Intonation as a pragmatic resource in ELF interaction

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Abstract

The investigation of pragmatic strategies in ELF interaction is a relatively new area of research. This paper examines intonation as a pragmatic resource in ELF interaction. There is considerable research pointing to the critical role played by intonational structure in NS-based discourse to establish a state of informational and social convergence (Brazil 1997; Chun 2002; Hewings 1995; Pickering 2001; Wennerstrom 2001). The question of whether similar practices can be identified in ELF interaction remains open. In this paper, I review current understanding of the role of intonational structure in NS-based interaction and then examine data from ELF interactions. Using a model of intonation in discourse (Brazil 1997) to interpret these data, I argue that both pitch movement (tone choice) and relative pitch level (key choice) contribute to intelligibility and interactional success in ELF interaction. Participants appear to orient to pitch cues both as a signal of a possible trouble source and as a means to indicate that negotiation or repair sequences have been accomplished successfully.

1. Introduction

Research in pragmatics in cross-varietal contexts of English has typically been conducted from a native speaker (NS) perspective; one in which the definition of native speaker is narrowly construed as one of the "normproviders" such as speakers of standard American or British English (Suzuki and Jenkins 2006: 612). Thus, when we consider our current understanding of pragmatic strategies in English interaction, many of our perceptions, pedagogical intuitions, and accepted practices are in fact, solely derived from this limited NS-based context; yet they are often implicitly regarded as the processes that underlie successful interaction of all kinds. It is increasingly clear that the majority of English language interactions

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involve non-native speakers (NNSs) of English in non-traditional contexts, i.e., outside of an English-only-speaking environment (Crystal 2000). This recognition of the spread of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), i.e., "a vehicular language spoken by people who do not share a native language" (Mauranen 2003: 513) as the increasingly prevalent context for English interaction has prompted acknowledgement of the limited scope of traditional research investigating interactional success. This paper examines the use of intonational resources as pragmatic devices in ELF interaction. For our purposes, ELF is defined as "communication between fairly fluent interlocutors from different L1 backgrounds, for whom English is the most convenient language" (Breiteneder et al. 2006: 163). "Fairly fluent interlocutors" are defined as competent L2 speakers, or in Jenkins' (2000) terms as non-bilingual English speakers (NBESs) for whom proficiency many range from nearly bilingual speakers (BESs) to beginner NBESs. Throughout the paper, I will refer to these speakers as L2 speakers or non-native speakers (NNSs) for ease of exposition.

2. Literature review

2.1. The role of intonation in NS-based interaction

There is broad agreement in recent models of intonation in discourse as to the underlying pragmatic function of intonation (Brazil 1997; Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg 1990; Wennerstrom 2001; Wichmann 2000). These approaches have revealed an expanded set of functions for intonation which can be grouped into three major areas: information functions, discourse management functions, and relationship-building functions.

Experimental studies have demonstrated that pitch structure, as measured by fundamental frequency (F0), plays an important role in the production and processing of local (utterance level) and global (discourse level) information structure (Grosz and Sidner 1986). A speaker's use of pitch can be directly related to the topic structure of the discourse: speakers tend to use a high pitch at the initiation of a new topic, a mid level at points of continuation, and a low F0 at topic final boundaries (Cutler et al. 1997). In perception studies, listeners were able to identify major discourse boundaries and predict when an utterance was likely to end using only prosodic features such as pause length and F0 variation (Cutler et al. 1997). Collectively, this research suggests that speakers employ prosodic structure to parse in-coming information and predict up-coming discourse structure.

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While psycholinguistic studies have focused on the role of intonation in information structuring, some discourse approaches have concentrated on how prosodic cues are used to manage interaction in an NS-based setting. This agenda has been largely set by researchers working within a Conversational Analysis (CA) approach to discourse interaction. It has investigated the association between interactional work and prosodic devices at the level of the sequential organization of the conversation, particularly in the examination of turn-taking structures (Couper-Kuhlen and Ford 2004; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996; Schlegloff 1998). Significant findings include a systematic change of pitch, tempo and loudness at points of turn-completion or turn-continuation, the association of specific pitch patterns with repair and conversational tokens such as "oh" (Local 1996), and evidence of interlocutors' awareness of each others prosodic patterns (Wennerstrom 2001). This is most commonly demonstrated with evidence of "pitch concord" (Brazil 1997), a matching of pitch contours and register by interlocutors in a display of "prosodic orientation" in collaborative discourse (Szczepek Reed 2006).

Approaches to conversational interaction grounded in interactional sociolinguistics or contextualization theory emphasize the role of prosodic features as devices used by interlocutors to promote interactional success through the projection of a common informational and social space (Gumperz 1982). The production and interpretation of these cues rests on "contextual presuppositions" (based on institutionalized linguistic and cultural knowledge), and "situated inference" (moment by moment context-bound inferences regarding the speaker's intent.) Overtime, these devices become tacit, conventionalized choices that rely on participants' shared linguistic and sociocultural background for their interpretation. Studies in cross-varietal contexts of English that include L2 or nativized varieties of English and NS interlocutors suggest that participants are likely to assume a mutual understanding of discourse conventions such as intonational cues and infer speaker intent within their own interpretive framework (Green 1989; Gumperz 1992; Hewings 1995; Tyler et al. 1988). Thus, interactional success can be compromised when naïve NS interlocutors assume a much larger common ground in terms of conversational conventions that their interlocutors often possess. Intonational cues are particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation as native speakers are less consciously aware of the prosodic components of language structure and are thus less able to compensate for prosodic miscues. In fact, miscues of this type are often interpreted in attitudinal terms as suggested by Gumperz: "A speaker is said to be unfriendly, impertinent or rude, uncooperative or fail to understand ... miscommunication of this type in other words is regarded as a social faux pas and leads to misjudgements of the

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speaker's intent ... it is not likely to be identified as mere linguistic error" (1982: 139).

2.2. The Role of intonation in ELF interaction

The investigation of the use of intonational resources in ELF interaction is a very recent one. In most cases, studies have focused directly on issues of intelligibility. In her ground-breaking work on phonology in NNS-NNS interaction. Jenkins (2000: 83) describes pronunciation as "possibly the greatest single barrier to successful communication." Based on a comprehensive data analysis, she identifies a core set of phonological features that were found to be crucial to intelligibility and which focus for the most part on segmental features. In her discussion of intonation structure, she identifies "three principal areas of interest: pitch movement, nuclear stress and division of the speech stream into word groups" (Jenkins 2000: 151). Of these, she prioritizes both nuclear stress placement and tone units (division into word groups). In her discussion of pitch movement, Jenkins rightly points out that much of what has been discussed in the past and that we may find in ESL/EFL textbooks deals with the "attitudinal" function of intonation; something that is notoriously dependant on the context in which it appears and is thus difficult, if not impossible, to teach. She further notes that another traditional staple of standard presentations of intonation structure, the rise and rise-fall dichotomy between "yes-no" and "wh" questions, is also no longer well supported (Geluykens 1987; Levis 1999). With regard to the possible applications of models of discourse intonation, Jenkins (2000) expresses doubts that pitch patterns of this nature are either teachable or learnable; thus, she states "we need to consider the extent to which pitch movement in fact contributes to EIL intelligibility" (Jenkins 2000: 108).

Mauranen (2006: 126) uses the example, taken from discourse intonation, of a distinction between information that is "referred to" (projected with rising tones) or "proclaimed" (projected with falling tones) as one that is potentially universal and thus "should find expression in ELF in one way or another." Such discourse phenomena have come under some initial investigation in ELF. In a study comparing deaccenting of given information in Singaporean English (SE) and British English (BE), Low (2006) finds that the two groups demonstrated different prosodic patterns. SE speakers demonstrated a lack of attenuation in F0 and duration as compared to BE speakers, and Low suggests that this information may be more readily signaled in SE using pragmatic particles. Setter (2006) compared Hong Kong English (HKE) to British English and also finds smaller differences in duration in HKE between stressed and unstressed

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prominent syllables that may make tonic syllables less easy to identify for a BE speaker. In both these studies, however, NS-NNS differences are the focus, rather than NNS-NNS communication.

In contrast, Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006) investigated ELF interaction between ASEAN speakers (L2 speakers of English from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.) They found "heavy end stress," or an indiscriminate placement of the nucleus on the final word, e.g., "I love teaching and I enjoy *teaching*" (2006: 20–21) to be a fairly common feature of the interaction, but conclude that this did not cause significant problems for intelligibility. Pitzl (2005) analyzes extracts from ELF business meetings and finds that the combination of tonic placement and rising intonation were used by participants to signal that there was a need for feedback. This indicator was recognized by interlocutors suggesting that this is a meaningful prosodic cue in ELF interaction.

Currently, there are two available corpora of interest for prosodic structure and ELF.¹ The first is the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE), a 2 million word corpus of naturally occurring spoken discourse approximately half of which is prosodically transcribed using a discourse intonation framework (Brazil 1997). A number of publications that address various aspects of discourse intonation have been published (Cheng 2004; Cheng and Warren 2005; Warren 2006). However, the corpus is focused on naturally-occurring discourse in Hong Kong between Hong King Chinese English speakers and native speakers of English from a variety of (unspecified) "inner circle" Englishes including Australian, American, and British English, and thus deals primarily with NS-NNS discourse, rather than ELF interaction. Notwithstanding, it is, as Cheng and Warren (2005: 88) note, "the first large-scale attempt to employ the discourse intonation system to mark intonation."

The LeaP corpus (Learning the Prosody of a Foreign Language) is a prosodically annotated corpus which targets English and German as second languages. Approximately 100 hours of NNS data from L1s from 32 different languages and additional NS data are included (Gut 2007). Unlike the HKCSE, the LeaP corpus comprises interviews, story retellings, and readings of lists and passages. Similarly to the HKCSE however, native or near-native speakers are included in the interactive samples found in the corpus. It seems that the investigation of intonational resources in ELF interaction is in its earliest stages. What significance pitch movement has in terms of promoting interactional success or conversely, in contributing to misunderstandings is still unclear. This paper is intended as an initial investigation into the question of what meaning, if any, ELF interlocutors may systematically attribute to pitch movement.

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3. Theoretical framework

The model of intonation structure employed in this study is the discoursepragmatic approach to intonation proposed by Brazil (1997). Both Gumperz's and Brazil's proposals share the same underlying principles regarding the communicative value of intonation in NS-based interaction. Central to Brazil's model is the principle of a "state of convergence" between discourse participants; that is, the continuous negotiation toward a roughly mutual state of understanding in the immediate and constantly changing world of naturally occurring spoken discourse that allows for successful communication between participants. Participants are in the process of negotiating a "common ground" or background to which new information is added. Intonational choices, which comprise a series of formal categories, contribute directly to this negotiation through the speaker's choices of pitch movement (tone choice) and pitch level (key choice) on prominent syllables. These choices project both referential and non-referential information which the hearers interpret within their understanding of how the system operates in English. The analysis of intonation structure in the ELF data discussed here is set within this larger framework of discourse interpretation. If it can be established that ELF interlocutors are employing intonational cues to orient to the interaction, then we can affirm that intonational resources are being used. In addition, the formal categories proposed by Brazil constrain the hearers' interpretation of particular pitch movements; thus, we can surmise what effect specific cues may be having on a given hearer's understanding of a given speaker's intent within a specific context.

3.1. Tone and key choice

In the tradition of functionally based descriptions of English intonation (Halliday 1967; Tench 1996), Brazil adopts pitch-defined tone units as a means of breaking up stretches of spoken discourse. Within each tone unit, he identifies a tonic syllable (or nucleus) which carries a sustained fundamental frequency (F0) peak, or tone choice. This tone choice marks both the informational status of the utterance and its social or informational significance within the context of the interaction and is chosen by the speaker based on her understanding of the assumptions brought to the interaction by the hearer. Falling tones (both fall and rise-fall contours) indicate the speaker's assumptions that the matter of the tone unit is a new, or in some way world-changing to the hearer and unrecoverable from the context. Rising tones (both rise and fall-rise contours) signify that the speaker assumes that the matter is part of the shared background

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Falling Tones (1)	Rising Tones (Level Tones (➡)
Finality	Continuation	Continuation
Telling	Reminding	Neutral
Proclaiming	Referring	Announcing a linguistic item

 Table 1. Pragmatic Functions associated with Tone Choice in NS-based Discourse (Table is derived from Cauldwell 2003: 106)

between participants and agrees with the current world view of the hearer. This information may be recoverable from the preceding discourse or prior knowledge assumed to be common at that time. This notion of inclusiveness is also apparent at the non-referential level of the interaction. Speakers can decrease the affective distance between themselves and their hearers by projecting a broader common ground that is more inclusive of the hearer.

The final tone choice, a sustained level pitch, has a somewhat different orientation. Using a level tone, speakers can exploit the tonal system to project a temporary withdrawal from the here-and-now negotiation with the hearer that the choice of either falling or rising tones represents. Choice of a level tone signifies the utterance as neither shared nor new but simply as a language item. By placing the utterance outside the context expressed using falling or rising tones, the speaker can signal a suspension of the moment-by-moment negotiation for any number of reasons related to the social or informational aspects of the interaction. In a typical conversational discourse, for example, a speaker may mitigate a dispreferred response or indicate that they are withholding expected agreement through the use of a level tone on a "dummy item" such as $//\Rightarrow WELL//$ or $//\Rightarrow UM//$. Some of the pragmatic functions that are typically assigned to these tone choices are summarized in Table 1.

Key choice describes the relative height or pitch level of prominent syllables using the voice range of the speaker as a "minimally fixed framework" (Couper-Kuhlen 1986). The three-tier system divides the speaker's pitch range into three levels: high (H), mid (M), and low (L). Choice of high key on a prominent syllable denotes the constituent (or matter of the tone unit) as either "contrastive" with something derivable from the preceding discourse or "particularized", i.e., highlighted as crucial over and above the surrounding information. Mid key choices have an additive function and denote the constituent as an "expansion" or "enlargement" of the information in previous units. In conversational exchanges, it is essentially the unmarked key choice and carries an expectation that the

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High key (↑)	Mid key (\rightarrow)	Low Key (↓)
Beginning	Continuation	Ending
Anticipating reaction of surprise or contrast	Anticipating agreement	Anticipating final assessment or completion
"react to this"	"agree to this"	"in other words"

Table 2. Pragmatic Functions associated with Key Choice in NS-based Discourse (Table is derived from Cauldwell 2003: 210)

hearer will understand and concur with the speaker's utterance. Finally, a low key choice signifies an "equative" value in relation to previous units. It may indicate a reformulation of previous information, or recognition that no new information is added. In exchange structures, it carries an additional restrictive function as it indicates the completion of the sequence. This is particularly evident in interactions between participants of unequal status where it is the prerogative of the participant with the higher status to signal the end of the exchange with a low key, such as an exchange between a teacher and a student. These functions are summarized in Table 2.

Although the model proposes that there are sequential implications of key choice both to the contributions of one speaker and the establishment of pitch range interactions between speakers, it should be emphasized that with regard to both of these systems, there is no absolute requirement that a speaker must obey constraints such as concord (see above). Rather, the intonation system operates on the Gricean co-operative principle that, generally speaking, speaker's contributions are designed to be understood. From this, we assume that speakers will operate on the basis of their assessment of the state of convergence between themselves, the hearer, and the message while still allowing that speakers may override any "expected" choices for "unexpected" reasons.

4. Method

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4.1. Data and participants

The data for this analysis derive from a 17 hour data set collected for the purpose of investigating the prosodic features of NNS speech. The participants and setting resemble data described in Jenkins (2000: 19) in that they comprise "the speech of NBESs from different L1s as they engage in interaction," The data set comprises twenty-five proficient and non-

proficient ELF speakers from a variety of L1 backgrounds, and four native speakers. They were collected in a university setting. Participants completed the following interactive tasks: A direction giving information gap task (NS-NNS dyads), a "spot the difference" information gap task (NNS-NNS), a dialogue reading (NS-NNS) and an informal conversation (NS-NNS). All tasks were videotaped, and sound was recorded using Sony DAT recorders and headset microphones.

4.2. Procedures

For the purposes of this paper, a subset of examples are examined from the "spot the difference" information gap task completed by the NNS-NNS dyads. For this task, each participant looked at a picture that was very similar to their partner's picture but contained some differences. Together, they had to identify the five differences between their pictures by describing their pictures to each other. There was no time limit for the task. Each interaction was transcribed and "negotiated non-understandings" (Varonis and Gass 1985) were identified. Varonis and Gass propose a straightforward model of "non-understanding" routines which comprises a trigger, "that utterance or part of an utterance on the part of the speaker with results in some indication of non-understanding on the part of the hearer" (1985: 74), and which leads to a response and a reaction to that response (see Pitzl 2005 for detailed examination of the use of this model with ELF data). Negotiation sequences that indicated negotiation of meaning through pitch movement, i.e., tone and or key as either the "trigger" or the "response" were included in the analysis. It was not possible to triangulate the interpretation of these negotiation sequences with the participants involved; thus, only sequences in which interpretation could be supported by additional evidence such as non-verbal cues from the videotapes were included.

5. Results

The results of the data analysis are given in three sections; the contributions of 1) misplaced tonic stress; 2) tone choice; and 3) key choice. I argue that in addition to tonic stress placement, which has already been recognized as a crucial component for intelligibility, ELF interlocutors interpret and respond to both pitch movement (rise, fall or level sustained tonic movement) and relative pitch height (high, mid or low key) on prominent syllables as meaningful cues in the interaction.

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5.1. Misplaced tonic stress

Example 1 confirms the significance of tonic stress for intelligibility in ELF interaction (see the Appendix for transcription conventions.)

- (1) Thai L1 speaker (T) and Korean L1 speaker (K)
- 1 T: // but near that have a big <u>PIC</u>ture//
- 2 K: // → before <u>WIN</u>dow//
- 3 T: (looks down at picture, looks back at K and frowns)
- 4 K: // → before <u>WIN</u>dow// (small hand gesture)
- 5 T: //★ not WINdow//
- 6 K: //♥ Ah—be<u>FORE</u> window// yeah//♥ <u>NEXT</u> to window//
- 7 K: (repeats softly) // ♥ <u>NEXT</u> to window //

In line 1, T is outlining his picture, and in line 2, K asks a question "before window?" with a clear nuclear stress on "*win*dow" and no appreciable stress of any kind on "before". T checks his picture again before responding to K. In line 4, K repeats his question with the same intonation and stress contour, and with the addition of a hand gesture. T immediately responds in line 5 that he is not talking about the window, which he clearly takes as K's focus; however, following a very short pause he repeats K's phrase with a change of stress to "be*fore* window" followed by a confirmation marker and then a correction using a contrastive stress pattern, "*next* to window."

This straightforward example of a misplaced nuclear stress, on the noun instead of the preposition, confuses T who initially interprets the speaker to be focused on the window instead of the picture. Following K's hand gesture, T appears to realize that K is attempting to place the picture with respect to the window in his picture. T virtually simultaneously repeats K's utterance with the correct nuclear stress, "before window", and then places a contrastive nuclear stress on the correct preposition, "next to the window". It is not possible to assess with certainty whether K understands that the resolution to T's non-understanding lies in the change in nuclear placement as well as in the lexical item "next" as opposed to "before;" however, he does respond by echoing T's final phrase with the same intonation and stress contour. Cogo and Dewey (2006: 70) describe the use of repetition in ELF discourse as an accommodation strategy that can show cooperation by "signaling agreement and listenership and engagement in the conversation," and this may be the case here.

Jenkins (2000: 49) notes that nuclear stress placement may be accompanied by "errors" in other areas of the language system such as segmental pronunciation or syntactic structure. In this case, the lack of nucleus

placement on "before" adds to an incorrect lexical choice ("before" as opposed to "next"); however, as T's comment "Ah, be*fore* window, yeah" demonstrates, the misunderstanding is compounded by the lack of primary stress on the preposition.

The remaining examples in this analysis examine negotiation routines that involve the intonational area of pitch movement, that is, tone or key choice. In each case it appears that participants are orienting toward a linguistically meaningful use of pitch height or movement that encourages them to make a particular kind of interpretation of the discourse message.

5.2. Tone choice

As discussed earlier and illustrated in Table 1, within an NS-based understanding of the tone system in English, the pragmatic value of rising tones conventionally includes continuing interaction and falling tones, a final close to an interaction. There were a number of data examples in the ELF data that demonstrated that participants were clearly orienting to this understanding of their partner's tone choices. In Example 2, between a Korean L1 and Japanese L1 speaker, rising tones are used to confirm a lexical item and both speakers use a falling tone to indicate that they have understood, and that the negotiation routine is over.

- (2) Korean L1 speaker (K) and Japanese L1 speaker (J):
- 1 K: //**≯** There is a television near the single (sh)<u>O</u>fa//
- 2 J: //**▶** <u>WHAT</u> near//
- 3 K: //**▼** (sh)<u>O</u>fa//

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- 4 J: //▼ (sh)Ofa// // ★ (sh)Ofa// (laughs—points to the sofa on his picture)
- 5 K: // YEAH // (laughs)
- 6 J: //**₽** and how many <u>CHAIR</u>//

In line 2, J asks L to confirm what the television is near to, most probably because he is processing K's mispronunciation of "sofa" as "shofa." In line 3, K repeats his error which J echoes with a rising tone in line 4, and following a short pause, revises using a falling, completion tone. He points quickly to the sofa on his picture, smiles and laughs. Despite the fact that K cannot see J's picture (and doesn't know exactly what he is pointing at), he concludes the negotiation routine with a falling tone on "yeah" and a short laugh. J goes on to ask a different question "and how many chair?" Both participants in this interaction use rising and falling tones to indicate their understanding of both their contribution and the contribution of their partner. Tone choices complement additional

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paralinguistic behaviors including "supportive laughter", something that has been noted as a frequent conversational behavior in ELF interaction and is thought to indicate cooperation between participants (Meierkord 2000, 2004).

Example 3 shows a similar pattern of pitch movement choices being successfully used to indicate that a negotiation routine (at least for one participant) has been successfully completed.

(3) Korean L1 speaker (K) and Taiwanese L1 speaker (T)

- 1 K: //★ Curtain is open <u>HAP</u>//
- 2 T: //▼ <u>HAP</u>//
- 3 K: //≯ HAP//
- 4 T: //**≯** HA-//
- 5 K: //⇒ HALF//
- 6 T: //★ HALF//
- 7 K: (laughs) // and **₽** YOUR-//
- 8 J: (laughs) // ▲ <u>AL</u>so//

In this negotiation of a pronunciation problem (K's pronunciation of "half" as "hap"), T repeats the mispronounced word twice with a rising tone (lines 2 and 4) until K clearly pronounces the syllable. T repeats the correct pronunciation in line 6 with a distinct falling, completion tone and they agree in line 8 that both their curtains are open halfway.

In both Examples 2 and 3, tone choice is used as a signal to indicate continuing and completed interactional work, and this appears to be recognized by both ELF interlocutors.

Tone choice also emerges as a feature of what have been called "semantically analyzable formulas" in ELF interaction (Kecskes 2006). That is, "target formulas" or "fixed expressions with clear compositional meaning" (Kecskes 2006: 10). In these data, such expressions frequently take the form of clarification or comprehension checks which have a fixed lexical and prosodic shape. Some examples from the data are shown in Example 4.

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(4)
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 Turkish speaker:
 // ◄ It's empty <u>RIGHT</u>//

 // ◄ It's recTANgular <u>RIGHT</u>//

 // ◄ you have a CARpet <u>YEAH</u>//

 Spanish speaker:
 // ◄ It's the SAME <u>RIGHT</u>//

 // ◄ It's the sofa is near the TAble RIGHT//

In all cases in the ELF data analyzed here, a rising tone nuclear tone is present. Previous research in NS-based discourse, however, has shown

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that small lexical items such as those in Example 4 ("yeah", "ok", "right") can carry a range of tone choices—falling, rising, or level—reflecting differences of function (Nattinger and DeCarrio 1993; Pickering 1999). It seems that participants in ELF interaction have co-opted one of these functions and recognize that the rising tone choice is essential to its interpretation. Mauranen (2006: 135) also identifies these lexical-prosodic cues which she describes as evidence of "proactive work in talk" In analysis of her data, Mauranen (2006: 136–137) suggests that "minimal confirmation checks have many uses in ELF communication ... ELF speakers can make good use of small linguistic devices." Tone choice is an inherent feature of both these descriptions.

5.3. Key choice

Key choice is concerned with relative pitch height, both within and between speakers. For each speaker in a given interaction, a typical range is identified, within which three levels of key or pitch height are marked: high, mid, and low. Choice of key within this "minimally fixed framework" (Couper-Kuhlen 1986) is associated with the pragmatic functions shown on Table 2. A consistent finding in these data is a function of key choice previously identified by Selting (1996: 231) as "a prosodically marked configuration used as an 'astonished' or 'surprised' signaling of a problem that requires special treatment." Based on her data, Selting describes "astonished questions" as the initiation of "other-initiated repair sequences in which speakers indicate problems of understanding. For such problem signaling, the speaker resumes or echoes the problematic item from a prior turn" (Selting 1996: 234). The repair is signaled by the high key choice associated in intonation models with meanings of "surprise" or "contrast", and can be loosely glossed within the discourse intonation model as "I expect you to react to this" (see Table 2). An example of this prosodic device is shown in Example 5 below.

- (5) Taiwanese L1 speaker (T) and Korean L1 speaker (K)
- 1 T: $//\rightarrow$ ok LEAVES leaves of <u>PLANT</u>//
- 2 K: $// \rightarrow \underline{YEAH}//$
- 3 T: $//\rightarrow$ how many <u>LEAVES</u>//
- 4 K: $// \rightarrow ONE$ just one //
- 5 T: //↑ just <u>ONE</u>// //↑ <u>LEAFS</u>// (looks at K)
- $6\quad K{:}\quad /\!/{\to} uh/\!/$
- 7 T: //↑ plant <u>LEAFS</u>//↑ just <u>ONE</u>//
- 8 K: // \uparrow ah <u>LEAFS</u>// //uh// (counts leaves with fingers) // \rightarrow <u>SE</u>ven//
- 9 T: $//\rightarrow$ oh <u>SAME</u>//

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Once the participants have established that there is a plant in both pictures, T asks K in line 3 how many leaves there are on the plant. K responds in line 4 saying that there is only one leaf on his plant. T responds with an elevated high key "just one?" in line 5.

This initiates the repair sequence, and K seems confused. T repeats his high key questioning in line 7, "plant leafs, just one?" and almost immediately, K responds with a matching high key, "oh leafs!" in line 8. He counts the leaves, and T responds that they have the same amount of leaves in line 9. I interpret the initiation of this negotiation by T in line 5 as probably caused by the common sense assumption on his part that K's response is unlikely to be true: one does not often see a plant with one leaf. K's matching high key response suggests his recognition that he has misunderstood "leaves" for "plant" or "stem" or perhaps the plant pot that it is in,² and he immediately rectifies the error. This use of high key marking is "routinely oriented to" by the participants in the ELF data examined here and responses suggest that these participants have similar expectations to Selting's original group of German speakers:

Their treatment of these utterances suggests that they interpret them as activities in which the speakers are manifesting a contradiction or contrast derived from their own expectations with respect to an interlocutors prior talk as displays of an overtone which in lay, participant terms could be labelled 'surprise' or 'astonishment' with respect to the content referred to. (1996: 264)

Examples 6 and 7 also demonstrate this kind of orientation by the participants to key choice. Both examples are from the same interaction between a Spanish L1 speaker (S) and a French (Beninese) speaker (F). Together, they manifest a long negotiation or repair sequence related to the number of armchairs in each picture. In Example 6 below, S is outlining her picture to her partner when she is interrupted by F.

(6)

- 1 S: // \rightarrow there is a SOfa next to <u>LAMP</u>// // \rightarrow there are two arm<u>CHAIRS</u>//
- 2 F: //↑ <u>TWO</u>//
- 3 S: //↑ YEAH//
- 4 F: $//\uparrow \underline{TWO}$ chairs//
- 5 S: $//\uparrow \underline{ARM}$ chairs/// $//\rightarrow$ and a \underline{SO} fa/// $//\rightarrow$ no $\underline{MORE}//$
- 6 F: $// \rightarrow uh \underline{-HUH} // (level tone) /$
- 7 S: (with high rising tone) $//\uparrow \underline{YEAH}//$
- 8 F: (laughs)

Following S's description of two armchairs, F interrupts with "two" using a high key choice that is considerably higher than S's key in line 1,

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and which clearly violates any expected pitch concord. S appears to orient immediately to F's pitch signal. The combination of the high key and lack of pitch concord between her initial turn and F's following turn alerts S to a potential trouble source and she responds with a high key "veah". Both participants repeat their high key questions and responses in lines 4 and 5, and S adds that there is a "sofa" and "no more", i.e., no other chairs. F's response is unexpected; her confirmation marker "uh-huh" appears in a level or 'uncommitted' tone choice but with a mid-key agreement tone. S, who has clearly oriented to F's high key choices appears puzzled by the incongruity of the last tone and key choices and responds with a high key choice "yeah" which has a "checking" function and can be glossed "I'm asking is this clear or is this not clear?" It suggests that she is reluctant to go forward until she has a clear signal from F. F responds with a smile and a short laugh, but with no further information, and together they move on to another part of the picture. As noted earlier, laughter has been reported as a common conversational behavior in ELF that may be used to mitigate potential problems and encourage consensus; certainly, at this point, there is no apparent resolution, and that is mirrored in the tone and key choices. Rather, both F and S seem to drop the issue.

These behaviors can be interpreted using Firth's (1996) "Let it Pass Principle"; a prevalent conversational strategy in ELF interaction in which "the hearer lets the unknown or unclear action, word or utterance "pass" on the (common-sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses" (p. 243). Evidence for this interpretation is found a minute or so later in the interaction, when F returns to the issue of "armchairs" and a second, more lengthy negotiation sequence begins:

(7)

- 1 F: $// \rightarrow$ HOW many chairs <u>ARM</u> chairs do you say//
- 2 S: $// \rightarrow \underline{\text{TWO}} //$
- 3 F: $// \rightarrow \underline{TWO} //$
- 4 S: $// \rightarrow \underline{\text{YEAH}}//$
- 5 F: //↑ ARMchairs, <u>TWO</u>//
- 6 S: // \uparrow YEAH <u>YEAH</u>// // \rightarrow and a SOfa- you have how<u>MA</u>ny//
- 7 F: $// \rightarrow I \text{ count } \underline{FIVE}//$
- 8 S: //↑ <u>FIVE</u>//
- 9 F: //→ I have TWO armchairs like you say <u>BUT</u> uh-// //→ HOW do you call it, the <u>MAIN</u> armchairs// (laughs)
- 10 S: $// \rightarrow I$ don't <u>KNOW</u>// (laughs)
- 11 F: $//\rightarrow$ LET'S say an armchair which has three <u>SEATS</u>//

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- 12 S: $//\uparrow \underline{\text{THREE}}$ seats// $//\rightarrow$ so you have a SOfa and $\underline{\text{THREE}}$ seats, yeah//
- 13 F: $//\uparrow$ WHAT is a <u>SO</u>fa, you say//
- 14 S: $/\!/ \rightarrow$ yeah, the <u>SO</u>fa, the big-//(makes a gesture indicating a long sofa)
- 15 F: $// \rightarrow$ yes, that is <u>IT</u>//

In line 1, F asks again how many armchairs S has in her picture. An agreement sequence between the interlocutors follows in a mid key in lines 2-4. In line 5, however, F returns to her contrastive high key with "armchairs, two?" S replies with a matching high key followed by a mid key repetition of her earlier "and a sofa." She also adds a question "you have how many?" In line 8, F responds that she has five armchairs and this time S signals her surprise with a high key "five?" In lines 9 and 10, both participants try to move forward through what they clearly now recognize as a trouble source. It becomes evident that F is not familiar with the word "sofa". She endeavors to circumvent the vocabulary problem by describing her sofa to S as "an armchair which has three seats" in line 11. S seizes on this possibility with a high key "three seats?" (glossed as "you have THREE seats not FIVE seats") and tries to confirm this with F using a mid key confirmation marker in line 12. F, however, signals a problem both with her question and her use of high key in line 13, "what is a sofa, you say?" In lines 14 and 15, both F and S reach agreement, reflected in their key choices, that they have a sofa in their picture.

In both these negotiations, key choice plays a crucial role in both signaling the trouble source and moving toward a resolution (whether it is successful or not; in fact, in this case, S and F did not realize throughout the task that they both had one sofa and two armchairs). Selting remarks that her analysis of "astonished" utterances makes clear that "prosody is not merely an additional and therefore dispensable signaling cue; in the cases under analysis, it distinguishes between activity types which would otherwise appear identical, yet which yield different recipient reactions" (1996: 232). The extracts analyzed above suggest that this is also the case in ELF interaction.

6. Discussion

Analysis of the data presented here suggests that ELF interlocutors do orient to pitch movement cues in the shape of tone and key choices; both choices in pitch movement (fall, rise or level) and pitch height (high, mid or low) are interpreted by the participants as meaningful. Key and tone choices are used by interlocutors both to signal trouble spots and to nego-

tiate their resolution. Thus, pitch movement clearly has a role in the production of intelligible and successful interaction in ELF discourse.

These data do not suggest that ELF interaction mirrors NS-based interaction in terms of the role of intonation as a pragmatics resource. This is particularly the case for what has been described as "socially integrative" uses of tone choice in NS-based interaction (Hewings 1995). Hewings reports that when contradicting a previous speaker, NS participants uniformly use a rising tone to avoid the appearance of overt contradiction that may be inferred from a falling tone. A similar strategy has been identified in NS-based classroom discourse in which teachers will use a level tone on a "dummy item" such as "well" in order to signal to a student that he/she is incorrect without indicating overt disagreement (Sinclair and Brazil 1982; Pickering 1999). There is no evidence of this "face-saving" function of tone choice in these data. In fact, participants appear to have no expectation of this kind of intonational function. Example 8 demonstrates the low, falling tones that typically occur when these speakers disagree and which may strike the NS ear as unnecessarily abrupt and rude.

- (8) Thai L1 speaker (T) and Korean L1 speaker (K)
- T: $// \checkmark$ do you have <u>TA</u>ble//
- T: //▶ <u>NO</u>// //▶ <u>TA</u>ble//

It is unclear how much of the use of pitch movement in these interactions is related to the L2 speakers' language learning experience. As Mauranen (2006) points out "all communicating parties have usually received formal instruction in English at some point. EFL is thus a 'distant' contact language for many speakers; that is, adopted via foreign language instruction rather than personal contact" (p. 126). It seems reasonable to suppose that such instruction may have resulted in learners acquiring certain fixed intonational patterns or "chunks" in their speech that they bring to their ELF interactions. If they perceive these patterns to be "semantically transparent", they may converge on these forms throughout the interaction (Kecskes 2006).³

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Finally, we would anticipate universal discourse level features to appear in ELF interaction in some form (Mauranen 2006). Not a great deal of work has been conducted with regard to pitch universals (Vaissiere 1983), although Jenkins (2000) notes that "although tone universals undoubtedly exist, it seems that the use of tones is also to a fairly large extent language-specific" (p. 43). Cruttenden (1997) suggests that some tonal usages "exhibit clear near-universal differences between the use of falling tones on the one hand and rising tones on the other" (p. 163). He

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proposes a "cover label" of "closed" for falling intonation and "open" for rising intonation patterns. This general description is supported by the first few data samples discussed here; however, its application is limited.

The confirmation checks shown in Example 4 seem rather to point to a lexical and prosodic "chunk" that has been acquired by the L2 speakers, and not necessarily to the transfer of a universal set of meanings for specific contours. As Cruttenden observes, although there may be some "near universal links" between meanings and tone choices, "this is of course in no sense to say that there are no differences in the exact realizations of the falls and rises of different languages" (1997: 163). Such an investigation is beyond the purview of this paper; however, it is noted here that further systematic observation of both phonetic and phonological characteristics of ELF speakers in interaction is needed to adequately address this question.

It is noteworthy that studies in NNS-NS interaction have typically reported L2 speakers using low final tones at boundaries between related propositions where NS hearers would anticipate a rising or mid level tone (Wennerstrom 1994, 1997; Pirt 1990). This was not a typical finding for these data and suggests that ELF speakers may be converging on what they perceive to be universal functions of intonational structure. That said, it is also the case that these data do not present a discourse context in which a substantial series of extended turns present themselves. They were collected under experimental conditions and were limited to information gap tasks. It is crucial that we assess the role of the same intonational features in naturally occurring ELF interaction, and this investigation is currently underway. Certainly, this initial investigation into the role of intonation as a resource in ELF investigation suggests that there is more to be uncovered in relation to intonational resources and ELF interaction.

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Notes

1. ELF corpora currently in development include the VOICE (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) corpus (Seidlhofer 2001) and the ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca Academic) corpus (Mauranen 2003).

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- 2. My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this observation.
- 3. Data from the LeaP corpus, for example, show that many of the L2 speakers from widely different L1 backgrounds adopt a typical "listing intonation" pattern (rises with a final fall) during their readings of the word lists in English.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions

tone unit boundaries
prominent syllables
tonic syllable carrying the tone choice or tonal pitch movement associated with the tone unit
falling tone
rising tone
level tone
high key
mid key
low key

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