



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of English and ELT Methodology

A Review of a Final Thesis

submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer:

Reviewed as: a supervisor an opponent

Author of the thesis: Bc. Veronika Vonzová

Title of the thesis: Melodic contours in political debates: comparison of British and American English

Year of submission: 2023

Submitted as: a bachelor's thesis a master's thesis

Level of expertise:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Factual errors:

almost none appropriate to the scope of the thesis frequent less serious serious

Chosen methodology:

original and appropriate appropriate barely adequate inadequate

Results:

original original and derivative non-trivial compilation cited from sources copied

Scope of the thesis:

too large appropriate to the topic adequate inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):

above average (scope or rigor) average below average inadequate

Typographical and formal level:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Language:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Typos:

almost none appropriate to the scope of the thesis numerous



Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)

The thesis investigated nuclear pitch movements in prosodic phrases of American and British (political) speakers to contrast differences between the two English varieties.

Strong points of the thesis:

The topic of this thesis is highly relevant and interesting. The hypothesis is grounded in previous literature, the analyses are sound and yielded interesting results. In addition, Ms Vonzova developed her own analytical tools to expand on the study of nuclear pitch movement (FMUs). The manuscript is well written.

Weak points of the thesis:

I have some minor comments on how some aspects of the thesis may be improved. They can be found below.

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

1. Explain and give examples how your cadence/ functional melody approach enriches the field by providing more fine-grained analyses of pitch movement.
2. Please comment on lexical specifics of (some of) your “target words”. Did you notice any differences in nuclear pitch movement that could be related to grammatical word class or phonological make-up of a word?

Other comments:

In the introduction, the literature cited could at times be (a) a bit more recent and (b) more varied. For prosodic structure theory, for instance, the same Elfner paper keeps getting cited. Overall, there is a relatively small number of recurring papers.

The first time TOBI is mentioned (on page 17), a citation is needed.

When you introduce Kono on page 17, you should provide some background for readers unfamiliar with the language, specifically which of the languages referred to as Kono you mean. This will help clarify the Kono examples you go on to list.

On page 19, the first paragraph cites mainly Shattuck-Hufnagel & Turk (1996) and one paper from 2006 (Frazer). Yet, you start the next paragraph with “later research showed...” and cite the same Shattuck-Hufnagel again. I am sure you could find more recent literature to update this section.

p. 20: it would be nice to be shown a figure displaying the prehead/head/nucleus/tail structure of an English example. Figure 3 could be moved here.



Chapter 3 starts out with a good overview of the different definitions of prosody, intonation, etc. This acknowledgement is important for the context of the thesis. Equally, chapter 4 is well written and very informative. You later mention “terminological chaos” (p. 40) – this is a good description of the situation.

When you say on page 24 that pitch is influenced by speaker’s physique, you primarily cite Roach 2009 but there is a lot of recent research on pitch and male/female physical attributes (very interesting for instance this recent paper: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2018.1634>)

P. 25, rephrase the sentence: “*Loudness, lengthening and other such aspects which might make the conclusions of the experiments potentially unreliable.*”

to reflect that those factors need to be carefully controlled in an experiment to make results reliable.

Cite primary literature, rather than secondary literature. For instance on page 25

“*which resulted in only a few linguists undertaking comparative studies of intonation systems between more than two languages until the 90s (Hirst, 1998, p. 2)*”

→ who are those “few linguists”? Citations of their works are more interesting than Hirst’s review.

Figure 6: reiterate in the caption what the different slashes represent. You mention it later on p 37 but the information could be indicated somewhere near the figure (in the caption, e.g.)

On page 29, readers would appreciate figures of the types of rise-fall combinations.

When you describe Tobi on pa 36, you could present an overview of the break indices (the 0 to 4 equivalences). That would make this section more informative for readers.

P. 37, the first “Jenna came home...” - explain the !

The Tobi notations given on page 36, 37 could be made clearer by displaying them together with pitch in Praat (as is frequently done in the literature).

Page 42: the term Cz. “kadence” or Engl. “cadence” is (unfortunately) also ambiguous in music theory. Generally, your introduction of new terms should be expanded to include some examples that capture how your new terminology/ concepts can be applied. I greatly applaud the attempt to make finer distinction in prosodic research and use analogies to music. Your new approach is just a bit difficult to follow initially and should be explained a bit more and contrasted with the traditional approach.

In the methods section I couldn’t find much information on how the phrases were selected. Did you use all phrases you could find in a given speech?



How exactly did you determine the contours, e.g., fall-rise, etc.? By listening to them or by looking at the pitch contour in Praat? You later show some example of pitch tracking in Praat, so I assume you looked at spectrograms. This should be made explicit.

You should mention whether you controlled for different characteristics of the nuclear-pitch carrying “target” words. They weren’t all the same, it seems. Did you notice an influence on pitch stemming from specific phonemes (e.g., aspirated plosives and succeeding vowels) or word class? Were they all nouns? These factors may not have had much of an influence but I just wonder what you observed.

On page 47 you mention “articulation rate” but do not provide any information on how you calculated it. An explanatory sentence would be appreciated somewhere near the list. You mention something pages later, but it doesn’t go into detail how you treated the number of syllables in relation to the duration of the phrase.

What were the pitch settings chosen in Praat for the pitch measurements? Were male and female voiced treated equally?

P. 48 “in the political debate, there is a more frequent division of the speech in prosodic groups (...) with the purpose of keeping the audience’s attention (Braga, 2004).

→ how interesting!

Graphs are done nicely! Good choice of what information is being presented.

You mention it in Figure 19 but I assume that phrase-final creaky voice can be a problem in the analyses. You seem to have had only a few of those cases.

Minor:

- Inconsistent capitalization in figure index and figures themselves
- Write decades as (for instance) “1960s”
- Avoid the use of “etc.” at the end of a sentence
- Explain abbreviations the first time you mention them (e.g., p. 25 “ST”, or AmE in Figure 11)
- Figure 11 appears before Figure 10
- Looking at Figures 28 and 29, I wonder why you capitalized the transcription here but not in most other figures
- Comma as decimal points: e.g., p. 49 “5,9 syll/sec”
- In case of bracket clash, collapse them into one (e.g., p. 26 “(which is a term for conveying praise that is not easy for us to express) (Ward, 2019, p. 15-16)” → (... ; ...)



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Proposed grade:

excellent very good good fail

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:

Prague,

January 13, 2022

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Lena".