

BASIC PHONETICS AND ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

LESSON: INTONATION

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introduction

- Segmental phonology is dedicated to phonemes.
- On the other hand, suprasegmental phonology/prosody/ prosodic phonology looks at the syllable, and other units above the syllable.
- Suprasegmental features include stress, pitch, rhythm, and intonation.
- This lesson is dedicated to intonation.

Tone and intonation

- They affect syllables and larger units.
- They are really the same thing , in that they fundamentally based on pitch.
- Davenport and Hannahs (2010) observe that the distinction between tone and intonation has to do in part with the size of the unit to which they apply;
- Tone is a property of individual syllables or words,
- Intonation applies to much longer stretches, such as phrases and sentences.

- The other major distinction between tone and intonation has to do with the role they play in a language;
- Tone is typically used as a way of distinguishing between items at word level (such as minimal pairs)
- Intonation is used for a variety of functions including distinguishing between clause types (e.g. statements vs questions)
- Or signaling the speaker's attitude.

Meaning of Intonation

- No definition is completely satisfactory, but any attempt at a definition must recognize that the **pitch** of the voice plays the most important part.
- 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.
- One of the most important tasks in analyzing intonation is to listen to the speaker's pitch and recognize what it is doing;
- this is not an easy thing to do, and it seems to be a quite different skill from that acquired in studying segmental phonetics.

- We describe pitch in terms of high and low, and some people find it difficult to relate what they hear in someone's voice to a scale ranging from low to high
- We should remember that “high” and “low” are arbitrary choices for endpoints of the pitch scale.
- It would be perfectly reasonable to think of pitch as ranging instead from “light” to “heavy”,
- for example, or from “left” to “right”, and people who have difficulty in “hearing” intonation patterns are generally only having difficulty in relating what they hear (which is the same as what everyone else hears) to this “pseudo-spatial” representation.

FORM AND FUNCTION IN INTONATION

- i) What is the form of intonation?
- ii) What is the function of intonation?
- One syllable utterance-
- Two common one-syllable utterances are 'yes' and 'no'. The first thing to notice is that we have a choice of saying these with the pitch remaining at a constant level,
- or with the pitch changing from one level to another.

- The word we use for the overall behaviour of the pitch in these examples is **tone**;
- a one-syllable word can be said with either a **level tone** or a **moving tone**.
- If you try saying 'yes' or 'no' with a level tone you may find the result does not sound
- natural, and indeed English speakers do not use level tones on one-syllable utterances very frequently.
- Moving tones are more common.

- If English speakers want to say 'yes' or 'no' in a definite, final manner they will probably use a **falling** tone -
- one which descends from a higher to a lower pitch. If they want to say 'yes?' or 'no?'
- in a questioning manner they may say it with a **rising** tone - a movement from a lower pitch to a higher one.

- Intonation is represented in a gross fashion in writing by punctuation marks: ? , . ! ; -.
- Intonation patterns may also indicate the attitude or relation of the speaker to the hearer as well as various contextual features.
- Therefore, though intonation is a phonological feature, its meaning lies within the province of syntax and pragmatics.
- Intonation patterns differ quite substantially among different dialects of English, for example between British and American or American and Canadian English.

- In describing intonation, we generally identify four different levels of pitch,
- “extra high”, “high”, “middle”, and “low”.
- Within an utterance, the pitch tends to alternate between low and high.
- The extra high level is reserved for expressing a strong emotion such as surprise, enthusiasm, or disbelief;
- it is also the pitch level that signals contrastive or emphatic stress.

Falling and rising intonation

- It has been the practice to recognize two basic intonation contours:
- **falling intonation** (where the end of the utterance is marked by low pitch) and,
- **rising intonation** (where the end is marked by high pitch).
- In general, a fall signals certainty or finality while a rise signals uncertainty.
- Within these two basic contours, we can identify several different pitch patterns, which convey different meanings:

Pitch pattern	Meaning
Long falling	expresses finality, conclusion, affirmation, agreement
Short falling	expresses an attenuated or qualified conclusion
Long rising	expresses questioning and a lack of finality
Short rising	expresses some degree of reservation or functions as a signal of attentiveness (continuation marker)
Rising-falling	expresses finality with added emotion (e.g. emphasis, enthusiasm, certainty, annoyance)
Falling -rising	expresses skepticism, reservation

Data from Brinton, L & Brinton, D. (2010). *The linguistic structure of modern English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- We normally speak in sequences longer than an individual word.
- In analyzing intonation patterns, we need to divide longer sequences of discourse into **tone groups**.
- Tone groups are not necessarily syntactic, but correspond to units of information.
- A single tone pattern continues over a particular tone group. There may be more than one tone group per sentence.
- The number of tone groups may vary depending on style: in more formal, deliberate, or pompous style, there are a greater number of tone groups than in more colloquial styles.

- Consider the following sentence:
- *She sat by the window in the late afternoon, // reading a letter.*
- Here there are two tone groups, corresponding to syntactic units, both with falling intonation.
- A more formal style might consist of three tone groups:
- *She sat by the window // in the late afternoon, // reading a letter.*

- Each tone group contains a **tonic syllable**, which carries the major shift in intonation.
- Usually, the tonic syllable is the last stressed syllable in the tone group.
- It expresses the information which the speaker considers new (unknown) and most important, as in the following sentences where the tonic syllable is underlined:
- *Did you get the job? vs. Did you lose your job?*
- *I visited my mother. vs. I visited your mother.*

FUNCTIONS OF INTONATION IN ENGLISH

- We can see that intonation makes it easier for a listener to understand what a speaker is trying to convey.
- The ways in which intonation does this are very complex, and many suggestions have been made for ways of isolating different functions.
- Roach (2009) proposes the following functions:
 - i) Intonation enables us to express emotions and attitudes as we speak, and this adds a special kind of “meaning” to spoken language.
- This is often called the **attitudinal function** of intonation.

- Intonation helps to produce the effect of prominence on syllables that need to be perceived as stressed,
- and in particular the placing of tonic stress on a particular syllable marks out the word to which it belongs as the most important in the tone-unit.
- In this case, intonation works to **focus** attention on a particular lexical item or syllable.
- This has been called the **accentual function** of intonation.

- The listener is better able to recognize the grammar and syntactic structure of what is being said by using the information contained in the intonation;
- for example, such things as the placement of boundaries between phrases, clauses or sentences,
- the difference between questions and statements, and the use of grammatical subordination may be indicated.
- This has been called the **grammatical function** of intonation.

- Looking at the act of speaking in a broader way, we can see that 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.
- Such functions are examples of intonation’s **discourse function**.

ATTITUDINAL FUNCTION OF INTONATION

- Intonation is used to convey our feelings and attitudes:
- for example, the same sentence can be said in different ways, which might be labelled “angry”, “happy”, “grateful”, “bored”, and so on.
- A major factor in this is the tone used, and most books agree on some basic meanings of tones.
- Consider the following examples (without punctuation):

- 1. Fall
- *Finality, definiteness*: That is the end of the \news
- Im absolutely \ certain
- Stop \ talking
- 2. Rise
- Most of the functions attributed to rises are nearer to grammatical than attitudinal, as in the first three examples given below; they are included here mainly to give a fuller picture of intonational function.

- *General questions:*

Can you /help me

Is it /over

- *Listing:* / Red / brown /yellow or \ blue

(a fall is usual on the last item)

- *“More to follow”:* I phoned them right a/way (‘and they agreed to come’)

You must write it a / gain (and this time, get it right)

- *Encouraging:* It wont / hurt

- 3. Fall-rise
- *Uncertainty, doubt*: You v may be right
- It's v possible
- *Requesting*: Can I v buy it
- Will you v lend it to me
- Note: v here represents fall- rise tone.

- 4. Rise-fall
- *Surprise, being impressed:*
- You were ^ **first**
- ^ All of them
- ^ indicates rise-fall

The accentual function of intonation

- The term accentual is derived from “accent”,
- a word used by some writers to refer to what Roach (2009) calls “stress”.
- When scholars say that intonation has accentual function they imply that the placement of stress is something that is determined by intonation
- one particular aspect of stress *could* be regarded as part of intonation: this is the placement of the tonic stress within the tone unit.

- The location of the tonic syllable is of considerable linguistic importance.
- The most common position for this is on the last lexical word
- (e.g. noun, adjective, verb, adverb as distinct from the function words) of the tone-unit.
- For contrastive purposes, however, any word may become the bearer of the tonic syllable.
- It is frequently said that the placement of the tonic syllable indicates the **focus** of the information.
- In the following pairs of examples, (i) represents normal placement and (ii) contrastive:

- i) I .want to .know .where hes \ travelling to
- (The word 'to' at the end of the sentence, being a preposition and not a lexical word, is not stressed.)
- ii) (I 'dont want to 'know 'where hes 'travelling vfrom)
- I ,want to, know, where he's ,travelling \to
- i) She was 'wearing a 'red \ dress
- ii) (She 'wasn't 'wearing a v green -dress) I She was wearing a \red -dress

- Similarly, for the purpose of emphasis we may place the tonic stress in other positions;
- In these examples, (i) is non-emphatic and (ii) is emphatic:
 - i) It was 'very \ boring
 - ii) It was \very -boring
 - i) You 'mustn't 'talk so \loudly
 - ii) You \ mustn't -talk so -loudly

The grammatical function of intonation

- The word “grammatical” tends to be used in a very loose sense in this context.
- It is usual to illustrate the grammatical function by inventing sentences which when written are ambiguous,
- and whose ambiguity can only be removed by using differences of intonation.
- A typical example is the sentence ‘Those who sold quickly made a profit’. This can be said in at least two different ways:
 - i) 'Those who 'sold v quicklv l ,made a \ profit
 - ii) 'Those who v sold l .quickly ,made a \ profit

- The difference caused by the placement of the tone-unit boundary is seen to be equivalent to giving two different paraphrases of the sentences, as in:
- i) A profit was made by those who sold quickly.
- ii) A profit was quickly made by those who sold.

Consider:

- i) The Conservatives who v like the pro-posal I are \ pleased
- ii) The Conservatives I who v like the pro-posal I are \ pleased
- The intonation makes clear the difference between (i) “restrictive” and (ii) “non-restrictive” relative clauses:
- (i) implies that only *some* Conservatives like the proposal, while (ii) implies that *all* the Conservatives like it.

- Many languages have the possibility of changing a statement into a question simply by changing the tone from falling to rising.
- This is, in fact, not used very much by itself in the variety of English being described here, where questions are usually grammatically marked.
- The sentence ‘The price is going up’ can be said as a statement like this:
- The \ price is going -up

- the tonic stress could equally well be on 'up').
- It would be quite acceptable in some dialects of English (e.g. many varieties of American English) to ask a question like this:
(Why do you want to buy it now?) The / price is going -up
- But speakers in Britain would be more likely to ask the question like this:
(Why do you want to buy it now?) 'Is the / price going -up?

- The intonation of **question-tags** (e.g. ‘isn’t it’, ‘can’t he’, ‘should she’, ‘won’t the /, etc.) is often quoted as a case of a difference in meaning being due to the difference between falling and rising tone.
- In the following example, the question-tag is ‘aren’t they /; when it has a falling tone, as in
- (i), the implication is said to be that the speaker is comparatively certain that the information is correct, and simply expects the listener to provide confirmation,
- while the rising tone in (ii) is said to indicate a lesser degree of certainty, so that the question-tag functions more like a request for information.

- i) They 'are 'coming on \ Tuesday | x arent they
- ii) They 'are 'coming on \ Tuesdav | / arent they
- The difference illustrated here could reasonably be said to be as much attitudinal as grammatical.
- Certainly there is overlap between these two functions.

The discourse function of intonation

- The study of discourse attempts to look at the larger contexts in which sentences occur.
- For example, consider the four sentences in the following:
 - *A*: Have you got any free time this morning?
 - *B*: I might have later on if that meeting's off.
 - *A*: They were talking about putting it later.
 - *B*: You can't be sure.

- Each sentence could be studied in isolation and be analysed in terms of grammatical construction, lexical content, and so on.
- But it is clear that the sentences form part of some larger act of conversational interaction between two speakers;
- the sentences contain several references that presuppose shared knowledge (e.g. 'that meeting' implies that both speakers know which meeting is being spoken about),
- and in some cases the meaning of a sentence can only be correctly interpreted in the light of knowledge of what has preceded it in the conversation (e.g. 'You can't be sure').

- If we consider how intonation may be studied in relation to discourse, we can identify two main areas:
- one of them is the use of intonation to focus the listener's attention on aspects of the message that are most important,
- and the other is concerned with the regulation of conversational behaviour.

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