

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intonation Patterns in Indian English News Reading: A Praat-Based Analysis

• Afroz Begum

Assistant Professor, Keshav Memorial Institute of Commerce and Sciences, Narayanguda, Hyderabad, Telangana. Affiliated to Osmania University, India;
afrozbegumaffu@gmail.com

Accepted version published on 5 November 2025



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18066962>

ABSTRACT

Indian English has evolved into a distinct variety shaped by India's multilingual context. While much attention has been given to its segmental features, prosody—especially intonation—has received comparatively less focus. This study examines intonation patterns in Indian English news reading, with particular attention to the use of falling and limited rising tones. Speech samples from selected North Indian English television news readers were analysed using Praat to observe pitch contours and phrase-final tonal movement. The analysis shows a strong preference for falling intonation in declarative sentences, reflecting the controlled and information-oriented nature of news discourse. A small number of rising or near-level contours were also observed, mainly serving pragmatic or discourse-structuring functions rather than expressing interrogation. The findings suggest that intonation in Indian English news reading is systematic and stable, supporting the view of Indian English as an established variety with its own prosodic patterns. The study highlights the role of media speech in reinforcing these patterns and calls for further region-based and comparative research.

Keywords: intonation; news reading; Praat analysis; falling tone; prosody

FULL PAPER

Introduction

Indian English has developed over time through constant interaction with the many languages spoken across the country. It cannot be viewed merely as a derivative of British or American English, as it reflects systematic linguistic features shaped by multilingual usage and local communicative needs. While earlier studies on Indian English have primarily focused on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, prosodic features such as intonation have received comparatively less attention, especially in formal and institutional modes of speech (Pandey 329).

Intonation plays a crucial role in conveying meaning beyond words by signalling sentence type, speaker attitude, and discourse structure. In spoken English, patterns of rising and falling pitch help listeners distinguish between statements, questions, and emphasis. However, these patterns are not universal and often vary across varieties of English. In the context of Indian English, intonation is influenced by the phonological systems of Indian languages, which tend to favour relatively stable pitch movements and syllable-based rhythm. Research into Indian English prosody has recognised the significance of such prosodic phenomena in defining its distinctive character (Bansal, *The Intelligibility of Indian English* 23).

Television news reading provides a suitable context for examining intonation patterns, as it represents a controlled and standardised form of spoken language. News readers are expected to deliver information clearly, neutrally, and without excessive emotional variation. As a result, their speech offers insight into preferred and socially accepted prosodic patterns within a speech community. Studying news discourse, therefore, helps in understanding how intonation functions in a formal public setting and how specific patterns become normalised through repeated exposure.

The present study examines intonation patterns in Indian English news reading with a focus on pitch movement at the end of utterances. Using Praat for acoustic analysis, the study primarily investigates the use of falling intonation in declarative sentences, while also noting limited instances of rising or level contours. By analysing selected speech samples from Indian English newsreaders, the study aims to highlight recurring prosodic tendencies and to contribute to the understanding of Indian English as a systematic and stable variety.

Methodology

The present study adopts an acoustic-phonetic approach to examine intonation patterns in Indian English news reading. Speech data were drawn from selected television news broadcasts featuring Indian English news readers. The focus of the study is on sentence-level intonation, particularly the pitch movement occurring at the end of utterances in formal news discourse.

The speech samples were analysed using Praat, a widely used software for phonetic analysis. Pitch contours (F0) were examined using waveform and pitch displays to observe rising, falling, or level intonation patterns. Only utterances with clearly identifiable pitch movements and minimal background interference were selected for analysis to ensure acoustic clarity. The data set consists primarily of declarative sentences, as these occur most frequently in news reading and allow for the observation of stable intonation patterns. In addition, a small number of WH-questions were included to examine whether their intonational behaviour differs from that of statements in this formal speech context. The analysis is qualitative in nature and aims to describe recurring tendencies rather than provide statistical generalisations.

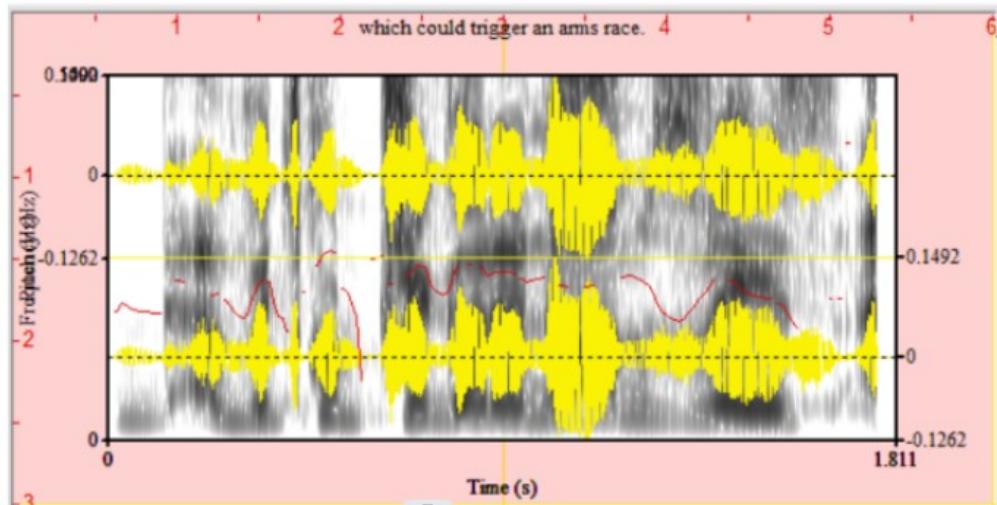
As the study is limited to selected samples and a specific speech context, the findings are indicative rather than exhaustive. Nevertheless, the analysis offers insight into preferred intonation patterns in Indian English news reading and highlights the role of media speech in shaping and reinforcing prosodic norms. The selected samples were chosen for their acoustic clarity and represent typical intonation patterns observed in Indian English news reading.

Falling Intonation in Declarative Statements

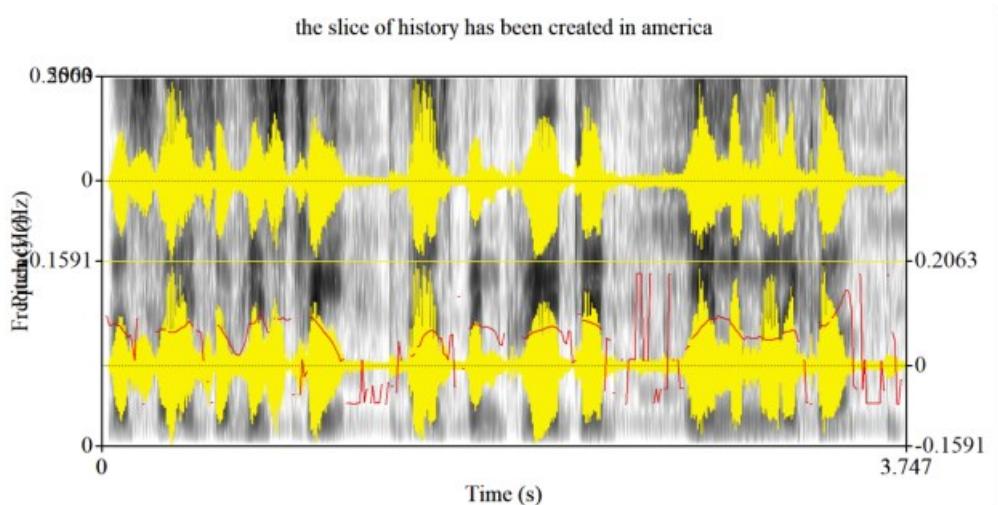
The analysis of the selected news reading samples shows a clear and consistent preference for falling intonation in declarative sentences. In most of the utterances examined, the pitch contour gradually declines towards the end of the clause, indicating a falling tone. This pattern reflects the neutral and information-focused nature of news discourse, where the primary aim is to deliver facts rather than express personal emotion or interactional intent. Research on Indian English prosody has observed similar tendencies, in which enhanced correlates of phrasing rather than prominence marking characterise the variety (Féry et al. 127).

The falling contours observed in the data are relatively stable, with limited pitch fluctuation and a controlled pitch range. Such patterns suggest that Indian English news readers tend to maintain prosodic uniformity, possibly to ensure clarity and seriousness in delivery. This controlled use of falling intonation aligns with the

formal expectations of broadcast news and contributes to the perception of authority and objectivity.



A similar falling pattern can be observed across other declarative samples analysed in the study. Despite minor variations in pitch height among speakers, the overall tonal movement remains consistent, ending in a downward pitch trajectory. This recurrence indicates that falling intonation in declarative sentences is not incidental but represents a preferred and systematic pattern in Indian English news reading (Maxwell et al. 942).

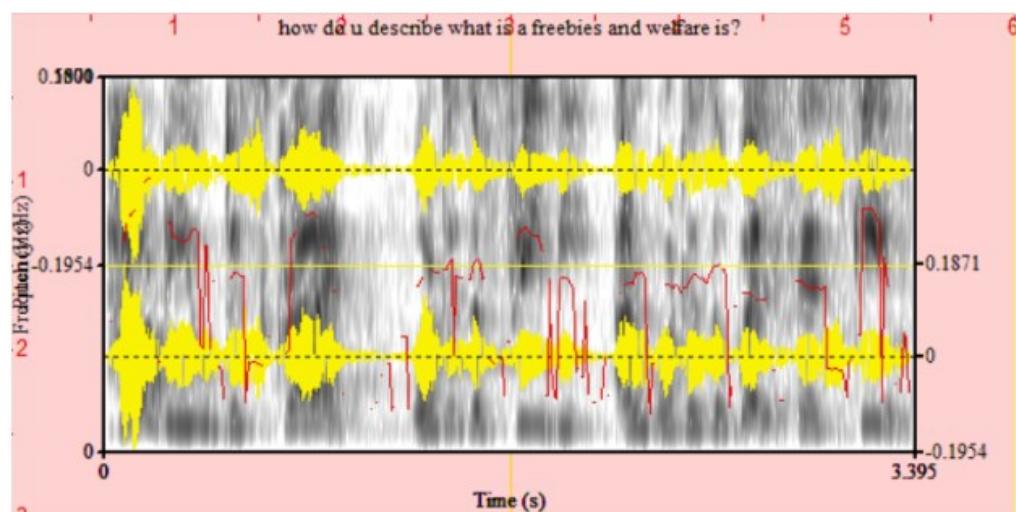


Falling or Level Intonation in WH-Questions

In addition to declarative sentences, a small number of WH-questions were examined to observe their intonational behaviour in news reading. The analysis reveals that these WH-questions frequently display falling or near-level intonation rather than a rising contour. Instead of functioning as genuine information-seeking

questions, such WH-structures often serve explanatory or rhetorical purposes within news discourse.

The pitch contours of these WH-questions show patterns similar to declarative statements, with either a gradual fall or minimal pitch movement at the end of the utterance. This suggests that, in the context of news reading, WH-questions are prosodically aligned with statements, reinforcing their role in structuring information rather than initiating interaction. Studies of prosody across languages have noted that WH-questions commonly employ falling intonation, marking them as information statements rather than queries that expect answers (Cruttenden 312).



The limited use of rising intonation in WH-questions further supports the observation that Indian English news reading favours tonal stability and reduced expressive variation. Such patterns highlight the influence of discourse context on intonation and reflect broader tendencies within Indian English prosody. Previous research has documented that Indian English exhibits a distinct intonation system influenced by substrate languages, which contribute to its characteristic prosodic patterns (Puri 68).

Discussion

The dominance of falling intonation across both declarative sentences and WH-questions indicates that Indian English news reading follows a systematic prosodic pattern shaped by formality and communicative function. Rather than strictly adhering to native-speaker intonation norms, the speakers adopt a variety-specific approach that prioritises clarity, neutrality, and controlled delivery. These

findings support the view that Indian English possesses its own stable prosodic features, particularly in institutional speech contexts such as broadcast media. Scholars have emphasised that prosodic phenomena play a significant role in lending Indian English its distinctive character, and that patterns observed in formal contexts, such as news reading, contribute to the standardisation of the variety (Bansal, “The Pronunciation of English in India” 221).

Conclusion

The present study examined intonation patterns in Indian English news reading using acoustic analysis in Praat. The findings indicate a clear preference for falling intonation in declarative sentences, reflecting the formal and information-driven nature of news discourse. The limited presence of rising or level contours, particularly in WH-questions, suggests that such structures often function in an explanatory rather than interactive manner in broadcast speech.

These patterns indicate the presence of stable, systematic prosodic features in Indian English, especially in institutional contexts such as television news. Rather than closely following British or American intonational norms, Indian English newsreaders appear to adopt a controlled, neutral intonation style suited to public information delivery. The study supports the view of Indian English as an established variety with its own prosodic characteristics. Although the data set is limited, the analysis highlights the role of media speech in reinforcing preferred intonation patterns. Further research with a larger and more regionally diverse sample could provide deeper insights into variation and change in Indian English prosody.

Works Cited

Bansal, Ram Krishna. *The Intelligibility of Indian English*. 2nd ed., Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, 1976.

---. “The Pronunciation of English in India.” *Studies in the Pronunciation of English: A Commemorative Volume in Honour of A.C. Gimson*, edited by Susan Ramsaran, Routledge, 1990, pp. 219-30.

Cruttenden, Alan. “The Deaccenting of Given Information: A Cognitive Universal?” *Pragmatic Organisation of Discourse in the Languages of Europe*, edited by Giuliano Bernini and Marcia L. Schwartz, Mouton de Gruyter, 2006, pp. 311–56.

Féry, Caroline, et al. "The Prosody of Focus and Givenness in Hindi and Indian English." *Studies in Language*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2016, pp. 323–64.

Maxwell, Olga, et al. "Investigating (Rhythm) Variation in Indian English: An Integrated Approach." *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Speech Prosody 2018*, Poznan, Poland, 2018, pp. 942–46.

Pandey, Pramod. "Indian English Prosody." *The Phonology of Indian English I: Overview*, edited by Ravinder Gargesh, Academia.edu, 2015, pp. 327–48.

Puri, Vandana. *Intonation in Indian English and Hindi Late and Simultaneous Bilinguals*. 2013. U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, PhD dissertation.