

REVIEW

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# A review of Wendy L. Bowcher and Bradley A. Smith (eds.), *Systemic Phonology: Recent Studies in English*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2014. vii + 451 pp. £85.00 (hbk), £30.00 (pbk)

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*Systemic Phonology: Recent Studies in English* is an extremely timely addition to the literature of systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Despite the importance of phonology to any general description of language, the editors note that this is the first collection focusing on phonology within a SFL framework in the last twenty years. As the title indicates, the collection focuses on the phonological and intonational aspects of the English language within SFL. The introduction by the editors presents a useful orientation to systemic phonology and its place within the general field of phonology, as well as a clear introduction to the purpose and scope of each of the chapters. The volume is divided in five sections and offers an interesting range of studies in systemic phonology.

The first section, “Intonation: Construing the Textual Metafunction,” includes four chapters focusing on the role of intonation in the creation of text in context. In Chapter 1, Gerard O’Grady examines the relationship between prosodic prominence and information structure. He illustrates with examples the ambiguity of prosodic prominence in signaling New information, and provides a reconceptualization of what is meant by Given and New. Two different uses of the term New are identified: New1 and New2. New1 is used to mark items which are non-recoverable from the previous context, while New2 is associated with items given prominence for being of particular interest in the discourse. Since the majority of prominences fall on lexical items, O’Grady investigates the relationship between lexical items and tonic and pre-tonic prominence in three texts: two speeches by the former UK prime minister, Tony Blair, and a monologue from Halliday’s book, *A Course in Spoken English: Intonation* (1970). The results show that speakers may give prominence to lexical items and project them as New2, regardless of whether the particular items are previously mentioned. By offering a useful categorization of New information to explain prosodic prominence choices, this study greatly enriches our understanding of the semogenic power of intonation in signaling information structure and realizing speakers’ communicative goals.

The next chapter, by Annabelle Lukin, explores the relationship between the contextual parameter of mode and the textual metafunction, by analyzing a TV news report concerning the invasion of Iraq. More specifically, it examines how the intonational

systems of INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION and INFORMATION FOCUS interact with other textual systems to express the values in mode. Lukin undertakes the methodological challenge of organizing “the interpretation of the findings from analysis of various systems” (p. 55), and explores how choices from these systems can be shown to be working together. Her analysis suggests that there is a certain looseness in the texture of the news report, and that intonation plays a central role in maintaining its “textual appearances” (p. 73). It is illuminating to see what a thorough analysis of one instance of news reporting can reveal about this specific register, as well as the socio-cultural context in which the news was produced. The value of her integrated approach is evident, because it demonstrates the importance of incorporating intonational analysis into the study of media discourse.

Chapter 3, by Shan Zhu, presents a detailed analysis of a news commentary, which explores how the interplay of thematic structure and information structure helps realize textual organization. She applies Martin and Rose’s (2007) “information flow” to her analysis, and uncovers the various ways the newsreader signals information peaks through intonation. By relating onset pitch to topic change and focusing on marked structures, the macro-textual organization of the news item is revealed. Themes, hyperThemes and macroThemes are identified at different levels of discourse, and are found to be reinforced by the information structure. The analysis shows how the newsreader guides the audience through the text, as to what to expect and what information to focus on by the use of intonation. Although the results only apply to limited registers like news commentary, the study adds to our understanding of the wave-like pattern of spoken discourse in general.

In Chapter 4, Kazuyoshi Iwamoto further explores the role of pitch levels in the realization of paraphone boundaries, that is, the boundaries of a spoken paragraph. The chapter begins with a useful literature review of both written and spoken paragraphs, with an effort to contextualize previous descriptions of a spoken paragraph within the SFL framework. Two lecture segments demonstrating rather different tenor relations are analyzed, with three distinct types of paraphones identified. One type of paraphone is found to function as a macro-theme, which echoes Zhu’s finding in Chapter 3. This pioneering study establishes the role of pitch levels in defining paraphone boundaries, and further suggests that paraphoning is not merely a semiotic process, but a semogenic process. By approaching the notion of paraphone from a multidimensional perspective, it details how paraphoning affords different meanings depending on the context of situation. The study concludes by calling for more research on paraphoning, especially its relation to register variation.

Section B of the volume, “The Interface between Written and Spoken Language,” contains two chapters dealing with the spoken interpretation of written text. Both chapters draw attention to the relationship between cohesion and information structure as an essential aspect in the interpretation process. Chapter 5, by Martin Davies, can be seen as a conclusion of his previous studies since the 1970s, focusing on what is involved in reading aloud. He uses amusing examples of misreadings to show that correct interpretation of the rhythm and the information structure of a written text is a necessary part of meaningful reading. Although information structure is only realized in phonology, not in graphology, meanings expressed by TONALITY and TONICITY can be worked out from the cohesion. This point is clearly illustrated in his analysis of one

short sentence, which, depending on the co-text, can have up to nine different interpretations of the information structure. The chapter also includes an experiment in which Davies asked three participants to read aloud the transcription of a spoken text from Halliday's book, *Spoken and Written Language* (1985). It is found that their readings display almost identical choices of TONALITY and TONICITY as the original transcription. Davies's study has valuable implications for teachers of English, and his engaging style of writing makes the chapter a particularly enjoyable read.

The next chapter, by Michael Cummings, continues the theme from a different but complementary angle by taking its departure from written English. It focuses specifically on texts that are designed to be read as written English, as opposed to texts designed to be spoken. The study aims to provide a guide to how a written English text should be reasonably recited, and discusses how this can be achieved by working out the focus or foci of information and the extent of Given and New in each clause from the cohesive aspects of the text. In effect, the inquiry moves from the lexicogrammar of the clause to phonology rather than the other way around. Seven principles of interpretation are developed and applied to both a "classical text" and a "narrative text." It is concluded that "the location of the tonic in the recitation of a text written originally to be read as written may proceed mainly from principles of lexicogrammar" (p. 216). Given that previous descriptions of systemic phonology were based primarily on spontaneous spoken English, Cummings's study thus fills an important gap in understanding the relationship between phonology and clause grammar.

The two chapters in Section C, "The Interface between Music and Language," extend the scope of phonological analysis to the realm of music. In Chapter 7, David Banks examines the pronunciation of the *-ed* endings of the simple past tense and the past participle in Handel's *Messiah*, a classical sacred choral work. It is found that sixty percent of the target instances were interpreted as a separate syllable by Handel, a pronunciation that was no longer in use by his time. Handel's treatment of the *-ed* endings in the *Messiah* is then analyzed with respect to its different source texts, different types of vocal and choral movements, as well as the corresponding socio-cultural context. It is hypothesized that this older form of pronunciation was used to give extra value to the sacred text, which can be conceived in terms of the Appraisal framework. Banks's application of the Appraisal framework to the rank of morpheme is innovative, which sets this chapter apart from the others in the volume in its scope and concerns, but it is nevertheless a well-argued piece within the theoretical framework of SFL.

Chapter 8, by David Caldwell, presents an interesting interdisciplinary study that compares the paralinguistic features of two distinct vocal performances: rapping and singing. It integrates work within systemic phonology, social semiotics and music studies, and locates paralanguage within the theoretical framework of SFL as a distinct modality that interacts with the stratified language system. Drawing on van Leeuwen's (1999) paradigmatic approach to sound semiotics, Caldwell presents the paralinguistic features of the rap and the sung voice using a system network, capturing the systemic, meaningful choices that distinguish one voice from the other. Not only does the study describe the distinct meaning potentials of these two performance voices, but it also represents a successful attempt to integrate paralanguage within the theory of SFL. The chapter ends with some directions for future research, encouraging scholars to

incorporate insights from systemic phonology and sound semiotics in the study of a wider variety of vocal sounds. The use of such vastly different musical texts for analysis in Chapter 7 and 8 is one of the gems of this volume, and pushes the boundaries of phonological analysis into new and interesting arenas.

Section D of the volume, “Modelling Intonation,” begins with Chapter 9 by Paul Tench, who presents a detailed model of word phonology in English with a particular focus on monomorphemic words. The chapter includes system networks for syllable count, syllable structure, syllable peaks and syllable margins, and can be seen as an extension of Young’s (1992) work on a systemic description of English consonant clusters. Tench also briefly discusses some other dimensions of word phonology, such as allophonic variation, phonotactics and sound symbolism, suggesting the possibility of using system networks to describe these phenomena. System networks are a hallmark of SFL theory, and Tench clearly shows how they can be used in presenting a model of word phonology in English. This chapter also includes a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between phonology and lexicogrammar, illustrating “how phonology operates at all levels of lexicogrammar” (p. 291).

In Chapter 10, Bradley Smith, Stefano Fasciani and Kay O’Halloran cover a topic of growing significance: the role of technology in the study of phonology. They first outline some of the digital resources available to systemic phonologists with a primary focus on Praat, a powerful software application for multidimensional analyses. They then discuss issues that emerge from using such applications, for example, how to manage increasing complexity, how to make easily accessible annotations, and how to integrate analyses of multiple semiotic resources. Finally, they demonstrate how concerns over these issues have inspired the development of a new software application specifically designed for the study of multimodal communication within the SFL framework. This highly informative chapter underlines the great opportunities provided by digital technology for both skilled and non-skilled computer users, and encourages us to adopt a holistic approach to the study of sound and video with the help of advanced computational processing.

Chapter 11 is an important contribution by Robin Fawcett within the Cardiff SFL model of language. It is necessarily the longest chapter in the volume, because it presents a partly new model of both intonation and punctuation as an integral part of an overall model of English. Fawcett’s detailed explanations lead the reader to a clear understanding of his model, which is generative in nature. By contrast with the traditional tri-stratal model of language, the Cardiff model treats language as a bi-stratal semiotic system consisting of two levels: meaning and form. Meanings are “realized as (i) syntax, (ii) items (words and morphemes) and (iii) either intonation (in speech) or punctuation (in writing)” (p. 332), all of which are sub-components of the level of form. Along with his system networks and realization rules, Fawcett has demonstrated that intonation and punctuation can be generated the same way as syntax and items. The inclusion of such a distinctive chapter in the book represents a valuable effort by the editors to present a comprehensive volume in its approaches, models and concerns.

Section E, “Interacting with Systemic Phonology,” contains a particularly interesting chapter by William Greaves. It offers the reader an opportunity to not only read the text, but also listen to sound recordings and analyze them with Praat software. The

accompanying sound files and Praat files are available for download on the Equinox website. Two English poems, a limerick and a sonnet, are chosen to be analyzed. Both are familiar genres to speakers of English, yet they exhibit distinct rhythmic patterns and construe markedly different fields of discourse. By approaching these two texts from different aspects, Greaves carefully leads the reader to an understanding of how intonation interacts with other systems in the meaning-making process. He also uses vivid visual illustrations and clear Praat spectrograms to guide the reader through his analysis. The reader becomes easily engrossed in the reading-listening experience. This distinctively interactive chapter is an excellent example of using digital technology for multidimensional analyses, an important issue addressed in Chapter 10.

The end of the volume provides an author index and a subject index as a quick reference for the reader. The editors have clearly taken pains to compile these, especially the subject index, which is well designed and thorough, allowing the reader to readily focus on a particular subject matter across different chapters.

Overall, the chapters in this volume comprise a remarkable collection of thought-provoking articles by well-established scholars in the field. The five sections of the book offer rich and complementary perspectives on the study of systemic phonology, covering a wide variety of texts. Together, they represent an excellent contribution to our understanding of how meaning is organized and expressed phonologically in English. This up-to-date, innovative, ground-breaking volume is sure to become a classic in the field of systemic functional linguistics.

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