

- Robertson, Michael. "Is Anybody Listening?: Responding to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 37 (1986): 87-91.
- Rubens, Philip M. "Oral Grading Techniques: An Interactive System for the Technical Writing Classroom." *Technical Writing Teacher* 10 (1982): 41-44.
- Sommers, Nancy I. "Responding to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 33 (1982): 148-156.
- Stratton, Charles R. "The Electric Report Card: A Follow-up on Cassette Grading." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* (1975): 17-22.
- Tanner, Bernard. "Teacher to Disc to Student." *English Journal* (1964): 362-363.
- Volger, Stephen H. "Grading Themes: A New Approach; A New Dimension." *English Journal* (1971): 70-74.
- Zak, Frances. "Between the Red Pencil and the Smiley Face: More Ways to Respond to Student Writing." Conference on College Composition and Communication. St. Louis, Missouri, 18 March 1988.

DEFINING AND TEACHING VOICE IN WRITING: THE PHONOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Rosemary L. Gates
The Catholic University of America

Teaching students to write is difficult, but we've found ways to do it better and more systematically through studying language and cognitive processes, social and personal contexts, and textual structures and features. One feature of text that still eludes us is "voice." Most of us will grant that it is one of the most important aspects of good writing, but no adequate definition exists. By adequate, I mean a definition that is both conceptually useful, to help us understand what goes into making up what we call voice, and pedagogically useful, to indicate directions for classroom practices that can actually help our students develop textual voices. Only a few attempts have been made to come to terms with this difficult but important area. Ken Macrorie, who himself writes with a wonderful sense of voice, tells us that the key is the ability of writers to hear what the text sounds like (185-86). Wallace Chafe, who has written recently about the role of punctuation in getting across a sense of voice, corroborates Macrorie's view with a quote from one of the twentieth century's master storytellers, Eudora Welty. In her autobiographical essay, *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty tells us that voice is something she hears, internalized but "spoken": "Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't hear. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me . . . My own words, when I am at work on a story, I hear too as they go, in the same voice that I hear when I read in books." To develop the concept of *voice*, then, it seems we must at least begin with some version of a spoken voice that is learned so well that the writer is able to hear written lines.

But how does a writer accomplish a sense of her own voice, distinct and interesting, along with other qualities she may want to project? In *One Writer's Beginnings*, Welty says that her writing begins with a sense of "rumblings." Other writers—Edgar Allan Poe, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, to name a few—have said that they too first get a sense of rhythmic motion, some felt turbu-

lence or beauty. One thing we might do with students is to have them listen for the sound a piece of writing seems to have before beginning to set pen to paper, and to keep listening during drafting. I know that before I begin to set pen to paper I listen, for a quiet, concentrated moment, for the sound the writing is to have. I do this even with most business writing, especially if the audience or form is new to me. I also look for a sense of shape in that moment. And I don't think the two—sound and shape—are separate at the discourse level, though I'm not sure why I think that. Perhaps I extend what I do know about sound and shape at the phrase level, where the two are not separate. It is at this level, of the phrase, that I think we can best begin an exploration of the concept of voice and its involvement in shape and meaning.

Though linguists have studied phonology for a century, only in the last two decades, with the publication of Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle's *The Sound Pattern of English* in 1968, has research on the accentual contour of the phrase progressed. The area of linguistics that deals with the sounds of language—with their shapes, structures, and the relation of sound to meaning—is phonology. Of all areas of linguistic study, phonology is the most scientific; it was the rigor of phonological study that afforded linguistics its scientific status. From the study of phonology we can arrive at a conceptual basis of the "sound-shape" of the English phrase as a beginning toward a definition of voice. From phonology we can also draw some practical applications for the classroom instruction of voice. In the first part of this essay I summarize relevant linguistic research on the sound, shape, and meaning of phrases, and in the second part I describe a set of classroom procedures for helping students to become aware of the phonological rules underlying spoken English and to learn to incorporate that knowledge in developing a written voice.

The "Sound-Shape" of the English Phrase: Toward a Definition of Voice

Though linguistic research on phonology applies to oral speech, written texts, according to Carlos Gussenhoven, are read in "full focus"—the sound pattern described for speech by Chomsky and Halle in 1968.¹ Chomsky and Halle proposed that a basic sound pattern ("shape"), characterized by a contour of ascending levels of prominence from sentence beginning to sentence end, was the norm for all English sentences. An accompanying set of distressing rules was proposed to account for the positions of lesser degrees of prominence. Much subsequent work contributed to the refinement of the theory and the rules, and some linguists took issue with the motivational aspect of the theory, which Chomsky and Halle asserted was syntactic. But for the first time, linguists looked beyond the word level to the phonology of the entire sentence. As with most earlier (since 1948) and later linguists, Chomsky and Halle used a four-level system of prominence: three degrees—primary, secondary, and tertiary—and one level of non-prominent syllables, which was the baseline from which the voice began and to which it returned in its forays into other prominence levels. Actually, the gradations of prominence are finer, but the human ear can detect at most four levels; therefore, only four levels are perceptually relevant.

According to Chomsky and Halle's theory, the sound pattern of English is such that new information falls at the end of the sentence, or the "phonological phrase" (which could be something shorter than a sentence). Thus, primary prominence, the highest degree of accent, falls on the word that is the focal point of the new information. This focal point is normally the last *lexical item* in the phrase. (A *lexical item* is a word bearing information—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs—rather than

indicating functional relations, which is the work of prepositions, articles, conjunctions, pronouns.) Lesser degrees of prominence precede the primary focal point, in an ascending order of degree and following syntactically determined stress reduction rules.² The function of the lesser degrees of prominence is thought to point toward the primary prominence point, signaling onset of topic (old information) and alerting the hearer to new or otherwise important information linked to the topic.³ Normally, only lexical items will acquire prominence. As an example, consider this sentence. A response to "Why didn't you attend the party?" might be:

2 1
My mother was sick.

where 1 indicates primary prominence and 2 indicates secondary prominence. In this case, the most important item of information is *sick*. *Mother*, being a lexical item and the onset of topic, acquires a secondary degree of prominence. This is the sound pattern of the normal, or "unmarked," sentence. But the degrees might be switched to

1 2
My mother was sick.

if the speaker wishes to indicate that his mother was the most important factor, rather than her illness, as might happen if she habitually did not allow the child to go places for various reasons, or if he *felt* she was intrinsically the reason for the lack of permission and not her illness.

These possibilities for prominence that I have described so far all fall within the normal range of variation. According to Dwight Bolinger, emotional intensity, including the desire to indicate the importance of certain words, is the motivation behind prominence, not syntax as Chomsky and Halle asserted (1966, 1983, 1986). Following Bolinger's theory, we have a partial explanation for the sense of a personality speaking behind certain types of writing. Writing which deploys the sound-shape in patterns that require a high degree of heightened prominences would indicate a mind thinking and valuing. In addition, a raising of the range of variation, with the voice going higher (or lower) in pitch, the primary indicator of prominence, would indicate a heightened emotional intensity. In the example above, neither *mother* or *sick* would be voiced with a greater pitch change than is normal for that speaker, and could be marked with an S to indicate surmounted pitch range (Bolinger, 1961, 1986; Gates, 1987). Thus,

- S1 2
(1) My mother was sick.
- or
- 2 S1
(2) My mother was sick.
- or
- S2 S1
(3) My mother was sick.

These changes, when transferred to writing, can only be indicated by contextual meaning, by graphemic signals (underlining, italicizing, capitalizing), or by rewording the message in such a way that it will bear the intended meaning through the vocabulary or the rhythmic potential of written language. When the dialogue format is inappropriate, as it is in most kinds of writing (at least currently), the sense of the spoken voice must be retained while adapting itself to a literate style of syntax and vocabulary. For instance, with no question posed, all the information has to be included in the response. Example 1 could be written as

I couldn't go to the party because of my mother. She was sick.

I couldn't go to the party because my mother was sick.

My mother was sick so I couldn't go to the party.

Of these, the first carries the strongest sense of speaking voice. The information about the illness comes in a short independent clause following a longer sentence. The contrast of rhythm helps to highlight the information, but setting the information in its own sentence also gives more weight, more importance, to the content of the phrase, and adds to the emotive content. To use a dash in place of the period after mother would increase the emotional immediacy of the writer, giving a sense of a person speaking without rearranging the language:

I couldn't go to the party because of my mother—she was sick.

To use a semi-colon would give a more formal feel, and a sense of a logical mind at work pulling together the relationships among ideas in a consciously controlled way, since a semi-colon and a colon normally indicate logical relationships not emotional ones:

I couldn't go to the party; my mother was sick.

The semi-colon alone carries the literate style here, so that the brevity and organization remain without sacrificing the appearance of a literate writer. The strategy of using punctuation well to maintain a casual speaking voice is one used by Elie Wiesel (In Bloom: 22-7). Listen to this passage:

One must make a choice; one must remain faithful. A big word, I know. Nevertheless I use it, it suits me. Having written the things I have written I feel I can afford no longer to play with words. If I say that the writer in me wants to remain loyal, it is because it is true. This sentiment moves all survivors; they owe nothing to anyone, but everything to the dead.

The two semi-colons give a weight to the sentences that contain them that the short clauses would not have if linked by commas or separated by periods. The semi-colon is the mark of the literate person; but it also enables a spoken style to be transformed into a written one. The fragment that is the second sentence adds to the spoken style, and the third sentence, nicely bridges both styles: the vocabulary is from a formal register of language, but the brevity of the clauses and their link by a comma instead of the more formal semi-colon contributes to informality.

Other elements of the Wiesel passage contribute to the sound of the spoken voice. The repetition of words, phrases, and syntactic structures, as in the first sentence ("one must," "Have written") works toward emotional intensity by altering the rhythm from the normal sound-shape. The first occurrence of each phrase acquires a normal distribution of prominence, but the second occurrence requires a surmounting prominence on either the word repetition or the word being contrasted to the first primary prominence, because the normal pattern of prominence placement varies only in cases of contrast or comparison. Thus, consider:

3 2 1 3 2 S1
One must make a choice; one must remain faithful.

Or, this case, where "written" arrives early and is the most important word in the phrase, signaled by the repetition of "written" at the end, which indicates that the fact of "having written" is more important than the "things" that were written:

1 3 2
Having written the things I have written,

Though the phrase is a highly formal written style, the phonology is that of speech, where primary prominence is commonly moved from the end to give the new information first. In speech this happens because the old information was just stated by the previous speaker and is usually not repeated. And to move the primary prominence from its normal phrase-final position is to alter the rhythmic contour to produce an intensity and interest that Bolinger says is driven by emotion.

The deployment of spoken rhythms within a written style's syntax and vocabulary is a way of creating a voice that is educated yet personal. A sense of thoughtful control is conveyed. Another way to create a sense of thoughtful control is to move some part of the sentence to the front, as was done with the "having written" clause. Here is another example of voice achieved through rhythmic deployment. This passage is from the beginning of Annie Dillard's "Transfiguration" from her 1977 book, *Holy the Firm*:

I live on northern Puget Sound, in Washington State, alone. I have a gold cat, who sleeps on my legs, named Small. In the morning I joke to her blank face, Do you remember last night? Do you remember? I throw her out before breakfast, so I can eat.

The phonological rhythms here are highly patterned, and the phrases are short, as in speech. Commas control our reading, limiting the length of the sound units to no more than four prominence points per phrase. The first phrase has four, followed by two, then one. That's sentence one. Sentence two performs a variation on the rhythmic sequence of sentence one: the first phrase has three points of prominence, the second has two, and the third has two. But even more importantly, against this variation is working an exact syllabic-rhythmic duplication of "in Washington State, alone" by "who sleeps on my legs, named Small." The next sentence returns to the rhythm of sentence one: the first phrase has four points of prominence, the second has two, and the following sentence—which is actually an extension of sentence three to produce emotional intensity—has one point. The last sentence repeats the rhythmic sequence of the two preceding "Do you remember" phrases. The repetition with variation gives the passage its lovely lilt, attributed to the voice, and the mind behind it, that are capable of such sensitivity of patterning, such control, such attractiveness. Emotional intensity is also heightened by keeping the number of words capable of bearing prominence to a small number; the effect is that each lexical item is heightened, so that no information is lost in the non-prominent level. Splitting the sentence into phrases also gives attention to more details, since more words in the sentence can thus acquire primary prominence. Also interesting is the way Dillard exploits this capacity of heightening intensity by repeating the phrase, "do you remember?" The second time it occurs, it can only be there for emphasis, some new information of emotional, not denotative, importance. Phonologically, the pitch level must be raised over the previous primary prominence, on "remember" in the previous sentence. Because the second occurrence does in fact occur in its own sentence, there can be no mistaking that Dillard wants this effect—because it stands in an emphatic relationship in its own sentence, it must surmount the pitch range of the rest of the discourse.

I have aimed so far to explain how the phonological system influences written discourse, and to indicate how phonology contributes to what we call voice. I see this contribution as a "hearing" of the sound of written discourse—of hearing a voice speaking—and also as attentiveness to the patterning by which

the phonological dimension is deployed on the page. Since it has been estimated that over 50% of the coherence signals of oral discourse is prosodic, to lack a control of the sound system in writing is probably to sacrifice not only voice, but much of the meaning as well.

A definition of voice must begin, then, with the sound of a speaking voice, that is signaled in controlled patterns of sound in such a way that attention is focused in certain directions for certain effects, which may be difficult to define but which nevertheless accumulate toward an impression of a person speaking to the reader in an interesting way.

Teaching Voice: Awareness and Practice

How can we help students improve their sense of sound in writing and their ability to control patterns of sound? As speakers of English, students already know, tacitly, the prosodic signaling system. But they're not consciously aware of what the underlying principles are. To make them aware is not difficult and it takes very little time. Their awareness of the principles of the sound system makes the teaching of voice easier and more understandable.

The first step, then, is awareness, and the second is practice with recognizing and creating patterns of sound.

How do we get students to pay attention to—to make conscious—the operation of sound focus? I begin with a brief discussion about how prominence is signaled in speech. I explain that the sound units of English are roughly phrases, bounded by pauses, which may be short or long, and that there is a characteristic accentual contour of ascending prominence. The three features that combine to comprise prominence are pitch, duration, and loudness. The most important of these, I tell them, is pitch change, not loudness, as they usually believe.⁴ If you think of pitch change as a deviation from a roughly level tone where you pronounce prepositions, articles, all unstressed syllables, and then determine the *degree* of change from that level as higher or lower, you can tell which syllables are more or less prominent by how far your voice goes up or down. (I use the analogy of a piano keyboard since most of my students can relate to that metaphor.) Drawing a diagram of the pitch movement on the blackboard helps a good deal by giving a visual aid to thought.

Then I tell them that pauses, signaled (roughly) in writing by end, and sometimes medial, punctuation marks, indicate the boundaries of the sound units within which the contour plays (See also Chafe, 1988). If they can find the point of greatest pitch change, they've found the point of primary prominence, and the information focus of the sentence. To prove to them that meaning does indeed change when the point of primary prominence changes, we move the point elsewhere in the unit, as in this example. We start with a full focus reading,

3 2 1

The arms of the chair were soiled.

where "arms" would have tertiary, "chair" secondary, and "soiled" primary prominence. Information focus occurs on "soiled," the point of new information in the utterance. If we move primary prominence to "chair" or "arms," the meaning also changes. In

2 1 3

The arms of the chair were soiled.

"chair" is in contrast or comparison to the arms of some other object. If we move primary prominence to "arms," that word stands in a contrastive or comparative relationship with some word preceding or following it. In other words, the word bearing primary prominence contains the new information: the arms

of the *chair* were soiled, not the arms of the sofa, a fact that would have been either explicit or implicit in the preceding context.

At this point, one of the major differences between speech and writing can be shown to students: there is no way to signal the change in information focus in writing, and unless the shift is clear from preceding or immediately succeeding sentences, the focus will be misplaced—read at the end of the sentence—and the intended meaning will not be signalled. The information from a dialogic mentation of material must be assimilated into a monologic presentation. For students, this can be explained as the “answer / response” exchange of language that must be assimilated into the sentence. In conversation (dialogic speech), the old information is presented in the question or topic and the new information is added to it by the second voice, usually without repeating the old information. The topic is developed by successive additions of comments, which become topics as soon as the next transactional component (phrase) occurs. Assimilating this stream of dialogic speech into an internal monologic “voice” is one of the tasks of drafting and revision. Developing the *ability* of writers to assimilate their dialogic thought within a single written “voice” is a large part of what teaching the “literate style” involves. This single, sustained voice presents, in the literate style, a point-driven discourse as opposed to the participatory discourse of conversation (Michaels; Tannen in *Literacy for Life*). The small points of focus contribute to the gathering sense of textual coherence; if the text is organized according to an (oral) conversational mode, with parts of the new information appearing as old information and vice versa, so that the focal points of the information are unclear, or not present through failure to include the ideas necessary for understanding the point, large scale misunderstanding of the text may result, depending on the frequency and the specific importance of the units in which the displaced prominence points occur.⁵

To help students practice noticing prominence levels and see what changes they can make in meaning with prominence shifts, I have them do this short exercise. I give them five or six words, of which at least half can function as nouns or verbs (e.g., plant, butter, trumpet, glaze, ship, evening). The exercise has more interesting results if the words suggest contexts that clash, as this list does. I give them a minute or two—no more—to write a sentence or two containing all six words and however many more words they need. Next I tell them to draw a slash mark through the place or places they would pause in reading what they’ve written. Then I ask them to mark all syllables that they would give some degree of prominence, and to determine which syllables they would give primary prominence. Several students write their examples on the board, with each sound unit on a separate line, as it would appear in poetry. Then other students read each text aloud, and we determine if the intonation contour, and its meaning, are the same as the author intended. If they aren’t, we suggest ways of rewriting the sentence to indicate the proper focus.

The next step is to show how the shift of focus can radically change meaning and subvert expectation, as happens in much modern poetry, most radically that of William Carlos Williams and his followers. Using one of the student examples on the board, I reform the student’s lineation by breaking apart syntactic units, as in this example:

Trumpets glazed hot butter
not so far into the evening
planting jazz like small ships.

which could be reformed to

Trumpets glazed hot
butter not
so far into the
evening
planting
jazz like small
ships.

Here the many line end hesitations create a frequent interruption of the normal sound pattern by silence that creates an effect akin to jazz. The place where a downbeat should be in the normal English phrase is replaced by a rest, yielding syncopation. Many of the students’ texts will make interesting poetry in this vein—the next step is to let them reform their own texts and write those on the board. Besides demonstrating how language rhythms work, this exercise shows that the rhythms of poetry are adapted from the rhythms of language; disrupting them exposes how they work. Ken Macrorie reminds us that good prose writers know the rhythmic sound of poetry. Spending time teaching the rhythm of poetry would thus seem essential to teaching writing.

The material I’ve described so far takes generally one class period: in that hour, students begin to see the importance of word placement, of rhythmic boundaries, of fashioning prose with a feel for the power of language rhythms. Once students have a basic awareness of the phonological system, they can begin to work on improving voice in their writing. Mere awareness of the operation of the sound system will do much, because students, many for the first time, pay attention to rhythm and its effects in texts they read. Here are some examples of sentences students have written from, or following, the exercises described above:

1. It was late in the evening, just before I went to bed, as our ship glazed over the water, and I reminisced of how my father had used butter as a last resort to free the sluggish valves on his trumpet, and was able to play his best night club appearance ever.
2. Yet the summer slips through my fingers, like sand, slowly, day by day, as student life takes over.
3. This was our secret I thought, this beautiful yard of ours, and they don’t need to know it’s even here.

The next step is to give practice in analysis of models, in changing words and punctuation around in examples on the board and discussing the effects. Work with model texts involves reading aloud and flagging rhythmic patterns in words and syntactic groups within sentences and among sentences. For a definition of rhythm, I use the one E. M. Forster proposed in *Aspects of the Novel*: rhythm as repetition with variation. This definition is broad enough to include everything from the structural elements of story plots and characterizations to the structural and interactional elements of linguistic systems. The sense of a speaking voice comes through the use of spoken phrasings and weightings assimilated to the textual voice. But the sense of a person behind the voice—an individual—is a result of a sustained use and arrangement of certain patterns that are repeated and recur in variations from the basic patterns. In other words, the personal voice is transmitted in textuality in part through rhythm.

The student examples above show patterning and control of phrase length and pausing by punctuation. The exercises described above stimulate awareness of effective patterning. Analysis of models, like the Dillard and Wiesel texts, is another essential step in developing students’ knowledge of the potential

for creating patterns. Such analytic skill is important also because it is one that will last as a learning tool for a lifetime.

Another effective exercise is one I used originally for analyzing and teaching free verse. Marian Mohr uses it with basic writers with excellent results. The technique is derived from Chomsky and Halle's work, and helps students gain insight into their own rhythm by marking a draft into rhythmic groups and accentual contours as was done with the example above. They can mark their own drafts, and write them out with one sound unit per line. They can do this with model texts as well. The visual examination has several advantages. Mohr sees the main advantage as enabling the student to see the shape of thought, which she calls in her book the "rhythm of meaning."

Other advantages of the procedure obtain in having students notice the use of sentence and phrase length and word and syntactic repetition; then they can work for *effective* repetition and learn to create variations on a pattern. Students become aware of varying sentence and phrase length for effect. Important information will be highlighted in a short phrase surrounded by longer phrases. Highlighted information can acquire emotional intensity in some contexts, especially in short, brisk phrases or sentences surrounded by longer phrases and sentences.

If a student is using the same word, or grammatical category of a word, to initiate most sentences, it becomes immediately clear as all beginnings appear in a row down the page. The same goes for ends of sentences. If primary prominence does not fall at the ends of these lines, the writer can check to see if the contrastive or comparative counterparts to prominent words are present in the text. If not, she knows she must add them, or risk ambiguity or misinterpretation. (That this may be a desirable event can, of course, provide the occasion for an interesting discussion of language and its use.) I especially like to start with a text that has a strong sense of the spoken voice. Elie Wiesel's essay, "Why I Write: Making No Become Yes," from which I quoted earlier, is an exceptionally good one. The style is new journalism, and so bears the informal intimacy of conversation. Its style ranges from very informal to highly elevated. And Wiesel manages to break just about every "rule" students have been told they should observe in punctuation, which is the main marker of phonological rhythm. While discussing rhythmic movement and voice, students are also absorbing Wiesel's ideas about the power of language along with the experience of powerful writing. (The Wiesel article is one of the most powerful I have ever used.)

Other essays I especially like are E. B. White's "Once More to the Lake," George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant," and Sheila Tobias's "Who's Afraid of Math and Why" (all reprinted, as is the Wiesel essay, in Lynn Z. Bloom, *The Essay Connection*, Second Edition). The speaking voice comes across loud and clear in all of these, and they provide excellent examples of how effective, short topic sentences involve transiting from one paragraph to another by leading the reader along in an essentially conversational mode. But any essay that has plenty of examples of the rhythmic patterns and effects you want to teach will work. Here are some students' sentences modeled after patterns in the White essay:

1. The Redwood Valley in California is a very impressive place, providing the West Coast of the U.S. with some of the most majestic forests for miles, offering a natural beauty and serenity for one's senses to behold—an awesome example of nature at her finest.
2. This place, this beautiful instrument, this artist at work—all of this moved me deeply.

In order to become more aware of their lines of thought, students can perform a kind of stylistic analysis that follows the theory of Carlos Gussenhoven on sentence accents and semantic fields. After marking a draft, they make a list of words on which primary prominence falls. Then they ask: On what types of words does focus fall most often? Is there a pattern to the focus words? Does "I," or any other single word, initiate the topic (i.e., is it the first word with some degree of accent) with great frequency? Are the patterning and alternation of ideas as brought into focus for emphasis, either by variation or duplication, effective? Is repetition of the same words at the beginning of each phrase or sentence effectively mounting a desired emphasis, or is the pattern ineffectively expressing what I want to say? Of course, the same device can be used very badly. Students need practice, plenty of good models, and plenty of feedback. And, as Donald Hall and Peter Elbow, among others, have reminded us, have we allowed students plenty of room to write badly so that they may write well?

Many of the rhetorical schemes can be taught with an accompanying phonological explanation of why they work (or don't) in example texts. To be effective, the instruction has to take place with *discourse*, not individual sentences. You can tell very little about effective rhythm in writing by working only with individual sentences, as we know about the teaching of other discourse features.

The exercises I have suggested help students understand the internal relations of words and the intimate connection of sound to meaning—of how sound is the innermost life of language and of their utterances and texts. Awareness of phonological processes can give them access to analyzing their own meanings, to finding the patterns and disruptions of their own discourse. Awareness of phonological processes can help us as teachers to hear with greater acuity and accuracy our students' voices, and assist them in developing their textual voices.

Further Implications

Though my students are all native speakers of English, several ESL teachers have told me these exercises work to help teach non-native speakers how the English sound system works—something they eventually have to abstract at some time if not taught it directly. For ESL student writers or for native speakers who are poor readers—that is, who are competent speakers but not competent writers—phonology may offer a way for students to understand some of the differences that confront them when learning to write: why, for instance, writing at its most effective cannot be merely, written down "talk." And reading too, reflecting the generality of the prosodic shape of writing, has its own distinct style. "Reading aloud" style is recognizable by the higher degree of relative evenness of prominence levels resulting in a more subdued (narrowed) range of pitch variation. (Oral performance readings are exceptions.) The discourse situation of reading aloud is similar to the situation of ritual reading—psalms by a congregation, for example—though certainly the regularity in reading does not approach that used in liturgy.

A growing body of linguistic research demonstrates the heavy reliance of cohesion and structure on prosody in oral speech (see especially Gumperz, Kaltman, and O'Connor, in Tannen). In some discourse styles, such as topic-associating, identified by Sarah Michaels, coherence ties are made through prosodic cues that are different from the prosodic cues for coherence in the topic-centered style. Studies of differences in the prosodies' different dialects reveal that coherence ties may be mainly prosodic rather than lexical, or that intonation contours may signal the topic rather than the sentence. Students who are used to relying

on prosody for signaling topic and whose prosodic "period" (falling intonation at end of phonological phrase) does not end a sentence but a topic will be greatly confused by the literate style explanation of topic sentences and punctuation. Knowledge of these alternate systems is valuable in helping us as teachers understand that coherence is a matter of communicative agreement, not textuality per se. Knowledge of phonology should also help us listen for and understand students' communicative goals and help them shape their goals in writing. In order for researchers to understand how coherence is created in texts, we must first understand how it is created in speech. After that, we must study the dependence on oral language knowledge in the pragmatics and discourse organization of reading and writing. An attempt to link coherence to conversational exchange has been made by Rochelle Smith. Smith considers a paragraph as analogous to a signal of speaker change in conversation, with the topic of a paragraph answering an implied question by an absent interlocuter. Ron Scollon's research indicates that rhythmic changes in spoken discourse signal importance, just as pitch change signals importance within the phrase. He sees discourse as analogous to musical ensemble, with timing as the controlling feature of understanding and interaction. These studies would seem to imply that we ought to be looking for rhythmic changes in written discourse as signals of shift in writer/reader focus on the topic and as a signal of important information. In fact, it is most common to have the first or last sentences in a paragraph perform both functions, and in the model essays I listed, those are indeed the two places we find most of the rhythmic changes. With these indications of the importance of sound in discourse, the impact of phonology on written discourse is a subject we can no longer afford to ignore.

Notes

¹To account for cases in which primary prominence occurs earlier than the last lexical item, Chomsky and Halle proposed a theory of markedness. Sentences that diverge from the normal contour pattern are said to be "marked," and the words bearing primary prominence either contrast or compare to previously stated or assumed information. In written discourse, the contrastive or comparative information would appear in the text immediately surrounding the discourse. For Gussenhoven, the intonation contour is spread over a "focus domain," which is rule governed, but governed by the morphology of the contour and the semantic constituents of the phrase rather than syntax. Gussenhoven notes that his theories apply only to normal conversational style, and that Chomsky and Halle's pattern applies only to "full focus" sentences, where all information is given some degree of prominence (that is, initially, before the destressing rules are applied) because all the information is new information. In reading, says Gussenhoven, the reader must infer backgrounds, that is, what is probably meant by the writer as "given" or "old" information. Prominence points are predictable because the reader has a knowledge of the spoken language, which is the basis for the accentual contour in written text.

²See especially *Essays on The Sound Pattern of English*, ed. by D. L. Goyvaerts and G. K. Pullum, for critiques and extensions of Chomsky and Halle up to 1975.

³Dwight Bolinger (1985, 1986) claims that the onset of topic is signaled by the first prominence peak. Carlos Gussenhoven (1984, 1985) views pre-primary prominence peaks to be pointing ahead to the peak on the new information, with these lesser degrees having the function of gathering words into a kind of idiomatic focus domain that indicates a single semantic field.

⁴After many studies of the factors influencing the perception of prominence, pitch obtrusion has come to be regarded as the most important indicator, with the degree of variation from the non-prominent level indicating the relative degree of prominence. Loudness is the second most influential, and duration the third of the three factors. See Bolinger, "Pitch Accent"; Fry, "Experiments," and "Physical Correlates"; Chatman, 26; Hill; and Ladefoged. Pitch change is also easiest for students to recognize, for it is easy to make a syllable louder when consciously trying to see where the accent lies. But the pitch change will always be placed on the correct syllable despite their misguided efforts. Most students need only a few examples to be able to see where accents are falling and in what degree. A few in each class will take a little longer, and one or two may never be able to hear pitch difference. The method I use has also worked remarkably well for helping students scan poetry and to see and hear the prosodic structure of non-metrical verse, which was the avenue for my using prosody in teaching writing.

⁵The research collected by Deborah Tannen in *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse* is relevant to my discussion, for the various essays explore how coherence is signaled, including prosodic cues and variations in signaling for different linguistic communities. The first essay, "Cohesion in Spoken and Written Discourse: Ethnic Style and the Transition to Literacy," by John J. Gumperz, Hannah Kaltman, and Mary Catherine O'Connor, examines in depth the prosody of oral styles and the problems of writing, and reviews the research that has been done in this area. For studies of school children's discourse strategies, see Sarah Michaels, in Tannen, and in *JE*; also James Paul Gee. For a study of cultural interference in signaling systems, including prosodic differences, see John J. Gumperz, "The Linguistic Bases of Communicative Competence," in Tannen, *Analyzing Discourse*, 323-34; and Ron Scollon, "The Rhythmic Iteration of Ordinary Talk," in Tannen, *Analyzing Discourse*, 335-49.

Works Cited

- Attridge, Derek. *The Rhythms of English Poetry*. London and New York: Longman, 1982.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. *The Essay Connection*. Second Edition. Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1987.
- Bolinger, Dwight. "Around the Edge of Language." In *Language and Learning*. Eds. Janet Emig, James Fleming, and Helen Popp. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966.
- _____. *Intonation and Its Parts: The Melody of Spoken English*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986.
- _____. "A Theory of Pitch Accent." *Word* 17 (1961): 309-17.
- _____. "Two Views of Accent." *Journal of Linguistics* 21 (1985): 79-123.
- Chafe, Wallace. "What Good Is Punctuation?" *The Quarterly*, 10 (January 1988), 8-11.
- _____. "Writing in the Perspective of Speaking." In *Studying Writing: Linguistic Approaches*. Eds. Charles R. Cooper and Sidney Greenbaum. New York: Sage Publications, 1986.
- Chatman, Seymour. *A Theory of Meter*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1965.
- Chomsky, Noam, and Halle, Morris K. *The Sound Pattern of English*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- Dillard, Annie. "Transfiguration." In Thomas Cooley, ed. *The Norton Sampler*. Second Edition. New York: W. W. Norton, 1982, 227-230.

- Elbow, Peter. "The Shifting Relationships Between Speech and Writing." *CCC*, Vol. 36 (October 1985): 283-303.
- Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. 1927; rpt. San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1985.
- Fry, Dennis. "Duration and Intensity as Physical Correlates." *Journal of Linguistics* 28 (1955): 765-68.
- . "Experiments in the Reception of Stress." *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 28 (1955): 126-52.
- Gates, Rosemary L. "Forging American Free Verse from Speech Rhythms: Williams after Whitman." *Poetics Today*, (Winter 1987), forthcoming.
- . "The Identity of American Free Verse: The Prosodic Study of Whitman's 'Lilacs.'" *Language and Style*, 18 (Summer 1985): 246-278.
- Gee, James Paul. "The Narrativization of Experience in the Oral Style." *Journal of Education* 167 (1985): 9-30.
- Goyvaerts, Didier L., and Pullum, Geoffrey K., eds. *Essays on the Sound Pattern of English*. Ghent: E. Story-Scientia, 1975.
- Gumperz, John J., Hannah Kaltman, and Mary Catherine O'Connor. "Cohesion in Spoken and Written Discourse: Ethnic Style and the Transition to Literacy." In Tannen. *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse*.
- Gussenhoven, Carlos. *On the Grammar and Semantics of Sentence Accents*. Dordrecht, Holland/Cinnaminson, N.J.: Foris Publications, 1984.
- . "Two Views of Accent: A Reply." *Journal of Linguistics* 21 (1985): 125-38.
- Halliday: *System and Function in Language*. Ed. Gunther Kress. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976.
- Hill, Archibald A. *Introduction to Linguistic Structures: From Sound to Sentence in English*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1976.
- Ladefoged, Peter. *Elements of Acoustic Phonetics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Leech, Geoffrey N., and Michael H. Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. *English Language Series* 13. Ed. Randolph Quirk. London and New York: Longman, 1981.
- Macrorie, Ken. *Writing To Be Read*. Rev. Third Edition. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1984.
- Michaels, Sarah. "Hearing the Connections in Children's Oral and Written Discourse." *Journal of Education* 167 (1985): 36-56.
- Mohr, Marian. *Revision: The Rhythm of Meaning*. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1984.
- Scollon, Ron. "The Rhythmic Integration of Ordinary Talk." In Tannen. *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*, 335-49.
- Smith, Rochelle. "Paragraphing for Coherence: Writing as Implied Dialogue." *College English* 46 (1984): 22-31.
- Tannen, Deborah, ed. *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*. *Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* 1981. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1982.
- , ed. *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse*. *Advances in Discourse Processes* XII. Ed. Roy O. Freedle. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex, 1984.

CONFERENCING, CULTURE AND COMMON SENSE

Michael Feehan
University of Texas at Arlington

As composition theory becomes progressively more committed to viewing the writer's work as essentially interactive, Freshman English programs become more deeply involved in various kinds of intervention, conferencing, peer group workshops, even collaboration. On the whole these projects open valuable new arenas for the acquisition of writing abilities, replacing the Romantic view of the isolated genius hoping for the influx of grace with a broadly dramatic view of the writer as never quite alone, always accompanied by some created reader. Such a view invites writers to connect their native intuitions about how conversations work with the specialized demands of the blank page. If all goes well, the inexperienced writer will come to the writing project with some useable resources for addressing the writing to some real person in a real situation. Moreover, the student can begin to take the teachers' comments as more than an insistence on correctness, rather as contributions toward the shared success of common discourse. Freshman English, on such an interactive view, might become a genuinely functional part of the students' whole learning process, the place where the various emerging discourses of the University take form and focus. Using various methods of intervention should help students recognize that texts are not inevitable, that all writing develops through negotiated revision.

At the same time, all methods of intervention share a single, unstated presupposition that introduces a broad new range of problems into the teaching of writing. Whenever we confer with students about writing, whenever students talk among themselves about writing, all of us assume that ordinary expectations about conversation will suffice for communication. We assume that our conversations about writing will take the same form and succeed within just the same range of limitations as our conversations about everyday subjects. The question of writing will not interfere with the common sense work of talking together. Certainly ESL students will have more trouble than others and we may encounter the occasional glitch in comprehension, but for the most part, conferences, workshops and collaborations will proceed without problems.

Recent studies in cross-cultural conversation call this common sense assumption into question, arguing that all conversations demand intricate interpretive negotiations. The more closely we look at the actual workings of conversation, the more clear it becomes that misunderstandings far outnumber understandings, that in fact, we all expend a great deal of energy in masking the many ways our conversations misfire. Most particularly, conversations that must cross cultural boundaries often go awry in ways so odd that the participants cannot even tell how or when they became lost. Teachers recognize such problems when speaking with students from very different cultures, but the sociolinguists admonish us to look more closely at the conversations we think are working effectively. We regularly encounter more, and more complex, cultural boundaries than we have allowed ourselves to suppose. Indeed our most ordinary, everyday conversational strategies actively prevent us from seeing just how many methods we possess for circumventing confusions. Everyday conversation forms the substructure for interactive composition