



English Pronunciation

A student's guide to intonation



Intonation

- Intonation concerns the way something is said
- A speaker can lower or raise his voice
- Intonation adds meaning to an utterance (i.e. a phrase or sentence)

Intonation: words

Say the word on the next slide aloud.

Try to change the way you say it to show
different meanings!

Intonation: words

Yes

(meaning 'Yes I'd be happy to')

Yes

(meaning 'Yes but I don't really want to')

Yes

(meaning 'Yes what do you want')

Intonation: words



Yes

(meaning 'Yes I'd be happy to')



Yes

(meaning 'Yes but I don't really want to')



Yee•es

(meaning 'Yes what do you want')

Intonation: phrases

Say the phrase on the next slide aloud.

Try to change the way you say it to show
different meanings!

Intonation: phrases

It's eight o'clock!
(meaning 'Hurry up')

It's eight o'clock!
(meaning 'I've overslept')

It's eight o'clock!
(meaning 'Yippee')

Intonation: phrases



It's eight o'clock!

(meaning 'Hurry up')



It's eight o'clock!

(meaning 'I've overslept')



It's eight o'clock!

(meaning 'Yippee')

Intonation: tone units

- A sentence or phrase can be divided into parts called 'tone units'
- Each tone unit has an intonation pattern
- The most important part is called a 'tonic syllable'

Intonation: tonic syllable

- Most of the pitch change in a tone unit is carried by the 'tonic syllable'
- The tonic syllable also carries prominence (i.e. sentence stress)
- Note that the speaker can choose which word to stress

Simple tone units

Tonic syllable
Yes
No
Stop
Look

Simple tone units

Tonic syllable	
YES	please
THANK	you
NO	thanks
LOV	ely

Intonation: Sentence Types

- It is very difficult for a student to know which syllable to stress and when to raise or lower his voice
- However, there are some general patterns
- For example, in Wh-questions people tend to lower the pitch of the voice towards the end
- More patterns are listed on the next slide

Intonation: Sentence Type

Type of sentence

Intonation

Declarative ↘

Falling

Wh-questions ↘

Falling

Yes/no questions ↗

Rising

Imperative ↘

Falling

Question tags:

Expecting confirmation ↘

Falling

Less certain expectation ↗

Rising

Intonation: - Sentences

Hurry **UP!**

It's **eight** o'**CLOCK**

Let's **GO!**

We'll **miss** the **BUS!!!**

References

Underhill, A. (1994). Sound Foundations. Heinemann.

Further practice

Practice activities and more examples can be found in;

“English Pronunciation in Use. Intermediate”
by Mark Hancock.
Cambridge University Press.