

**Smiljana Komar**

University of Ljubljana

Faculty of Arts, English Department

## Listened To Any Good Books Lately? The Prosodic Analysis of Audio Book Narration

### Summary

The popularity of audio books is increasing. In the USA fewer people are reading books but many more are listening to them on tapes, CD's and in MP3 format. The phenomenon is redefining the notion of reading. The purpose of the paper is to present some pros and cons of listening to books instead of reading them. The conclusions have been reached on the basis of a linguistic analysis of parts of two audio books belonging to two different literary genres: a crime novel (Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*) and a comic one (Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*).

**Key words:** literature, narratology, linguistics, prosody

## Ste v zadnjem času poslušali kakšno dobro knjigo? Prozodična analiza branja v zvočnicah

### Povzetek

Priljubljenost zvočnic narašča. V ZDA vedno manj ljudi knjige bere, mnogo več jih knjige poslušajo na trakovih, zgoščenkah in MP3 predvajalnikih. Ta pojav poskuša redefinirati branje. Namen tega članka je predstaviti nekaj dobrih in slabih strani poslušanja knjig. Zaključki so nastali na osnovi jezikovne analize nekaj odlomkov iz dveh zvočnic, ki sodita v dva zelo različna književna žanra: kriminalni roman (Dan Brown, *Da Vincijeva šifra*) in komični roman (Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: Na robu pameti*).

**Ključne besede:** književnost, narativnost, jezikoslovje, prozodija

# Listened To Any Good Books Lately?

## The Prosodic Analysis of Audio Book Narration

### 1. Introduction

An audio book is a recording of the contents of a book read by a professional reader, hence referred to as narrator. Some twenty years ago, the first audio books appeared as cassette tapes, and nowadays, with the development of technology, audio books are distributed as CD's or in digital formats.

Audio books can be abridged or unabridged and read either by the authors themselves or by professional readers, often actors. Sometimes a book is read by more than one person and accompanied by music and sound effects.

Initially, the reason for recording books on tape was to provide people with poor sight with books which otherwise they could never enjoy. Eventually, other people seem to have recognized the benefits that listening to books may have.

The phenomenon is particularly popular in the USA. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, fewer Americans are reading the books than a decade ago, but almost a third more are listening to them. An article published in *The New York Times* (Harmon 2005) in May 2005 presents the reasons why people have turned to audio books, as well as their attitudes to reading and listening of books.

One of the most frequently expressed reasons why people prefer audio books is that they can listen to them almost everywhere: when driving a car, eating lunch, sitting in doctors' waiting rooms, walking a dog or in bed with no lights on to disturb the sleeping partner.

The growing popularity of audio books has caused several debates among the critics, writers and readers. The purists believe that listening to books is inferior to reading and look down upon audio book fans. Writers of books prefer the audience to read their books, but believe that listening to them is better than nothing.

There are two types of audio book consumers: the ones who have never liked reading, and those who are simply too busy to spend time sitting and reading. They both claim that listening to books has several advantages to reading: they can jump among chapters, they have to listen to all the text, whereas when reading they tend to skip paragraphs, and, for some, the narrators untangle difficult grammatical structures and complex sentences. Their liking or disliking of a book often depends on the narrator's ability to get the most out of the text.

Due to their popularity, audio books deserve some literary and linguistic analysis. In this paper, the matter of linguistic analysis is two audio books read by a single narrator. These

are: a crime novel by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, and a comic one by Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. The former is read by the actor, Jeff Harding, the latter by the author herself. The purpose of the analysis was to answer to the following three questions: Is reading a book really the same as listening to it? What is the function of the narrator in an audio book? Can he influence the popularity of a book?

## 2. Reading vs. Listening

In order to be able to answer to the question whether reading a book is the same as listening to it, we have to acknowledge the fact that the two activities make use of different cognitive processes which are the consequence of the basic difference between the spoken and written modes: speech is a linear, ongoing process, whereas writing is a complete product. Thus in listening, the text is perceived dynamically, while in reading the text is presented synoptically. Our understanding of a spoken text largely depends on the intonation clues, such as the rhythm, the highlighting of important pieces of information, the pitch movement and the pitch range, volume, tempo and voice quality. In reading, the only clues that we have are punctuation and division into paragraphs and chapters. Those do not always overlap with prosodic clues, as will be shown below. It can be said that the visual analogue to listening is a film, to reading, a painting.

Knowing this, what are then the advantages and disadvantages of listening to reading? Apart from the fact that listening to books can be done while doing something else, there is no single and straightforward answer to this question. Some people prefer reading simply because their visual perception is better than the audial, others may be in favour of listening because they are slow readers or because their ability to extract the message is better when they listen to a text read aloud.

There is, however, one very important difference between reading a book and listening to it being read by somebody else. Reading a book is a solitary experience during which an invisible and very intimate bond is established between the reader and the author. The reader is allowed to make his own conclusions, opinions and interpretations as he goes on reading. In his mind, he creates his own images of the characters and hears their voices. Listening to a book read aloud is a sort of trilateral relation where the third party is the narrator acting as a go-between the author and the listener. Audio book listeners are deprived of the beautiful experience of being immersed into the story. Instead, the plot and the characters are interpreted for them and offered ready made. In abridged versions of novels whole paragraphs are usually cut and left out. These paragraphs often provide important background information for the plot and the character development, as it is the case with *The Da Vinci Code* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*.

## 3. The Role of the Narrator

The person reading an audio book has a very serious and responsible job. The success of the audio experience is judged by what we hear. It is the narrator's job to make the story memorable, enjoyable and sometimes even understandable. In other words, a good narrator can contribute considerably to the success of a book, whereas a bad one can ruin it.

The task of the narrator is to transmit the story as accurately as possible but with necessary additions in the form of the voice quality, rhythm and pitch movement. In addition, he has to be able to interpret the text and by means of prosody make necessary alterations as to the coherence and cohesion of the text. This is particularly important in abridged audio books where whole paragraphs are cut out.

#### 4. Prosodic Features Mirroring Text Relations

A written text is not merely a string of isolated sentences. In order for a sequence of sentences to be considered a text, certain criteria have to be met. Among them the most important ones are cohesion and coherence. In this way meaningful units are created which often deal with topics, hence they can be called topical units. In written texts, the boundaries between topical units are visually marked by paragraphs, whereas the unity within a paragraph is made visible by punctuation. Similarly, if the written text contains direct speech of one or more people, their turns are also visually marked by means of punctuation marks.

A hearer of a spoken text has no access to the visual clues of coherence and segmentation into paragraphs. Instead, he has to rely on prosodic clues to identify coherence relations, major breaks, changes of topics and subtopics, as well as the changes of speakers, their moods, emotions and attitudes.

The theory of discourse analysis and intonation particularly distinguishes among several degrees of preparedness in speech. Wichmann (2000) describes speech as a continuum from scripted (i.e. read) to spontaneous, and claims that every utterance is made with some degree of preparedness. Even in the most spontaneous spoken interactions, speakers take time to plan ahead and prepare for the next utterance. There are spoken interactions where speech seems spontaneous, but is in fact very prepared (e.g. interviews, public lectures, etc.). Reading a written text aloud is mostly prepared. Variation may be found in how much it has been rehearsed. In the case of audio books, we can assume that the narrators spend quite some time preparing and rehearsing their reading, not to mention correcting the recording if they are not satisfied with it.

Brazil et al. (1980) claim that the reader of a text has two options: he can either interpret and perform the text as if he himself were speaking to the listener, or he can step outside the text and simply stand as the medium. This depends on the type of text a person is reading aloud. If the purpose of the reading is to entertain, then some artistic performance is necessary. If, on the other hand, the text read aloud is of a more informative nature, then the role of the reader is to pass on someone else's message merely by converting the written text into speech.

The two books which have been chosen for the linguistic analysis are novels belonging to two different literary genres: a crime story (*The Da Vinci Code*) and a comedy (*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*). They were abridged and recorded as audio books. We can assume that both narrators were very familiar with the texts and had prepared and rehearsed the reading before they went into the studio to record the audio books. They knew that the purpose of their job was to

provide an entertaining and highly aesthetic reading of the novels. Thus we can expect their use of prosodic features mirroring the text relations to be appropriate.

The sub-sections to follow will discuss the prosodic features that the narrators in the two audio books have used to express:

- division into paragraphs,
- cohesion and coherence within and between paragraphs,
- character portrayal

## 4.1 Paragraph division vs. paratone division

A paragraph is a coherent textual unit which usually consists of more than one sentence and deals with one topic. The authors divide their texts into paragraphs according to the grammatical, textual and topical considerations. Grammatically speaking, a paragraph has to coincide with syntactically complete sentences. From the textual point of view, a paragraph has to be cohesive and coherent. The topical consideration is probably most flexible and left to the author's narrative ability. However, the readers expect a paragraph to be a topically complete unit.

In writing, we visually recognise a paragraph as a string of sentences separated from another string of sentences by an empty line or an indented beginning. In speech, paragraphs are marked by intonation.

The notion of paragraph intonation is not new. Yule (1980) proposed the existence of a paratone which covers a topic or a sub-topic in speech, roughly equivalent to a paragraph in writing<sup>1</sup>. The first extensive discussion, by Lehiste (1975), showed that the most common prosodic feature of a new paratone is an extra high pitch. Later studies by Brazil et al. (1980), Brown et al. (1980) and Yule (1980) all came to the same conclusion. "A new start is marked phonetically ... by the speaker speaking high in his pitch range and speaking loudly" (Brown et al. 1980, 26). The other important prosodic feature involved in the audial perception of a paratone is the final low pitch contour, which is often accompanied by explicit phonetic criteria, such as "pause, lengthening of a preceding syllable or a break in the rhythm" (Williams 1996, 51).

Initial extra-high pitch and final low pitch accompanied by a pause are thus prosodic phenomena which occur at the boundary between two paratones. The third prosodic feature typical of paratone intonation is a gradual declination of pitch. Wichmann calls this gradual lowering of pitch over a topic unit "supradeceleration" (2000, 107) in order to distinguish it from the notion of pitch declination across a single utterance. In other words, there is a distinction between utterance and paratone declination.

The topical structure of a novel is the author's construct and a reader has no access to the author's intentions behind the narrative structure. However, there should always be some textual motivation behind it. Similarly, the narrator of an audio book has his own understanding of the

<sup>1</sup> In my references to speech I shall use the term 'paratone' to distinguish it from the written 'paragraph'.

narrative structure and his own interpretation of the story. Thus we can expect that the written division into paragraphs may not always overlap with the spoken one.

My analysis of paratone division in the spoken delivery of a novel was based on the comparison between the written division into paragraphs and the acoustic features of their spoken delivery. I decided for a paratone whenever there was a pause followed by a considerable change in pitch or just a pause with no change in pitch in the following initial accented syllables.

### 4.1.1 *The Da Vinci Code*

The analysis of the written and spoken paragraph division in *The Da Vinci Code* has shown that the narrator quite strictly follows the author's division into paragraphs. There are, however, two types of deviation from the written text. The narrator either divides one written paragraph into two paratones (1), or joins two paragraphs into one paratone (2).

(1) printed version:

*Pain is good*, Silas whispered, repeating the sacred mantra of Father Josemaría Escrivá – the Teacher of all Teachers. Although Escrivá had died in 1975, his wisdom lived on, his words still whispered by thousands of faithful servants around the globe as they knelt on the floor and performed the sacred practice known as ‘corporal mortification’. (30)

spoken version:

*Pain is good*, Silas whispered, repeating the sacred mantra of Father Josemaría Escrivá – the Teacher of all Teachers. [pause]

↑<sup>2</sup> Although Escrivá had died in 1975, his wisdom lived on, his words still whispered by thousands of faithful servants around the globe as they ~~knelt on the floor and~~<sup>3</sup> performed the sacred practice known as ‘corporal mortification’.

(2) printed version:

The Louvre's main entrance was visible now, rising boldly in the distance, encircled by seven triangular pools from which spouted illuminated fountains.

*La Pyramide.*

The new entrance to the Paris Louvre had become almost as famous as the museum itself. The controversial, neomodern glass pyramide designed by Chinese-born American architect I. M. Pei still evoked scorn from traditionalists who felt it destroyed the dignity of the Renaissance courtyard. (35)

spoken version:

The Louvre's main entrance was visible now, ~~rising boldly in the distance,~~ encircled by seven triangular pools from which spouted illuminated fountains. *La Pyramide.* ~~The new entrance to the Paris Louvre had become almost as famous as the museum itself.~~ The controversial, neomodern glass pyramide ~~designed by Chinese-born American architect I. M. Pei~~ still evoked scorn from traditionalists who felt it destroyed the dignity of the Renaissance courtyard.

---

2 ↑ (high key), ↓ (low key), ↗ (rise), ↘ (fall), ↘↗ (fall-rise), ↗↘ (rise-fall), → (level);

3 ~~knelt on the floor and~~, the part was omitted from the spoken version;

In order to understand why paratones do not overlap with the paragraphs, one has to look at the structure of the text. In (1) the division into two paratones can be explained by the narrator's need to give special emphasis, and hence a new paratone, to the information about Father Escrivá. In (2) the narrator joins the three paragraphs into one paratone because they all concern the same topic, i.e. the pyramid in front of the Louvre. The justification for one paratone instead of three paragraphs is even stronger due to the abridged spoken version.

#### 4.1.2 *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*

The analysis of the written and spoken paragraph division in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* shows a much more faithful narration of the written text in spite of the fact that the novel is heavily abridged for the purpose of the audio recording. The reason for that is certainly the fact that the narrator is the author herself. In addition, the novel is written as a diary in which each chapter begins with the day of the month and the entries in the diary are preceded by the time of the day. Each entry, unless it is very long, is typed as one paragraph. The shorter entries often deal with more than one topic: Bridget's thoughts and the actual events which happen at the indicated time of the day. By means of intonation the narrator successfully interprets the text and a listener has the impression that there is more than one paragraph. The opening entry (3) deals with three ideas written as one paragraph but read as three paratones:

(3) printed version:

**7.15 a.m.** Hurrah! The wilderness years are over. For four weeks and five days now have been in functional relationship with adult male thereby proving am not love pariah as previously feared. Feel marvellous, rather like Jemima Goldsmith or similar radiant newlywed opening cancer hospital in veil while everyone imagines her in bed with Imran Khan. Ooh. Mark Darcy just moved. Maybe he will wake up and talk to me about my opinions. (3)

spoken version:

**7.15 a.m.** Hurrah! The wilderness years are over. For four weeks and five days now have been in functional relationship with adult male ~~thereby proving am not love pariah as previously feared.~~ [pause]

Feel marvellous, rather like Jemima Goldsmith or similar radiant newlywed opening cancer hospital in veil while everyone imagines her in bed with Imran Khan. [pause]

↑ Ooh. Mark Darcy just moved. Maybe he will wake up and talk to me about my opinions.

Another example of disentangling the complicated paragraph structure of the written text, where a reader has to be quite attentive to learn who is talking and to whom, is (4) where Bridget receives a telephone call from her friend Magda, a mother of two baby sons, who is simultaneously talking to Bridget and the elder son:

- (4) written version:  
'Bridget, hi! I was just ringing to say in the potty! In the potty! Do it in the potty!' (11)

spoken version:  
'Bridget, hi! I was just ringing to say [pause]  
↑ in the potty! In the potty! Do it in the potty!'

There are other cases of paragraph coalescence which are due to the abridgement and not to a different interpretation of the written text.

## 2.2 Cohesion and coherence within and between paratones

### 4.2.1 Cohesion

In written texts cohesion is expressed by different types of grammatical and lexical references present either in the actual text or in the context of the situation. In speech cohesion is additionally expressed by means of different prosodic features. The pioneering and seminal work on discourse intonation was carried out by Brazil (1997) who has established that the prosodic features of 'tone', 'key' and 'termination' play an important part in expressing cohesion and coherence in speech.

The 'referring' tones (i.e. the fall-rise, the rise) are to express the anaphoric reference to everything that is shared by the interlocutors, whereas the 'proclaiming' tones (i.e. the fall, the rise-fall) are usually used to express cataphoric reference, i.e. to introduce new information.

The analysis of narration in the two audio books has proved the validity of Brazil's intonation model. The anaphoric and cataphoric references realized by the tones are systematically used by both narrators, which suggests that the system works both in British and American pronunciation.<sup>4</sup>

Example (5) is taken from *The Da Vinci Code* and is a good example of interplay of a proclaiming tone (↘) introducing new information, followed by a referring tone (↘↗) providing the name of the place, and then followed by another piece of new information (↘) which winds up the whole informational unit and completes the sentence:

- (5) Shaped like an enormous ↘ horseshoe, / the ↘↗ Louvre / was the longest building in  
↘ Europe. (34)

In this way listeners are provided with prosodic clues of cohesion between the three pieces of information.

By means of the same prosodic features cohesion is established within one paragraph in example

4 Helen Fielding who narrates her own novel is British, while Jeff Harding, the narrator of *The Da Vinci Code*, was born in New England, USA.

(6), which is also taken from *The Da Vinci Code*, and describes the room in which the albino Silas was staying during his visit to Paris:

- (6) The room was ↘ spartan / – hardwood ↗ floors, / a pine ↗ dresser, / a canvas ↘ mat / that served as his ↘ bed. He was a ↘↗ visitor here this week, / and for many → years / he had been blessed with a ↘↗ similar sanctuary / in New York ↘ City. (27)

The fall on *spartan* introduces the topic of the paragraph while the four tone units which follow provide the explanation of the spartan ambient of the room. The first two are pronounced with referring tones (↗) because they express a common bit of knowledge regarding simple accommodation. The narrator has decided to pronounce *canvas mat* with a proclaiming tone (↘) thus treating this piece of information as different from expectation; it is common knowledge that even the most uncomfortable and simple accommodation would have a bed. The second sentence begins with a referring tone (↘↗), introducing the fact that Silas's room was his temporary residence. The repetition of the referring tone in the third tone unit of the second sentence not only makes reference to a miserable accommodation in New York City, but also implies Silas's ascetic lifestyle.

#### 4.2.2 Coherence

If the proclaiming and referring tones are the prosodic features used to express cataphoric and anaphoric references respectively, then keys and terminations are the prosodic features used to express coherence, i.e. different meaningful relations between sentences and paragraphs.

Brazil (1997, 40) distinguishes between three levels of key and termination: high, mid and low. Different keys establish contrastive or equivalent meaningful relations between two pieces of information. Thus the high key is used to express contrast and the low key equivalence between two packages of information. The mid key is used to add one piece of information to another. The function of termination is primarily to limit and predict the addressee's response: the high termination is said to encourage further conversation, while the low termination indicates the possible end of conversation. The low termination has an additional function: it marks the end of a unit, which Brazil (1997, 117) calls a 'pitch sequence' and which often coincides with a written paragraph. The pitch sequence is hierarchically higher than a tone unit. Brazil claims that the choice of the key in the beginning of a pitch sequence puts the whole sequence in a meaningful relation with the previous pitch sequence. Thus a pitch sequence with an initial high key puts the whole sequence in a contrastive relation with the previous one, whereas a pitch sequence with an initial low key establishes a relation of equivalence between the two successive pitch sequences.

The analysis of narration in the two audio books has confirmed Brazil's theory. Examples (7) and (8) are taken from *The Da Vinci Code* and show the relations of contrast and equivalence between two paratones respectively. In example (7) there are two packages of information about the physical appearance of Robert Langdon and his public image which are in a contrastive meaningful relation:

- (7) His usually sharp blue eyes looked hazy and drawn tonight. Around his temples, the grey highlights were advancing into his thicket of coarse black hair.  
↑ Last month, much to Langdon's embarrassment, Boston magazine had listed him as one of that city's top ten most intriguing people ... (23)

In example (8) a whole paragraph is dedicated to a detailed description of corporal mortification performed by Silas which is wound up by the second, one-sentence long paragraph containing the expected consequences of the whole ritual and thus uttered in low key:

- (8) Silas turned now to a heavy knotted rope coiled neatly beside him.  
↓ The Discipline↓. The knots were caked with dried blood. Eager for the purifying effects of his own agony, Silas said a quick prayer. Then, gripping one end of the rope, he closed his eyes and swung it hard over his shoulder, feeling the knots slap against his back. He whipped it over his shoulder again, slashing at his flesh. Again and again, he lashed.  
↓ Finally, he felt the blood begin to flow.↓ (30)

In example (8) there is also an internal relation of equivalence between the message of the first sentence and the second one which can be interpreted as: *The Discipline is a heavy knotted rope.*

It was said above that the initial extra-high pitch and the final low pitch accompanied by a pause were the prosodic phenomena which marked the boundary between two paratones. Although this is very often the case, one cannot precipitously jump to the conclusion that this is the only possibility. The examples (7) and (8) clearly indicate that the meaningful relations between the paragraphs have to be taken into consideration.

## 2.2 Character portrayal

Character portrayal is probably the most important and demanding element in audio book narration. It is also an element where the narrator's own image of the characters and his own interpretations of their behaviour come to light. Although the narrator reads the words of the author, it is his or her voice which gives life to the characters and triggers our imagination. The narrator takes the author's cues and provides the dramatic experience. In doing so, the narrator has two choices: he can keep a low profile and merely read the story providing subtle emotional and attitudinal colouring of the characters and the events; or he can go out of his way and use the author's words to make his own story by adding passionate and exaggerated prosodic choices. A good narrator will know how to keep his interpretation within acceptable limits and not get carried away with exaggerated imitations of characters. He will know how to create the appropriate atmosphere, when to become an invisible channel of words, as well as when and how to make the narration vivid.

Evaluating the quality of the narration is just as difficult and subjective as is the narration itself. Our judgements are conditioned by our personal preferences regarding the voice and the accent of the narrator. In my analysis of the two audio books I have tried to be as objective as possible but unfortunately could not help myself being partial and critical, too.

### 4.3.1 *The Da Vinci Code*

The characters in *The Da Vinci Code* are of different nationalities, occupations and ages. Although male characters prevail, one of the main protagonists is a young French woman, Sophie Neveu. The main male character is a Harvard professor, Robert Langdon. Among other important characters there are several French police officers, a French albino called Silas, a Spanish bishop and a British historian of aristocratic origin, Sir Leigh Teabing. The narrator, Jeff Harding, has decided to give each of the characters his or her own tone of voice depending on the character's age, occupation, nationality and gender. Thus he uses English with a heavy French accent when reading the words of the French characters, adding a variety of different voice qualities, such as roughness pitched low for the main detective, Bezu Fache, or very weak and frightened voices pitched either high or low for other minor police officers.

If the narrator's French English accent is acceptable to some extent, this cannot be said for his imitation of female voices because he sounds like Dustin Hoffman playing 'Dorothy Michaels' in the well-known comedy *Tootsie*. This has created a totally misplaced humorous effect in this crime story.

Another weak point in Jeff Harding's narration is his imitation of the British English aristocratic accent which he uses for Sir Leigh Teabing, a knight and a historian of great influence, wealth and power. The narrator has failed to acquire those British English vowels which are not present in the American English or have a different quality and quantity. Among the consonants he uses voiced, alveolar tap /ɾ/ instead of the British voiceless, alveolar plosive /t/ and he pronounces post-vocalic /r/ also before consonants. Intonation-wise, he retains his American mid-level pitch contour instead of the more lively British intonation which exhibits a number of pitch jumps and pitch slumps. The only intonation which he manages to get right is the intonation of exclamations and greetings where he puts on a very posh and affected British English accent which is generally associated with older aristocrats. But, unfortunately, this produces inconsistency with his English accent.

The narrative structure of the whole novel is quite varied: in the foreground there is the death of the Louvre's curator, Jacques Saunière, and the mysterious message which he left, as well as his instruction to his granddaughter, Sophie Neveu, to contact Robert Langdon. The two become prime suspects in Saunière's murder and try to escape the French police in order to decode the message and find the real murderer. The story is interrupted by Silas's attempt to find the keystone before Sophie and Robert. In order to understand the importance of the keystone, the action is often slowed down by longer explanations of historical nature, as well as the main characters' inner thoughts.

The narrator is quite successful in using the prosodic features of rhythm and volume, as well as the pitch height to distinguish between the meditative and explanatory parts of the novel on the one hand, and the actions surrounding them, on the other. In the book, the parts that represent the characters' thoughts are written in italics, and the narrator pronounces them slowly, silently and in the lower key of the pitch range:

- (9) The spiked cilice belt that he wore around his thigh cut into his flesh, and yet his soul sang with satisfaction of service to the Lord. ↓ Pain is good. ↓ (27).

Increased volume and speed of speech are used to interpret the fast actions, such as the chase of the police after Robert Langdon who had faked the escape from the Louvre museum by throwing the tracking dot through a window on a by-passing truck.

In sum, the narrator of *The Da Vinci Code* quite successfully uses different prosodic features to bring to life the intricate string of events and historical facts and assumptions, but fails with the portrayal of some of the important protagonists of the story.

### 4.3.2 *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*

The characters in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* are all British in their thirties and forties. The main protagonists are Bridget Jones and her boyfriend Mark Darcy, as well as a number of their female and male friends. The novel is written as a diary in which Bridget diligently notes her daily thoughts and events. The main theme of this comic novel is Bridget's brand new relationship with Mark, their ups and downs and the cliché differences between male and female way of thinking and behaving. Since the narrator is the author herself, it is possible to assume that she knows her characters very well and will be able to bring them to life as accurately as possible.

And indeed her narration is faithful to the book in that it tries to produce the characters' feelings and attitudes towards each other and the events surrounding them. Thus she puts on the sobbing, bellowing, murmuring and whispering voices when her characters behave in those ways. When narrating the male voices, she does not exaggerate but simply drops her voice to her normal low pitch.

The narrative structure of the novel is actually a fast interchange of events and the characters' thoughts, which the narrator manages to achieve by means of the rhythm of the narration. Bridget's thoughts and meditations are narrated in slow rhythm and with neutral, mid pitch range. But when her dreamy, thoughtful mood is interrupted by a sudden event, her startled reaction is appropriately marked by a high pitched intonation and increased speed of delivery. In example (10) these changes of rhythm and pitch are well conditioned by the action:

- (10) **11.05 a.m.** Yes. As it says in *How to Get the Love You Want* – or maybe it was *Keeping the Love You Find?* – the blending together of man and woman is a delicate thing. Man must pursue. Will wait for him to ring me.

**11.15 a.m.** Was Richard Finch yelling again. Have been put on the fox-hunting item instead of Labour Women and have got to do live insert from Leicestershire.

Right, better get out cuts...

[fast rhythm, very high pitch] ↘Oh. ↘Telephone. (10-1)

## 5. Conclusion

In the paper I have tried to present how narrators use their voices to deliver as accurately as possible the contents of a written novel in an audio book. I have specifically looked at different prosodic features which are used to achieve cohesion and coherence within and between different topical units or paratones, as well as how narrators use their voices for character portrayal and the narrative structure of the plot.

The analysis of two audio books of two different genres has shown that the written division into paragraphs is not observed in the spoken version. In the analysis I decided to treat a shorter or a longer pause as the only clue for the paratone division. The reason for this is to be found in Brazil's intonation theory, which claims that the paratone initial key puts the whole paratone in a particular relation with the previous paratone. The relation can be either that of contrast or equivalence. In this way, a speaker achieves coherence between two paratones.

The analysis into paratones has shown that the two narrators have not strictly observed the division of the written text into paragraphs. There are two reasons for that: the first one is due to the abridgement of the written novels for the purpose of audio book narration, the second one has to do with the narrators' perception of the information packed into one paragraph. They have either decided to split a written paragraph into two or more paratones or they joined two or three paragraphs into one paratone. Both decisions have been made according to the narrators' perception of topical unity.

Cohesion in speech is achieved by means of different tones, whereas coherence is expressed by the prosodic features of key and termination. The interplay of new and old or referred-to information has been analysed and compared with the prosodic realizations. The analysis has proved the theoretical assumptions made by Brazil (1997) that the fall-rising and the rising tones make reference to shared knowledge, whereas the falling tone is used to introduce new information. The analysis of paratone initial keys has also confirmed Brazil's theory of high key expressing contrast and low key expressing equivalence between topical units.

Another very important element in the audio book narration is the character portrayal and the delivery of events. Although this is the most difficult element to evaluate because it is often very subjective, I can nonetheless conclude that some artistic performance is necessary to transmit the right moods and attitudes of the characters, as well as the pace of events. However, an exaggerated performance can achieve an unwanted effect, as is the case with the imitation of a female voice by the male narrator in *The Da Vinci Code*.

In conclusion I would like to return to the initial dilemma whether listening to audio books will eventually replace the traditional reading of written books. I believe that this will not happen and that the present enthusiasm will eventually wane. Audio books may be a good solution for some types of books and some people. Although the idea of listening to a crime story while cooking or driving a car may be pleasing, it cannot compare to a quite and intimate experience of being immersed in the story and carried away by the characters.

## Bibliography

- Brazil, D. 1997. *The Communicative Value of Intonation in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brazil, D., M. Coulthard, and C. Johns. 1980. *Discourse Intonation and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Brown, D. 2004. *The Da Vinci Code*. London: Corgi Books.
- . 2004. *The Da Vinci Code*. 5 Audio CDs. London: Orion Audiobooks.
- Brown, G., K.L. Currie, and J. Kenworthy. 1980. *Questions of Intonation*. London: Croom Helm.
- Fielding, H. 1999. *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. London: Picador.
- . 1999. *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. 3 Audio CDs. London: Macmillan Audio Books.
- Harmon, A. 2005. *Loud, Proud, Unabridged: It Is Too Reading! At <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/26/fashion/thursdaystyles/26audio.html>*
- Lehiste, I. 1975. The phonetic structure of paragraphs. In *Structure and Process in Speech Perception*, ed. A. Cohen and S.G. Neeboom, 195-206. N.Y.: Springer Verlag.
- Wichmann, A. 2000. *Intonation in Text and Discourse: Beginnings, Middles and Ends*. Harlow: Longman.
- Williams, B. 1996. The formulation of intonation transcription system for British English. In *Working with Speech*, ed. G. Knowels, A. Wichmann and P. Alderson, 38-57. London: Longman.