

"East Fife, four... Forfar, five" - Intonation of the Classified Football Results

This paper investigates the extent to which intonation in English can convey meaning by examining the weekly reading of football's classified results. Specifically, we test the claim, originally posited by Cruttenden (1974) but now a part of everyday football culture, that the result of a match (home win, away win, or draw) is predictable based solely on the intonational contours preceding the final team's score.

Our study involved both production and perception experiments. The former was carried out in Praat as an analysis of the intonational contours from audio recordings of fifteen football results, all taken from the BBC's Final Score program. For the perception experiment, we played excerpts from these same recordings (excluding only the final part of each scoreline) to 30 males and 30 females across a broad range of ages, attitudes towards football and levels of exposure to hearing the classified results on TV or radio. These four independent variables were considered in the analysis.

Results of the production experiment reveal that particular match results are indeed assigned particular intonation contours. In fact, the patterns used to signal the match outcome differ only slightly from those found in Cruttenden's earlier study (1974), suggesting that these intonational 'rules' have been passed down largely successfully from the 1970s. Specifically, we find that draws are deaccented, presumably due to an information structural effect when the two teams' scores are repeated. The away team name tends to be promoted to accented status, a finding that contrasts with English norms of accentuating the last contentful lexical item in an intonational phrase. Additionally, this study uncovers effects of 'effort code' through the large pitch excursions observed to accompany surprising results.

Data from the perception experiment reveals an overall prediction success rate of 74%. This confirms that match results are indeed predictable based on intonation, by individuals with no academic background in this field, who can draw only upon pre-existing intuitions. Multivariate analysis confirms footballing interest ($p = 0.006$) and exposure to results ($p = 0.008$) as significant effects, suggesting that this is an ability honed through practice, most likely on a sub-conscious level.

Cruttenden, A. 1974. An experiment involving comprehension of intonation in children from 7 to 10. *Journal of Child Language* 1, 221-231.