal-oriented social process" (Martin and Rose, 2007:8), and an analysis of instructional discourse instantiated in the shape of lectures, presentations or the systematization stage in the classroom should focus precisely on the social activities, role relations and structural elements making up this type of text. If the contextual variables of *field, tenor* and *mode* (respectively) are analysed, the following generalisations can be made regarding this genre:

- Instructional discourse is the preferred way for knowledge to be distributed in the scientific community and educational contexts;

- Instructional discourse in its manifestations, and based on each unique context, reveals varying degrees of monologicity and interactivity between the assymetrical roles of the participants –one clearly in a state of conversational and topical dominance -, of apparent objectivity and expression of subjectivity. Audiences may be well known or pre-constructed.

- Instructional discourse generally conjures up the lexical density and grammatical complexity of written discourse and its means of cohesion, together with the limitations of on-line planning features of speech (Biber, 2009)

The organisation of instructional discourse generally employs a set of resources related to what is known as *periodicity,* with the structure of the text made up of "information pulses" (Martin and Rose 2007:17) acting as "waves" of anticipation, which lead the audience from the known, the shared or assumed information to "set the scene towards the relevance context for processing his utterance" (House, 2006). After this presentation of background, the speaker is "smoothly" led onto the core of the message, into the consolidation of meanings, which constitutes new information.

Periodicity is generally manifested through *thematic structure*, via the presentation of a set of elements placed towards the beginning of the clause, as a "point of departure" that present the topic or participants (unmarked topical themes), the circumstances, settings or conditions (marked topical themes), emphatic structures of shared information (thematic equatives), stance (interpersonal) or cohesive markers (textual). These thematic elements frame the message by limiting, anticipating or restricting the upcoming

message, thus inviting the audience to process the following information in the light of this starting point.

Another element which contributes to the perception of cohesion is connected to *conjunction,* the set of resources used to sequence and relate ideas in *clause complexes*. In particular, there are two basic types of logico-semantic relations set up between clauses: *expansion* and *projection.* Relationships of expansion include:

- *Elaboration*: one clause restating, clarifying, commenting on, exemplifying another
- *Extension*: one clause presenting negative or positive addition to another clause, or presenting replacement or alternatives.
- *Enhancement*: one clause introducing the time, place, condition, result or reason in connection to another.

Relationships of *projection of locution or ideas* include the presence of a verb or noun related to a mental or verbal process and another "voice" being introduced through direct or indirect speech or at times, or prepositional phrases introducing the content of ideas or speech.

Even though these are not the only meaning-making devices or cohesion resources in an instructional text, these thematic and logico-semantic sequences appear to be suitably accompanied by prosodic choices which both support these structures and add further meanings, as the works by Brazil et al (1980, 1982, 1997), Halliday and Greaves (2008), among others, discuss.

Prosodic Configuration of Instructional Discourse

Based on the descriptions of intonation developed by Brazil (1980, 1982, 1997) and Halliday and Greaves (2008), the analysis of prosody and *periodicity and conjunction* was applied on a small corpus of mini-lectures (Cantarutti, 2013) and online grammar lesson tutorials (Cantarutti, forthcoming). An exploration of the systems of tonality, tone and key termination as employed by the presenters of these scrutinized texts revealed a number of tendencies which in most cases confirms the findings of both SFL and DI[1].

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[1] Readers of this paper are invited to explore the References section to become acquainted with the systems described in the works by David Brazil and Halliday and Greaves, since due to space constraints they cannot be reviewed fully in this presentation.

The preliminary results have unveiled the following tendencies for lectures and grammatical systematization tutorials:

Prosody and Periodicity

1. Tonality -the system by which speech is segmented into units- appears to be an organizing principle for thematic organization, particularly in the separation of unmarked, marked and textual themes from their rhemes. The audience is thus guided into the apprehension of different units of information in manageable bits as the given-new structure is demarcated by chunking.

2. The referring fall-rise tone (Brazil et al, 1980) is overwhelmingly used in marked and unmarked topical themes, precisely those "points of departure" which introduce topics or settings, elements which can be treated as either shared, assumed or implied information, and which act as "loops" in the development of discourse, simply establishing background information from which to anticipate the upcoming message. Most rhemes, on the other hand, appear as true "increments" and holders of new information which "drive the discourse forward" (Brazil 1997) through the presence of the proclaiming fall. So whereas fall-rises anticipate, falls consolidate knowledge.

3. Textual themes acting as "frames" or "boundary markers" (Brazil 1982) tend to express separation and divergence from the previous intonational phrases, either by starting new paratones or inviting the listener to reinterpret the upcoming information as somehow boosting or cancelling out previous points.

4. Interpersonal themes reveal different choices of tone, depending on the levels of convergence or divergence chosen by the presenters. The levels of variability in tone choice depends on the stance speakers present with their audience and text, with either more frequent authoritative (falling tones) or collaborative (rising tones) selections.

Prosody and Conjunction

5. Most relationships of elaboration show clear uses of low equative and restrictive key (Brazil 1980, 1982, 1997), except in those cases where speakers assessed the content of their appositives or parentheticals as contrastive or unexpected by an audience constructed as "lay" in connection to the topic being developed.

6. Not all cases of elaboration reveal tone concord (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004), though. This was most widely used in cases where both clauses were replaceable by one another, mostly noun-phrase appositions.

7. Most relationships of enhancement reveal some degree of limitation, reservation or implication, which is why the use of the fall-rise was preferred on the condition, temporal or reason clauses over the clauses presenting results and conditioned elements, which were treated as "increments".

8. Relationships of projection generally present a separation in terms of tonality between the mental or verbal process and the second "voice" presented, with the verb/noun generally obliquely produced with the level tone.

**Teaching the Prosodic Configuration of Instructional Discourse**

Given the fact that many of the descriptions by both SFL and DI in terms of tonality, tone and key appear to be clearly applied in instructional discourse, the next question would be: how can we ensure that teacher trainees apply these onto their speech more naturally?

When making presentations, trainees are asked to monitor their lexis, their grammar and their phonology. However, of these, it is generally intonation which presents a greater amount of transfer from Spanish, with rise-falls and high level-rises being frequently used when rises and fall-rises in English are expected (Cantarutti, forthcoming). Making the most of the online processing that speech requires, students can be asked to plan their speech initially in terms of simple sequences of "loops" and "increments", that is, attempting to produce thematic background elements requiring fall-rises or rises, and rhemes with falls. A few practical activities for both perception and production may include:

1) <u>Identifying "loops" and "increments"</u>. Students listen to extracts from lectures or YouTube tutorials and identify the patterns employed by the speakers in terms of "loops" and "increments", with or without the script.

   a. E.g. *Today, in this lesson, we are going to discuss tonality.*
   Students may be later be given sequences to be filled in with their own phrases and clauses:
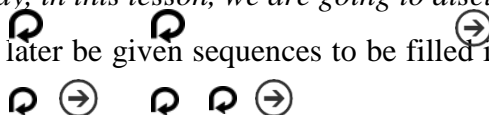
2) <u>Introducing topics and settings:</u> Students are provided with a context, e.g.: *you are starting your lesson and you would like to tell your students about the class plan.* As one student improvises this presentation, other students are given cards with thematic elements that need to be included by the speaker as he/she goes along: *today's lesson …. This topic…..Later on….Once we have completed this task.…* This activity again

reinforces the idea of elements that may provide an "excursion into common ground" (Brazil 1997:115), and thus, which need to be produced with referring tones.

3) <u>Deconstructing everyday tasks:</u> Students are given an everyday activity to describe, step by step, as for a "how-to" tutorial. Situations to be explained may include "how to hail a taxi", "how to brush your teeth", without revealing to the audience the activity outlined. Each step should start with a textual or interpersonal theme either creating a convergent "flow" (rise or fall-rise) or a divergent "frame" (fall), depending on the organization of the sequence and the assessments intended.

These activities train students in the recurrence of the fall-rise/rise + fall pattern which is typical of the sequential organization of an instructional text whenever the speaker intends to present anticipatory or background elements first, and consolidatory and new elements later in the rheme. They are quite useful particularly in the initial stages of awareness, and in a way they ensure that each clause in the development of the text being produced is set out with maximal monitoring of intonation patterns.

Control over tone and key in logico-semantic sequences is a bit more complex, as meanings are less generalizable and normally anchored in each specific context. However, there are three abilities that may be exploited through tasks like these:

4) <u>Prosody and Elaboration:</u> students are asked to describe an everyday activity as in #3 but with an "alien audience" in mind which requires that they try to define, clarify or exemplify every referent the audience may not be familiar with (e.g., *to do this, you need a brush, which is an object that….*). The appositions, asides and parentheticals presented should have clear "step downs" and an appropriate tone, watching out for the application of tone concord whenever needed.

5) <u>Introducing other voices:</u> Students are given a sheet with bulleted points on a topic and a quote and are asked to make a 1-minute presentation of the topic referring to the bulleted points and the quote and making use of oblique orientation when suitable. The audience needs to spot and comment on the uses of oblique orientation employed by the speaker.

6) <u>Prosody and Enhancement:</u> A variant on task #2. Students describe their class plan by using cards with conditions, temporal clauses or clauses of purpose or result, which need to be employed and completed with a second clause (e.g. *if you do all your homework…*). As these items are included in their speech, students need to

decide on the most likely tone to use: are these items to be seen as "background", "limiting" (fall-rise / rise) or perhaps "foreground" processes?

Conclusion

A natural acquisition of intonation is not an easy task for learners who are not immersed in the foreign culture on a daily basis. The teaching of intonation is a huge challenge for the teacher and it may turn out to be "fuzzy" for learners, as it is so intricately related to situated meanings and contexts. Therefore, an approach that privileges the teaching of the prosodic configuration of genres may aid learners in making the right intonational choices in more restricted contexts where the communicative aim is clear, and the textual function of language, essential, as is the case with instructional discourse. This also becomes significant for trainees if the genres being taught are directly related to the teaching practice. Moreover, providing students with a linguistic framework which focuses on meaning and the organization of the text such as that which SFL provides can aid trainees in becoming more aware of the type of constructions they are using in their speech, how the sequences of information are built, and how the audience can smoothly be led from one idea to the next through intonation and lexico-grammatical choices operating together. Making students aware of the "loop" nature of most thematic elements and the "reaching an increment" objective of most communicative exchanges, allows them to start with a clear pattern in mind, with an idea of mindfulness and control from the first uttered intonational phrase, and can thus, contribute to their reduction of transfer from L1 in terms of intonation. In spite of the unpredictable nature in the use of language and intonation choice in real life, the presentation of certain regularities can help students to find something to cling on amongst all the possible uncertainty and the limitations of on-line speech planning and delivery.

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