Number System for Sight-reading Melodies

At the University of Northern Iowa we use a Number System to sightread melodies. The numbers represent the function (scale degree) of the pitch in the key. With this system we are able to sing the number of the pitch without upsetting the rhythm, since most of them are one syllable words. The only exception is 7, which has two syllables, therefore we just say "sev" for that number.

For example:

C major scale:

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 \text{(sev)}
\end{array}
\]

In minor keys the lowered 3, 6, & 7 are assumed, since they are part of that key, and the numbers are not altered to show that difference. When scale degrees 6 & 7 are raised, as in melodic minor, those pitches are still sung on the numbers 6 & 7, respectively, because they are considered "part of the key" as well. The raised pitches are simply sung according to the alteration.

G melodic minor scale:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 \text{(sev)} & 1
\end{array}
\]

Diatonic Melody (all pitches belong to the key) in G major:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 & 7 \text{(sev) 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1}
\end{array}
\]

In Chromatic Melodies (when some pitches are altered with an accidental such that they no longer belong in the original key), we use the terms "sharp" and "flat" to indicate the inflection of the motion of that pitch in the melody. If the accidental raises the original pitch, it is sung with the term "sharp." If the accidental lowers the original pitch, it is sung with the term "flat." The natural sign can be either "sharp" or "flat" depending on whether it is raising or lowering the pitch. For example:

Chromatic Melody (some pitches altered from the original key) in B\textsubscript{b} major:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 5 & 1 & 2 & 5 & 2 & 3 & 1 5 \text{ b 4 2 5 3 1 4 2 7(sev) 5 # 6 # 7(sev) 2 1}
\end{array}
\]

The same Chromatic Melody in B major:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
1 & 5 & 1 & 2 & 5 & 2 & 3 & 1 5 \text{ b 4 2 5 3 1 4 2 7(sev) 5 # 6 # 7(sev) 2 1}
\end{array}
\]