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A Matter of Prosody, or Why Prosody Matters

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Summary

This essay takes as its starting point a fact which no-one disputes: that the prosodic characteristics of **nihongo** are radically different from those of **eigo**, and, in certain crucial respects, a good deal less complex. It follows that Japanese learners experience great difficulty in accustoming themselves to the alien rhythms, stress habits and intonation contours of English; from this, it follows that students need to be consciously aware that these prosodic differences do indeed pose problems and that the problems must be faced: a failure to do so can result in serious breakdowns in communication. Since few Japanese high school teachers are competent to teach the prosodic features of English, and almost none of them tries, native-speaking teachers of English have a duty to make up for this deficiency, and are, of course, best-placed to do so. This essay offers first a brief account of the rhythm of Japanese, a syllable-timed language, against which to set a more extended description of the rhythm of English, a stress-timed language; it then seeks to demonstrate how the rhythmic beat of English under-pins phonological stress, and is thus related to the semantic function of stress as a marker of information. Since stress and intonation work in partnership, issues of intonation are, from the beginning, inevitably woven into the discursive fabric, until, finally, the essay deals more specifically with the various functions which intonation fulfills as the over-arching prosodic melody, the tune of speech: to highlight contrasts, to express emotion, to mark cohesion and coherence, to reveal a speaker's affiliations, education and class.

Key Words: Rhythm, Stress, Intonation

Introduction

Not long after I arrived in Japan, I attended a concert given by a local choir. A member of the choir, an English teacher at a Sapporo High School, observed a foreign face or two amongst the audience and made an announcement in English: "Tonight, we shall be singing a programme of French SONGS and German SONGS; I am sorry that we shall not be singing any English SONGS."

Had I been a native speaker of French or German, I might have considered his apology uncalled for, but as English is indeed my mother tongue, I appreciated his thoughtfulness; even so, and naturally enough, I was puzzled. His grammar was faultless, his pronunciation unambiguous, but since I knew when I bought my ticket that the business of choirs is to sing songs, I wondered, if only for a moment, why he had stressed the word 'songs': what was this meant to tell us?

As I was a teacher of English as a foreign language, however, I asked myself a couple of other questions which were perhaps more pertinent. Since most Japanese sentences end on an up-beat, was he simply unable to produce Shakespeare's "golden cadence of poesy", Orsino's "dying fall", which is a feature of spoken English as well as verse? Or had he learned — as Halliday has taught us — that, in English, new information is usually focused in a 'tone-group' at or near the end of a phrase or sentence, but had failed to appreciate that, in English, stress signals what is new and important regardless of where the new information may come, while pitch change is used to mark a wide range of subtle effects, including contrast.

Should the answer to either of these questions have been 'Yes', the

reasons would have been entirely understandable. However much native speakers themselves may seek to re-make their modes of speech — as Eliza Dolittle and Margaret Thatcher re-made theirs — the vocal habits which resist change most stubbornly are those characteristic modulations of tone which we absorb when rocked in our mother's arms — or bounced on our father's knee — and of which, unless we happen to be linguists, we remain largely unconscious.

It is correspondingly less easy for non-native speakers to employ the huge variety of English “tones of voice”, since the non-native speaker, if Japanese, seems rarely able to hear them; and however cunningly we may illustrate the intonation contours — as David Crystal, in the new *Cambridge Encyclopedia*, uses tadpoles which swoop and fall to indicate nine different ways of saying ‘Yes’¹ — non-native speakers do not possess at the tip of their tongues, nor at their fingers' ends, those ingrained, and to some extent immutable, habits of intonation which would enable them to rehearse, or play over, with any accuracy, or conviction, Crystal's witty descriptions.

Not even Japanese speakers of English employed by NHK to provide the English voice-over in bi-lingual news broadcasts, people who are presumably well-trained and experienced, show any signs that they possess such awareness and expertise — or they used not to. They would say such things as “Tomorrow it will rain in Western JAPAN, but it will be fine in Eastern JAPAN”. I do not know if they still do: I gave up pressing the bi-lingual button long ago.

Yet were I to supply a tape to illustrate this paper, you might not, if you are a Japanese reader, be able to ‘catch’ and, in turn, ‘mimic’ the intonational contours of my performance. Tapes are always second-best. Ideally, there has to be a living voice, a deuteromother, to act as a model — which is how I see my role in the classroom: to be such a

mother, from whom my students may learn, as we read together the texts my mother taught me, something of the intonational habits of the English language — or at least my idiolectal variety of it.

I shall have more to say about the idiolect later on, and all I can do for the time being is to suggest that what the man at the concert should have said is “Tonight we shall be singing a programme of FRENCH songs and GERman songs; I am very sorry that we shall not be singing any ENGLISH songs”. The voice-over should have said “Tomorrow it will rain in WESTern Japan, but it will be fine in EASTern Japan”.

The stressed steps in these progressions are also intonational steps-up: those words, or parts of words, which convey the new information will receive exponentially greater stress, and, since the stressed terms are also in contrast with each other, they will be given an increasingly extended and heightened pitch movement — or that would be so in my own performance of these sentences. The final syllables rise slightly and then fall away, upon a cadence.

There was another thing: the choir not only sang European songs, they wore sixteenth-century costumes and performed a number of Renaissance dances. What struck me was how lumpishly they moved, how lacking they were in what the Renaissance called ‘air’, that balletic uplift which Friar Lawrence speaks of when he says of Juliet “O, so light a foot Will ne’er wear out the everlasting flint!” Had the Sapporo choir been wearing **geta** and **kimono**, their movements would, I am sure, have seemed entirely proper, and it is most likely that I would have thought them elegant.

For some years, a Toyota commercial on television sought to persuade us that a Toyota car was “FUN-TO-DRIVE!” This phrase was spoken as if it were Japanese: each word was delivered at identical pitch, with equal stress, and was of equal duration. Native speakers of

English, on the other hand, might say “FUN to *DRIVE*”. The ‘to’ would be unstressed, coming “off the beat”, and it would also, for the same reason, be shorter than the words on either side of it. There would be lots of pitch movement, both rising and falling, on both ‘fun’ and ‘drive’. Some speakers might prefer “*FUN* to DRIVE”.

Whichever stress pattern and pitch movement native speakers were to select — without, of course, thinking about it — their choice would indicate their attitude both towards driving cars and towards what they think is fun. Since this is a very personal thing, no two native speakers are likely to produce identical versions, nor is it even likely that the same speaker on different occasions will do so — even actors are rarely able to reproduce their lines exactly — which makes it all the harder for the non-native speaker to appreciate what is going on in the first place, or to imitate it in the second.

None of this, however, absolves native-speaking teachers from the duty of attempting to do everything possible to explain these habits of language, and to help their students to adopt them. My examples of the constraints imposed by the intonation of the Japanese language suggest that if our students on trips to English-speaking countries have trouble when applying stress — or when neglecting to apply intonation — they may fail to communicate, however good their grammar and diction might otherwise be. My experience at the concert also convinced me that during my training to be a teacher of my own language, I had been right to place as much importance as I had done — and was by then doing in the classroom — on prosody.

1 Prosody

The term ‘prosody’ comes from the Greek word **prosoidia**, which referred, when the music of a song was written down, to the markings

which indicated the tone — that is to say, the musical pitch — of the syllables. Such a transcription would have served as a musical score.

Although rhetoricians have, for hundreds of years, used the term 'prosody' to describe the metrical forms of verse and the pronunciation of words in a poem or song, linguists have recently taken over the term and now use it in a sense which is perhaps closer to the original Greek: the rise and fall, the intonation curve or contour, of a speaker's voice.

Nevertheless, the traditional use rhetoricians made of the term implies that they must have believed that intonation and stress work hand in hand with rhythm and metre. Since I, too, believe that this is indeed the case, it follows that I also believe that we need to attend to the issue of rhythm first, since rhythm is the ground base upon which prosodic features rest, a kind of *cantus firmus* or *basso ostinato* (the ground bass) above which the prosodic features play their various tunes.

In other words, I wish to say that we shall not understand, nor consequently be able to describe, the manner in which intonation works and what its functions are until we have appreciated that intonation acts in counterpoint with linguistic stress, while stress, in its turn, has an interdependent relationship with the rhythmic beat. Intonation plays along with stress, and stress rests upon rhythm.

2 The Prosodic Character of Japanese

Dr. Ro Ogura² is a distinguished composer and musicologist whose account of the Japanese language bears most helpfully upon what I have to say about the prosody of the English language.

My own slender knowledge of Japanese is derived from daily contact rather than from study or scholarly analysis, but Dr. Ogura's account goes a long way to explain the errors of stress and intonation which my students commit both in the classroom and, rather more

noticeably, in the countless speech competitions that, over the last seventeen years, I have been asked to judge.

I have learned from Dr. Ogura that the Japanese language is vowel-dominated rather than consonant-controlled, and that each vowel is separated from its neighbour by a short frame of silence: ma: 間. This means, in practice, that the movement of Japanese speech is, like the movement of Japanese traffic, stop-go — the analogy is Dr. Ogura's. Each syllable is an individual beat or pulse, and syllable-timed languages lack the flow of a stress-timed language — such as English.

Dr. Ogura relates this linguistic phenomenon to the traditional life-style of pre-Meiji Japan, which was not the **bushido** culture that so many people assume it to have been, but a farming culture: it was *agricultural*; what is more, it was a farming culture which differed significantly from the farming cultures of the west. Whereas western farmers often bred domestic animals and moved freely across the steppes, the Japanese farmer cultivated rice and his feet were fixed firmly in the paddy fields. The cereals and root crops grown in Europe require rather different techniques of cultivation, and, as a consequence, the European farmer has developed quite different habits of work — and quite different ways of walking.

While the Chinese place their weight on the heel, Westerners roll on the ball of the foot as it rocks from heel to toe; the Japanese, however, put pressure on the toe. When you wear **geta**, it is necessary to keep the sole flat, so as not to break contact with the shoe; you cannot move backwards or sideways without losing your shoe: the only movement is forwards, and, like Japanese speech, the movement is stop-go. Dr. Ogura argues that these two movements — of body and of language — are inter-related and inter-dependent: the kinetics of the body have

set the pace for the kinetics of the voice.

This entails that how we farm dictates how we shoe ourselves, which will affect not only how we walk, but also how, in consequence, we dance. Furthermore, the rhythms of our dance influence the rhythms of our speech, and vice versa. The dances of the **kabuki** drama offer, says Dr. Ogura, a traditional and illustrative model: the dancer leads with the hip, one short step at a time, each step followed by a pause, the hand held up, the palm open, in a frozen gesture: the essence of the dance is to be found in that momentary pause. When you teach children to dance, the clap does not come on the step, as it would do in western dancing, but on the stop.

Whereas western dancing is dynamic, air-borne, Japanese dancing celebrates the posed pause. I have studied with some care the movement of the **bon-odori** dances, which is a shuffling two-step, chaste and earth-bound; and when, years ago, I saw a **kabuki** performance of **sumida-gawa** (*Curlew River*), I could hardly believe my eyes: the actor 'danced' for fifteen minutes but never once moved his feet. Western movement is flow, but Japanese movement is flow arrested.

The difference is not only aesthetic: when the **Meiji** Emperor wished to train farmers to march and drill in the manner of Western soldiers, he hired foreign instructors, so Dr. Ogura says, to teach them how to dance in a Western mode.

To compete successfully in the Olympic Games, the Japanese athlete needs to run like a Westerner and lift his knees, unless, of course, he happens to be Hiromi Taniguchi, who manages — goodness knows how — to run a very fast marathon without lifting his knees at all, although he does make the business look desperately uncomfortable. Tetsuya Kumakawa, on the other hand, a **dosanko** from Sapporo³, is now a principal dancer with the Royal Ballet and is justly

famous for the splendour of his elevations.

3 On Rhythm (and Metre)

Curt Sachs⁴ tells us that a Latin grammarian of the 4th century AD, Charisius, explained the difference between rhythm and metre thus: “Rhythmus est metrum fluens, metrum rhythmus clausus”: “rhythm is metre flowing, metre is rhythm in bonds”. A somewhat freer translation might run: “rhythm is metre loosened up; metre is rhythm regulated”.

Metrical verse is ‘measured’ verse and the basic rhythmic unit of a line of verse was called, and is still called, ‘a foot’. This is hardly surprising, since our speaking motions are physiologically linked to all our other bodily motions, especially to the rhythm of the walk. This was Dr. Ogura’s point, a point which I consider to be self-evidently true. At its simplest, metre is like the regular tread, trot or run of a person walking, trotting or running: left, right, left, right, although, for the Greeks, I understand, one foot was a double step, both left and right. Sometimes, the movement seems to mimic the canter or gallop of other creatures, such as the horse.

4 On Quantity

Late Renaissance rhetoricians used the Latin term ‘**quantitas**’ (Gk: **pototes**) to distinguish the alternating long and short syllables of the rhythmic foot in the verse of both Greece and Rome. In the late eighteenth century, the term ‘quantitative’ was used to signify vowel length.

The Greeks themselves employed a number of different metrical feet, and since the sixteenth century, English verse has made conscious use of four of them, particularly the iamb (short/long: *be-'fore*), since

this seems to suit the rhythm of much English speech, as various prosodists from time to time have argued⁵. Poets like Tennyson or Hardy occasionally played with other metrical feet: the trochee (long/short: 'af-ter), the anapaest (short/short/long: *long a-'go*), and the dactyl (long/short/short: 'lat-ter-ly).

As my examples are meant to suggest, English words regularly exhibit rhythmical structures that might be described in the old terms, although the examples would only count as metrical feet, of course, if they were combined in a line of verse alongside other feet with the same rhythm. We might also notice the rhythmic patterns of the cretic (long/short/long: 'af-ter-'wards, 'yes-ter-'day), and the amphibrach (short/long/short; to-'mor-row, al-'rea-dy), patterns which fit easily, when suitably partnered, into an iambic line.

Although this glance at classical prosody may seem a digression, it is relevant to my present purposes, since it has frequently been said that because the classical languages were quantitative languages while English is a stress-timed language, it is not appropriate for English prosodists to use the classical terminology. I believe, however, that if one pronounces the words which I have cited, the syllables which take the accent are indeed appreciably longer than those which are not accented, and this is something that we need to keep in mind when we are talking about stress and the stressed syllable.

Although, in the following example, there are three minims to each musical bar, I challenge any native speaker to sing the words and notes as written: it would sound too much like a Japanese song. I sing these lines with one beat to the bar, and the syllable which falls on the beat — that is, the first note in the bar — is not only more strongly stressed, it is also significantly longer than those which follow it, whatever the note-values may lead us to suppose.

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The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff contains the lyrics: "I've been a wild rover for man-y's the year And I've". Above the staff are chord symbols: F, C7, F, and Bb. The second staff contains the lyrics: "spent all my mon - ey on whis-ky and beer ; But". Above the staff are chord symbols: F, C7, and F. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some rests.

This is one of the many traditional songs which I sing with my classes, as means to help my students experience and imitate the rhythms and stresses of English. It also, incidentally, helps them to understand the importance of pitch since the musical tune of many traditional folk songs regularly follows, or approximates to, the tune of the spoken words. Of course, this requires vocal demonstration, and, for the moment, you will have to take my word for it.

It has also been argued that whereas the English language marks the beat with accent and stress, the ancient Greeks relied for rhythmic effect upon quantity rather than stress — since they never mentioned it. Even so, it seems unlikely that the ancient Greeks relied on quantity alone when so many of their prosodic terms come originally from dancing and foot movements. Curt Sachs (op. cit.) is convinced that the '**thesis**', or downward movement of the foot, what the Romans were later to call the '**ictus**', must have involved stress, since the leader of the chorus (a term which originally referred to a dancing group) wore a strange wooden contraption tied to his right foot, with a castanet inside, which, when stamped, made a sharp percussive sound; the silent lift of the foot was known as the '**arsis**'.

Yet, as Dr. Ogura has told us, in Japanese dancing the clap comes on the pause between the beats; and so it may conceivably have done for the Greeks. Since '**arsis**' means 'up', it was also taken, by late

Roman prosodists, to mean the rising of the voice pitch, on the beat, the 'ictus', while 'thesis' has been taken to mean the dropping of the pitch, off the beat. Whatever may or may not have been the exact features of Greek or Roman practice — about which I am in no way qualified to speak — the immediate relevance of these matters for my theme is that, clearly, the kinetic association of work activity, foot movement, dancing, word stress, word accent and pitch change has always been a feature of European musical and poetic practice, as it is of African prosodic practice, and as — so it would seem from Dr. Ogura's account — it is of Japanese prosody as well: we articulate with our whole, nerve-strung bodies, not just with our vocal chords.

5 The Rhythmic Beat

Since the rhythmic units of prose do not always match in metrical terms the rhythmic groupings or either side of them, it is not appropriate to use the term 'foot' when we are describing English prose — or, indeed, much of the verse written in English since the days of Walt Whitman. Nonetheless, we can use the term 'the beat' to describe the steady, relatively regular pulse which appears to underlie spoken language — and Whitmanesque verse. I am arguing — a proposition which most linguists accept — that spoken languages aspire to, even if they do not always settle into, a rhythmic pulse, a regular beat; and as different pieces of music move to a variety of underlying rhythmic patterns and pulses, so the rhythms of different languages will also vary.

Although each language will have its individual rhythmic pulse or pattern, which will move at varying tempi depending on the speaker's moment by moment needs, languages are, as a general rule, held to be either syllable-timed or stress-timed. As Dr. Ogura reminds us, the

Japanese language, like the French language, is syllable-timed⁶: that is to say, the rhythmic beat falls on every syllable: all syllables have more or less equal weight as well as equal duration.

The English language, on the other hand, is stress-timed: that is to say, not all syllables in an utterance fall on the more or less regular beat, and those which do fall are stressed, sometimes strongly, sometimes only very slightly. The term 'stress' refers, in my account, to the extra strength or muscular pressure (rather than extra volume) which is given by the speaker to the syllables which coincide with the rhythmic pulse or beat — in contrast to the relative weakness of the syllables, irregular in number, which fall between the pulse beats and are not stressed. All syllables on the beat are stressed, but only those which carry the burden of the message are stressed strongly.

We can easily demonstrate the difference between the beat of **nihongo** and that of **eigo** by adapting the regular rhythm of our spoken words to the rhythm of our walking, our feet falling in time with the vocal stress. Should we be wearing **geta** and should our lower legs be wrapped tightly in a **kimono**, we can only shuffle, or scuttle, like Hiromi Taniguchi. "**Watakushi wa igirisu-jin desu**" has thirteen beats (the 'n' of '**-jin**' counts as a syllable), thirteen tiny foot movements; "I am an Englishman" strides — there are seven syllables, but only two beats — on 'I' and 'Eng-' — and we lift our knees as we stretch our legs.

This sense of pressure, of a regular pulse, must not be confused with word accent, which prosodists such as Dwight Bolinger also term 'stress'. One syllable in a polysyllabic word will, when spoken, receive more weight than others, and David Abercrombie⁷, whom I follow here as elsewhere, calls this marked syllable the 'accent'; some polysyllabic words have a secondary as well as a primary accent. The accent,

Abercrombie insists, is part of the information about the word contained in the lexicon and has nothing, in itself, to do with the extra pressure that we may choose to apply to the accented segment when we stress it — for meaning and significance — in a sequence of words.

Accents are stressed, of course, because accents coincide with the beat, but it is handier to keep the terms apart — especially as the word ‘stress’ has already come to have two distinct, if related, references: strong physical stress on significant words has come, by metonymy, to stand for semantic emphasis, and the term ‘stress’ is consequently applied to those segments of the message which are given the most semantic as well as the most phonological weight: that is probably quite enough meaning for the word to bear.

It is easy to confuse the terms ‘stress’ and ‘accent’, of course, since native speakers of English intuitively adjust their utterances to ensure that the accent in the words which carry the weight of a message naturally fall “*on* the beat”, to be stressed accordingly; this physical stress highlights the most important parts of the message. Unaccented syllables or words, which do not carry the weight or burden of the meaning, are unstressed and come “*off* the beat”.

This is just as true of a Gilbert and Sullivan patter song, where each rapidly-sung syllable appears — at first sight or on first hearing — to have its own beat. Yet though many bars of Ko-Ko’s song from *The Mikado*, say, might seem to consist of a series of eight equally important semi-quavers, as if Ko-Ko really were Japanese, the time signature is two minims to each bar: this is the underlying pulse. Sentences start before the bar line and the fifth note of each bar is often longer than others since it is the focused term — ‘list’, ‘missed’. And although every syllable must be precisely articulated, the first and fifth notes of each bar are given extra weight. We should notice the

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italicised 'him': in performance, the extra pitch pressure it receives, although off the beat, highlights the pitch change, even if here it is downwards, and draws our attention to the contrastive nature of the stress: a *syncopated* stress.

v. Ko-Ko. 3rd verse.

There's the *Ni-si Pri-us* nuisance, who just now is ra-ther rife, The Ju - di - cial hu-mor-ist—

I've got *him* on the list! All fun-ny fel-lows, com-ic men, and clowns of pri-vate life—

They'd none of 'em be miss'd— they'd none of 'em be miss'd!

All this, of course, creates problems for someone learning English whose mother-tongue is indeed syllable-timed. Such a learner is quite unable, more often than not, to hear the syllables which come “off the beat”, and since, for instance, the articles in English fall “off the beat” — except for those cases where they are in deliberate contrast with each other and are thus significantly stressed — Japanese listeners rarely ever hear them: as a result, they are at a loss to know when or how to use them.

Another problematic feature of these differences in rhythm and stress and their relation to body movements is that when we speak **eigo** we use certain muscles which are not used when we speak **nihongo**. When, for instance, my class sings “What shall we do with the drunken sailor” — a sea-shanty which sailors sang to accompany the hauling

up of the anchor — I ask the students to use their stomach muscles to produce the ‘up’ in the phrase “up she rises”.

They appear to find this very hard to do. I therefore take the word ‘heave’, used by the leader in a tug-of-war, and compare it with ‘hiki’ in ‘tsu-na-hiki’ (the Japanese name for ‘tug-of-war’), which has much the same meaning as ‘heave’: ‘hiki’ is two short beats and is sounded lightly in the larynx, but ‘heave’, from deep in the diaphragm, is a long, steady pull. One of my students believes that because the Japanese language inhibits its speakers from, among other things, digging down into themselves to produce words like ‘heave’, say, or ‘up’, they are unable to find that extra effort which is needed to win Olympic gold medals.

When I introduce my listening course, I tell the story of the three little pigs and the wolf. When the wolf is refused entry into the houses which the little pigs have built for themselves, he says, “Very well, if you will not let me in, I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down!” I demonstrate that the strongly stressed ‘huff’ and ‘puff’ should mimic the actions they describe, which can only be done by a strong, and conscious, muscular effort of the diaphragm.

As a consequence of the multiple difficulties which Japanese students face when listening to and trying to produce English, it is vital that they should be given regular choral practice in English rhythmic patterns and should learn to become sensitive to the rhythmic beat: it is a prerequisite, a *sine qua non*, to any training that they may go on to receive in stress and intonation.

6 Isochronicity

I am assuming, of course, that all utterance, not simply metrical performance, is basically isochronous — from Greek, ‘iso’, equal,

'**chronos**', time. Not everyone accepts this claim, or not wholeheartedly, but I once again follow David Abercrombie in supposing that there is a strong tendency for speakers to adjust their words to a regular pulse beat. Certainly, when speech flows without hesitation — as in the speech of a practised, articulate orator or an actor performing a familiar text — we can easily discern a regular pulse, while it is impossible to read aloud *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, for instance, without immediately falling into a regular, steady rhythm. There will, of course, be variations of tempo, which will depend on the moment by moment rhetorical needs of the tale and the speaker's sense of these needs — the tempo may speed up or slow down — but over long stretches the tempo will be constant, and this makes it easy for students to perform the text chorally, which is what, in my classes, we do.

Certain researchers, for instance Brazil et al⁸, argue that in everyday speech, with its pauses and hesitations, isochronicity is lost; and this is probably so; yet with the taped material that I was required to use last year⁹ — which, though conversational, had obviously been rehearsed — I was able to give to the recorded dialogues a regular beat, and was thus able to conduct my students, who were consequently able to place the stresses on the words that were being stressed, something which they otherwise seemed quite unable to do.

7 A Model

My rhythmic model is a simplified version of the one devised by Corinne Adams¹⁰, a model which, although exemplary, is, I have found, too elaborate for use in the classroom. The model is based upon the musical staff (or stave) and on the custom of dividing printed music into bars, where each bar line indicates that the note which comes *before* the bar is *off* the beat, while the note placed *after* the bar is *on* the beat:

that is to say, the syllable which comes on the beat will be stressed.

Although musical bars may contain a varying number of beats, as well as notes, this speech model assumes that there will be one beat — although a varying number of syllables — to each ‘bar’ of speech. I place an upright line — | — before each rhythmic beat, and use an inverted, raised caret — ˘ — to signify a silent beat. That is all.

“ | Once upon a | time, there were | four little | rabbits, ˘ and their
| names were | Flopsy, | Mopsy, | Cottontail, and | Peter. ˘ They
| lived with their | mother in a | sand-bank, ˘ under- | neath the | root
of a | very big | fir-tree.”

This is how I read the lines, and it is how I coach my students to read them, and even if another native-speaker were to dispute my reading, she would still intuitively look for, and give to her reading, a regular beat. Each of the words on the beat receives a stress, some stresses only slight, while, in my reading, ‘four’ has a slightly stronger stress than ‘rab-’, though ‘rabbits’ will have more pitch movement and will rise to a higher pitch. As for hyphenated words, the term before the hyphen takes the stress: thus, ‘sand-’ and ‘fir-’ come on the beat, and, in this sentence, they have both the strongest stresses and the widest range of pitch movement; the pitch contour may fall or rise on ‘-bank’, depending on whether the reader wishes to signal that the sentence is not yet over (a rise), or that the phrase is complete (a fall); the pitch will rise slightly and then slip downwards on ‘-tree’. I shall look again, for different purposes, at the opening words of this story.

In 1969, Ronald Blythe published his remarkable book *Akenfield*¹¹, which is the name he gave to a fictional Suffolk village, inhabited by living people whose words Blythe recorded and transcribed, but whose

names he changed for publication. His characters talk with exceptional, almost suspicious, fluency; one of them is an old lady whom Blythe calls Emily Leggett.

Again, of course, the beat here signifies my performance; another reader might discover a different overall rhythm: but find one I am sure he would. If this really is what Emily Leggett said — rather than Blythe's edited version of what she said (which some critics have supposed) — it would certainly support Abercrombie against Brazil et al. This is the opening paragraph of the text.

“~I have been | wed and | widowed | twice. ~My | first | husband was | head | horseman at | Round Wood | Farm ~and | when we | married his | wages were | thirteen | shillings a | week. ~He | used to | give me | twelve | shillings and | keep a | bob for his | pocket. ~We were | children to- | gether, ~then | lovers, ~then I | married him. ~He | lived in the | next door | double- | dweller. ~We were | both nine- | teen when we | wed. ~A | beautiful | boy he | was. ~It seems a | long time | now since I | saw him. ~He had | six | horses to look | after and he | used to get | up at | five o'clock every | morning to | bait them.”

All the sentences begin off the beat, and those with several syllables before the first beat hurry towards the first stressed syllable, which thus takes significant semantic stress: “~I have been | wed...”; “~It seems a | long...” Some syllables — ‘first’, ‘head’ and ‘six’ — occupy a whole beat, whereas in other places the beat may be filled up with three or four syllables. Some sentences end off the beat and with a cadence — ‘| married him’, ‘| saw him’ — which native speakers of Japanese always find very difficult to manage: they always want to

stress 'him', since it is the final syllable.

The words which fall on the beat are the words which carry the burden of the meaning, and these are the words which Mrs Leggett naturally stresses: 'child-ren', 'lov-ers', 'ma-rried', 'beau-ti-ful', 'boy'. The words 'first', 'head', and 'six' are all lengthened and all occupy a whole 'bar', since they are, respectively, in contrast with an unspoken, but understood, 'second', 'groom/stable lad', 'three, four, five, seven'. Within particular bars, words which come on the beat are longer than words which come off the beat: in "It seems a | long time | now since I | saw him," 'long' will be much longer than 'time', while 'now' will be much longer than 'since I...'. Of course, I can demonstrate these features much more easily in the classroom than on paper

What also needs to be demonstrated, however, is that the rhythmic flexibility of the English tongue affects many more aspects and functions of language use than may, at first, be apparent. Although prepositions, for instance, like deictic and demonstrative terms, come on the beat, modals and aspect markers, like articles and unaccented syllables, often fall off the beat and consequently remain unstressed — unless they are in marked contrast with terms that have not been selected.

This means that the rhythmic and stress characteristics of English compound the difficulty which the aspectual forms of the verb and the modal auxiliaries, as problematic grammatical features, already present: my students, for example, always stress modals and aspect markers when they come across them. I do not blame them: since they are unable to catch all such unstressed words or word segments in speech, it is perfectly understandable that they rarely have the confidence to use them, either in speech or in writing, and if they *do* use them, so regularly get them wrong. They therefore have to be taught,

since a sense of these prosodic habits does not come naturally.

At the end of a listening course, I have often used the Emily Leggett passage, and subsequent paragraphs, as a test: I hand out the text, read it aloud, and ask the students to mark the beat. The inattentive students, or those who have missed vital lessons, put the bar lines everywhere but in the right places, before articles and pronouns and all the other elements which I have told them almost never come on the beat; the diligent regular attenders, who have become much better listeners, invariably turn in performances that are virtually flawless.

Such an experience has convinced me — even though it may not persuade you — that if students genuinely wish to be able to hear and comprehend English when it is spoken — and thus acquire the confidence to speak it — and if they are prepared to persevere, the choral, rhythmic reading of poems, dialogues and prose texts is an invaluable way of improving their performance, since sensitivity to the rhythm will mean, automatically, a sensitivity to, and a better understanding of, the nature and function of stress.

8 On Stress

The narrator on the tape of the listening material which I was required to use last year had nothing to say about rhythm, and only one thing to say about stress, an advertised feature of the course: that stressed syllables are ‘louder’ than other syllables, which is all that Crystal (op. cit.) says, too.

Quite apart from the inadequacy of this, it is as unhelpful as it is misleading to isolate volume as the significant, indeed only, criterion for producing stress, since such an emphasis directs the learner’s attention away from features which — in my experience as a per-

former — are altogether more significant: that, on the rhythmic beat, a speaker applies extra muscular pressure, often lengthens the vowels and frequently changes the pitch. Pressure and extra volume may, of course, coincide, but they are not the same, and ought not to be confused.

I wish to argue that phonological stress is distinguished by four features: and this seems to be true not only of my own speech, but also of the speech of the Californians on the tape which we were condemned to listen to last year. A stressed syllable comes *on the rhythmic beat*, and, in comparison with the syllables around it, it will be *stronger* (and may sometimes be louder), *longer* (usually), and *higher* (often) — especially when it is either the topic or focus of an utterance. Just how much stronger, longer or higher (or lower in some Scottish dialects and in Ko-Ko's patter song) the stressed syllable is will indicate the degree and type of semantic stress which the individual speaker wishes to give to that particular segment.

It may at this point be proper to add — although I am sure that it must be obvious — that my beliefs do not depend upon laboratory experiments which measure, say, degrees of stress or levels of volume, nor upon texts taken from recorded dialogues of everyday speech, and only partly does it rely upon the research of others, although the work of David Abercrombie and Corinne Adams, the first in person, the second on paper, was, when I needed it, absolutely vital, and gave me confidence to trust in my own intuitions. My current beliefs are basically the fruits of seventeen years of classroom experience here in Japan, and forty years overall experience as a performer of verse and other literary texts: that is to say, my beliefs are reasoned opinions, derived from attentive introspection of my own practice as a performer.

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Let us therefore consider the first two verses of A. E. Housman's *On Wenlock Edge*. If the first line were to be scanned in the traditional manner, the metrical units, or feet, would be marked in the style used to signify an iambic pattern of alternating unstressed, u, and stressed, —, syllables; there is an extra weak syllable at the end of the first and third lines of all five verses; in my performance, the unstressed, weak syllables are much shorter than the strong, or stressed, syllables.

u — u — u — u — u

On Wen- /lock Edge /the wood's /in trou-ble;

Most of the lines of the poem follow this particular metrical pattern, but there are certain metrical anomalies, and traditional scansion might have difficulty in accounting for the third line of the second stanza. I will now score the first two stanzas according to my rhythmic model:

˘On | Wenlock | Edge the | wood's in | trouble;

˘His | forest | fleece the | Wrekin | heaves;

˘The | gale it | plies the | saplings | double,

˘And | thick on | Severn | snow the | leaves.

˘'Twould | blow like | this through | holt and | hanger

˘When | Uri- | con the | city | stood:

˘'Tis the | old | wind in the | old | anger,

˘But | then it | threshed an- | other | wood.

This rhythmic notation — as opposed to the metrical scansion —

indicates that all the lines start weakly, “off the beat”, which gives strong pressure to the first stressed element; it also demonstrates that ‘heaves’, ‘leaves’, ‘stood’ and ‘wood’ are likely, in an oral performance, to be lengthened in order to fill up what, if this were music, we should call a bar.

The third line of the second verse, however, is anomalous. Unless one were to stress ‘the’ — which would be a quite unnatural thing to do — this line can only be performed according to the manner in which I have marked it. The repeated ‘old’ extends for the whole musical ‘bar’ — it is a sustained beat — while ‘wind’ will take up much of its own bar to balance ‘old’; ‘in the’ will take hardly any time to perform; ‘anger’ is trochaic: ‘an-’ will again be much longer than ‘-ger’, to balance the second ‘old’.

The natural spoken rhythm — rather than the poetic metre — forces us to recognise the significance of ‘old’, which, in this context, means ‘the same’. This will entail that we must give strong stress and a marked rising-falling contrastive pitch movement to ‘another’, which in the context means ‘not the same’, although how much pitch movement we decide to give it will depend on individual performers: I myself give it a great deal. In terms of how the poem continues and concludes, this is the vital semantic contrast upon which the poem depends. Although the terms “the same” and “not the same” are never used, it is to this contrast that the poem desires to draw our attention.

9 Halliday’s Model of The Information Structure

Although Michael Halliday’s model¹² of the information structure of an English sentence may, of necessity, be an idealisation, it is not only exceptionally useful, it is also elegant and exemplary: a well-written, or well-spoken, sentence will usually attempt to adapt itself to

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the style of Halliday's model. The model posits that in English the topic of the sentence or paragraph, the theme, is placed at or near the front, while the information focus, which contains the new information, the rheme, is located at the end of the sentence, or paragraph. This is the model which I recommend to my students and to those whose learned papers in English I am asked to edit — a very necessary model to emulate, since a Japanese sentence seems to follow an almost directly contrary course.

In an English sentence, both the topic and the focus are likely to be stressed, and both are also likely to be marked by some intonational movement, while the focus of new information is likely to receive both stronger stress and greater pitch movement than the opening, introductory topic.

Not all possible English sentences conform to the Hallidayan model, of course, but most of my examples appear to, even “This is the house that Jack built”, for although this children's rhyme piles up its new information at the front of each verse paragraph, each piece of new information is still jointed into a topic+focus structure before it heads back into the old information, while the information structure of each new element is also, in my performance at any rate, treated to certain intonational constants which, I trust, the students will find instructive. The verses build up, one sentence, or step, at a time:

| This is the | house that | Jack | built.

| This is the | malt that | lay
in the | house that | Jack | built.

By the time we reach the fifth step we have got as far as this:

| This is | dog that | worried the | cat
that | killed the | rat
that | ate the | malt
that | lay in the | house that | Jack | built.

Each new topic, “house/malt/rat/cow/maid”, etc., will take a strong stress on its first appearance, while the stronger focus-stress will fall on the verbs, “that *lay* (in the house)”, “that *ate* (the malt)”: that is, the verbs — on their initial appearance but not thereafter — will receive the strongest stress, and, in my reading, the highest pitch. I have put brackets around what has become here a second reference, since second references consist of old information and are not normally stressed.

In the first line of the fifth verse, the dietic ‘this’ points us towards the topic, ‘dog’, while ‘worried’ is the focus of the new information; ‘this’ takes a stress; ‘dog’ receive a stronger stress and a lifted pitch, ‘worried’ will receive the strongest stress and highest pitch. Each new sentence will be treated in the same way: ‘this’, topic, focus — climbing a stairway of stress and pitch.

When we reach “This is the cow with the crumpled horn that tossed the dog...”, ‘cow’ is the topic and ‘tossed’ the focal centre of the new information, the centre of what Halliday calls a ‘tone-group’, and what applied to ‘dog’ and ‘worried’ applies here, too: ‘cow’ receives strong stress and raised pitch, while ‘tossed’ receives the strongest stress and the highest pitch. Once we settle into the repetition of the old information, the voice will drop down to a rapid rattle-along, all on one breath if possible, since the information we are dealing with grows increasingly old.

May I humbly submit another nugget of anecdotal evidence? —

although you may think it vainglorious. It is one more tale from the backwoods rather than from the laboratory, but it supports my faith in the all-embracing value of rhythmic practice, and of the use of songs and rhymes in general. A former student of mine has just received his doctor's degree in formal linguistics from the University of Connecticut, and has been asked to stay on in an junior teaching post. Over lunch recently, he said, "I came to Hokudai from Kushiro with a good knowledge of reading and writing, but it was learning from you 'This is the house that Jack built' which opened the gate for me." I have known him for fifteen years, and he had never told me this before.

10 On Intonation

It may seem that I have taken a long time to reach this point, but, as I have been eager to argue, and to demonstrate, we cannot discuss the nature and purpose of intonation unless we are able to set it in its greater prosodic context, a context which is established for it in the first place by the rhythms of the language, and secondly by stress, with which it acts in counterpoint if not always in harmony.

10.1 The Functions of Intonation

Although one of the principal functions of intonation is to express the feelings of speakers towards the matter of their discourse, my analyses have already indicated that this is not the only function which intonation fulfills.

For convenience, I have taken as a rough guide the following list from David Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995) (op. cit.). According to Crystal, the functions of intonation — in addition to the *attitudinal* or *expressive* — are *grammatical*, *informational*, *textual*, *psychological* and *indexical*.

The analyses of the examples which follow are my own, however, and I have not found it easy, or at times possible, to separate out one function from another quite as simply as Crystal's list might imply that we can — although he may not have meant the list to be taken too categorically. Examples of intonation within a single utterance seem often to fulfill a medley of functions, including one or two which do not appear to be included amongst Crystal's species of the genus.

This may also be the moment to speak, as I promised, about my idiolect, or anyone else's idiolect, for this factor must constitute a caveat to anything anyone may ever say about intonation, important though it is to give one's students as much information about it — and, by that token, as much immersion in intonation's many dialectical and idiolectal varieties — as may seem reasonable.

Each adult speaker of a language will have his or her own unique "tone of voice" in both innate timbre and intonational character, and these characteristics will be compounded of factors that, apart from natural endowment, range from the songs which our mother taught us when we were infants nursed in her lap to the influence of our friends and teachers at school, in the army, or at university.

This particular aspect of intonational habit is what Crystal calls the *indexical* 'function'. Personal habits of intonation bespeak a person's class, occupation, temperament, regional background: they point, indexically, to his or her education, class and social affiliations, cultural preferences, sexual leanings, and the like: and what may sound natural and pleasant to some ears may to other ears sound like an excruciating whine or an affected bleat.

Since my vocabulary, syntax and accent (the sounds of my speech) are all, I believe, those of an educated person, my fellow countrymen sometimes find it difficult to tell where I come from, although an astute

listener may be able to place me: “Are you out of Wales?”, a woman in Whitehaven — a town on the north-west coast of England, and strongly north country in feeling — once asked me, meaning “Do you come from Wales?”: she had spotted my maternal intonation.

Had my wits been up to the mark, I might have replied, “*Just* out of Wales”. The italicised ‘Just’ would have been accompanied by a good deal of intonational movement, and would have been meant to draw the lady’s attention to an intended pun, “just *out* of”, since I was born on the *English* side of the border. I give ‘English’ in that last phrase a contrastive stress: “English not Welsh”. This region is also known as *The Welsh Marches*, where more emphasis — both of stress and intonation — will fall on ‘Marches’, to distinguish them from and contrast them with anything else — such as cakes or sheep or a language — that we might consider Welsh.

10.2.i Intonation is used to express emotions and feelings

Since the semantic content of words is good deal more fluid than we might suppose — should we rely on the lexicon for our information — meaning will often depend upon, and change according to, our tone of voice. “I understand a fury in your words, But not the words”, says Desdemona when Othello begins to rage at her, while a dog appears to listen only to our tone of voice.

*Winnie the Pooh*¹³ is an excellent source of countless examples of this feature, since A. A. Milne almost invariably adds adverbs to indicate just what “sort of voice” the speaker is using; this, in turn, tells the reader how to perform the text when reading it aloud. At the same time, all his characters have their own idiolects, based upon their own temperamental idiosyncracies: Pooh is kindly, Rabbit is bossy, Piglet is fearful, Roo is fearless, Eeyore is melancholy, and so on.

When Piglet says “Never mind, Pooh!” twice within a couple of pages, he varies his tone of voice, and thus changes the significance of what the words are meant to convey. The first time, Piglet speaks the words ‘impatiently’; the second time, he speaks them ‘comfortingly’. The word which, in terms of stress and intonation, will do most of the work is ‘mind’, but the tempo of the two utterances will also differ. When Piglet speaks impatiently, his tempo will be quick, even staccato, and there will be a strong, sharpish stress on all three beats — “ | Never | mind, | Pooh!”; there will be a marked peak on ‘mind’ and a fall on ‘Pooh’. When Piglet speaks comfortingly, the tempo will be slow, largo, almost languorous, the vowels will be drawn out, and the intonational contour will be much flatter: there will be less pitch variation or movement.

Pooh, in his turn, will interpret the sentences according to Piglet’s tone. He will understand the first to mean, in its context, something like “Oh, don’t be so silly, Pooh! Forget about it! That is not what we are talking about!” Pooh will understand the second to mean, in its context, something like “Oh, Pooh, you funny old Bear, I do love you, but there really is nothing whatever for you to be sad about!”

10.2.ii Intonation has a grammatical function

As well as marking questions and exclamations, changes in pitch can also signal boundaries between phrases and sentences, marking their completion or incompleteness, as I have already indicated when speaking of the ‘sand-bank’ where the Rabbit family lived. The rise and fall — the lead up to the cadence and the cadence itself — which mark the end of many sentences can best be illustrated by the tune which goes with the first line of “Early one morning”, a song which my mother taught me: “Early one morning just as the sun was rising”.

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The tempo of this song is slow, and the last word of the phrase, 'rising', has three notes —'ri-i-sing': the pitch rises on '-i-' and falls on '-sing', a characteristic up-and-down marker of the ends of phrases and sentences, which the Japanese student has to learn since this is something else that does not come naturally. But as the drawn-out rise and fall of the tune of 'ri-i-sing' is very easy to hear when it is sung, it is not too difficult to transfer the same intonational curve or contour to the spoken tune. The Japanese, contrary to their often stated belief that their own hearing is poor, have such very good ears: it is just that they frequently close those ears whenever they hear English spoken; when they are listening to music, they keep their ears wide open.

As for questions, high school students are, of course, taught that a sharply rising intonation signals a question: they do not always know that a question may also be accompanied by strongly falling intonation. A rising intonation indicates a genuine question: that you are ignorant of the answer and wish to be informed. A falling intonation, on the other hand, indicates that you know the answer and merely desire confirmation, as when Piglet says to Christopher Robin, "Tell Kanga who I am. She keeps saying I'm Roo. I'm not Roo, am I?"

If I leave this to my students, they give to Piglet's question the high rise of an ordinary question, with an upward swoop on 'I'. But Piglet knows very well that he is Piglet: he is not seeking to know if he is Roo; he is seeking confirmation that he is not Roo. As well as the strong stress on 'not', there will be high pitch and strong stress on 'am', and a steep fall on 'I'.

Conversely, a declarative sentence may sometimes take a questioning intonation. When this happens the questioner expects the person being questioned to reply in the affirmative: 'Yes'. When Rabbit says, "Well, Pooh, you see what you have to do?", he expects Pooh to say

'Yes!' Pooh, however, disappoints him: "'No,' said Pooh Bear, '*Not* yet. What *do* I do?'" The unexpected negative reply requires much stronger stresses than would an affirmative reply, as Milne's italics indicate, since it is necessary, in this instance, to contradict the expectation of the questioner.

In L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*¹⁴, the narrator Leo questions Lord Trimingham about one of Trimingham's dead ancestors, shot in a duel. The cause of the duel was the man's wife. "He thought she was too friendly with another man", Trimingham tells Leo. Leo tells us "I had an inspiration. 'He was jealous?'" The '-ous' will swoop up very sharply. Trimingham does not disappoint him: "Yes!" Later, speaking of the wife, Leo asks "She hadn't done anything wicked?", with another sharp rise on '-ed', and again expects the answer "Yes. She had". This time, Trimingham is more grudging: "Well, she'd been a bit unwise", he admits.

Beatrix Potter is able to put a question into a single word, which is not even a word but the noise made by a bird:

"'Quack?' said Jemima Puddleduck, with her head and her bonnet on one side, 'Quack?'"

How we interpret this is up to us, but it may be something like "What have we here?", "What are you doing?", "Who is this handsome gentleman?"

As for word or phrase boundaries, a rising intonation after a word or at the end of a phrase which is complete in itself is a signal that there is still more to come, as in

" | Once upon a | time, there were | four little | rabbits, ~and their

| names were | Flopsy, | Mopsy, | Cottontail, ~and | Peter”.

There will be rising pitch on the names of each of the three girls, “Wait for it, there are more to come”, and a falling pitch on ‘Peter’ —“There are no other family members, and I have come to the end of the sentence”. The rise in pitch indicates that the speaker wishes to continue and that we should not interrupt, as Pooh does when Rabbit is being his usual bossy, and obtuse, self:

“ | Here are | we — | you, | Pooh, and | you, | Piglet, and | Me
—~and | suddenly —’

^And | Eeyore, —~ said | Pooh.

^And | Eeyore —~ and then | suddenly —’

^And | Owl, ’ said | Pooh.

^And | Owl —~ and then | all of a | sudden —’

‘ | Oh, and | Eeyore, ’ said | Pooh, ~‘I was for- | getting | him.’

‘ | Here | are | we’, ~said | Rabbit, ~very | slowly and | carefully,
~all | of | us...”

There will be a steep upward swoop on ‘suddenly’, ‘suddenly’ and ‘sudden’, all meant to signal that Rabbit has more to say: Pooh is rudely interrupting him. At the same time, the strong stresses with rising intonation which accompany each word of “we — you, Pooh...you, Piglet ...Me” are all strongly indexical (though not in Crystal’s sense): they are vocal gestures which point to the characters mentioned, and might be accompanied by an actual physical gesture, as is often the case, too, with demonstrative pronouns: intonation can have a *deictic* function.

At the same time, the stress on the names, and on the names which

Pooh introduces, all indicate set membership, a feature which is allied to contrastive stress: one set member is being contrasted with other set members: 'him' is given an especially strong stress because everyone is always forgetting Eeyore, which is why he is the melancholy member of Christopher Robin's family. This is similar to the italicised 'him' in Ko-Ko's patter song. There is much more to say about this function, which I shall attempt to discuss in the next section.

Finally, Rabbit is reduced to stressing every word, as if Pooh were a child — or a second language learner.

As the reader will have noticed, I take my examples from literary works rather than recorded data or text books, partly because they are written by people with a genuine feeling for the English language, partly because they are more imaginative, and partly because they are a great deal more fun. A. A. Milne, for instance, was, whatever Dorothy Parker¹⁵ may have thought, a very clever man, a successful dramatist who spent many hours teaching his son Christopher Robin and listening to the child learning language. He had a very good ear, and he incorporated what he heard into the poems and stories which he then wrote to entertain, and instruct, his son, and ultimately to entertain and instruct the millions of adults as well as children, in many countries around the world, who have subsequently read his books.

The first verse of Milne's "Us Two", for instance, reveals his excellent ear, and teaches us a good deal in the process:

"Wherever I am, there's always Pooh,
There's always Pooh and Me.
Whatever I do, he wants to do.
"Where are you going, today?" says Pooh:
"Well, that's very odd 'cos I was, too.

Let's go together," says Pooh, says he,
Let's go together, says Pooh."

In the first line (which has four beats) the pitch-curve of 'am' will rise, while the pitch-curve of 'Pooh' will descend; in the second line (which has three beats), the pitch-curve of 'Pooh' will rise, while the pitch-curve of 'Me' will fall. This rising pitch at the end of the first half of the line seems to serve as a hook on which to hitch the line's second half. I demonstrate this with a gesture: I curl the index finger of my left hand upwards on 'am', and curl the index finger of my right hand downwards on 'Pooh', linking the two fingers together. I do the same thing in the second line, on 'Pooh' and 'me'. The third line offers the possibility of a fascinating extra twist:

~What | ever I | do, he | wants to | do.

The first 'do' will rise, a hook, and the second 'do' will fall, a link, and both of them, of course, come on the beat; yet 'I' and 'he', both of which are off the beat, are in marked contrast to each other. Consequently, I lift the pitch on both 'I' and 'he' to signal the contrast while keeping the rhythm steady and the beat on the 'do's. Such examples as this lead me to suppose that although high (or low) pitch normally coincides with the stress, it doesn't always do so: and since all my examples of this phenomenon have to do with contrasts it is perhaps misleading to call this function, as linguists do, 'contrastive stress': it is contrastive all right, but, in this instance, since it is not on the beat, we cannot really say that it is stressed — or, at least, my model does not permit me to say so.

In the fourth line, 'today' will, of course, have a questioning intona-

tion, but the native speaker will be able, should she wish, to imbue it with an extra flourish which will imply — to the listener who is able to pick it up — “compared with (what we did) yesterday”. I do not believe that there is any way in which we could transcribe such an intonational subtlety.

Between the fourth and fifth lines, we infer that Christopher Robin (the ‘I’) has answered Pooh’s question, for Pooh always agrees with whatever Christopher Robin does or says:

“~Well, | that’s very | odd, ’cos | I was | too.”

The deictic — or what I should like to call indexical — stamp on ‘that’s’ will be very strong: “that thing which you have just said”, while there will be a contrastive stress on ‘I’, which this time does come on the beat “You are; so am I”. There will also be a good deal of rising and falling on ‘too’, as there always is, and as there always is on similar words, such as ‘instead’, with its implication of a strong contrast. The contraction ‘cos’ comes off the beat which will make it doubly difficult to pick-up. “ | Let’s go to- | gether” in the sixth and seventh lines will not be given identical performances. In the sixth line the intonation on ‘together’ will rise: I have not finished yet. In the seventh line it will fall: I have finished. The sixth line might be given an almost questioning intonation: the seventh line will be strongly affirmative — or would be, in my performance.

As these examples suggest, it is difficult to talk about the various functions of intonation in isolation from each other: they regularly overlap, and some of my observations here, particularly those which relate to contrastive stress and set membership belong, I suppose, to the following category.

10.2.iii Intonation has an informational function

Most of my examples have already demonstrated this category, but I would like to consider a further example. It comes from a folk song, which, like many English folk songs, is a dialogue, often, as here, between a young man and a young woman.

Where are you going to, my pretty maid?

I'm going a milking, sir, she said,

Sir, she said, sir, she said.

I'm going a-milking, sir, she said.

The questions and answers continue, two beaten stresses to each question and two beaten stresses to each answer, each answer wrapped up every time in the accompanying “my pretty maid”s and “sir, she said”s. The tune has the following beat:

| May I go | with you?

~You're | kindly | welcome.

| Say, will you | marry me?

| Yes, if you | please,

| What is your | father?

~My | father's a | farmer.

The first beat of the question is the topic—the word which signals a question—and the second beat is the focus. The first beaten stress of the answer picks up the focus of the question, the request for information, as its own given or old information, offering

the answer as the new focus: all in true Hallidayan style. The tune steps up from topic to focus, and the tune of the answer is pitched a little higher than that of the question. In the next, the penultimate, verse, however, something very interesting happens:

| What is your | fortune?

˘My | face is my | fortune.

Of course, when we sing this, we must follow the tune, but should we speak the words, we shall have to reverse the stress pattern of the milkmaid's answer: 'face' will receive the stronger of the two stresses, and it will be an especially strong stress, accompanied with exaggerated lift of pitch, because it comes in an unexpected position: 'for-' will then take a much lighter stress, and '-tune' will fall away, since it is a second reference. Students — no less than their more experienced elders — find it hard to adjust to such a shifting of information focus: they wish to stress 'fortune' since this is the pattern which they have been taught and which, anyway, comes naturally to them. The final verse offers another illuminating variation:

| Then I can't | marry you.

| Nobody | asked you, | sir, she | said.

Again, when we sing this, we shall not be able to vary the pitch as we might choose to do in speech. In speech, however, although I would not fit 'can't' to the beat — that is to say, I would not stress it — I would give it very high pitch, to contrast it with the preceding stages of the dialogue: "Will you marry me?" "Yes!" "Have you any money?" "No!" "Then I *can't* marry you!"

This type of pitch change adds various layers of subtlety to the meaning that the words convey, and therefore affects the information content of the text. There is much more to be said about it than I have room for here, and, in my examples, it appears to be related to the signalling of class or set membership within the text.

As the use of intonation to indicate set membership is a particularly interesting aspect of intonation, I should like to consider one or two more examples.

Another song my mother taught me was “Oh, dear, what can the matter be?” The singer is a young woman whose boy-friend, Johnny, has not come home from the fair.

˘He | promised he'd | bring me a | bunch of blue | ribbons.

Since my students learn this song early in the course, I use it to introduce the notion of sets and set membership. The colour ‘blue’ is one of a set of colours, and if we choose not to lift the pitch of ‘blue’, we are saying that its being ‘blue’ is not especially important; but if, in speech, we follow the tune — which gives the highest note or pitch to ‘blue’ although it precedes, and comes off, the beat — we are saying “not green, red, brown, or any other member of the set of colours, but very significantly blue”: we are training the spotlight of high pitch upon ‘blue’ and high-*lighting* it.

The last line of the song tells us that Johnny had also promised that he would bring her a “a little straw hat” to “set off the blue ribbon”. Blue ribbon, yellow straw hat, brown hair, all these set each other off, as a gold ring sets off a diamond, as a theatrical set forms a background and setting for the actors. This is precisely what intonation in English appears to do: it sets off one thing against another, highlights

it, makes it stand out against its contrasting background, and so reveals its meaning and significance. It is clear that the anonymous author of “Oh, dear, what can the matter be?” understood this very well.

Chapter VII of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, from which I have taken several of my examples, tells of the coming into Christopher Robin’s family of Kanga and Roo, and of the efforts of Rabbit in particular to persuade them to leave. Kanga and Roo are **gaijin**, not members of the family, and although Pooh is supposed to be a bear of very little brain, he knows — which Rabbit does not — that what Rabbit is really talking about in the short passage that I have already quoted is the family: when Pooh introduces the names of Owl and Eeyore, who are not present, he stresses their names strongly, since they are members of the family. Throughout *Winnie-the-Pooh*, issues of set membership are extremely important, as are contrasts between the members, contrasts of all kinds, indeed, and the story uses a vast range of “tones of voice”.

10.2.iv Intonation has a textual function

When we make a speech, we employ pitch change to signal to the listener the shape and progress of our argument. The beginnings of paragraphs usually begin on a high pitch; paragraphs generally end with a steeper-than-usual cadence, or a drop of pitch; the ends of paragraphs are often followed by a pause, before we begin the next paragraph on a lifted pitch. Most competitors in Speech Contests are at first unable to do this, and they have to be coached very carefully before they can.

This type of pitch movement helps to alert the listener to the coherence of one’s discourse, indicating how it hangs together. Similarly, all those many classes of words, or punctuational choices, which are used to signal cohesion and are designed to link our discourse, are also subjected to pitch change and movement — to point to what has

gone before or to what is to come next.

As well as linking parts of a discourse together, the raising of the pitch on a particular word may signal that there is a contrast or a similar type of word or phrase to come, and this helps the listener to anticipate the development of the argument.

When, in Milne's "The King's Breakfast", the king, who is really a spoiled child, has made a fuss because he cannot have butter with his bread, he is consoled by three female voices:

The | Queen said
“ | There, there!”
and | went to the | Dairymaid.
The | Dairymaid said
“ | There, there!”
and | went to the | shed.
The | Cow said
“ | There, there!”
I | didn't really | mean it.
~Here's | milk for his | porringer
and | butter for his | bread.”

If we lift the pitch of 'Dairymaid' and lift it even higher on 'Cow', a marked step-up of pitch as if we were climbing stairs, this will tell the listener that the words which the Dairymaid and the Cow are about to speak will be *exactly the same* as the words already spoken by the Queen: pitch change helps us to *anticipate* what will come next.

My students often wish to stress 'Here's', but, in fact, the rhythmic beat tells us that the stress must fall on 'milk'. I give the word 'Here's' an intonational swoop, however, and, to illustrate this, I accompany it

with a sweep of the hand; on the word 'milk' I hold my extended hand out, offering the milk to the listener, the students. Intonation is often *gestural*.

There will, each time, be a step-down on to the second of the two 'there there's, and the effect of this is comforting, like the patting of a child on the head. The same effect may be noted in "Teddy Bear", when Teddy has fallen out a window and is raised to his feet by a passer-by, who says "Well, well! Allow me. Not at all. Tut-tut. A very nasty fall!" with a marked cadence on the final item of each phrase: the words will be delivered slowly and will signal the man's feeling: his sympathy and concern. After Teddy and his helper have stood talking for a while, the man again says "Well, well!". The words, this time, will be marked by a sharp, brisk wobble and flick up, at an overall high pitch, on both 'well's, since, in this context, his words signify, "I must now bring this conversation to an end": this is information. Such features have to be demonstrated, and can only be learned by imitation.

Henry Reed's "Naming Of Parts" offers the reader many opportunities to practice those intonational changes which mark both coherence and cohesion. The poem begins

To-day we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,
We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day,
To-day we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighbour gardens,
And to-day we have naming of parts.

There will, again, be a series of steps-up on 'to-day', 'yesterday',

'tomorrow morning', 'to-day'. The tempo of the first four sentences will be brisk, the intonational movement volatile — the speaker is a sergeant-instructor — while the last sentence of the verse — the speaker is the poet — will have a much slower tempo and a gentler, flatter, more ironic tone. As the poem is also an example of the next function, it becomes, once again, impossible to speak of these functions in isolation as if they were entirely discrete categories: the various functions work together, like figures in a Scottish Reel.

10.2.v Intonation may have a psychological function

By this, Crystal appears to mean the breaking up of our speech into manageable, and recognisable, units, and giving to them an identifiable intonational contour: this makes it easier for the listener to recall what she has been listening to. Children find it easier to remember stanzas of rhyming couplets than to recall paragraphs of prose:

Now Teddy, as was only right,
Slept in the ottoman at night,
And with him crowded in as well
More animals than I can tell;
Not only these, but books and things,
Such as a kind relation brings —
Old tales of "Once upon a time,"
And history retold in rhyme.

These lines also help us to practise the drop of intonation that accompanies a parenthesis, "as was only right", and the various intonational contours which mark the ends of lines, whether they are run-on, in which case there will be a rise of pitch followed by an

infinitesimal juncture before beginning the next line at the same pitch, or end with a comma, in which there will be a rise, or by a period, in which case there will be a fall. Throughout this poem, and in all Milne's poems, there is a wonderful variety of such intonational features.

Conclusion

Once again, the pieces which I have discussed here amount to only a small fraction of the material that I use in the classroom; and my descriptions do not cover everything which I might, ideally, have said about them. But I hope that the examples and the discussions will suggest the possibilities that are open to us if we take songs, nursery rhymes and children's stories as material for an exploration of the prosodic features of the English language. Although most children today perhaps pick up their intonational habits from television rather than from the songs and stories that their mothers may find time to teach them, it must still be through the stories, songs and word games they listen to that children absorb the subtle intonational habits of their own language. It is my belief that to expose our students to these same characteristics and habits and in such or similar works as these I have quoted from — and as if they were indeed our children — is one of the best ways that we can take to help them to understand and perhaps eventually to imitate the prosodic features of a language which, in this respect as in practically every other, is so confusingly different from their own.

Notes

- 1 David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, C. U.P., 1995, pp248-249.
- 2 In August, 1981, Dr. Ogura addressed the Vth International Symposium of the Kodály Society, at the KyoikuBunka Kaikan, Sapporo, and I, by blessed good fortune, was in the audience. I report Dr. Ogura's views in my book *Down to Earth*, The Shinozaki Shorin Press, 1983.
I wrote my first prosodic analyses at least three decades ago, when teaching at Shrewsbury School, and I first described the present model in *The Northern Review*, No.9, 1981: "A Revised English Prosody". The present piece is, in part, a re-working of that earlier piece, and incorporates what I think I have learned in the meanwhile, since we go on finding new examples all the time.
- 3 A **dosanko** is a "child of Hokkaido", someone born in Hokkaido: it comes from a term meaning "Hokkaido Horse". Hokkaido horses are not noted for their elegance, but for the qualities of courage and strength: Tetsuya Kumakawa, however, seems to possess all three.
- 4 I take this quotation from *Rhythm and Tempo*, by Curt Sachs, W.W. Norton and Company, 1953, a book which I first read sometime in the sixties, and by which I was greatly influenced. It is from Curt Sachs that I take my information about thesis and arsis.
- 5 For example, John Thompson, *The Founding of English Metre* (2nd edition, New York, 1988); I read the first edition, again sometime in the sixties. The most comprehensive book on this topic is probably Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London and New York, 1982).
- 6 Whereas French is indeed a syllable-timed language, Japanese is actually classified as a 'mora-timed' language, a 'mora' being a syllable that consists of a short vowel followed by a consonant, or syllables with either a long vowel or two consonants, but the issue is too technical to be gone into here, and for the purposes of this essay, 'syllable-timed' will do, although the term is not quite accurate.
- 7 The late David Abercrombie was Professor of Linguistics at Edinburgh in the sixties and seventies. See his *Studies in Phonetics and Linguistics*,

- O.U.P., 1965. His father, the poet Lascelles Abercrombie, wrote *Principles of English Prosody*, Martin Secker, 1923.
- 8 D. Brazil, M. Coulthard and C. Johns, *Discourse Intonation and Language Teaching*, Longman, 1980.
- 9 *Interactions II*, McGraw-Hill, 1990, a work for which, it will be obvious, I did not greatly care.
- 10 Corinne Adams, *English Speech Rhythm and the Foreign Learner*, Mouton, 1979, a work for which I care very much, and to which I am greatly indebted: it provides the research and evidence that has enabled me to justify my own perceptions and approach.
- 11 Ronald Blythe, *Akenfield*, The Penguin Press, 1969. It is, in every respect, a most significant book.
- 12 I am rather assuming that everyone knows the work of Michael Halliday: for instance, *Language as Social Semiotic*, Arnold, 1979, or, with R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, Longman, 1976, or "Language Structure and Language Function", in John Lyons (ed.), *New Horizons in Linguistics*, Penguin Books, 1970.
- 13 In the mid-twenties of this century, A.A. Milne wrote two books of verse and two books of stories for his son, Christopher Robin, who died earlier this year (1996). These books have remained popular throughout the world, although they made life very difficult for Christopher Robin. They are important language teaching resources since they are essentially about a child learning language.
- 14 L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, Hamish Hamilton, 1953, Penguin Books, 1958. This novel also contains some splendid dialogues: I regularly used passages from it in my "Language through Literature" class at Bunkakabu, Hokudai.
- 15 Dorothy Parker wrote a famous (or infamous) review of A.A. Milne's Christopher Robin books, in which she accuses him of using infantile language: her review ends, if my memory serves me, with the words, "At this point, dear reader, I thwoed up". This is grossly unfair: Milne certainly showed his characters making all the mistakes which child language learners habitually make — and in this he paves the way for those who today study "child acquisition of language" — but they never

speaking baby-talk.

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