

Utterance-Finality: What Have We Learned?

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It is somewhat presumptuous to try to speak on behalf of a group of distinguished academics and readers with regard to what “we” have learned as a group from the papers in this volume, so it is safer for me to speak for myself.

These papers have clearly provided answers to a number of the questions I pose in my introductory paper (“Utterance-Finality — Framing the Issues”). First of all, I find it encouraging that so much of the discussion seems to accept and/or support the Neogrammarian viewpoint; this is in sharp contrast to the view of one reviewer for the National Science Foundation, who, when evaluating the (ultimately unsuccessful) proposal I submitted for funding to support the workshop represented here, claimed that the Neogrammarian hypothesis has been “discredited”. Overall, I am even more sanguine about the Neogrammarian view of sound change now than before, though I feel that the general issue of the relationship between synchrony and diachrony needs to be examined further, and questions need to be asked about when a sound change in its strict sense (i.e., a Neogrammarian sound change, purely phonetically conditioned) ceases to exist as such.

With regard to other focal issues for the workshop and for these papers, clearly much was said and learned about intonation and its semantic and pragmatic interpretation, as the papers by Godjevac, Firbas, and Bartels & Merin all contribute to that issue. Similarly well represented was the issue of the range of phenomena that occur utterance-finally, for both Oneida, as discussed by Michelson, and Nunivak Yupik, as discussed by Woodbury, provide interesting answers to that question and raise the equally interesting further question of whether there is a single physiological underlying cause with different phonological manifestations for all utterance-final effects. Oneida, along with Farsi, as discussed by Hock, also shows the generalization process in action whereby utterance-final effects spread to non-

final contexts; a key element that plays a role here is the expressive function that is served by this generalization and spread, as speakers in a sense look to the internal resources of their language for ways of conveying expressivity.

Other new questions were raised. Mary Beckman, in her presentation at the workshop, suggested as a critical background question concerning the phonetics of utterance-finality that one needs to consider what is meant by “phonetic” in the first place. Similarly, we can ask what the basic elements are that we need to worry about — utterance and phrase seem to matter, but can we define them rigorously? What is the minimal utterance? Seemingly it would be one word, but Joan Bybee (in an invited lecture at Ohio State University in the spring of 1997) pointed to the fact that the intonation contour for *I dunno* ‘I don’t know’ in English was sufficient to convey the relevant meaning, giving an utterance with no segmental realization at all! By the same token, is there a maximum length to what can serve as an utterance? The domain of effects in Serbo-Croatian discussed by Godjevac spanned several words and thus begins to provide some answers to that question.

Finally, the issues that linguists worry about more generally are relevant here: what do speakers know with regard to their command of utterance-final effects? Also, what can they do? Do they have computing abilities, something that Ilse Lehiste hinted at in her commentary at the workshop? Katagiri’s paper suggested that speakers can compute combinations of meaning for Japanese sentence-final particles, and Bartels & Merin’s contribution points in a similar direction with data mostly from English sentential intonation.

Much has been learned, I would say, but much remains to be learned, and that, to my way of thinking, is a good outcome for a workshop and a proceedings volume. This way, the audience and readership are left wanting more, and are thus ready for further investigation into this area of inquiry.