



THE ASPECTS AND COMPONENTS OF INTONATION

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Annotation: The rules for assigning phrasal intonation to sentences are assumed to require an autonomous level of intonational structure as opposed to what is usually viewed as surface syntactic structure. This article discusses not only the intonational structure but the aspects and components of intonation. Intonation is a feature of pronunciation that is common to all languages, and as with other features of pronunciation, intonation has more to do with how we say things than what we say.

Key words: phonetics, phonology, pronunciation, intonation, speech melody, sentence stress, phonation, stress, rhythm, syllable, components of intonation, system of tones.

Intonation is a feature of pronunciation and is common to all languages. Other features of pronunciation include stress, rhythm, connected speech, and accent. As with these other features, intonation is about how we say something rather than what we say.

Intonation is a complex unity of melody, stress, temporal components (tempo, length, pausing), rhythm, and voice timbre color. Intonation formalizes expression and conveys the speaker's emotions and attitude to an interlocutor/subject.

At its simplest, intonation could be described as "the music of speech". A change or variation in this music (or pitch) can affect the meaning and attitudes.

Speech melody refers to the pitch trajectory associated with utterances of any length. This term does not entail a distinction as to whether the pitch is generated lexically tone or post-lexically intonation, or whether the trajectory (or a part thereof) serves a linguistic or paralinguistic function.

Sentence stress is the pattern of stressed and unstressed words across a sentence. Normally this emphasis is on words that carry important information, although this can change significantly depending on the specific meaning the speaker wants to communicate.

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Temporal and timber components of intonation

Intonation is a complex unity of melody, stress, temporal components (tempo, length, pausing), rhythm, and voice timbre color. Intonation formalizes expression and conveys the speaker's emotions and attitude to an interlocutor/subject.



The tempo of speech is the third component of intonation. The term tempo implies the rate of the utterance and pausation. The rate of speech can be normal, slow, or fast. The parts of the utterance which are particularly important sound slower. Unimportant parts are commonly pronounced at a greater speed than normal.

Any stretch of speech can be split into smaller portions, i.e. phonetic wholes, phrases, intonation groups by means of pauses. By 'pause' here we mean a complete stop of phonation. We may distinguish the following three kinds of pauses:

1. Short pauses which may be used to separate intonation groups within a phrase.
2. Longer pauses which normally manifest the end of the phrase.
3. 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, emphatic and 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.

Each syllable of the speech chain has a special pitch colouring. Some of the syllables have significant moves of tone up and down. Each syllable bears a definite amount of loudness. 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. An intonation pattern contains one nucleus and may contain other stressed or unstressed syllables normally preceding or following the nucleus. The boundaries of an intonation pattern may be marked by stops of phonation that is temporal pauses.

Speech timbre is a special coloring of voice which shows the speaker's emotions.

A syllable is one unit of sound in English. Syllables join consonants and vowels to form words. Syllables can have more than one letter, however, a syllable cannot have more than one consonant and more than one vowel, as well.

The components of intonation can be viewed on the acoustic level. Each of them has its own acoustic correlate and can be objectively measured. Pitch correlates with frequency of the vibrations of the vocal cords, loudness correlates with intensity, tempo correlates with time (duration) during which a speech unit lasts.

Pitch is usually described as a system of tones (fall, rise, fall-rise and so on), pitch levels (keys, registers), which can be high, medium and low, and pitch ranges (intervals 2 between the highest and the lowest pitched syllables), which can be wide, normal and narrow.

Tempo includes rate of speech and pausation. The rate of speech can be normal, slow and fast. The parts of the utterance which are particularly important are usually pronounced at a slow rate, while in less important parts the rate of speech tends to be faster.



Any stretch of speech can be split into smaller segments by means of pauses. A pause is a complete stop of phonation. Pauses are classified according to their length, their position in the utterance and their function. In teaching English intonation, it is sufficient to distinguish the following types 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 used to separate bigger phonetic units.

Pauses made between two sentences are obligatory. They are longer than pauses between sense-groups and are marked by two parallel bars. Pauses made between sense groups are shorter than pauses made between sentences. They are marked by one bar.

Pauses are usually divided into filled and unfilled, corresponding to voiced and silent pauses. Functionally there may be distinguished syntactic pauses (which separate phono passages, phrases, intonation groups), emphatic pauses (which serve to make some parts of the utterance especially prominent) and hesitation pauses (which are mainly used in spontaneous speech to gain some time to think over what to say next). Besides the segmentation of the speech continuum, pauses contribute to the temporal and rhythmical organization of speech (constitutive function).

All the components of intonation are closely interconnected in the process of speech production and speech perception.

The latter three definitions of intonation include all the components of intonation and have been given in a very broad sense. We also shade these definitions. Intonation is a prosodic or suprasegmental characteristics of an utterance or phrase, therefore it is possible to speak of the prosodic structure of a phrase. By the term "phrase or utterance" we mean the sentence realized phonetically as a unit of speech.

Like other phonetic units intonation may be studied in four aspects: (1) articulatory (physiologically), (2) acoustically (physically), (3) perceptually (auditorially) and (4) functionally (linguistically). There is a close relationship between all these aspects of intonation. The functional aspect of intonation which deals with a linguistic analysis of it, namely phonological aspect of intonation, has not been studied thoroughly. This aspect is very important in linguistic structuring of intonation components and in establishing relations between the phonological, grammatical, lexical and stylistic levels of a language.

M.Pomportl considers that intonation is studied by a special branch of phonetics, namely intonology, and suggest even Intonological Typology as a part of universal typology of languages. Though we do not shade the term "Intonology", but admit the possibility of scientific investigation of intonation in relation with linguistic levels and comparative -typological study of various intonation types in languages. Besides, it is possible to study intonational interference between the mother tongue and foreign language which has a theoretical and practical value.



Any utterance may have communicative and expressive –emotional functions, which may be formed either by intonational or lexic-grammatical means. Any sound information is formed by intonation which also contributes to distinguish communicative types of utterance. The expressive-emotional function of an utterance, which is determined by the division of sense-groups in a contexts or in a text, may also be formed by means of intonation. Various types of emotions expressed by intonation are studied by a special branch of phonetics, the so-called phonostylistics. A.M.Antipova calls it “intonational stylistics” which, being a branch of intonology, studies intonations of different functional styles of language.

The distribution of intonation itself and its components depend on the situation or contexts. It is called the texts-forming function of intonation. The phonological, phonostylistic and text-forming functions of intonation have not been deeply investigated and these types of scientific approaches are going to develop in modern linguistics. As to the place of intonation in transformational-generative grammar, it is no clear how intonation can operate in this theory.

Intonation itself and its components perform four functions like other phonological units.

(1) A constitutive function of intonation expressed by its existence in an utterance through which intonation shapes a sentence phonetically. For example, Come! As word and sense-group has its own grammatical form and intonation. The phrases Come here! Or He will come tomorrow constitute different grammatical (syntactic) structures and intonation

(2) A delimitative function of intonation is very closely connected with its constitutive function. Intonation, as a prosodic constituent of a phrase, may also delimitate parts within a phrase, and its end, through breaking up a sentence into sense-groups(pause-group or intonation groups). By a sense-group we mean a word or a group of words forming the shortest possible unit in a sentence form the point of view of meaning, grammatical structure and intonation. E.g. “Early in the morning it’s ‘always pleasantly cool.” In this sentence there are two sense groups (a single vertical stroke (1) denotes a short pause inside a sentence)

(3) A distinctive (phonological) function of intonation serves to distinguish the communicative types of sentences, e.g. He is a student may be pronounced by four different pitch contrasts. When it’s pronounced by a low pitch at the end it means a normal, matter-of-fact report. When it has a mid pitch at the end of a sentence it indicates that the utterance is not finished or that the fact is like an afterthought, having significance for something said previously. If it is pronounced by a high pitch at the end it indicates mild doubt, as if he is a student or trying to remember he is a student. When it’s pronounced by an extra-high pitch it indicates strong disbelief or surprise. In this case the distinctive function of intonation becomes clear through the pitch contrasts which has its distinctive function too. In the minimal pair “Is there any Miss Take here? - Is there any mistake here?” the distinctive function of intonation



becomes clear through stress levels at the junction of mistake (one stress). The distinctive function of intonation and its components is under discussion in modern phonology.

(4) A recognitive (identificatory) function of intonation may be proved by the fact that every language or dialect has a characteristic pattern of intonation which is manifested in all utterances of speakers, though there may be some individual prosodic features in their pronunciation. Any phrase or utterance has its proper intonation, according to which it may be identified by all speakers. It is not possible, for example, to pronounce a declarative sentence by a high or extra-high pitch. If so, the recognitive function of intonation may be destroyed and a sentence pronounced by a high pitch becomes an exclamatory or interrogative sentence, i.e. the communicative type of a sentence may be changed. To learn the right recognitive function of intonation is necessary in mastering a good pronunciation of a foreign language.

All the functions of intonation are in close relationship with each other. Wrong usage of one of these functions may bring about wrong interpretation of other functions. All four functions of intonation are characteristic also of its components as given examples illustrate.

Intonation, its components and functions exist not only in oral speech but in the written form of a language as well. In a written text the punctuation marks make the meaning of sentences clear to the reader. Besides words, word combinations and grammatical combinations used in written texts, the writer's idea, his emotions and feelings may be expressed by means of punctuation marks which visually express various intonation types within a sentences, e.g. the punctuation marks which are called "end stops", i.e. period (.), a question mark (?), exclamation mark (!) are used to mark the end of sentences and indicate the communicative types of sentences through intonational delimitation. The internal punctuation marks: comma(,), semicolon(;), colon (:), dash (-), parenthesis() are used to separate, to in close or indicate the relation between elements within a sentence. They usually indicate pauses, intonations expressing non-finality (the rising tone) or finality (the falling tone) and emphatic intonations. Punctuation marks with specialized uses: quotation marks(" "), brackets(), ellipsis(. . .) and italics may also signal certain intonation delimitations by means of pitch changes, stress levels, pauses.

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.

Speech melody and sentence stress are the most important components of intonation, because it is chiefly thanks to them that the meaning of a sentence can be expressed. Their close interconnection manifests itself, among other things, also in that



the last stressed word in a sense – group or sentence contains the significant change in pitch (i.e. one which determines the semantic importance of the sense – group or the communicative type of the sentence: a fall, a rise, etc.), e.g.

I am studying English.

The sentence is pronounced with this particular intonation when the speaker considers the name of the language he is studying to be the most important piece of intonation and wants to communicate it, either on his own initiative or in answer to the question What language are you studying? The most important piece of information given in this sentence (the name of the language being studied) may also be conveyed by a slightly different sentence: I am studying the English language.

In this case the last stressed word is also English, and a significant change of pitch (a fall) takes place within that word.

The word language that follows the last stressed word is pronounced without any sentence – stress or with very weak stress and on a low pitch level.

The last sentence – stress may be combined not only with a fall, but also with another significant change in pitch – with a rise, for example, e.g. Are you going home? Are you studying the English language? (or some other language?)

The most important piece of information (something new to the listener) conveyed in the sentence (or sense - group) is called its communicative centre. It may be expressed by a single word or a number of words. In the latter case it is usually the last word in the word – group that bears the last full stress in an English and Russian sentence or sense – group. This word is called the accentual nucleus of the communicative center, and it carries the terminal tone. To illustrate this let us compare the following:

What language are you studying at the Institute?

Какой язык вы изучаете в институте?

We're studying English. or Мы изучаем английский.

We're studying the English language. Мы изучаем английский язык.

The most important piece of information asked for in these questions and given the answers is expressed by the word English and английский.

They form the communicative center in the answers and bear the last sentence – stress and the terminal tone.

Now let us ask and answer the following questions:

What languages are you studying at the Institute? Какие языки вы изучаете в институте?

We're studying English and French. Мы изучаем английский и французский

This time the communicative center of the answer is expressed by a word – group containing three words (English and French - английский французский) and the accentual nucleus of the communicative center is the last word French – французский which bears the last sentence – stress and the terminal tone.



In the answer to the following question the communicative centre consists of the word the English language and its accentual nucleus is expressed by the last word language:

What's the main subject you're studying at the Institute?

It's the English language.

Straightforward statements with the same communicative centers and the same accentual structure as those described above would be made not only in answer to question, but, of course, on the speaker's own initiative, as well, when he wants to communicate the same pieces of information as something new to the listener, e.g.

You know at our Institute we're studying English (or ...we're studying English and French).

All the above examples show that communicatively most important is the last full stress in a sentence or sense – group, because it indicated either a one – word communicative center or the nucleus of a word – group communicative center in the sentence or sense – group.

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