


# Lecture 6. Intonation


- Intonation: Definition, Approaches, Functions.
- The Components of Intonation and the Structure of English Tone-Group.
- The Phonological Aspect of Intonation.

Two main approaches to the problem of intonation:


- **The contour analysis** (H. Sweet, D. Jones, H. Palmer, L. Armstrong, I. Ward, R. Kingdon, J. D. O'Connor, A. C. Gimson)
- **The grammatical approach** (M. Halliday).




According to the contour analysis the smallest unit to which linguistic meaning can be attached is a tone-group (sense-group).




According to the grammatical approach the main unit of intonation is a **clause**. Intonation is a complex of three systemic variables: **tonality**, **tonicity** and **tone**, which are connected with grammatical categories.



On **perception level** intonation is a complex, a whole, formed by significant variations of **pitch**, **loudness** and **tempo** closely related. Some linguists regard **speech timbre** as the fourth component of intonation.



M.O. Sokolova writes that the term **prosody** embraces the three prosodic components and substitutes the term intonation.



According to D. Crystal, the most important  
**prosodic effects** are those conveyed by the  
linguistic use of **pitch movement**, or melody.



# **FUNCTIONS OF INTONATION**





T.M. Nikolayeva:

- delimitating,
- integrating,
- semantic



L.K. Tseplitis:

- semantic,
- syntactic,
- stylistic



N.V. Cheremisina:

- communicative,
- distinctive (or phonological),
- delimitating,
- expressive,
- appellative,
- aesthetic,
- integrating

## D. Crystal:

- emotional
- grammatical
- informational
- textual
- psychological
- indexical



## **Emotional function**

Intonation's most obvious role is to express attitudinal meaning -sarcasm, surprise, reserve, impatience, delight, shock, anger, interest, and thousands of other semantic nuances.



## **Grammatical function**

Intonation helps to identify grammatical structure in speech, performing a role similar to punctuation.

## Informational function

Intonation helps draw attention to what meaning is given and what is new in an utterance. The word carrying the **most prominent tone** in a contour signals the part of an utterance that the speaker is treating as new information.



## **Textual function**

Intonation helps larger units of meaning than the sentence to contrast and cohere. In radio news-reading, paragraphs of information can be shaped through the use of pitch.





## **Psychological function**

Intonation helps us to organize speech into units that are easier to perceive and memorize.




## **Indexical function**

Intonation, along with other prosodic features, is an important marker of personal or social identity.



# **THE COMPONENTS OF INTONATION**




The **pitch component** or **speech melody** – the variations in the pitch of the voice which take place when voice sounds, especially vowels and sonorants, are pronounced in connected speech.

The pitch parameters consist of distinct variations in:

- direction of pitch,
- pitch level,
- pitch range.


According to Roger Kingdon the **most important nuclear tones** in English relevant for the teaching practice are:

- Low Fall,
- High Fall,
- Low Rise,
- High Rise,
- Fall-Rise,
- Rise-Fall



**Kinetic/Moving** tones vs **Static** tones (the High Level Tone, the Low Level Tone)


**Simple** tones (e.g. Low Fall) vs **Complex** tones (e.g. Rise-Fall, Rise-Fall-Rise)



A **falling tone** of any level and range expresses certainty, completeness, and independence.

A **rising tone** on the contrary expresses uncertainty, incompleteness or dependence.

A **level tone** expresses hesitation and uncertainty.




The use of the **Low Fall** enables the speaker to convey in his utterance an impression of **finality**, **definiteness**, **resoluteness**. Phrases with the Low Fall sound **categoric**, **calm**, **neutral**, **final**.







The use of the **High Fall** adds **personal concern**,  
**interest** and **warmth** to the features characteristic  
of the Low Fall. The High Fall **sounds lively**,  
**interested** and **airy** in statements. It sounds very  
emotional and warm, too.



The **Low Rise** conveys a feeling of **non-finality, incompleteness, hesitation**. Phrases pronounced with this tone sound not categoric, non-final, encouraging further conversation, wondering, mildly puzzled, soothing.



The **High Rise** expresses the **speaker's active searching for information**. It is often used in echoed utterances, calling for repetition or additional information or with the intention to check if the information has been received correctly. Sometimes this tone is meant to keep the conversation going.



**The Fall-Rise** may present a combination of two tones: either the Low Fall-Low Rise or the High Fall-Low Rise.

The falling part marks the idea which the speaker wants to emphasize and the rising part marks the addition to this main idea. The speaker using this tone **leaves something unsaid** known both to him and his interlocutor.


**Statements** with the Fall-Rise express **correction** of what someone else has said or a **contradiction** to something previously said or a warning.

**Imperatives** pronounced this way sound **pleading**.

**Greetings** and leave-takings sound **pleasant** and **friendly** being pronounced with the Fall-Rise

The **Rise-Fall** denotes that the speaker is **deeply impressed** (favorably or unfavorably). Actually the Rise-Fall sometimes expresses the meaning of "even".

It is used in **statements** and **questions** which sound **impressed** and **challenging**. **Imperatives** pronounced this way sound **hostile** and **disclaiming responsibility**.



The **Low Level** tone is very characteristic of reading poetry. The **Mid-Level** tone is particularly common in spontaneous speech functionally replacing the rising tone. It is usually used in non-final intonation groups expressing **non-finality** without any expression of expectancy.


## Pitch ranges:

- normal
- wide
- narrow




## **Pitch levels:**

- high
- medium
- low



**Loudness** is used in a variety of ways. Gross differences of meaning (such as anger, menace, and excitement) can be conveyed by using an overall loudness level.



**Sentence stress/utterance stress** is the greater prominence of one or more words among other words in the sentence. It makes the **force component of intonation**.

According to Prof. Vassilyev the **temporal component of intonation** manifests itself in:

- pauses;
- duration (rate or tempo in speech);
- rhythm (in close combination with sentence stress).



The rate of speech can be

- normal,
- slow,
- fast.


We may distinguish the following three **kinds of pauses**:

- **Short pauses** which may be used to separate intonation groups within a phrase.
- **Longer pauses** which normally manifest the end of the phrase.
- **Very long pauses**, which are approximately twice as long as the first type, are used to separate phonetic wholes.



**Functionally**, there may be distinguished:

- syntactic pauses,
- emphatic pauses,
- hesitation pauses.




**Syntactic pauses** separate phonopassages, phrases, and intonation groups.


**Emphatic pauses** serve to make especially prominent certain parts of the utterance.

**Hesitation pauses** are mainly used in spontaneous speech to gain some time to think over what to say next. They may be silent or filled.






Pitch movements are inseparably connected with loudness. Together with the tempo of speech they form an **intonation pattern** which is the basic unit of intonation.




Intonation patterns serve to actualize syntagms in oral speech. A **sense-group** or a **syntagm** is an elementary structural and meaningful segment of a text. It is a part of the utterance which is **organized syntactically**, has a **definite meaning** and is characterized by **definite intonation means**.




If the intonation properties of a sense-group are meant, the sense-group is called a **tone unit** /**an intonation group**.


The intonation group is a stretch of speech which may have the length of the whole phrase. But the phrase often contains more than one intonation group.




The number of intonation groups depends on the **length of the phrase** and the **degree of semantic importance** or **emphasis** given to various parts of it.



One of the syllables has the greater prominence than the others and forms the **nucleus**, or focal point of an intonation pattern.



Formally the **nucleus** may be described as a strongly stressed syllable which is generally the **last strongly accented syllable** of an intonation pattern and which marks a **significant change of pitch direction**.



The tone of a nucleus determines the pitch of the rest of the intonation pattern following it which is called the **tail**.


The nucleus and the tail form what is called **terminal tone**.

The two other sections of the intonation pattern are the **head** and the **pre-head** which form the pre-nuclear part of the intonation pattern.


## Common types of pre-nucleus:

- a **descending** type in which the pitch gradually descends (often in "steps") to the nucleus;
- an **ascending** type in which the syllables form an ascending sequence;
- a **level** type when all the syllables stay more or less on the same level.






The meaning of the intonation group is the combination of the «meaning» of the terminal tone and the pre-nuclear part combined with the «meaning» of pitch range and pitch level.



**Prosodic components** tend to become **formalized** or **standardized**, so that all speakers of the language use them in similar ways under similar circumstances.


These abstracted characteristics of intonation structures may be called **intonation patterns** which form the **prosodic system** of English.



Intonation patterns which are completely  
**colourless in meaning** and provide a mold into  
which all sentences may be poured so that they  
achieve utterance represent the **intonational  
minimum of speech.**

# THE PHONOLOGICAL ASPECT OF INTONATION


Phonology has a special branch, **intonology**, whose domain is the larger units of connected speech: **intonation groups**, **phrases** and even **phonetic passages** or **blocks of discourse**.



Descriptions differ according to the **kind of meaning** they regard intonation is carrying and also according to the significance they attach to different **parts of the tone-unit**.

J.D. O'Connor and G.F. Arnold assert that a major **function of intonation** is to express **the speaker's attitude to the situation** he/she is placed in.

They attach meanings not to pre-head, head and nucleus separately, but to each of **ten 'tone-unit types'** as they **combine** with each of four **sentence types** (statement, question, command and exclamation).




**M. Halliday** supposes that English intonation contrasts are **grammatical**.

He argues first that there is a **neutral** or **unmarked tone choice** and then explains all other choices as meaningful by contrast.

Halliday attributes separate significance to the pre-nuclear choices.


**D. Crystal** presents an approach based on the view "that any explanation of intonational meaning cannot be arrived at by seeing the issues solely in either grammatical or attitudinal terms". He ignores the significance of pre-head and head choices and deals only with **terminal tones**.






The **distinctive function** of intonation is realized in the **opposition** of the same word sequences which **differ in certain parameters** of the intonation pattern.

Any section of the intonation pattern, any of its three constituents can perform the distinctive function thus being **phonological units**.



The most powerful phonological unit is the **terminal tone**. The opposition of terminal tones distinguishes **different types of sentence**.

The number of terminal tones indicates the **number of intonation groups**. Sometimes the number of intonation groups may be important for meaning.



Together with the increase of loudness terminal tones serve to single out the semantic centre of the utterance which may simultaneously concentrate the expression of attitudes and feelings.


The opposition of the **distribution of terminal tones** is fulfilling the distinctive function.

*It was an unusually rainy day.*


*It was an unusually rainy day.*

*It was an unusually rainy day.*


*It was an unusually rainy day.*



The most important role of the opposition of terminal tones is that of **differentiating the attitudes and emotions** expressed by the speaker.



Commonly different kinds of pre-heads, heads, the same as pitch ranges and levels fulfill their distinctive function not alone but **in the combination with other prosodic constituents.**



**Intonation** may be in contradiction with the **syntactic structure** and the **lexical content** of the utterance neutralizing and compensating them.

Lack of balance between intonation and word content, or intonation and the grammatical structure of the utterance may serve **special speech effects**.