Unit 10

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Intonation (2):

the primary tones of English and their meaning

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English Phonetics: Unit 10: [ˈɪŋ.glɪʃ fə.ˈnet.ɪks ˈjuːn.ɪtˀ ˈtʰen]

Intonation (2) [ˈɪnt.ə.ˈneɪʃ.n̩ ˈtʰuː]

the primary tones of English and their meaning [ðə ˈpɹaɪm.(ə)ɹ.i ˈtʰəʊnz̥_əv_ˈɪŋ.glɪʃ_ən̩ ðeə̯ ˈmiːn.ɪŋ]

Robert Spence [ˈɹɒbət ˈspens]
based on material by M. A. K. Halliday [ˈbeɪst̬_ɒn mə.ˈtʰɪə̯ɹ.i.əɫ baɪ̯ ˈʲem_eɪ̯ keɪ̯ ˈhæl.ɪd.eɪ̯]

1 Tone(s): form and function

English primary tones: form and function

· The primary tones of English are based on the opposition between falling pitch ('polarity certain', Tone 1 ⟍) and rising pitch ('polarity uncertain', Tone 2 ⟋).
· The pitch movement concerned (rising or falling) begins at the beginning of the tonic segment of the tone group.
· The opposition between 'falling' and 'rising' can be neutralized as a 'level' pitch ('polarity not (yet) relevant', Tone 3 ‿); phonetically, this is typically low, and slightly rising at the end.
· The movements 'falling' and 'rising' can be combined into one : 'falling-rising' ('polarity starts out certain, turns out to be uncertain', Tone 4 ⌵) or 'rising-falling' ('polarity starts out uncertain, turns out to be certain', Tone 5 ⌃).
· Tone 1 and Tone 5 can have an extra 'level' tonic segment at the end; this is identical to the tonic segment of a Tone 3, but without a pretonic segment of its own (⟍ ‿ and ⌃ ‿)
· Primary tones express choices in the system of 'KEY', 'fine-tuning' the grammatical system of 'MOOD' (and/or the discourse-semantic system of 'SPEECH FUNCTION').

2 A constructed dialogue

Constructed dialogue illustrating all primary tones

A: //.1. Arthur and / Jane / left for */ Italy this / morning //

B: //.2. do they / take the */ car when they / go a- / broad //

A: //.3 Arthur / likes to */ have it / while he's / there //

B: //4. ∧ they / didn't / take the / car */ last time they / went//

C: //5. ∧ I / didn't / know they'd / ever */ been to / Italy //

A: //.13 Arthur's / been there */ twice in the / last */ year or so //

C: //5.3 ∧ he's / never / taken */ Jane on / any of his */ visits / though //

Notes on the dialogue

The constructed dialogue on the previous slide (taken from M. A. K. Halliday: *A Course in Spoken English: Intonation.* London: Oxford University Press, 1970) demonstrates the five simple primary tones of English and also the two compound primary tones. Each tone is shown in its most typical variant form (see next lecture on 'secondary tones' for more detail).

Conventions used in the transcription:

- · Foot boundaries (rhythm) are shown by single slashes.
- · Tone group boundaries (tonality) are shown by double slashes; every tone group boundary is also automatically a foot boundary.
- · A silent beat is shown by a caret sign.
- · The location of the tonic syllable (tonicity) is shown by an asterisk immediately before the foot boundary symbol, thus dividing the tone group into a 'pre-tonic' and a 'tonic' segment.
- · The intonation contour (tone) is shown twice: non-iconically via a code number immediately after the double slash at the beginning of the tone group, and iconically via the straight and/or curved lines above the transcription.

3 Simple primary tones

3.1 tone 1

Tone 1

- Tone 1 is the most common tone in English.
- It is the neutral ('unmarked') tone for every major speech function except yes/no questions:

  – statement: John's a doctor.

  – wh- question: When are they coming?

  – command: Close the window!

  – offer: Let me take your coat!

  – suggestion: Let's have lunch!

<div align="right">10.6</div>

3.2 tone 2

Tone 2

- Tone 2 is the neutral ('unmarked') tone for yes/no questions:

  – Are you finished?
  – Tone 1 on a yes/no question would sound peremptory, almost rude:

  – Are you finished?
- Tone 2 can be used to make a wh- question more polite; compare:

  – What's the time? (normal)

  – What's the time? (polite)
- Tone 2 is used in indignant responses:

  – ('Have you got the tickets?') No I haven't!

<div align="right">10.7</div>

3.3   tone 3

Tone 3

- Tone 3 expresses that something is tentative, or deferential, or incomplete:

- That could be true ...

- It doesn't really matter ...

- Well so far I've invited Peter, and Sally, and Tom, ...

- In the minor speech function 'Call', tone 3 has a special form that involves switching down in pitch by a minor third (kleine Terz):

- Jo-...ohn...

10.8

3.4   tone 4

Tone 4

- Tone 4 is the second most common tone in English.
- It can imply a logical complication (such as a condition on something) or a personal opinion offered for consideration.

- If it rains, we'll get wet.

- I quite like it...
- It is also the typical tone choice for a grammatically marked Theme.

- In summer we go to the beach.

10.9

3.5   tone 5

Tone 5

- Tone 5 is common in the speech of children, where it expresses surprise; it is a typical tone for exclamations:

- Look at that! Isn't it amazing!
- It is also typically used in statements to 'override' any possible objections (i.e. it is an even stronger way of asserting something than to use Tone 1):

- It's true!

10.10

4

4 Compound primary tones

4.1 tone 13

Tone 13

- The use of tone 13 ("one-three") is related to the absence of what in German is the 'Satzbogen': in English, the 'zweite Prädikatsteil' comes in the middle of a clause, and can be followed by an indefinite amount of material. Some of this may come after the main information focus, as 'secondary' information (on tone 3). It is thus typical for a clause-final circumstance, e.g. of time, which is not unimportant enough to be post-tonic ('Given') but not important enough to get a separate tone group all to itself.

- Arthur's been there twice in the last year or so.

Tone 13 in commands (especially negative commands)

- Tone 1 in a command can sound somewhat too brusque:

- Please close the window!
- We therefore use tone 13 instead:

- Please close the window...
- In negative commands this is even more important:

- Don't stay out all night again! (rude)

- Don't stay out all night again (polite — 'entreating')

4.2 tone 53

Tone 53

- The meaning of tone 53 ("five-three") is deducible from the meaning of the tone 5 tonic segment and the meaning of the tone 3 tonic segment that follows it.

- He's never taken Jane on any of his visits though.
- The word "though" is a grammatical item (a conjunctive Adjunct, with no real lexis in it); therefore it has no trouble being entirely post-tonic; but the circumstantial Adjunct "on any of his visits" has a lexical item in it, and there is therefore a tendency to treat it as a piece of 'secondary' information.

5   Tone sequences

5.1   listing questions

Tone sequence and listing questions

$\|_{2.}$ ∧ is it */ mine or *$\|_{1.}$ yours ∥

   (closed list — there are no further possibilities)

$\|_{.2.}$ would you / like some */ tea $\|_{2.}$ ∧ or some */ coffee ∥

   (open list — there are additional possibilities)   10.14

5.2   intonation and taxis

Intonation and taxis

$\|_{.1.}$ ∧ I'll / just finish this */ letter. $\|_{.1.}$ Then I'll be */ ready ∥

   (typical tone sequence signalling 'two independent clauses')

$\|_{.3}$ ∧ I'll / just finish this */ letter and $\|_{.1.}$ then I'll be */ ready ∥

   (typical tone sequence signalling 'paratactic clause complex')

$\|_{4.}$ ∧ if we / don't */ hurry we're $\|_{.1.}$ going to be */ late ∥

   (typical tone sequence signalling 'hypotactic clause complex')   10.15

5.3   intonation in moodtags

Intonation in Moodtags

$\|_{.1.}$ ∧ they / live in */ Beckenham *$\|_{2.}$ don't they ∥

   (speaker expects answer 'yes' but is not completely certain)

$\|_{4.}$ ∧ they / live in */ Beckenham *$\|_{1.}$ don't they ∥

   (speaker expects answer 'yes' and is almost absolutely certain)   10.16