



THE IMPORTANT FEATURES OF INTONATION COMPONENTS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Intonation, in phonetics, the melodic pattern of an utterance. It conveys differences of expressive meaning (e.g., surprise, anger, or delight), and it can also serve a grammatical function. Intonation is primarily a matter of variation in the pitch of the voice. In such languages as English, it is often accompanied by stress and rhythm to produce meaning. Tone is also a form of pitch modulation, but the term describes the use of pitch to differentiate words and grammatical categories. In many languages, including English, intonation distinguishes one type of phrase or sentence from another.

The most essential speech unit, complete and independent enough to function as a unit of communication, is the sentence. It can perform this function not only because it consists of words that are made up of definite sounds, have a definite meaning, and follow each other in a definite order according to the rules of the language, but also because it possesses definite phonetic features, without which the sentence cannot exist. These features are closely connected with the meaning of the utterance as a whole and carry important information that the words of the utterance do not convey. They are superimposed upon the sound making up the sentence in the process of speech and are inseparable from it.

These features are called prosodic, or supra – segmental and include speech melody, sentence – stress, tempo rhythm, pauses. So intonation is a complex of these prosodic features. Of all these prosodic and phenomena the most important are speech melody and sentence – stress. The main functions of intonation are:

- (a) sentence – forming
- (b) sentence – delimiting
- (c) distinctive
- (d) attitudinal

Intonation, along with words and grammatical structure, is an indispensable feature of the sentence. A chain of words correctly used according to grammatical rules does not necessarily make an unambiguous utterance with a clear communicative aim, if pronounced without differentiations in pitch and stress. For instance, "He's passed his exam" may be taken for a statement, or a question, or an exclamation, while with a definite intonation contour superimposed on this chain of words, the communicative aim of the utterance is clearly revealed.

The end of a sentence is always recognized by a pause of varying length combined with a moving (or nuclear) tone on the most important word of the sentence; the end of a non – final sense – group* is usually signalled by a shorter pause in combination with a nuclear tone on the semantic centre of the sense – group.

The distinctive function of intonation is apparent from the fact that communicatively different types of sentences are distinguished by intonation alone. The decisive role of intonation in defining the communicative type of an utterance stands out clearly in those cases where grammar and intonation are at variance; for example, where the grammatical features suggest a statement but the intonation turns the utterance into a question, or vice versa.

As has been mentioned above, the sentence possesses definite phonetic features. Each feature performs a definite task, and all of them work simultaneously.

Sentences are usually separated from each other by pauses. If necessary, the sentence is subdivided into shorter word – groups according to sense; these are called sense – groups or syntagms.

The pitch of the voice does not stay on the same level while the sentence (or the sense – group) is pronounced; it fluctuates, rising and falling on the vowels and voiced consonants. These falls and rises are not chaotic, but form definite patterns, typical of English. The fluctuations of the voice – pitch are called speech melody.

The word that is most important for the meaning of the sentence, i.e. the word acting as its semantic centre, is made prominent by stress and special moving tone; this special tone is the result of a perceptible change in the pitch, which either falls, or rises, or changes its movement first in one direction, then in another (fall – rise or rise - fall). The movement is initiated on the stressed syllable of the most important word of the sentence (or sense - group).

Other words, also essential for the meaning, are stressed, but the pitch of these words remains unchanged. Form words, performing grammatical functions (such as articles, prepositions, auxiliary, modal, and link verbs) are usually left unstressed; they are mostly pronounced in their reduced (weak) forms. Connected English speech comes as a series of closely – knit groups of words, each group containing only one stressed syllable. The stressed syllables occur at approximately equal intervals of time.

The result of this subtle interrelationship of stress and time is a peculiar rhythm resembling a drum – beat. This rhythm is not easy for a foreigner to acquire, but its absence often make his speech barely intelligible.

The rate of speech is not constant, but is made to suit the semantic weight of each sentence or sense – group of the utterance. For example, utterance in direct speech are usually pronounced slower than those that are said parenthetically, and stressed element of a sentence are pronounced slower than the unstressed ones.

The timbre of the voice changes in accordance with the emotions experience by the speaker. All the phonetic features of the sentence enumerated above (speech melody, sentence stress, tempo, rhythm, pauses and timbre) form a complex unity, called intonation. The most important components of intonation from the linguistic point of view are: speech melody, sentence – stress and rhythm.

It should be borne in mind that all the components of intonation are closely connected;

none of them can be separated in actual speech. This can be done, however, for the sake of analysis which is essential as a preliminary stage in mastering intonation.

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