

Chapter 1. Introduction

This dissertation provides an account of the phonology and phonetics of intonation in Derry City within the Autosegmental Metrical (AM) framework. Derry City is located in the northwest of Northern Ireland near the border with Donegal in the Republic of Ireland and is the second largest urban area in Northern Ireland. Derry City English (DCE) belongs to the northern Irish English variety (nIE), which is spoken across most of Northern Ireland, in Donegal, and in northern parts of counties Monaghan and Cavan. The AM framework views the pitch contour as the systematic implementation of a sequence of underlying phonological primitive tones (L for low and H for high) inside an intonational phrase (IP). The majority of AM research on northern Irish English has focused on Belfast English, with a much smaller body of research on Donegal English. Only one study of intonation in Derry City has been carried out in the last forty years, and that presented an analysis of two speakers within the framework of the British Tradition of intonational analysis. There has until now, been no larger scale research on Derry City intonation, nor any research conducted within the AM framework, even though this approach has been the dominant mode of intonational analysis for the last thirty years.

The first broad aim of this work, therefore, is to offer a description of Derry City English within the AM framework so that it is amenable to comparison with other studies of nIE intonation, with the intonation of other varieties of English, and with intonation in other languages. It catalogues the phonological inventory and phonetic features of pitch events in relation to a variety of formal and functional conditions. On the formal side, it analyses intonation in unmarked declaratives under a range of metrical conditions, namely variation in foot size, anacrusis (unstressed content before the first stressed syllable), and lexical boundary conditions. On the functional side, it analyses intonation across sentence modes (declaratives, binary questions, wh-questions, and declarative questions) and under different of focus conditions. In this context, focus refers any semantic element which the speaker brings to prominence in an utterance, through linguistic and implementational strategies.

The second key aim of the research is theoretical in nature. It originates in questions raised by the pervasive use of rising intonation in unmarked contexts in northern Irish English, while most other varieties of English (and other languages) tend to have a fall in pitch. Firstly, this raises questions about the phonology and the phonetics of intonation, in terms both of description and function. For example, within AM, it is common to divide the pitch contour into a linguistic component which can be described in terms of intonational phonology, and a paralinguistic component which exists (quasi-)independently of the linguistic element. The linguistic/paralinguistic distinction may be easy to maintain when unmarked declaratives and binary question use pitch accents involving different pitch trajectories, i.e., a falling pitch in the nuclear contour (H*L %) and binary questions use a rising pitch (L*H % or L*H H%). However, if the same rising contour