

Chapter III: Intonation in English

1.1. Learning Goals and Objectives

- Develop an awareness of English intonation
- Understand the different intonation patterns
- Use appropriate intonation based on context
- Understand the different functions of intonation

Lecture 13: Intonation: Form and Meaning

Intonation:

Intonation is defined by Jones (1960) as the variations which take place in the pitch of the voice in connected speech, i.e. the variations in the pitch of the musical note produced by vibration of the vocal cords. According to Roach (1991) the pitch of the voice plays the most important part in intonation. Only in very unusual situations do we speak with fixed, unvarying pitch, and when we speak normally the pitch of our voice is constantly changing.

So, we call the melody of language intonation. The latter refers to the total pattern of pitch changes, i.e., the rising and falling of the voice when a person is speaking, within an utterance. Intonation is another important element of spoken English. It is the English intonation which makes English sound really English. In addition, it makes speech meaningful. In English, intonation adds the meaning of an utterance in two ways:

- A. It shows the relationship of words within and between sentences.
- B. It tells something about the feeling of the speaker.

In other words, different pitches may indicate different meanings for the same utterance. They also help us express our feelings: happiness, sadness, surprise, annoyance, anger, disbelief and so on. In listening to the meaning of an utterance, therefore, we listen to how speakers talk as well as to what they say. The HOW and WHAT together give us the meaning of an English utterance.

We now see the importance of using the appropriate intonation patterns when we speak. Otherwise, we may be sending messages using intonations that contradict what we want words to say. In fact, intonation patterns that disagree with the content of the utterance may indicate doubt, sarcasm, or confusion.

Tone:

According to Roach (1991) a unit of speech bounded by pauses has movement, of music and rhythm, associated with the pitch of voice. This certain pattern of voice movement is **tone**.

A tone is a certain pattern, not an arbitrary one, because it is meaningful in discourse. By means of tones, speakers signal whether to refer, proclaim, agree, disagree, question or hesitate, or indicate completion and continuation of turn-taking, in speech. Each tone-unit contains a syllable that carries the tone.

This syllable is called the **tonic syllable**. It has a high degree of prominence. A tonic syllable does not only carry a tone but also a type of stress that is called **tonic stress**.

- Consider two common one-syllable utterances like 'yes' and 'no'. You may say these with either the pitch remaining at a constant level or with the pitch changing from one level to another. The overall behaviour of the pitch in these examples is tone.

Tone unit:

In the study of intonation it is usual to divide speech into larger units than syllables. In longer utterances, there must be some points which mark a break between the end of one pattern and the beginning of the next. These breaks divide speech into tone-units, and are called tone-unit boundaries. An 'intonation unit' (also called intonation-group, tone group or

tone-unit) is a piece of utterance, a continuous stream of sounds, bounded by a fairly perceptible pause. Thus, the most obvious factor to look for in trying to establish boundaries is the presence of a pause, and in slow careful speech (e.g. in lectures, sermons and political speeches) this may be done quite regularly. However, it seems that we detect tone-unit boundaries even when the speaker does not make a pause, if there is an identifiable break or discontinuity in the rhythm or in the intonation pattern.

An intonation unit or tone group usually corresponds to a sense group (a word, a phrase or a clause). It may contain several syllables, some of them stressed and some unstressed. The last stressed syllable is usually a marker of the highest importance and has the focus stress. On this syllable, there takes place a change of pitch, either an upward or downward movement, or a combination of the two.

So, Closely related with the notion of pausing is that a change of meaning may be brought about. Certain pauses in a stream of speech can have significant meaning variations in the message to be conveyed. Consider the example below, in which slashes correspond to pauses, the meaning (given in brackets) differs according to the place of the pause in the utterance:

When danger threatens your children ,call the police.

(you have to call the police when danger threatens your children.)

When danger threatens | your children call the police.

(Your children call the police whenever danger threatens)

Lecture 14: Intonation Unit Structure

Nucleus / tail / head / pre-head:

An important feature of English intonation is the use of an intonational accent (and extra stress) to mark the **focus** of a sentence. Normally this focus accent goes on the last major word of the sentence, but it can come earlier in order to emphasize one of the earlier words or to contrast it with something else (as we have already seen in emphatic / contrastive stress).

Within each intonation unit, there is usually one syllable called a **nucleus** which carries maximal prominence. This syllable is referred to as the tonic. The latter is important because it carries not only the major stress, but also the major pitch change: it changes according to the meaning intended by the speaker.

For example, this is the normal way of saying the following sentence:

I am WRItIng a LETter to him NOW.

There are ten syllables in this sentence among which three are stressed syllables. The last stressed syllable is NOW. So we say that NOW has the focus stress, and is the **tonic** syllable and therefore is the **nucleus** of the intonation unit. The nucleus is the essential part of the intonation unit. It is still present even if the unit consists of a single syllable, as is the case with many sentence words like *yes*, *no*, *why*, etc.

Any syllable or syllables that may follow the nucleus in an intonation unit are called the **"tail"**. In the sentence "I am WRItIng a LETter to him", the three unstressed syllables

after the nucleus are called the "tail" of this intonation unit. The part of an intonation unit that extends from the first stressed syllable up to the nucleus is called the "**head**" of the intonation unit. In the sentence "I am WRItIng a LETter to him", the "head" of this intonation unit is made up of three syllables: "writing a". Any unstressed syllable or syllables that may precede the "head", or the "nucleus" if there is no head, are called the "**pre-head**". In the sentence "I am WRItIng a LETter to him", "I am" comprises the "pre-head" of this intonation unit. The tail, head, and pre-head are optional whereas the nucleus is obligatory.

So if you analyze the following sentence, we will come up with the structure of an intonation unit like this:

I am WRItIng a LET ter to him

P = Pre-head

H = Head

N = Nucleus

T = Tail

So, any feature of intonation should be analyzed and discussed in relation to tonic stress placement and pausing. Closely related with the notion of pausing is that a change of meaning may be brought about; certain pauses in a stream of speech can have significant meaning variations in the message to be conveyed. In the following example (slashes correspond to pauses), the meaning (given in brackets) differs according the place of the pause in the utterance:

- Those who sold quickly / made a profit
(A profit is made by those who sold quickly.)
- Those who sold / quickly made a profit
(A profit was quickly made by those who sold.)

It can also be pointed out that right pausing may become a necessity to understand and to be understood well.

Lecture 15: Intonation Patterns

Introduction:

Intonation is the rise and fall of the voice pitch in speaking; it helps us to understand the speaker's emotions and attitude (a question, excitement, doubt, threat, happiness, sadness, shock, surprise, anger, sarcasm, seriousness, annoyance etc.). In English, intonation is considered to play a major role in the construction of meaning.

E.g: - You are ↘ going. (statement) - You are ↗going? (Question)

- ✓ It is the rise and fall of pitch which makes the difference between the statement and the question. The rise and fall of pitch throughout is called **intonation**.

Types of Tones

In connected speech, the voice-pitch is continually rising and falling. These variations produce intonations which may be described as “tunes”, “patterns” or “contours”. When the pitch of the voice rises we have a rising intonation; when it falls we have a falling intonation; when it remains on one note for an appreciable time, we have level intonation. Several intonation patterns are used in RP. The four commonest ones are **the falling tone** (Fall), the **rising tone** (rise), **falling-rising tone** and **rising-falling tone**.

As already seen, a unit of speech bounded by pauses has movement, of music and rhythm, associated with the pitch of voice. This certain pattern of voice movement is called tone. So, tone is a certain pattern, not an arbitrary one, because it is meaningful in language

analysis.

By means of tones, speakers signal whether to refer, proclaim, agree, disagree, question or hesitate, or indicate completion and continuation of turn-taking in speech.

1. **Falling Tone- Fall (\):**

A falling tone, the most common used tone of all, is assertive and conclusive. It signals a sense of finality, completion and confidence (belief in the content of the utterance). It is used for asking and giving information in normal, quiet, un-emphatic style. It is used in complete statements (not implying any continuation known to the speaker), WH questions (containing a specific interrogative word such as when, where, who, why, how...etc), commands, exclamatory sentences, in the last alternative of alternative questions, in the first part of tag questions and in the second part if the speaker expects the answer “yes”.

A speaker, by choosing a falling tone, also indicates to the addressee that is all he has to say, and offers a chance (turn-taking) to the addressee to comment on, agree or disagree with, or add to his utterance. However, it is up to the addressee to do either of these. This tone does in no way solicit a response from the addressee. Nonetheless, it would be polite for the addressee to, at least, acknowledge in some manner or form that he is partner in the discussion. Now, let us see the areas in which a falling tone is used.

1. **Proclamation:** The following is a proclamation in which a teacher is informing a student of the consequences of his unacceptable behaviour.

- I'll report you to the \headmaster.

2. **Statements (Assertions):**

- I have arrived \early
- I have spoken with the \cleaner
- She is a \TEAcher.
- It's \RAINing.

- He finished it \YESTERday.
- I'm absolutely \CERTain.

3. Wh/ questions:

- What have you \done?
- Where is the \pencil?
- Where does she \WORK?
- How did you get to \KNOW it?

4. Interjections and greetings:

- Nice to \meet you.
- Hel \lo \Hi

5. Listing:

- I visited Paris, London, Cairo and \Madrid.

6. Order:

- Do you \ homework.
- \ Stop it!
- Go and see a \ doctor
- Shut the door at \ONCE.
- Come \HERE Do what I \TELL you.
- Stop \TALKing.

7. Exclamatory sentences:

- How \nice of you!
- What a wonderful sur \prise!

8. Alternative questions:

- Do you want coffee or \tea?
- Would you like to go for a /WALK or would you rather stay \HOME?

- Shall we /WALK, or go by /BUS or take the \UNderground?

9. Gratitude:

- \Thank you

10. Tag Questions -- Yes/no Questions expecting a confirmation or agreement

- You like it, \don't you? \Yes
- You study \ENGLISH, \DON'T you? (I am sure you study English and I expect the answer "yes").

2. Rising Tone (/):

2.1.Low-rise:

This tone is used in genuine 'Yes/No' questions (where the speaker does not know the answer). Such yes/no questions are uttered with a **rising tone**. It is also used in requests, introductory phrases/clauses, in the first part of alternative questions, in the second part of tag questions where the speaker is not sure of the answer, in direct address and in enumerations (when listing).

1. Yes/no questions:

- Have you read this /BOOK?
- Shall we go out /NOW?
- a- isn't he ↗nice? b- ↗Yes/ ↗No / I don't ↗know
- Do you want some ↗coffee?

2. Tag questions (asking for confirmation)

- You don't speak Spanish, /DO you? (the speaker is not completely sure and asks for confirmation)

3. Requests:

- Pass the /BREAD, please.

4. Introductory phrases/clauses:

- If he /CALLS, ask him to \COME.
- All of a /SUDDen, the girl started to \CRY.

5. Alternative Questions (except the last alternative)

- Can he speak /SPANish or \GERman?
- She speaks /French, /German and \RUSsian.

6. Direct address:

- /TOM, could you \HELP me, please.

7. Enumerations (Listing):

- /ONE, /TWO, /THREE , /FOUR , \FIVE.
- /RED, /BLUE, /BROWN and \YELlow.
- She speaks /French, /German and \RUSsian.

Other examples which are uttered with a rising tone are:

- ✓ **Attract somebody's attention:** a- excuse me b- ↗Yes
- ✓ **To express also politeness, suspicion and encouragement:** It's ↗kind of you

➤ The low-Rise is used a lot in English, used as in 'agreement' or 'response with reservation'.

a- I've heard that it's a good school

b- ↗Yes (Low-Rise) (B's reply means that he is not completely agreed with what A said)

a- It's not really an expensive record, is it?

b- ↗No (Low-Rise) (B's reply indicates that he would not completely agree with it)

2.2. High-Rise: it may extend from low pitch to high pitch. It is associated with questions: asking for repetition or clarification. It may express surprise or incredibility.

You said ↗ **what?** ↗ **What? (elliptical questions)** You ↗ **did?**

- **Tag Questions:**

- You live in ↘ **Biskra**, ↗ **don't** you? (the speaker thinks you live in Biskra but he isn't sure and asks for confirmation)
- You live in ↘ **Biskra**, ↘ **don't** you? (the speaker is sure and expects the answer 'yes') to get confirmation or agreement
- Nice ↘ **weather**, ↘ **isn't** it? (the speaker is sure the weather is nice and expects the answer 'yes')

3. Fall-rise (\ /):

This tone also signals non-finality and continuation of the utterance. It signals a sense of limited agreement or response with reservation. It may also denote doubt or uncertainty, reproach, threat, disbelief, polite correction, partial statements and negative statements.

Examples may make this clearer:

1. A: I've heard that it's a good ↘ **SCHOOL**.

B: \ / **YES. (Fall-rise)** (implying " I do not completely agree with you")

B's reply would be taken to mean that he should not completely agree with what A said, and A would probably expect B to go on to explain why he was reluctant to agree.

2. A: It's not really an expensive record, is it?

B: no (fall rise)

The fall-rise in B's reply again indicates that he would not completely agree with A. Fall-rise in such contexts almost always indicates both something 'given' or 'conceded' and at the same time some 'reservation' or 'hesitation'.

3. a- She's coming on ↘ **Wednesday**

b- On ↘ ↗ **Thursday**

- a- There are ↘**twenty** students in the group b- ↘↗**Fifty**
- a- I came on ↘**foot**. b- On ↘↗**foot**
- a- She↘**refused** to pay. b- That's not ↘↗**true**
- She wasn't very ↘↗**pleased**. (Negative Statements)

Other Examples:

3. I ↘/**THINK** so. (implying “but I’m not quite sure”).
4. That’s not what I ↘/**MEANT**. (implying “ though it may have sounded as if I meant it”).
5. I’ll do it if I ↘/**CAN**.
6. It’s ↘/**POS**sible.

4. Rise-fall (/ \):

This tone is used for expressing rather strong feelings of approval, disapproval, disbelief contrast or surprise.

- A: You wouldn't do an awful thing like that, would you? B: / \ **NO**
- A: It is midnight B: / \ **IS** it!
- A: Isn't the view lovely B: / \ **YES**
- A: I think you said it was the best so far. B: / \ **YES**
- A: I'm extremely sorry, but I probably lost the book you gave me. B: / \ **WHAT?**

Remarks:

- **Elliptical answers:** ↘ yes yes, I ↘do. (falling intonation)
- **Greetings:**

Good ↘morning! (I am just greeting you)

Good ↗morning! (expresses an added interest in the person addressed)
- **A vocative after hi or hello, has its own rising tone:**

↘Hi, ↗Margaret.

Hel ↘lo, ↗Tim

▪ **Farewell :**

Good ↗ **bye!** (a fall can be used, but a rise is more frequent)

Good↘ **bye!** (get rid of an unwelcomed person)

▪ **Thank you**

↘Thank you (straightforward meaning)

↗Thank you (routine acknowledgment)

To express genuine gratitude, it necessary to use a fall.

At the bank: Asking about fees

A: Do you have any ↗questions?

High rise (yes/no question)

B: ↘ Yes, I want to know about ↘ fees.

Elliptical answer/ statement

A: Which ↗ fees?

High rise (elliptical question)

B: Overdraft ↘ fees.

Low fall (answer/ statement)

A: You will be required to pay a small fee for every time of your ↘ draft.

B: How much is the ↘ fee?

Low fall (wh question)

A: You'll have to pay \$25 every time you ↘ overdraft.

B: That's a small ↗ fee?

High rise (yes/ no question)

A: It should stop you from ↘ overdrafting.

B: You would think it ↘ would, but it most likely ↘ won't.

Low fall (statement)

A: Can I help you with anything ↗ else?

Low rise (polite request)

B: That's it for to ↘ day. ↗ Thank you. **low fall (statement)**

low rise (routine acknowledgement)

Lecture 15: Functions of Intonation

Before we start the discussion of the function of intonation, let's ask ourselves what would be lost if we were to speak without intonation.

Let's imagine a speech in which every syllable was said on the same level pitch, with no pause and with no changes in speed and loudness. In fact, intonation makes it easier for a listener to understand what a speaker is trying to convey. There are many ways in which intonation does this.

Intonation has four main functions: attitudinal, accentual, grammatical and discourse function.

1. Attitudinal Function

Intonation enables us to express emotions and attitudes as we speak, and this adds a special meaning to spoken language. For example, the same sentence can be said in different ways, which might be labeled 'angry', 'happy', 'grateful', 'bored' and so on. For example, one may use a rise –fall with the word *yeah* when one is not really believing what is being said (in writing, No punctuation is really available to indicate this attitude, so one might write, "*Yeah, yeah*" *he muttered*, and hope that the correct idea is communicated). Another example is the word *Yes* pronounced with different tones: if someone calls you and you answer *yes* with a rising tone, you signal that you are opening an interaction with them; but if you say *Yes* with a falling tone, this may denote that you do not wish to speak to

them and may even be interpreted as impolite.

A few examples about the attitudinal functions of the commonest intonation contours are provided below:

Fall: The attitudinal function that can be expressed by a falling tone is:

- **finality, definiteness:** That is the end of the news
- I'm absolutely certain Stop talking
- **Rise:** Most of the functions attributed to rises are nearer to grammatical than attitudinal, as in the three examples listed below. They are included here mainly to give a fuller picture of intonational function:

- **General question:** Can you help me Is it over
- **Listing :** red, brown, yellow or blue (blue is pronounced with falling tone)
- **'More to follow':** I phoned them right away (and they agreed to come)
- You must write it again (and this time get it right)
- **Encouraging:** It wont hurt
- **Fall-rise:**
- **Uncertainty, doubt:** you may be right It's possible
- **Requesting:** Can I buy it
- Will you lend it to me?
- **Rise-fall**
- **Surprise, being impressed:** You were first all of them
- In addition to functions within tone, pitch variations may convey different functions. For example, wider pitch range tends to be used in excited to enthusiastic speaking, slower speed is typical of the speech of someone who is tired or bored, an do on.

1. Accentual Function

Intonation helps to produce the effect of prominence on syllables that need to be

perceived as stressed. In particular the placing of tonic stress on a particular syllable marks out the word to which it belongs as the most important in a tone unit. The nucleus can in fact go onto any syllable in the phrase, although some positions are more likely and more common than others. In a very neutral production, the nucleus is most likely to fall on the lexically stressed syllable of the final content word of the tone unit. This occurs in most cases.

It is possible, however, to change the position of the nucleus from this neutral or default setting in order to affect meaning. Putting the nucleus on a syllable other than the default draws our attention to that syllable and suggests it is important. Three important cases are New vs Old information, contrastive stress and emphatic stress.

New vs old information: Intonation indicates new information. In conversation, the tonic shifts as new, important words come in.

A: Where did you go in the summer? B: The south of FRANCE.

A: Which part of France do you prefer ? B: The SOUTH of France.

In the first example, France is the most important word, so it is the tonic. In the response of speaker B in the second example (where the wording is identical), south has become the most important word because it gives new information (France has been mentioned in A's question, so it is considered as given information).

Other examples:

3. A: I fancy seeing a FILM. B: What KIND of film?

A: Oh, Any kind of film. B: How about a COMedy?

A: I can't STAND comedies. B: I'd rather see an ACTION movie.

A: I've lost my umbRELLa. B: A LADy's umbrella? C: Yes. A lady's umbrella with STARS on it. GREEN stars.

• **Contrast:**

• a) | I want to know where he is traveling to | (the word 'to', which is a preposition, is not stressed because it is not a lexical word)

• b) | I don't want to know where he is traveling from |

• | I want to know where he is traveling to |

• a) | she was wearing a red dress |

• b) | she was not wearing a green dress | She was wearing a red dress |

• **Emphasis:** (In these examples (a) is non-emphatic and (b) is emphatic)

• a) | It was very boring |

• b) | It was very boring |

• a) | You mustn't talk so loudly |

• b) | You mustn't talk so loudly |

• In addition to contrast and emphasis, there are other exceptions to the placement of the tonic stress on the last lexical word of the tone-unit. So the tonic stress may be placed earlier in the tone-unit if there is a word there with greater importance to what is being said. This can happen as a result of the last part of the tone-unit being already 'given' (i.e. something which has already been mentioned or is completely predictable), for example:

| Here is that book you asked me to bring | (the fact you asked me to bring it is not new)

Grammatical Function

Another function of intonation is the indication of syntactic structure. The listener is better able to recognize the grammar and syntactic structure of what is being said by using the information contained in intonation. For example, intonation indicates the placement of boundaries between phrases, clauses or sentences.

| He usually comes late |

| He worked hard | and passed the exam |

| Because he worked hard | he passed the exam |

| A lot of industry's profits | go in taxation |

| Professor Bull | the Head of the Department | declared his support |

| I bought a nice new jacket | with a zip down the front | and a lot of pockets |

- Intonation is also used to disambiguate grammatically ambiguous sentences.

1.a. | Those who sold quickly | made a profit | (A profit was made by those who sold quickly.)

1.b. | Those who sold | quickly made a profit | (A profit was quickly made by those who sold.)

2.a. | She read and graded papers | (she performed two activities relating to papers)

2.b. | She read | and graded papers | (she did a general activity of reading - perhaps including the papers-, and another activity of grading papers.)

Intonation is also used to distinguish the meanings of utterances that are identical. For example, it indicates the difference between questions and statements. In English, a rising tone is used for yes/no questions and a falling tone is used for statements.

| Is Bill a / DOctor | (rising tone)

| Bill is a DOctor | (falling tone)

However, it is possible to use a rising tone with a statement, making it a question:

| Bill is a DOctor | (statement: falling intonation) | Bill is a /DOctor | (question : rising intonation)

4. Discourse Function

Intonation can signal to the listener what is to be taken as NEW information and what is already GIVEN, can suggest when the speaker is indicating some sort of contrast or link with material in another tone-unit and, in *conversation*, can convey to the listener what kind of response is expected.

| Since the LAST time we met | when we had that huge DINner | I've been on DIET |

The first two tone-units present information which is relevant to what the speaker is

saying, but which is not something new and unknown to the listener. The final tone-unit, however, does present new information. Writers on discourse intonation have proposed that the falling tone indicates new information while rising (including falling-rising) tones indicate 'shared' or 'given' information.