

H. H. HARTVIGSON, *On the intonation and position of the so-called sentence modifiers in present-day English*. (pp. 269. Odense University Studies in English, 1. Odense University Press, 1969). Reviewed by DAVID CRYSTAL, University of Reading.

Books with titles like this one are much needed, if intonation studies are to progress beyond the stage of impressionistic description, and make a significant contribution to linguistic theory. Detailed studies of the relationship between intonational and syntactic patterns are likely to be both a corrective and a stimulus to thinking about the nature of linguistic structure and semantic interpretation. This book is one of the first to appear that concentrates on the description of an area of English syntax which involves taking account of intonation as a major means of expounding structurally significant semantic contrasts. It was a good idea to take sentence adverbials, as there are enough scattered references in the literature, and enough intuitive agreement amongst colleagues, to suggest that a project along these lines would be both feasible and illuminating. But unfortunately, the procedure Hartvigson uses stifles illumination right from the start, so that little of positive theoretical or descriptive value comes out of it. It is a dispiriting thing to have to say, as a tremendous amount of detailed work has been carried out during the investigation; but it cannot be used as a foundation for any further work on the nature of English speech. The reason is quite straightforward: the data cannot be trusted. From the title, one would be forgiven, in this day and age, for assuming that spontaneous conversation, everyday speech, or whatever you like to call it, was going to be the primary object of study. Far from it. What

we are given is written English read aloud—moreover, mainly literary English, and moreover again, largely read aloud by the author himself, it seems.

'It seems' is a necessary qualification, for we are given no clear information about the author's procedures for obtaining his spoken samples. He says on p. 26 that his texts are either his own or someone else's 'correct rendering of a speech sequence' (the two 'informants' referred to in other parts of the book are used only for recordings made for the purposes of acoustic analysis of selected sentences). We are however given full information about the texts: over 100 sources are carefully listed, including novels, non-fiction, newspapers, and periodicals, and sentences from these are scrupulously cross-referenced to them throughout the book.<sup>1</sup> One expects these vast compilations of literary or semi-literary material in the work of scholars falling within the continental handbook tradition of grammatical description, but their presence in a book ostensibly on intonation makes one suspicious; and one would be right to be so. The word 'correct' in the above quotation provides further grounds. Not only is the analysis based on written English read aloud—only 'correct' English is to be permitted for analysis. Hartvigson brings in Chomsky in an attempt to justify this position, but he chooses one of Chomsky's least enlightening passages to do so, and ends up in trouble. He says (p. 26): 'We assume that the text under analysis is correct, i.e. that it would be accepted as such by any number of native speakers of the dialect in question. By "correct" we mean the same as Chomsky [reference given] means by "acceptable", which he uses "to refer to utterances that are perfectly natural and immediately comprehensible without paper-and-pencil analysis, and in no way bizarre and outlandish".' There are two naiveties here, one to do with the matter of determining acceptability, and the other to do with how Hartvigson sees correctness in practice.

Anyone who has tried to do acceptability work with native speakers knows that it is not so easy to demonstrate things in the way that the quotation above suggests. This is especially the case when intonation is involved. Indeed, there is no agreed technique for eliciting native-speaker reactions even for syntax as yet, let alone intonation; and the problems which have yet to be solved are

<sup>1</sup> Hartvigson's concern for verifiability is in fact excessive. For example, we are told that the sentence 'The book falls naturally into two parts' occurred in the TLS on the 2nd September 1960, and then given a further SEVEN examples, just as specifically referenced, of the same construction (the use of 'naturally' in this position). I would be the first to defend the importance of corpus work as a balance against uncontrolled intuitionism in linguistic description; but this is really going too far. One-third of the book is data. Hartvigson may have needed to go through all this in order to develop his classification; but he did not have to print it; and little is gained by having done so.



numerous.<sup>2</sup> Thus when Hartvigson says (p. 27), in relation to a pause-insertion technique which he wants to use to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable sentence-pairs: 'This . . . has the advantage over a purely intuitive placing of the terminal that its results can be checked by asking informants which of the possibilities they prefer,' one can only smile. It is necessary only to try asking to see why. Throughout the book, the author refers to sentences as being 'natural', 'unlikely', and so on (e.g. pp. 126, 161); but there is no evidence that these remarks are based upon anything other than his own impressions of his own renderings. Naturally enough, inconsistencies follow—for instance, on p. 126, where he states that 'emphatic intonation is a possible alternative [in two syntactic positions previously described], but it cannot be said to be natural or neutral in any of the positions concerned'. For how can a pattern be both unnatural AND possible in correct English simultaneously? This is a small difficulty; but it arises from the same cause as my uncertainty about many of his recommended transcriptions. Even allowing for a fair amount of flexibility in interpreting the phonetic claims of the largely Schubigerian intonation transcription, there are too many examples of suggested usages where my own intuitions disagree with Hartvigson's for comfort. The question can only be settled by setting up adequate controls, and some attempt at this should have been made, in view of the artificiality of the data.

This brings me to the second general point—Hartvigson's readiness to use out-of context renderings of literary extracts as the basis of his generalisations about 'present-day English'. On pp. 35–6 he gives a clear indication of the nature of his data: he calls it 'edited speech'. The section needs to be quoted at length, to get a hint of the circularity and confusion which this notion gives rise to. 'By "edited speech" we mean the speech of someone with a good command of his subject and language. Unedited speech is characterized by numerous anomalous pauses,<sup>3</sup> by terminals that do not fall at syntactic boundaries, and by a number of other features . . . All these are alien to the system of the language spoken, and thus unpredictable from a linguistic point of view. In edited speech, everything that is not purely personal . . . belongs to the system of the language spoken . . . Below we shall use "edited speech" as the basis for our

<sup>2</sup> A valuable discussion of the problem is in Quirk and Svartvik, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> As far as I can gather from p. 30, these are silent or filled hesitation features, which are assumed not to belong to the system of the language. He does, however, allow them to be used stylistically, 'for effect', though this notion, and its relationship to 'non-stylistic' meaning, is nowhere defined. Hartvigson's discussion of pause is very scrappy, in view of all the work which has gone on in this area over recent years: he refers only to one of Boomer's papers, and concludes too readily that pauses are unsystematic.

investigation, or rather, an edited rendering of our corpus, most of which is taken from printed sources . . . in Chomskyan terms [reference given], we shall deal with "competence" and not with "performance", or rather, with the kind of performance which reflects a speaker's competence most faithfully'. So: we know *a priori* what competence is, and permit as acceptable only those performances (in both Chomsky's and the artistic sense!) which tally with it, presumably in the author's judgement; any data which shows the unpredictability of everyday speech are excluded. It is not surprising, then, that in such data, to take one example, 'terminals always fall at syntactico-semantic boundaries' (p. 35); they could hardly do anything else. I cannot accept this kind of reasoning as reputable linguistic SCIENCE. Hartvigson seems to think that his approach is quite normal, however, as he also says (p. 36): 'Most linguists do not use the speech of ordinary people in everyday situations as a basis for their investigations . . . They describe the kind of language most of us think we speak until we hear a recording of a casual conversation in which we are taking part.' Really! I would have thought that the aims and practices of most linguists these days was quite the reverse—at least one TRIES for everyday speech. There has to be a selection of speakers and utterances, naturally; but to be valid this selection cannot be made using criteria which it is the purpose of the conclusions to establish.

As a result of all this, the book contains a large number of rules whose descriptive status is uncertain, and whose relationship to the system underlying spontaneous speech is purely speculative. Many of Hartvigson's rules and categorisations are very neat, and there are relatively few exceptions to his generalisations; but this is hardly surprising for such regularised data. To be fair, he does not try to force exceptions into his classificatory system; he is aware that in language 'things are perhaps not quite as neat as we might wish them to be' (p. 35). Agreed. But his exceptions would be miniscule beside the large number of problems which would have emerged if he had analysed spontaneous speech. And it is this which an analysis of 'present-day English' ought to be concerned with.

Anyone who reads this book cannot fail to be impressed with the thoroughness and attention to detail which the author has shown in approaching his task. It is a doctoral thesis, and a very respectable one, within the frame of reference it chooses to use and the tradition of scholarship within which it falls. It is the frame of reference itself which is the main problem. Moreover, the tradition also is suspect in a number of places, in that it invites procedures which would be considered irrelevant to the question by present-day standards. For instance, he wastes a lot of expensive space reproducing intensity and pitch [*sic*] curves in the first half of the book, for he is quite unclear



about their purpose. At one point (p. 24) he claims that they are an aid to 'accurate segmentation' (though I do not see how), at another he says they are 'merely used as illustrations in the same way as transcriptions are' (also p. 24), and still on the same page he says that 'they are not meant to prove anything'—and indeed I can see no relevance whatsoever for them in relation to his linguistic argument. Again, he spends a commendable amount of time worrying about terminological clarity, but his concern in practice is more with the names of categories and not with the criteria upon which such categories should be established.<sup>4</sup> As a result he fails to make important distinctions which are necessary in order to make sense of the conceptual basis of his approach—for example, in his survey of intonational functions, he fails to differentiate between linguistically contrastive and non-contrastive functions of pitch. And again, despite his reference to competence, and the like, his grammatical approach is well within structuralist traditions, and shares in its weakness—at the very beginning of the book, for instance, he indicates his belief in the view that before one can write a grammar, the grammatical classes involved must be defined (p. 13), a view which would receive little support in contemporary linguistic theory.

Hartvigson has provided a massive compilation of material, and gives the reader a number of hints about the kind of problems to be faced in analysing this area of language; but the methodological and theoretical immaturity of his approach reduces its value considerably. He has certainly indicated the complexity of the relationship between intonation and grammar; but he has not gone far towards helping us to unravel it.

## References

- GREENBAUM, S. (1969). *Studies in English adverbial usage*. London: Longmans.  
QUIRK, R. and SVARTVIK, J. (1966). *Investigating linguistic acceptability*. The Hague: Mouton.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the emphasis on structural criteria in S. Greenbaum, 1969. The complexity of sentence-adverbials is made very apparent in this book, and makes one wonder whether any approach intending to establish distributional patterns of word-classes for this area is likely to succeed. Hartvigson does not refer to Greenbaum, but it would be essential reading for anyone wishing to assess the difficulties involved in investigating sentence-adverbials.