

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTONATION OF 'SABRINA' BY D. BOLINGER'S PROFILES (1)

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As early as 1951 Dwight L. Bolinger presented an idea to the effect that configurations rather than levels should be used as the basic units of intonation.¹ Such units of intonation are later referred to as 'profiles', which are accent-centered and are "determined by how the pitch jump cuing the accent is realized."²

The purpose of this paper is to show how the intonation analysis in terms of D. Bolinger's profiles proves to be efficient in dealing with any intonational materials that we may try to analyze, revealing subtle semantic differences accurately. In this paper, we will try to transcribe the intonation of sample dialogues from the 1954 American movie 'Sabrina' using the 'squibble notation' devised by D. Bolinger, and try to see how the "rich, almost endlessly varied, potpourri of examples and elegantly sensitive semantic readings"³ that Bolinger describes in *Intonation and its Parts* and *Intonation and its Uses*⁴ work successfully when applied to other materials we may want to analyze.

The dialogue begins with David Larrabee who comes across a most sophisticated woman as he goes cruising in his car, stops his car, and talks to her. But he does not quite recognize her as Sabrina Fairchild, his chauffeur's daughter, who is waiting for her father to pick her up in front of the Glen Cove Station after two years' study at a cooking school in Paris:

(1) David: Taxi, Miss? Cheapeest rates in Glen Cove.

(2) Sabrina: Well, hel lo- o- How are yo o! u?

Let us analyze the forms of this dialogue first, and then examine their meanings. The first part of utterance (1) may be analyzed as B+B. "In Profile B the accent is jumped up to."⁵ But since *taxi* is accented and "the accented syllable is initial, there is nothing to mark

the upward jump except the fact that the accent is at a fairly high pitch: there is an ‘up to’ in the speaker’s range. There are various treatments of the syllables following the accented syllable of a B. The end of a B, from the accented syllable on, could be rising, level, or falling.”⁶ With *Taxi, Miss?* it is rising. With the second part of utterance (1), *Cheapest rates in Glen Cove*, which may be analyzed as B+ B+ B+ A, the ends of the three B’s are all falling, with *cheap-*, *rates*, *Glen* and *Cove* each taking an accent.

There may or may not be an additional B on *Miss* in utterance (1). “Without an abrupt change such as might signal an additional accent, or without the dropback after the first B [*Taxi, Miss?* is neither of these], a succession of two B’s is apt to be heard as a single B,”⁷ with accent on *tax-* and everything following that syllable, including *Miss*, merely part of the tail—this would be appropriate if the vocative has already been introduced.⁸

The upness in pitch of Profile B as we see on *Taxi, Miss?* represents ‘keyed-upness’ which may be interpreted as merely the curiosity that goes with having a question to ask.⁹ “Profile A with its terminal fall is a coming-to-rest. The fall conveys notions related to termination. The most important is the cutoff: I’m through with speaking, now it’s your turn,”¹⁰ It may also convey ‘finality’ in a modal sense: I’m sure of myself, that’s that.¹¹ We see this use of Profile A at the end of the B + B + B + A contour on *Cheapest rates in Glen Cove*.

Each of the two parts of utterance (2) has an A, with accents on *-lo* and *are*, respectively. But the first A for *Hello!* is more high-pitched than the second A for *How are you?* and the extraordinarily high pitch of the first A shows that the speaker is highly aroused or excited. It is a hello that carries such a degree of familiarity and excitement that may be used only to an old acquaintance or close friend that one meets unexpectedly with pleasant surprise.

(3) David: W^ell, I’m f i n e. How are y o u?

And I might a d d — w h o a r e y o u?

(4) Sabrina: a m Who I - I - I ?

The first sentence of (3) may be analyzed as CA+A, with accents on *well* and *fine*, respectively. The CA profile on *Well* fits in with the following description by Bolinger: “The CA profile. . . represents a sort of breaking free of prior restraint, embodied in the initial low

Utterance (5) may be analyzed as B + B, with an accent on *-posed* and *know*. The tail is level and slightly rising for the first and second B, respectively. “The place where B is most conspicuous . . . is its sentential use in utterance-final position, where because of the fact that there is no cutoff (in the form of a drop in pitch) and the pitch usually remains high, the effect is that of ‘something unfinished.’ Here we find the prototypical instances of noninformativeness, namely yes-no questions.”¹⁹ “Noninformativeness is of a kind with incompleteness: the information comes in the answer, which completes the conversational exchange.”²⁰

Thus in utterance (6) the information comes with B+A on *no, you’re not supposed to know*. Before this B+A contour comes a sort of preliminary remark: *Come to think of it-*, which takes an A, since it is a separate piece of information Sabrina wants to convey.

(7) David: Are you stránded?

(8) Sabrina: My fáther was supposed to pick me up,

but something must have hap
pened.

Utterance (7) is another example of the sentential use of B in utterance-final position. As we saw in (5) and (1), the upness in pitch of B signifies ‘keyed-upness’ which in these examples may be merely the curiosity that goes with having a question to ask.²¹

The first part of utterance (8) is A, which “in contrast with B, can be used in the middle of an utterance to assert an independent fact.”²²

The second part of utterance (8) is B+A. One feature of B+A contrasted with A + A is “a tight union between profiles.”²³ Compared with A + A, B+A does not single out individual items for attention and aims at total effect rather than analytical significance.²⁴ Utterances (1) and (5) obviously make use of the B+A for such effect by “having the B higher than the start of the A” that “produces . . . a kind of synthesizing effect.”²⁵ Utterance (8) also makes use of the B+A for such effect. If A + A were used, individual items would be singled out for attention and the utterance would sound more serious: the speaker is very much concerned about her father; she is afraid something serious must have happened to her father. But with the contour B + A as is used in utterance (8), the speaker sounds less worried. Concerning such use of B + A, Bolinger also states: “A further phrasal syntactic use is to express a kind of casual observation—we might say that it *comments* rather than *tells*

. . . as if to imply 'no great need to tell you this'—the speaker may be downplaying it or may feel that it is too obvious to view as a matter of information."²⁶

(9) David: Who^{ever} your father^{is}, and what^{ever} happened,

ternally
I'll be e^{grat}eful.

That^{is}, if I can give you a li^{ft}.

(10) Sabrina: You cer^ctainly aⁿ. You can drive me ho^me.

In the first sentence of utterance (9), B + \hat{A} (= lower-pitched A) is used consecutively three times. B + A is used when "feeling, rather than fact, is uppermost,"²⁷ and embraces a wide range of emotive utterance, including imperiousness (often referred to as a "lofty" tone, which accords with the sustained high pitch of the B—the speaker is "on his high horse").²⁸ In utterance (9), one may feel imperiousness or at least an insistent attitude of the speaker. To quote Bolinger: "Clearly no one emotion governs these uses of B + A. Broadly, they seem to be a form of self-expression, speaker-dominant, leading not to answers that appeal for acceptance but to *comments* that the audience is expected to take at face value."²⁹

The second sentence of utterance (9) takes A + A. "Where the B + A family represents a tight union between profiles, the A + A family represents a loose one. The drop in pitch that marks the A signifies separation of some kind when it precedes another A. . . . The separation may be for sense or for power. . . . When a speaker wants to make the usually B + A *Now take it easy!* especially forceful, he uses A + A."³⁰ In utterance (9) the normally unaccented *that* takes an extra accent to make the conditional meaning more forceful: 'Only if I can give you a lift.'

The first sentence of utterance (10) also makes use of the A + A for the basic meanings of assertiveness and separate attention. The first A profile could be eliminated altogether for less force, but in this dialogue two A profiles are used. And the contour is in the form of A + \hat{A} (= higher-pitched A). Concerning the relative height of A profiles, Bolinger says that "we could of course say . . . with the first peak higher than the second [i.e. we could use A + \tilde{A}], but that might risk offence" and that "the former shape [i.e. A + \hat{A}] is the

“. . . relative height is a factor in suiting the B profile to certain more or less stereotyped situations and contexts. Having the B higher than the start of the A produces . . . a kind of synthesizing effect. This makes it suitable for routine combinations,”⁴⁵ which include frozen expressions, compounds, phrases with a high degree of fusion,⁴⁶ and probably aphorisms like ‘Love Thy Neighbor,’ especially when they make a part of someone’s utterance and when they are not independently cited, although aphorisms like *It’s never too late to mend*, *Old soldiers never die*, *Pretty is as pretty does* readily take the contour B + B + C (i.e., the final A profile is replaced by a C profile) and these profiles tend to make terraced monotones.⁴⁷

The interjection *Oh* at the beginning of utterance (16) takes a B and suggests “enhancement, including emphasis and intensification.”⁴⁸ “*Oh* also heightens enthusiasm, which is further augmented . . . by prolonging the interjection,”⁴⁹ as it is done here with Sabrina’s utterance. “. . . The normal intonation contour for these enhancing uses of *oh* is B+ \tilde{A} , sometimes B+ \tilde{A} , with *oh* a relatively high-pitched B. For greater emphasis A+A is common enough”⁵⁰ But *Oh, so do I* of utterance (16) takes the normal B+ \tilde{A} (the phrase *so do I* takes a B+A of its own, “but the tightly connected B+A segments can be viewed, in effect, as single A’s”⁵¹). At the same time, the sociability component of *oh*, which can be seen in the kind of affirming that it does: it does not assert, it agrees,⁵² may be present. The speaker’s impulse to be agreeable rather than to assert comes to the fore in the way *oh* collocates well, given a B+A contour, when affirmation is by way of reassuring the hearer.⁵³ So much for the use of *oh* and its collocation with what follows. Next, we will examine the contour used on the phrase *so do I*.

The phrase *so do I* takes B + A with accents on *so* and *I*, respectively. “B is most in evidence where things are predictable, where there is no need to single them out for separate attention. It may be that an expression is predictable . . . because some part or all of it has been previously introduced,”⁵⁴ as *do so* here has been previously introduced in David’s utterance referring to believing in ‘Love Thy Neighbor’. The second sentence *Come on, David* is addressed to Sabrina’s dog, and it has the contour A+C, the C being applied to the vocative.⁵⁵

NOTES

1. Dwight L. Bolinger, ‘Intonation; Levels Versus Configurations’ *Word*, Vol.7, No.3, Part 1 (1951) pp.199-210.

2. Dwight L. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Parts* (Stanford U.P., 1986), p.139.

The material quoted is enclosed in quotation marks only when it is a strictly direct quotation. When some modification of the original description is necessary due to its application to the material presently discussed, or when some interpretation of the original description by the present writer becomes necessary, the material referred to is not enclosed in quotation marks but only shown by a referential index, to distinguish it from a strictly direct quotation.

3. Robert P. Stockwell, ‘Obituary Dwight L. Bolinger’ *Language*, 69(1993) p.105.

4. Dwight L. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Uses*, 1989, Stanford U.P.

5. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Parts*, p. 152.

6. *Ibid.* , p.152.
7. *Ibid.* , pp.152-53.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.* , p.341.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.* ,p.244.
13. *Ibid.* , p.177.
14. *Ibid.* , p.177.
15. *Ibid.* , p.182.
16. *Ibid.* , p.162.
17. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Uses* , p.134.
18. *Ibid.* , p.135.
19. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Parts* , p.175.
20. *Ibid.* , pp.175-76.
21. *Ibid.* , p.341.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.* , p.292.
24. *Ibid.* , p.284.
25. *Ibid.* , p.280.
26. *Ibid.* , pp.173-74. Bolinger(1989 p.270) ,in discussing sentences that begin with the interjection *oh* , compares A +A and B+A expressing the most appropriate degree of concern versus lightheartedness.
27. *Ibid.* , p.284.
28. *Ibid.* , p.286.
29. *Ibid.* , p.287.
30. *Ibid.* , p.292.
31. *Ibid.* , p.59.
32. *Ibid.* , p.284.
33. *Ibid.* , p.297.
34. *Ibid.* , pp.301-2.
35. *Ibid.* , p.293, p.149, p.225.
36. *Ibid.* , p.179.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Uses* , p.133.
39. *Ibid.* , p.134.
40. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Parts* , p.177.
41. *Ibid.* , p.156.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.* , p.157.
45. *Ibid.* , p.280.
46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, p.229.
48. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Uses*, p.269.
49. *Ibid.*, p.271.
50. *Ibid.*, p.272.
51. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Parts*, p.293.
52. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Uses*, p.272.
53. *Ibid.*, pp.272-73.
54. Bolinger, *Intonation and its Parts*, pp.166-67.
55. *Ibid.*, pp.268ff.