

REVIEW

LUCY PICKERING, *Discourse intonation: A discourse-pragmatic approach to teaching the pronunciation of English*. Michigan, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2018. Pp. v + 149. ISBN: 978-0-472-03018-7
doi:[10.1017/S0025100320000018](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025100320000018)

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There existed a gap in the universe of ESL/ELT for a book like this to be published. No excuse is needed for revisiting Brazil's framework (Brazil 1985, 1997) on discourse intonation (DI) by means of a book which is designed to enlighten practitioners working in pre-service and in-service training (INSET). Lucy Pickering's book is suitable not only for ESL/EFL teachers but also for beginning researchers in Applied Linguistics. The book succeeds well in placing the Brazil legacy within the much-changed cultural context of the new varieties of English spoken by millions of speakers and their international use.

As outlined in the Introduction of the book, the first chapter offers a history of the different approaches to intonation, including DI, which it relates to pedagogical practice. Chapters 2–7 aim at making teachers and learners aware of the distinct components of Brazil's English intonation framework: the anatomy of the TONE UNIT, PROMINENCE, TONE and pitch level selections and DOMINANCE. One major reason why the book is innovative is the incorporation of the issue of communication and the treatment of intonation between native and non-native users of World Englishes and International English in Chapters 7 and 8. Each of Chapters 3–9 also contains a valuable section on pedagogical implications. Chapter 9 presents the teaching and learning of the discourse-pragmatic approach to intonation, while Chapter 10 draws concluding remarks on topics of further interest.

Continuing with the organization of the book, it should be pointed out that it contains a 'check your learning' section at the end of Chapters 1–10. The questions are mechanical and similar to the so-called display questions for teachers to check their students' understanding and comprehension of a topic recently introduced. Conceivably, these elicitations might be regarded as somewhat inconsequential, given the level of the readership, since they are unlike the more challenging type of question that commonly triggers reflective activities calling for a constellation of differing replies. The book provides a glossary but the overlap between these two – the 'check your learning' section and the glossary – seems to render the provision of the latter redundant, leaving the reader without an optimum tool for the management of updated terminology. However, the 'activities' at the end of Chapters 1–9 are fundamental to sensitize the students' proprioception, arouse their phonological consciousness and make them manage non-judgemental behaviour in cross-cultural situations. In order to show how all the information in the book can be employed with groups of high intermediate/advanced students, the author adds two appendices. Appendix A is a project designed by Colleen Meyers, in which intelligible non-native speakers of New Englishes become pronunciation models. Appendix B is a task devised by Catherine and Mark DeGaytan, in which the model speaker to imitate speaks General American. Regarding the audio, most tone units are accompanied by very clear male and female speakers of multiple varieties of English on MP3 online files. Finally, an extensive list of references is offered, this being particularly beneficial for the non-native lecturer or a teacher who may not have access to a sizeable physical library.

Now, I will review the introduction and chapters of the book in more detail. In the 'Introduction', the author expounds that intonation is an essential subsystem of language that needs to be dealt with, although some teachers may not feel confident enough for dealing with it. Pickering caters for broad and narrow definitions of intonation and draws attention to its pragmatic relevance and variation in global Englishes. On page 4, she presents Figure I.1, a simple but useful tool for practitioners to see where intonation is placed within 'the Sound System of English'. The author goes beyond Brazil's framework and includes other teachable and learnable concepts such as PAUSE and RHYTHM, not directly tackled by Brazil, although she has omitted these terms in the glossary. Pickering also presents a Chart of Transcription Symbols, with a conventional tonetic-stress mark representation of intonation that Brazil himself used as a pedagogic device in his textbook *Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English* Brazil (1994a, b). Regarding the writer's point of view, Pickering appears to be self-referential. She sometimes takes a stance of superiority, in discussing the status of the varieties of English, which could be because she enjoys the 'historical privilege' of those whose English is within the bounds of what Kachru (1985) calls the Inner Circle. Pickering is placing herself within the very same group of the select few she is describing. For example, on page 6, she writes 'most of us are less familiar with the systematic differences that occur in Indian English or African English'.

In Chapter 1, Pickering incorporates the word 'system' within the title ('The intonation system of English'), an asset for the reader to comprehend more fully the nature of intonation. The chapter serves the purpose of foregrounding that the form and communicative functions of intonation are 'not universal across languages or even dialects of the same language' (p. 9). As mentioned earlier, the author also summarizes the British and North American Schools of English Intonation in the last hundred years. With reference to Generativism, she points out that 'there was no way to incorporate the attitudinal function into transformations' (p. 13). On page 15, Pickering presents the 'Glide-up', traditionally called a Low Rise. Due to the fact that she has embarked on empirical research on intonation, as can be observed from the collection of articles she has written, she has used an interlinear notation of the tone unit where the prenuclear pattern remains flat in the middle of the staff before the rise – a Mid Rise. This is a contribution in which she has changed the visual representation of the 'Glide-up', as the result of identifying some modifications of the English intonation patterns in the last years.

In Chapter 2, Pickering re-examines some of the functions of intonation. She postulates that attitudinal and grammatical descriptions lack a satisfactory answer to the communicative function of intonation. She scrutinizes Brazil's four relevant subsystems of intonation: (i) the units of speech called TONE UNITS, (ii) PROMINENCE, (iii) TONE SELECTION, and (iv) pitch level choice known as KEY and TERMINATION, further enlarged in the following chapters. On page 24, Pickering describes the TONIC SYLLABLE as 'the syllable in the word that the hearer recognizes as the easiest to hear in terms of length, loudness and pitch'. The generalization is useful, predominantly for teachers and students, albeit not always accurate. Cruttenden (1997: 43–44) holds that speakers may differ in their appreciations. He explains that, in British English, if there is a step-up followed by down-stepping accents plus a low fall, some listeners may think that the first step-up is more salient than the movement down, while others may point out that the fall is more prominent. I would add that a high onset syllable frequently confuses students, especially those taking down dictation with tonetic marks, since they equate the high pitch of the onset syllable with the pitch movement of the nucleus. On pages 26 and 27, the author embarks on a fruitful explanation on the function of high, mid and low key and termination across utterances in a typical classroom exchange. Another advantage is registered in her example of a teacher showing dominance by the use of low termination to close a pitch sequence. This conceptualization expands the discourse framework because it is not explained in Brazil's book in association with pitch level. On page 32, Pickering presents an activity with some sound files taken from a North American English Corpus for the reader to start navigating the site and develop a vigilant eye in small

research activities. With reference to STRESS, on page 32, Pickering states that ‘lexical stress is difficult to predict in Traditional Englishes’. She then sets an exercise for the learner to spot differences of stress in a piece starting: ‘The farm was used to produce produce . . .’. Here, the writer seems to be referring to Cruttenden’s (*ibid.*) distinctive function of stress in nouns and verbs. Nevertheless, as David Rosewarne observed (personal communication 2019), such distinctions are disappearing from Modern English usage in the UK, possibly as the result of contact with other dialects and languages.

Chapter 3 tackles the role of PAUSE and the speaker’s competent separation of speech into tone units. On page 39, Pickering explains that Brazil determined to rely on ‘pitch cues’ rather than on pause to divide speech into tone groups and informs that ‘pause length and frequency vary with discourse genre’. The author also discusses ONSET and TONIC SYLLABLES. These need to be made prominent because ‘of the pragmatic intentions of the speaker’ (p. 35); on the same page, Pickering adds that this information cannot be retrieved from the context of interaction. On page 41, she provides an explanation on and a picture of the ‘suspension Bridge Contour’. She also emphasizes the significance of assigning appropriate rhythmic stress and of using weak forms in Traditional Englishes, which, I think, is particularly relevant for speakers of non-Germanic languages, whose objective is to acquire knowledge and skill in the said Traditional Englishes.

Chapter 4 covers a number of key notions such as the pragmatic meanings of TONE SELECTION, new and shared information, the contrast between PROCLAIMING and REFERRING TONES, the mitigating nature of the LEVEL TONE, TONE preference in the classroom, TONAL COMPOSITION (i.e. tones preferred in a discourse genre), and types of elicitations uttered on different contours. With reference to the explanatory graphic sequence of the pragmatic meanings of tones, in Table 4.1 (p. 47), it is convenient to clarify that it is Tench (1986: 88) who states that you may show your role of authority by means of a fall. He believes that this signals the control of an exchange, unlike Brazil, who claims that a speaker exerts dominance with two tones: the rise–fall and the rise – a topic taken up more widely in Chapter 6, where Pickering – rightly, in my opinion – adheres to the latter standpoint.

Chapter 5 contains valuable explanations in the field of KEY and TERMINATION, their internal and external significance, and the functions of PITCH CONCORD and CONCORD-BREAKING. It is as well to state that the author reappraises a matter not entirely fostered in activity books by Brazil himself (e.g. Brazil 1994a) and other authors such as Bradford (1988). The author gets ahead in presenting termination and key in turn-taking, and question types not only from a theoretical but also a practical viewpoint. She indicates that research in the classroom shows that a native speaker’s pitch level is higher than that of a non-native user of the language. I believe pitch level is a very sensitive area in need of addressing in text-books, as these concepts normally take some time and effort to be grasped, taught and learnt in the lecture room. A controversial point is the use of different terminology, supposedly for the sake of accessibility, as taken as one of the main objectives of the book, making the task of learning intonation confusing and off-putting. For instance, instead of Brazil’s PITCH SEQUENCE, Pickering mentions PITCH-DEFINED PARAGRAPHS (p. 62). Then, in connection with low pitch level, Pickering mentions a sociocultural phenomenon: young women’s VOCAL FRY in the U.S., not yet fully established in the 1970s and 1980s, when Brazil designed his theory.

In Chapter 6, Pickering highlights the use of tone in asymmetrical social roles. As to the direct manner of reading aloud and interacting, she endorses Brazil, i.e. the speakers are interested in their interlocutors, and commonly signal CONVERGENCE by means of rises. Yet, Pickering’s research demonstrates that International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in the U.S., whose first language (L1) is not English, sometimes fail to use mitigating rises to create togetherness in the correction process, the result being that the falls used seem to generate an undesirable state of separateness between teachers and students. As the label DIVERGENCE can be seemingly controversial and misinterpreted, Pickering’s significant omission of it warrants an explanation. My feeling is that bringing back this notion to the linguistic arena would lend itself to new descriptions of divergent linguistic use.

In Chapter 7, Pickering analyses the intonation of interlinguistic conversations between language users of Traditional Englishes and the New Englishes spoken in former British colonies in Africa and Asia. She upholds that ‘differences upon varieties are far more substantive, particularly with regard to intonation’ (p. 82). She goes on to report the preference for level tones and falls by Malaysian and Singaporean speakers of English – what Brazil would call ‘oblique orientation’ towards the use of the language itself, whereas speakers of the Inner Circle favour a direct speaking style with rising and falling tones. On page 86, Pickering explicates that high pitch, volume and length on onset and tonic syllables are central for the identification of information structure and division into tone groups in Indian English. She also mentions that a jump-down in the pitch of the prominences and ‘irregular volume’ has been observed, whereas speakers of Traditional Englishes would be expected to raise their volume and use a Bridge pattern. Pickering’s summary (pp. 92, 93) of the intonation patterns of Singapore, Malaysia and Filipino Englishes indicates that both the overuse of proclaiming tones and multiple prominences in short tone units may lead to misinterpretation of the communicative function. She informs that some sociolinguistic studies have been conducted into reactions to a variety of accents. She then explains that the process of accommodation helps in achieving communication, but that this is not always the case: ‘the higher the stakes are in a given interaction, the less forgiving speakers-hearers are likely to be’ (p. 93). This puts a strain on the listener – probably belonging to the Inner Circle – in attempting to decode unexpected intonation patterns. On page 94, Pickering speaks as though one of the important factors of learning English by non-native learners is to express their own identity. She is assuming that language is not being used for instrumental purposes. Finally, the author takes a healthy stance in avoidance of a prescriptivist view, i.e. a democratic one, where learners choose their own level of proficiency.

Chapter 8 is relevant to an international context with great interest in the core syllabus of the expanding International English (IE). Pickering provides her context of English as a *lingua franca*; on page 98, she quotes Breiteneder et al. (2006: 163): ‘ELF is defined as communication between fairly fluent interlocutors from different L1 backgrounds, for whom English is the most convenient language’ and who may have never talked to native speakers, she adds. While this conceptualization initially seems fuzzy, Pickering clarifies it and it is corroborated when we listen to the audio files and see the visual representation of a speaker of IE. She maintains that some prosodic features may not be confluent with native speaker choice. While Pickering does not avoid giving an account of the communicative value of contours and pitch levels, on page 105, she acknowledges her data are provisional.

In Chapter 9, Pickering backs up her work with a wealth of empirical evidence proving the significant advance for students in learning intonation. Pre-service teachers claim to have gained in self-assurance after taking pedagogy courses of intonation. In contrast, she still finds a breach between scientific research and classroom practice, which calls for a change in the application of the discourse model. She recommends the implementation of certain tasks to foster fluency in reading aloud and speaking, while working on tone group division, prominence, tone selection and pitch level choice, as put forward in the earlier chapters of the book. Then, advice on how to carry out the activities in the appendices is offered.

Chapter 10 summarizes some central tenets behind the model, a significant one being that intonation is characterized as PROBABILISTIC, i.e. it is far from being deterministic as traditional structural and attitudinal analyses sometimes seem to purport. Intonation has a free-standing nature; interlocutors constantly make assumptions about the state of convergence between them and find themselves in fleeting, never-to-be-repeated contexts. Another decisive view that she emphasizes is that even though the form and function of intonation may vary across distinct global Englishes, we should remember that speakers highly value accommodation strategies in discourse. Pickering holds that the interpersonal function of prosody is seldom treated in the classroom. Consequently, students fail to manipulate this aspect of intonation effectively outside the classroom.

Where the MP3 files accompanying the book are concerned, it is unclear whether the intonation notation for some of the recordings matches the signal. I will only mention two of these. In my opinion, the pragmatically accented words toDAY (SF 2.3) and BLUE (SF 4.5) are instances of fall-rise. I acknowledge that – complete agreement between linguists can be a challenge when undertaking intonation notation.

To conclude, Brazil's followers, Hewings and Cauldwell, stated the following in the foreword to his book:

Healthy theories should evolve in the light of what is learned in applying them to real data, and Discourse Intonation is no exception. Although David Brazil was very keen to preserve and promote the essentials of the description, evolution is reflected in his books and papers. (Brazil 1997: vii)

Pickering has duly achieved the said goal. Many teachers and beginning researchers of Applied Linguistics will find *Discourse Intonation: A Discourse-pragmatic Approach to Teaching the Pronunciation of English* a beneficial book.

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