

PRE-FINAL FOCUS ACCENTS IN ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO VARIETIES

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Two recurrent interests in R.K. Sprigg's work have been the phonological description of tonal features (e.g. Sprigg 1955, 1972), and comparative statement (e.g. Sprigg 1963a, 1972). A third, that has until recently been less in evidence in his publications, is the phonological description of English (Sprigg 1986a). It is therefore appropriate in this volume to present a study combining these three interests, in which an attempt has been made to apply principles of Firthian phonology as exemplified in the work of R.K. Sprigg and his former colleagues and students at S.O.A.S. - even though the material is of a type with which they were not primarily concerned: different varieties of English, in this case the 'standard' variety of British English and that spoken in Brownhills, near Walsall, in the West Midlands.

In Wells (1988) an analysis is presented of the patterning of pitch and other phonetic features in a non-localised (standard) variety of British English. The patterning of these features has previously been described in terms of intonational systems, but serious descriptive problems have arisen due to the fact that the functional or semantic categories, such as 'information focus' (Halliday 1967) or 'emphasis' (O'Connor and Arnold 1973), which intonation is claimed to realise, are vague and subjective, relying ultimately for their definition upon the very phonetic features which serve as their exponents. Thus, for Halliday, an item which carries the major pitch prominence (or 'tonic') is said to have information focus, but the semantic concept of information focus itself has not been defined independently of its phonological exponents (see Wells 1988, Chapter 1). This circularity has only been avoided in intonation studies when previously established *grammatical* categories have been taken as the basis for establishing intonational structures and systems, e.g. in Halliday's system of 'tone'; but it is generally agreed that the functions of pitch in English have less to do with syntax than with pragmatic or interactive categories, and that the relation between grammar and intonation is, in Bolinger's words, 'casual, not causal'.

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When studying lexical or grammatical uses of pitch etc. in a 'tone' language, the phonologist is able to take as his starting point the different lexical (or grammatical) categories which have been established at the appropriate levels of description for speakers of the language (cf. Sharp 1954, Sprigg 1955); he can then proceed to correlate them with differential phonetic exponents. For the phonology of English, it is necessary to achieve an equivalent starting point for an analysis of pitch and related features in terms of information focus at the appropriate level of linguistic description, i.e. the semantic level. In Wells (1988) an attempt was made, for the standard variety of British English (henceforth SBE), to establish a semantic system on the basis of the observed behaviour of native speakers and listeners. Listeners' judgements as to the 'relative importance' of items in decontextualised utterances were elicited, and on this basis a four-term 'focus' system was set up, the phonetic exponents of which were analysed in detail (see also Wells 1986b). The results were then integrated with the findings of a comprehensive phonological analysis of utterances produced under carefully controlled contextual and grammatical conditions. The analysis drew upon principles used in Firthian phonology for the analysis of *lexical* tone, which were found to be equally applicable to the analysis of the non-lexical uses of pitch etc. in English.

1. Material

The material which formed the basis of the analysis was elicited from seven native English speakers. Each was given a sheet of forty-five numbered sentences, and was instructed to read aloud each sentence in turn after hearing the appropriate cue. Subjects' responses were recorded on audio tape. On the tape that subjects heard were recorded forty-five cue sentences, each preceded by the number of the corresponding response sentence on the subject's sheet. Cue sentences were read by the author, using what would generally be considered to be neutral patterns of pitch, loudness and tempo for standard (RP) English, i.e. with unmarked tonicity, tonality and tone within Halliday's framework (Halliday 1967).

The sentences to be read out consisted in fact of just thirteen textually different sentences, each occurring at least twice. Nine of these were in fact used in the analysis. The sentences were designed to contain grammatical variables which had been identified as potentially relevant to the marking of focus (see Appendix).

The cue sentences that subjects heard on the tape were designed to represent a range of different types of focus context (referred to henceforth as 'focus types') which, according to previous accounts of English intonation (e.g. Ladd 1980), should elicit a corresponding range of different prosodic patterns. The focus types are listed below and exemplified with reference to Response Sentence 5, 'The sun was shining':

FINAL CONTRAST: the cue contains all the items in the test sentence except the last. It is expected that the last item in the sentence will therefore have contrastive focus:

Cue: I'm pretty sure the sun was hidden by a cloud.

NON-FINAL CONTRAST: the cue contains all the items in the test sentence but one, which is not sentence final. It is expected that this item will have contrastive focus:

Cue: As Mary stepped out into the garden, the moon was shining up above her...

PARTIAL BACKGROUNDING: the cue contains one item (or more) that also occurs in the test sentence, this item being the one that, according to the literature, receives the accent in a 'normal intonation' reading. It is predicted that here the accent will be shifted onto some other item which is not given. In Sentences 6 and 7, the back-grounded word is the final word in the cue sentence, whereas in Sentences 1, 4, 5 and 9 a non-final word in backgrounded:

Cue: Describe the sun that morning.

TOTAL BACKGROUNDING: the cue contains all the items that occur in the test sentence. It is predicted that the accent will not fall as in NEWS, but on another item:

Cue: Of course, if the sun had been shining I'd've felt a lot happier.

NEWS: the cue sentence does not contain any items in the test sentence, so there is no motive for deaccenting or contrastive focus. Under this condition one would expect to find the 'neutral' prosodic pattern:

Cue: What was it like?

The sentences and corresponding cues were presented to informants in a pseudo-randomised order which ensured that the same sentence did not occur twice in succession; this was to prevent the creation of unforeseen 'contrastive' contexts.

2. Focus accent systems in standard British English

The informants, who had no apparent difficulty with the task, were all native speakers of English who normally speak a variety that is standard for England in terms of grammar and lexis. Some have a slight regional accent, reflecting place of origin, which included Liverpool, Greater Manchester, Thirsk (North Yorkshire), Derby and the Home Counties. Possible effects of regional accent were borne in mind throughout the analysis that followed, but it was not possible to identify any individual informant as behaving in a markedly different manner from the others. It is to be expected that marked regional accents will differ from one another both phonologically and phonetically, in 'prosodic' as in 'segmental' respects (Knowles 1974; Jarman and Cruttenden 1976; Brown, Currie and Kenworthy 1980); and this is clearly the case with the Brownhills informant considered below. However, insofar as the speech of all seven informants is amenable to analysis in terms of the same phonological structures and systems, the statement presented here can be taken as valid for the standard accent of British English as spoken in England. Five of the seven informants were female; all were aged between 18 and 30, and were students at the University of York. None had training in English phonetics.

In brief, it was found that listeners and speakers of this variety of English operate with a semantic system of focus having phonetic exponents of pitch, loudness, tempo and duration;

terms in the semantic system can be related to their phonetic exponents in an explicit manner by setting up accentual systems at two places in structure: line-prefinal and line-final (Wells 1988:136). By means of these accentual systems, speakers are able to differentiate between focus types, although the interaction of phonology, grammar and context is complex (Wells 1988, Chapter 5).

The places in structure at which the accentual systems operate are named accent units. Each accent unit comprises minimally one syllable which forms its 'centre', or 'focus'/'focal point' in the phonological sense of Allen (1951a:86); the accent may have extent over syllables preceding and/or following its centre. The centre will henceforth be notated as [A]. Where it is located on a polysyllabic word, [A] invariably coincides with the lexically accented syllable of the word.

Accent unit boundaries are defined as follows:

An accent unit begins one syllable before its centre providing that syllable is not itself the centre of the preceding accent unit.

An accent unit thus consists of the syllable before [A], the [A] syllable itself, and all syllables following [A] up to but not including the syllable before the next [A].

In the examples, line boundaries are notated //, and accent unit boundaries /. Accent unit centres are underlined. (The typographical conventions are derived from Halliday (1967); it must be stressed, however, that their use here is quite different from Halliday's).

The prefinal accentual system is set out in Table 1. The labelling of accents in Table 1 derives from the analysis presented in Wells (1986), and relates to the grades of focus which they realise. The phonetic exponency of each accent can be derived from the table where accents are located on a matrix of phonological features. The phonetic specification of these features is as follows:

- P1: [A] is syllable with highest (or equal highest) pitch in the line.
- P2u: Step up in pitch from pre-[A] syllable to [A], or rising-falling pitch on [A].
- P2d: Step down in pitch from [A] to following syllable, or, where [A] has falling pitch, following syllable is not higher than end of fall on [A].
- P3: F: In Final Accent Unit: falling pitch on [A], to base of speaker's normal range.
In Pre-final Accent Unit: falling pitch on [A], not necessarily to base of speaker's normal range.
- R: Rising pitch on [A].
- LV: Level pitch on [A].
- L: [A] is the loudest, or equal loudest, syllable in the line.
- T: [A] has tempo prominence: either syllabic sustention of [A], or allegro over syllables immediately before word containing [A], or both.

In addition to the two accentual systems, it is necessary to posit a small number of phonological 'rules', or constraints on output, which operate upon certain accents under specified conditions of juncture etc. These will not be discussed here.

S5: TC PARTIAL BACKGROUNDING

CUE: Describe the sun that morning.

ðsʌŋwəʃ:ʌnɪŋ

- \ - \ -

pp f pp f pp

˘ - ˘ - ˘

//Maj 2 the sun /Maj 2 was shining//

||M the SUN ||M was SHINING||

S5: TC TOTAL BACKGROUNDING

CUE: Of course, if the sun'd been shining I'd've felt much happier.

ðəsʌŋwɒzʃʌnɪŋ

- - \ -

pp f ff f pp

˘ - ˘ - ˘

//Mn11 the sun /Maj2 was /Mn11 shining //

||Z the sun ||M WAS ||Z shining

S5: TC NON-FINAL CONTRAST

CUE: As Mary stepped out into the garden, the moon was shining up above her ...

ðəs:ʌŋwəʃ:ʌnɪŋ

- \ - \ -

pp ff pp f pp

˘ - ˘ - ˘

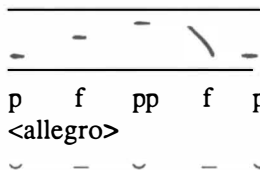
//Max1 the sun_ /Mn11 was shining //

||C the SUN ||Z was shining ||

S5: TC FINAL CONTRAST

CUE: I'm pretty sure the sun was hidden by a cloud

ðəsʌnwəʃˌaɪnɪŋ



//Mn11 the sun / Max1 was shining //

||Z the sun ||C was SHINING ||

The phonological exponency of focus is effected by recognising units of focus structure (deriving from the empirical investigations referred to above and reported in Wells 1986), of which one semantic variable constitutes the focus centre (Wells 1988). The phonological realisation of focus units and focus centres is assured by a convention stating that the lexically accented syllable of a focus centre constitutes an accent centre. Thus in the non-final contrast token illustrated above, there are two focus units: 'the sun' and 'was shining', whose focus centres are in each case the second word (see Wells 1988, Chapter 5, on how focus centres and unit boundaries are derived). The single syllable of 'sun' and the first (i.e. the lexically accented) syllable of 'shining' constitute accent centres, and take an accent which corresponds to the focus grade, i.e. 'Maximal' for the Contrastive unit 'the sun', and Minimal for the Zero focus unit 'was shining'. The conventions for the focus transcription are as follows:

|| = sentence boundary; | = focus unit boundary; UPPER CASE = focus centre; focus grade is indicated by letter at beginning of focus unit: C = contrastive; M = main; S = subsidiary; Z = zero.

3. Accentual systems and linguistic comparison

R.K. Sprigg prefaced a recent paper on English phonology (Sprigg 1986a) with the following quotation:

Nowadays a man must master at least one tongue language and one hand language. His ears, however, have to understand quite a number of ear languages, principally dialects of his own country.

(Firth 1937:23).

Prosodic phonologists have shown a persistent concern that phonological descriptions should facilitate comparison between related languages and dialects, as is evident in Sprigg's own work on Tibeto-Burman comparison and in the following quotation from one of his former students:

It is ... desirable - ideally - that the phonological statement arrived at for a particular language should be relatable in the simplest possible way to those made for languages known to be of the

same family or group, and, if possible, to the statement posited for the earlier stages of the history of that language or, indeed, of the group as a whole. (Kelly 1974:107)

One of the advantages that may be claimed for the approach to English 'intonation' taken in Wells (1988) and summarised above is that it facilitates phonological comparison of related dialects. To date, few attempts have been made to compare the intonation of different varieties of English, perhaps for want of a viable theoretical framework. Local (1986) has shown that there are no grounds for identifying *phonetically* similar pitch configurations in related varieties as *phonologically* comparable: in Tyneside English, a high fall-to-low is used by the speaker to check his or her understanding of what has just been said, whereas in non-localised varieties of English this function is realised by rising pitch. Conversely, a rising pitch configuration on Tyneside routinely cooccurs with declaratives, where a fall is usual in non-localised varieties. Similar observations have also been made with reference to Belfast English (Jarman and Cruttenden 1976) and Scouse (Knowles 1974). There remains, however, the problem of formulating a comparative statement. It is certainly valuable to compare varieties directly in terms of the phonetic exponency of interactive categories, such as the 'understanding checks' of Local (1986), or turn-delimitation as in Local, Kelly and Wells (1986) and Local, Wells and Sebba (1985); and there is also some interest in comparing the exponency of traditional grammatical categories, such as declaratives or interrogatives, as in Jarman and Cruttenden (1976), although this may be limited if the relation between grammar and intonation is 'casual, not causal'. Nevertheless, the phonologist will eventually wish to state relationships between the exponents of these categories in different varieties at the phonological level, as may be done in lexical phonology, for example by the use of abstract phonological formulae. The approach to English 'intonation' that has been outlined above offers the possibility of making comparative statements at the phonological level, since it entails setting up phonological structures and systems (of accentuation) which are abstractions from the phonic material and which relate explicitly to functional (here 'focus') categories. It is therefore possible to make such abstractions for more than one related variety of the language, with reference to the same functional category of focus, and then to identify similarities and differences at the phonological level. In insisting on the need for an abstract phonological level for the comparison of intonation systems, the present approach resembles that suggested by Knowles (1974). The main differences lie firstly in the fact that phonetic parameters other than pitch, i.e. loudness, tempo and duration, are given full consideration as candidate exponents of the phonological systems; and secondly in the fact that the phonological structures and systems are related explicitly to functional categories (of focus) which have been warranted from the observed behaviour of speakers and listeners (Wells 1988, Chapter 6).

The variety of English to be compared to the non-localised variety described earlier is one spoken in Brownhills, near Walsall, in the West Midlands. The principal informant (JP) was nineteen years old at the time of the recording, a student at the City of Birmingham Polytechnic who had lived in Brownhills all her life, having been educated locally. The following analysis is based on a recording of JP reading the sentences described earlier, under the same conditions except that the cues were read by another native of Brownhills (LC). JP and LC had attended the same school and lived close to one another. The cues were read by a Brownhills speaker in order to reduce the likelihood of JP modifying her responses in the direction of the standard variety.

Both informants were asked to read their sentences as they might speak them in an informal conversation with friends at home. They were satisfied that their performances reflected the way in which they normally spoke among friends in Brownhills. The material is illustrated by JP's tokens of the five items given earlier for TC.

S5: JP NEWS

CUE: What was it like?

ðəsənwəʃ:əiniŋk

— — — — —
— — — — —

p f p f p
~ - ~ - ~

//Maj the sun / was shining //
|| M the SUN | was SHINING ||

S5: JP PARTIAL BACKGROUNDING

CUE: Describe the sun that morning

s-ənwəʃ:ə-i-nin

— — / —
— — — —

f p f p
<allegro>
~ ~ - ~

//MnI the sun / was shining //
||Z the SUN | was SHINING ||

S5: JP TOTAL BACKGROUNDING

CUE: Of course, if the sun'd been shining I'd've felt much happier

s-ənwəʃ:əɪnɪ

— — — — —
— — — — —

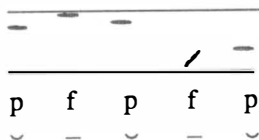
f f f p
- - - ~

//Mnr sun /Maj was / shining //
||S the SUN |M WAS | SHINING ||

S5: JP NON-FINAL CONTRAST

CUE: As Mary stepped out into the garden, the moon was shining up above her ...

ðəsɔnwəʃ:əɪnɪŋk

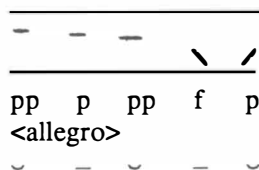
//Max the **sun** / was **shining** //

||C the SUN | was SHINING ||

S6: JP FINAL CONTRAST

CUE: I'm pretty sure the sun was hidden by a cloud

ðɪsɔnwəʃ:əɪnɪŋ

//MnI the **sun** / was **shining** //

||Z the SUN | was SHINING ||

There are several respects in which two varieties may differ with regard to 'intonation' and information focus:

- 1) The two varieties may differ so radically that the system of 'focus' is realised at different linguistic levels. For instance, in one, focus may be realised at the syntactic level, by a particle, rather than by an accentual system. Alternatively, the exponents may be at the phonological level in both varieties, but be organised in quite different ways. Thus it seems that in London Jamaican, dynamic pitch is used as an exponent of turn delimitation but is not associated at all with focus, which appears to be realised by consonantal duration and pitch height (Local, Wells and Sebba 1985:311 ff). This difference between London Jamaican and standard varieties of British English is reflected in the radically different patterning of rhythm and pitch in the two varieties (cf. Kelly and Local 1984), presumably resulting from their different histories. Direct comparison at the phonological level is thus inappropriate. The variety spoken in Brownhills, on the other hand, is indigenous, apparently sharing the basic rhythmic and pitch organisation of other indigenous varieties, such as 'stress-timing' and the use of dynamic pitch in the exponency of focus as well as turn-delimitation. Given that there is also a high degree of mutual intelligibility between Brownhills and non-localised varieties, it is appropriate to undertake a phonological comparison.

- 2) Two varieties may have comparable systems of focus, but differ in their rules for the location of the focus centre, and thence the accent centre. In the present case this would seem unlikely, given the apparently high degree of mutual intelligibility between varieties with regard to the interpretation of focus. However, in a study of Belfast intonation using a Hallidayan framework, Jarman (1972:47) noted instances where the 'tonic' is located on the preposition in a prepositional phrase, in contexts where there is no reason for contrast on the preposition:

//I saw him here // in Manchester //

Such divergences are not evident in the Brownhills material: phonetic prominence (e.g. change of pitch, tempo prominence or loudness prominence) centres on the same syllables as in the non-localised variety, even though the specific ways in which prominence is realised may differ. This can be seen by comparing TC and JP realisations of the same focus types in the examples given earlier. For the purposes of the present analysis it has therefore been assumed that the two varieties are similar in having a focus system realised by accentual systems, and that the rules for focus centre placement are the same.

- 3) It is possible that the two varieties diverge in the number of terms in the focus system. However, comparison of the same sentences under different focus conditions, as in the examples already given, indicates that JP distinguishes focus types to the same extent as TC and other speakers of the non-localised variety, for instance in differentiating between 'News' and 'Non-final Contrast' tokens of 'The sun was shining'. In general, JP makes no fewer distinctions between focus types than the SBE informants. For the purposes of comparison, it is therefore assumed that both varieties share a four-term focus system, realised by accentual systems with four corresponding grades of prominence: Maximal, Major, Minor, Minimal. It is not necessary to assume that each term in the focus system has exactly the same meaning in the two varieties: it is sufficient to recognise them as comparable linguistic items. This merely parallels the situation in comparative lexical phonology where two words may be recognised as the same item for comparative phonological purposes, even though their meanings are somewhat different in the two languages being compared.
- 4) It is at the phonological level that differences between closely related varieties are most likely to be found. These may involve (a) a difference in the number of alternative accents for a given prominence grade (e.g. more or fewer Major accents in Brownhills than in the standard variety); or (b) a difference in the feature specification of accents, i.e. the Brownhills accentual systems will require different entries in the matrix on Table 1, and/or different features. Differences between the two varieties at this level are discussed below, following an exposition of the accentual systems established for JP on the basis of her realisation of the various focus types.
- 5) Further differences may be found at the level of phonetic exponency, when two varieties share the same accentual systems, which can be described using a single set of phonological features, but the phonetic realisation of those features is different, e.g. 'tempo prominence' might be realised by sustentation of the vowel of [A] in one variety, but by sustentation of the initial consonant in another.

The pre-final accentual system established for JP is set out in Table 2, followed by details of the phonetic exponency of the phonological features given there.

Table 2. Brownhills pre-final accentual system

| | P1 | P2- | -P2 | P3 | L | T |
|------|----|-----|-----|----|---|---|
| Max1 | + | u | d | LV | + | 0 |
| Maj1 | - | d | u | LV | + | 0 |
| Mnr1 | - | 0 | d | LV | + | - |
| Mnl1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | LV | 0 | - |

Key:

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|-----|---------|
| + | obligatorily present | Max | Maximal |
| - | obligatorily absent | Maj | Major |
| 0 | optional | Mnr | Minor |
| | | Mnl | Minimal |

P1: [A] is syllable with highest (or equal highest) pitch in the line.

P2-: Step up (u) or down (d) in pitch from pre-[A] syllable to [A]; or the two syllables are at the same height (l).

-P2: Step up (u) or down (d) in pitch from [A] to following syllable; or the two syllables are at the same height (l).

P3: F: Falling pitch on [A], not necessarily to base of speaker's normal range.

R: Rising pitch on [A].

LV: Level pitch on [A].

L: [A] is the loudest, or equal loudest, syllable in the line.

T: [A] has tempo prominence: either syllabic sustention of [A], or allegro over syllables immediately before word containing [A], or both.

4. Comparison of Brownhills and SBE prefinal focus accents

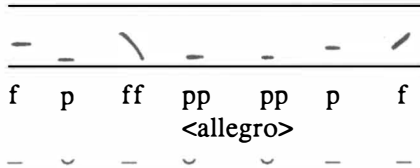
Maximal:

These accents typically function as exponents of Contrastive focus units in the non-final contrastive focus type. The examples above of this focus type for TC and JP 'The sun was shining' provide illustrations. The accent is phonetically similar in the two varieties, in that both have the accent centre as the highest syllable in the utterance; but for JP it has a level pitch, whereas in SBE a high fall to low is typical. The step up to the accent centre is less marked for JP, and tempo prominence is less common. These differences can be further exemplified from the corresponding tokens of another sentence:

S6: TC NON-FINAL CONTRAST

Cue: Someone's opened the window have they?

sʌm wʌnz bɪəw: kɪd̩ə wɪndəw

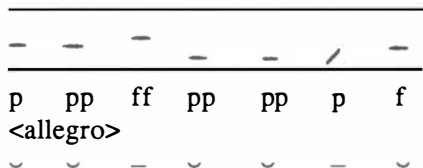


//Mn12 some- /Max1 -one's broken /Mn12 the window //
 ||Z someone |C 's BROKEN |Z the window ||

S6: JP NON-FINAL CONTRAST

Cue: Someone's opened the window have they?

sɔw wɔsbɪəw kɪd̩ə wɪndəw



//Mn1 some- /Max -one's broken / the window //
 ||Z someone |C 's BROKEN | the window ||

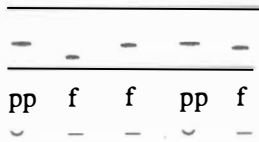
Major:

To the ears of an SBE speaker, the prefinal Maximal accent of Brownhills seems lacking in phonetic prominence. However, this is unlikely to be the case for Brownhills speakers, since JP clearly distinguishes the Maximal accent from the Major accent, which is used in non-contrastive contexts, and is illustrated above in her versions of 'The sun was shining' for the News and Total Backgrounding focus types. The Brownhills Major accent has a step *down* in pitch to the accent centre and a step up immediately following it. It is thus quite different, phonetically, from the Brownhills Maximal accent. It is also quite different from the SBE Major accents, where there is typically a step up to the accent centre and a step down following it (cf. TC's versions of the same sentences). The Brownhills Prefinal Major accent, when followed, as it generally is, by a final accent having mid or high level pitch, results in a pitch contour that is regarded by those living in the region as particularly characteristic of this variety. The following provide further illustrations of this accent

S4: JP NEWS

Cue: Why won't you be able to make it?

ðka:zʰɪɛɔkɪdeun



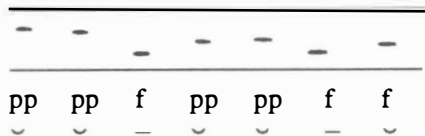
//Maj the car's / broken / down /

||M the CAR | 's BROKEN DOWN ||

S6: JP PARTIAL BACKGROUNDING

Cue: Just show John the new window in the front room will you?

sɔwɔsbɪɛɔ:kɪðəwɪn-deɔ?



//Mnl some- / Maj -one's broken / the window //

||Z someone |M 's BROKEN | the WINDOW ||

Minor:

The Prefinal Minor accents in the two varieties are phonetically similar, except that in Brownhills the accent centre generally has a level pitch, or a narrow fall, whereas in SBE the basic pitch movement is either a fall or a rise (see Table 1).

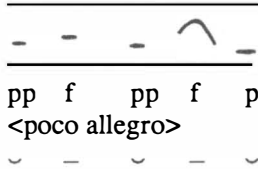
Minimal:

The Brownhills Prefinal Minimal accent resembles the SBE Prefinal Minimal 1 accent, but is more limited in its phonetic realisations. The Brownhills accent is characterised by having all syllables in the accent unit at the same pitch height, as in JP's Final Contrast token of 'The sun was shining'. In SBE, this is one possible realisation, but there is also a realisation in which the syllables step up progressively through the accent unit, as in TK's version of the same item. Furthermore, there is a second Prefinal Minimal accent in SBE, illustrated by another informant's version of the same item:

S5: MC FINAL CONTRAST

Cue: I'm pretty sure the sun was hidden by a cloud

ðəsʌn wəz ʃaɪnɪŋ



//Mnl2 the sun /Max1 was shining //

||Z the sun ||C was SHINING ||

Here, the accent is at a higher pitch level than the preceding and following syllables.

4. Conclusions

The comparison that has been presented of accentual systems in two varieties of British English is obviously limited in its scope: in particular, there has been no attempt to present the line-final accentual system of Brownhills. Line-final systems pose additional analytic problems, since their exponency is, almost certainly, intimately linked to the exponency of line delimitation, which strictly needs to be investigated in its own right first (see Wells 1988, Chapter 6). Only brief references have been made to the phonetic possibilities at final position in Brownhills, although the almost invariable non-low terminal pitch is one of the most striking features of this variety. No mention at all has been made of the different ways in which accents are realised under different junctural conditions, since this has not yet been investigated in detail.

Nevertheless, the comparison of pre-final accentual systems within a phonological framework points to some interesting differences between the two varieties. Firstly, it appears that in Brownhills an accent centre can be rendered pitch prominent by obtruding either *above* its adjacent syllables (Maximal), or *below* them (Major), whereas in the SBE material only the first possibility is found. Secondly, Brownhills pre-final accent centres generally have a level pitch, whereas in SBE a fall is the norm for the higher prominence grades (unless the final accent centre follows immediately: see TC 'Total Backgrounding' for 'The sun was shining', and discussion in Wells (1988)). Thirdly, the Brownhills speaker does not appear to make use of tempo prominence as an exponent of accentuation to the same extent as was found in SBE: it is not criterial for any of the Brownhills accents.

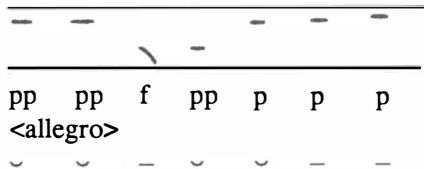
Such differences can be expressed readily in terms of the features matrices presented in Tables 1 and 2, although it will be noted that the definition of P2 has to be altered for Brownhills in order to capture the first of the differences just listed. At the same time, the possibility cannot be ignored that a quite distinct phonetic parameter is employed in Brownhills, for the exponency of the focus system. For instance, it appears from the present data that pitch register may have a distinctive function in the focus system: three of the four Total Backgrounding tokens elicited

share the phonetic characteristic of being spoken unusually high in the pitch range. JP's token, for this focus type, of 'The sun was shining', provides an example, as does the following:

S6: JP TOTAL BACKGROUNDING

Cue: I wish someone would break that horrible window in the front room

sɔwɔsbɪɛɔkɪðəwɪndəʔ



//Mn1 some- /Maj -one's broken / the window //
 ||Z someone |M 's BROKEN | the WINDOW ||

This unusual pitch height is not found with tokens of other focus types, which indicates that it may have a phonological function, although further investigation is required, with more informants.

APPENDIX: Test sentences

- (1) There's a man in the lobby.
- (2) A man appeared.
- (3) Macmillan's died.
- (4) The car's broken down.
- (5) The sun was shining.
- (6) Someone's broken the window.
- (7) He doesn't read books.
- (8) They said it would be hot today.
- (9) It's coming up at the faculty meeting.