

A Note on the Rise-Fall Nuclear Glide in English Intonation

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We know a good deal about the function of the fall-rise nuclear glide (FR), while the rise-fall (RF) has so far been given much less attention. It is the purpose of this paper to consider one aspect of the latter. Only statements will be taken into account. For reasons of comparison a few well-known facts concerning the FR will have to be stated, too.

It has repeatedly been pointed out that the FR can have a concessive or, as some would prefer to call it, a limitative function. When used in a retort, it restricts the speaker's agreement; e.g. A. *It 'wasn't a 'good 'winter for 'skiing in 'Switzerland, 'was it?* B. *We had 'more 'snow than in 'England.* B. broadly agrees with A. but makes a statement which qualifies his agreement. Here the function of the FR corresponds to that of *at least, anyway, at any rate*. When used in a qualifying answer to a general question the FR has a similar function. If the answer is a qualified affirmative, it points to the negative, and vice versa; e.g. *I can 'read it* as an answer to *'Do you 'know 'Dutch?* is a qualified affirmative. *It 'isn't es'sential* in reply to *'Should I 'learn the 'language of the ,natives?* is a qualified negative. In both cases the FR suggests a sequence beginning with *but* or *though*.

Another relation which for want of a more satisfactory term we call concessive is the converse of the one just mentioned. It can be expressed by *even*. *Even non-specialists could follow* means . . . *of whom it was to be expected least*. *At least the specialists could follow* means . . . *of whom it was to be expected first and foremost*. The particle *even*, too, is sparingly used in colloquial speech, intonation being in many cases the bearer of the concessive relation. Intonation can achieve this in several ways. One – and this has been pointed out before – is the tonetic stress pattern: nuclear stress on the word that could be

modified by *even*, subdued non-nuclear stresses; e.g. 'Homer ,some-times ,nods. I ,didn't 'tell my 'husband. We ,didn't be'lieve him for a 'minute. Compare with this the non-concessive *We 'didn't be'lieve him for a ,minute*. I am quoting this last example from an article by Professor Bolinger.

As these examples show, the effect depends on the presence in the sentence of at least one or two normally stressed words, which are wholly or partly de-stressed, in order to place in relief the word which the *even* connotation refers to. It is true that the destressing is not always essential. If the word bearing the nuclear glide is normally post-nuclear, as in the last example, the place of the nucleus in itself suggests *even*; e.g. *We 'didn't be'lieve him for a 'minute*. But *I 'didn't 'tell my 'husband* with two full prenuclear stresses and a non-emphatic nuclear fall does not suggest *even*. Nor can concession be expressed by the tonetic stress pattern alone in short sentences with only one normally stressed word. *There'll be 'more* as a retort to *There'll be about 'ten, I sup,pose, or I should be 'glad to* in answer to *'Would you 'mind ,helping?* do not suggest *even*. But they can be made to suggest it by bearing a RF instead of a simple F nucleus. The RF can suggest that the speaker is impressed and wants to impress his interlocutor. It can also convey complacency or censoriousness. Now one or several of these connotations are very often attached to the *even* connotation. In a retort *even* often suggests that the speaker's utterance adds something unexpected to his interlocutor's statement. In an answer to a general question it suggests that the answer corresponds to an expanded affirmative or negative. So the RF, whose basic function is purely expressive, can, in favourable circumstances, assume a grammatical function as well: the mood it expresses is interpreted also as the syntactical relation which easily engenders this mood. *There'll be ^more* as a retort to *There'll be about 'ten, I sup,pose* comes to mean *even more* (possibly with the implication: so you'd better provide enough seating accommodation). *I should be ^glad to* in answer to *'Would you 'mind ,helping?* suggests: not only do I not refuse to help; I am even glad to do it. I am quoting these two RF sentences – and some of the following ones – from *O'Connor and Arnold's* *Intonation of Colloquial English*, where the RF is allotted ample space. The RF is the main bearer of the *even* relation also in those cases where the pre-nuclear stresses are not subdued; e.g. A. *'Have you ,finished it?* B. *I 'haven't be^gun it. Or: It was 'lovely in ,Scotland ,last ,winter; we had 'more 'snow than in ^Switzerland*. Here the

second sentence is not a retort but an expansion of the speaker's own previous statement. Sometimes there is a RF in utterances where the tonetic stress pattern would be sufficient to suggest the *even* relation; e.g. *It's 'useless ,writing a ,letter; a ^telegram wouldn't ,reach him in ,time*. Needless to say that in many utterances where the particle *even* is enunciated the nucleus is a RF. In *O'Connor* and *Arnold* there are several instances of it.

We have seen that there is a certain parallelism between the intonation of utterances expressing limitation and that of utterances expressing expansion. Both suggest these grammatical relations by means of a two-directional instead of a one-directional nuclear glide, limitation by adding a rise to the fall, expansion by placing a rise before the fall. But there the parallelism ends. The R part of the FR is basically an intellectual device, it expresses incompleteness, need of supplementation. Consequently the FR can suggest *at least* both in emotional and in relatively unemotional utterances. The sentences I quoted at the beginning can be quite matter-of-fact; e.g. A. *'Do you 'know ,Dutch?* B. *I can ^read it. Or: 'Should I 'learn the 'language of the ,natives?* B. *It 'isn't es^sential*. The RF, on the other hand, is a purely emotional variant of the F. Its counterpart in the domain of incompleteness is the RFR. Therefore the *even* relation can be expressed by means of the RF only in emotional speech. The unemotional counterpart of *There'll be ^more* is *There'll 'even be 'more*. The tonetic stress pattern with an F nucleus suggesting *even*, on the other hand, can sometimes be made to sound quite matter-of-fact, especially in those cases where the nucleus falls on an element of the sentence that does not currently bear it. *'Homer ,sometimes ,nods* or *They 'wouldn't be 'happy if they had 'money* can be said quite unemotionally.

These remarks do not by any means exhaust the subject. There are other similar relations that favour the RF. One of them I briefly pointed out in my contribution to a discussion on the growing tendency to stress prepositions and give them a RF nuclear stress (in *English Studies* 1963; p. 275). I will quote only one instance: *You 'say this 'isn't an 'honest 'business. Then 'why did you 'stay ^in it?* Here the RF appears because the contrary of what would be the right reaction to a given situation has happened. There is a good deal more scope for investigation even in this highly restricted field within the vast domain of English intonation.

Discussion

Danes (Praha): It is a matter of fact that languages differ in their sentence intonation; but it is also true that they are very often similar in respect to various functions of the intonation. Now, the system of terms and the metalanguage by means of which different investigators try to describe the great variety of many and many subtle semantic nuances is very inconsistent and impressionistic. Such a situation is very unpleasant, esp. if we try to compare different languages. I suggest, therefore, that we should try to elaborate an exact system of terms by means of which the various subtle semantic values of intonation could be described more exactly.

Lebrun (Bruxelles): The use of the word *concessive* to refer to such clauses as "Whatever you may say (, I won't go)" is rather unfortunate because these sentences obviously express no concession.

The use of the word *concessive* to refer to the second intonational pattern (rise-fall) is similarly regrettable, because this pattern does not denote any concession: it enhances, or expands, a preceding statement.

On the other hand, some of the sentences quoted by Miss *Schubiger* to illustrate the first pattern (fall-rise) do express a concession (e.g. "It isn't essential"). If one insists on using the word *concessive*, it would seem that one ought to use it to refer to the first rather than to the second intonational pattern.

Jürgensen (Copenhagen): Questioned the usefulness of the term 'concessive'.

He further found that it would be a little surprising if 'rise-fall' had the connotation suggested seeing that rise-fall does not carry this suggestion in, say, excited recitation of one°, two°, three°, and similar situations.

Partridge (Johannesburg): I suggest that in place of the term 'concessive', the speaker should use the term 'contradistinctive' for the phenomenon she has been discussing.