

Functions of Intonation in Discourse

1. It helps to identify discourse types (“genres”); eg news reading, conversation, prayer, poetry reading, etc
2. It identifies “phonological paragraphs” within a discourse

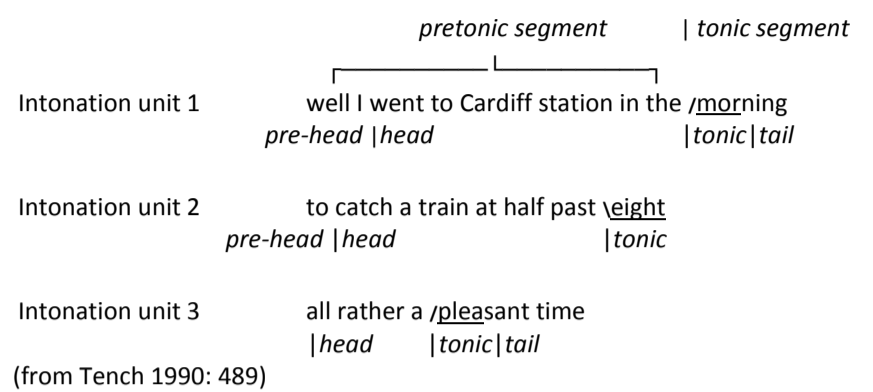
INTONATION INFORMATION

3. It expresses the speaker’s organization of information

Tonality: segmentation into intonation units (tone units, tone groups):
represents speaker’s perception of units (pieces) of information

Tonicity: location of the tonic (nuclear, main tone-bearing) syllable:
represents the speaker’s perception of (broad/narrow) focus of information

Tone: contrastive movement of pitch on the tonic syllable
(a) represents speaker’s perception of the status of information:
 \ = major information
 / = incomplete or minor
 √ = highlighted theme: √Dublin’s girls | are so \pretty
 or implication: Cardiff’s girls are just as \pretty



and (b)
↙

4. It represents the speaker’s communicative intention

Speaker	DOMINANCE	{	speaker knowing validity of the proposition	\ eg statements, answers, <i>wh</i> -questions, etc
			speaker assuming authority	\ eg commands, instructions, advice, threats, recommendations, etc
			speaker expressing own feelings	\ eg welcoming, thanks, congratulations, agreement, praise, etc
Speaker	DEFERENCE	{	speaker not knowing validity of the proposition	/ eg <i>yes/no</i> questions, echo questions
			speaker deferring to the listener’s authority	/ eg requests, suggestions, warnings, offers, invitations, etc
			speaker considering listener’s feelings	/ eg farewells, acknowledgement, good wishes, apology, sympathy, etc

QUESTION: *What about yes/no questions that go down?*
ANSWER: *They are not real questions!*
 Examples: Isn’t it \beautiful here (= exclamation!)
 Do you know what happened to \me this morning
 (= I’m going to tell you ...)
 (“Is this your handbag?” “Pardon?”) Is this your \handbag
 (= repeat question: “What I said was ...”)

QUESTION: *Why do wh-questions go down, and yes/no questions go up?*
ANSWER: *In wh-questions, the speaker knows the validity of the proposition, eg: “Where are you staying in Dublin?” I know that you are staying in Dublin – the only thing I don’t know is where.*
 With a yes/no question like “Are you staying in Dublin?”, I don’t know whether the proposition is valid or not, but I expect the listener to know.

QUESTION: *How can you tell when a rise indicates organization of information (3) or communicative function (4)*
ANSWER: *When a rise indicates organization of information (3), it is usually attached to a fall, eg incomplete + major, or major + minor*
 When a rise indicates communicative function (4), it is usually independent of any other intonation unit

EXAMPLES: In Dublin’s fair /city | the girls are so \pretty incomplete + major
 The girls are so \pretty | in /Dublin major + minor
 Are the girls /really so pretty in Dublin Yes/no question

5. It expresses the speaker’s attitude

Rise-fall ^	= intense	You ought to ^go
High fall \; rise to high /	= strong feeling	You ought to /go You ought to ^go (‘challenge’)
Low fall \	= mild	You ought to \go You ought to /go (neutral)
Rise to low-mid /	= non-committal	You ought to /go (‘grumble’)

Other devices for expressing attitudes include variations in tempo, loudness, pause, tension, and voice setting (eg whisper, breathy and creaky voice).

Heads and pre-heads

High head before rise	= focus highlighted	~You’ve never been to /Dublin	Wide falling head \	= expecting response; with authority	I’ve \never been to \Dublin	Have you \ever been to /Dublin
Low head before fall	= focus highlighted	_I’ve never been to \Dublin	Wide rising head /	= expecting response; with appeal	I’ve /never been to \Dublin	Have you /ever been to /Dublin
Low head before rise to high	= involved	_You can if you /want to	Stepping ~	= emphatic	I’ve ~never –been to \Dublin	Have you ~ever –been to /Dublin
Low head before rise to low-mid	= unconcerned	_You can if you /want to	Stepping _	= emphatic	I’ve _never –been to \Dublin	Have you _ever –been to /Dublin
High head before fall	= insistent	~I’m going to \Dublin	Glissando \	= forceful	I’ve \never \been to \Dublin	Have you \ever \been to /Dublin
High head before low fall	= important	~I’m going to \Dublin	Glissando //	= forceful	I’ve /never /been to \Dublin	Have you /ever /been to /Dublin

Recent innovations

Low head + mid level tone = routine listing _I’ve been to –London | _to –Edinburgh | _to Ber–lin | _all over –Europe |
 Raised rise to high 1/ = simultaneous statement and checking of comprehension She comes from \Cardiff | 1 in /Wales

6. It realizes a number of syntactic contrasts

She <u>came</u> to <u>hear</u> about it	She <u>left</u> me to get on with the <u>job</u> (sequences of two clauses)	You <u>know</u> he’s <u>Welsh</u> (comment + main clause)
She came to <u>hear</u> about it	She left me to get on with the <u>job</u> (single clauses, complex verb phrase)	You know he’s <u>Welsh</u> (report clause sequence)
He doesn’t take medicine normally	She spoke to me honestly (final comments)	It’s the <u>baker</u> Mr <u>Jones</u> (apposition)
He doesn’t take medicine normally	She spoke to me honestly (final adverbs)	It’s the <u>baker</u> Mr Jones (vocative)
I want some <u>green</u> <u>white</u> and orange <u>flags</u> (list, ie 3 sets)	You might find them <u>unusual</u> and <u>so</u> <u>puzzling</u> (so = ‘therefore’)	
I want some green white and orange <u>flags</u> (adjective sequence, ie 1 set)	You might find them <u>unusual</u> and so <u>puzzling</u> (so = intensifier)	
My <u>sister</u> who lives at <u>home</u> (non-defining relative clause; only one sister)	He didn’t <u>come</u> because of the <u>money</u> (negative verb)	
My brother who lives <u>abroad</u> (defining relative clause; which brother?)	He didn’t come because of the <u>money</u> (negative reason)	
They’ve <u>left</u> the <u>others</u> (others = displaced subject)	She <u>dressed</u> and fed the <u>baby</u> (dress = intransitive)	He <u>asked</u> himself (himself = reflexive pronoun)
They’ve left the <u>others</u> (others = direct object)	She dressed and fed the <u>baby</u> (dress = transitive)	He asked <u>himself</u> (himself = emphatic pronoun)

Select bibliography

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