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English Intonation from a Dutch Point of View

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The declared aim of this book is to provide an empirically based description of the differences in intonation patterns between Dutch and English, and to take the first step in providing an intonation course for Dutch learners of English.

There are eight chapters in all, characterizable according to content in four sections: a general introduction, a look at the theoretical bases of intonation descriptions, the presentation of experimental data on the production and perception of intonation by Dutch and English speakers, and a discussion of the implications of these empirical observations. An extensive appendix is added containing data too bulky or unnecessarily distracting to be included in the text. In the next part of the review I shall discuss these sections in more detail and then go on to evaluate the book's contribution to didactically oriented contrastive research.

Chapter 1 argues the importance of intonation for the communication process and thus for the language learner, specifying this general standpoint with reference to some of the various functions generally attributed to intonation (continuity, boundary marking, accentuation, attitudinal meaning). The last part of the chapter is devoted to a description and justification of the experimental approach adopted.

The 2nd chapter provides a brief survey of descriptive approaches in intonation studies, based on the usual British versus American dichotomy, with the 'Dutch school' establishing an independent third branch.

Chapters 3–6, which are the core of the work, present the reader with four sets of experiments marking the way towards the goal mentioned in the introduction. *Willems* proceeds systematically from an exploratory look at production and perception of pitch patterns by Dutch and English speakers and listeners (chapter 3) to a large-scale acceptability test employing two different groups of English na-

tive speakers as subjects (chapter 4), to a more comprehensive production experiment (chapter 5), and an analytic evaluation of the perceptual importance of individual deviating patterns (chapter 6). In chapter 6 *Willems* also reports on an attempt to evaluate the timing aspects of pitch movements independent of lexical structure by using spectrally rotated speech, but finds the method unsatisfactory. In a supplementary perception test designed to elicit further intonational deviations in Dutch-English speech he only finds confirmation for the deviations already found, and evidence for the relative unimportance of tonal movements on unaccented syllables.

Having established a hierarchy of deviations the author goes on to consider the theoretical and didactic implications of his findings in the final section of the book. Chapter 7 reports on an experimental finding of great importance for the practical application, namely that Dutch-English utterances with stylized native English patterns superimposed on accented syllables are almost equivalent in their overall acceptability to the native English utterances themselves. Chapter 8 takes up a whole range of questions which can be loosely termed 'implications'; they include a final discussion of results and methodology, a general apologia for the limited findings (repeated in a postscript, p. 171), suggestions for further research, a general delineation of a possible intonation course, its application and testing, speculation on the theoretical import of results in relation to recent descriptive models in intonation, and ten 'precepts' on English intonation patterns which are offered as a help 'to preclude some very common deviations' (p. 165).

My overall assessment of the study is that we have been offered the fruits of a very sound piece of empirical research, in keeping with the values that have long been established in Dutch phonetic work. The methodological discussion is particularly thorough, providing sound evidence for the use of stylized pitch contours and for the scaling methods employed in the perception tests. That the results can be reduced to a small number of important deviations, a fact which *Willems* repeats more than once with a strong apologetic undertone, should rather be seen in a positive light. The admitted limitations

as regards style and variety of the corpus do not detract from the findings. However, one general problem of intonation research, which *Willems* discusses at several points in the course of the book, *does* undermine the applicability of his findings in everyday language learning. It is the question of *where* in an utterance to place *which kind* of tonal accent. In other words, the didactic aim of *Willems*' envisaged course still requires of the learner formal tasks which are necessarily divorced from the communicative goal of speaking. This sad fact contrasts strongly with the statements in the introduction, which stress the central importance of the communicative role of intonation. It must be stressed, however, that this is not a weakness of *Willems*' study but of the Dutch school in general, and in fact of nearly all modern approaches to intonation, which have admittedly introduced an objective base into the complicated 'communicative' picture created by members of the British school, but in doing so have lost the 'meaning' lifeline which prevents sound studies from drifting between formalism and substantialism.

A second point of criticism is the author's tendency to cram too much of the intonation 'world' into the theoretical discussions. This is the case in chapters 2 and 8. The motive behind chapter 2 is no doubt a positive one; the author places his own approach firmly in an overall theoretical framework. For the reader who is familiar with the 'world', the whirlwind tour adds little but demonstrates *Willems*' orientation; the theoretically less informed reader, to whom a book with this declared aim is surely also directed, may be left a little breathless. In particular,

the inclusion of 'declination' and a discussion of the physiological factors behind pitch change in the section on the Dutch school could be confusing. Chapter 8's sortie into questions of general intonation theory is less easy to understand, given the specifically didactic orientation of the study. It has the effect of adding to the already variegated impression gained from the final chapter; the reader may feel that the stringent logic behind the development of the empirically oriented questions from chapters 2–7 has been abandoned.

One or two exceptions to the otherwise admirable presentation of data can be found in chapter 3. The experiments there are, admittedly, described as exploratory, but it would be better if the 'normalization' of the data mentioned on p. 52 were made specific. Also, the relationship between the stylized F_0 curves and the words of the utterances in appendix A is unclear. Likewise, in the results of the first perception experiment, the statements about the identification results for test items (and about the combined results for tones) do not appear to tally with the figures (pp. 62–63), thus making the figures totally opaque. These are, it must be stressed, the exceptions to an otherwise clearly constructed, presented and eminently readable piece of work. Minor slip-ups in the use of English, primarily in the sequence of tenses after 'if', in no way detract from this judgement. *Willems*' book is to be strongly recommended both to those interested in the results and to those looking for a viable methodology in contrastive intonation studies.

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