

Teaching Intonation

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This presentation aims to review the proposals and programmes in the teaching in English intonation since 1980, mainly in UK. Two of the presenters at this workshop began to be seriously involved in intonation teaching at that time, 25 years ago: Barbara Bradford, who explains her concerns in her own article in this issue about the materials currently in use then, particularly O'Connor & Arnold (1980) and Halliday (1970); and myself, whose first major work, *Pronunciation Skills*, was published in 1981 and included practical advice on the teaching of intonation. The material I wish to review is listed below, in chronological order. After some preliminary remarks I would like to consider the **content** (forms and functions of intonation), the **techniques**, and the (simulated) **situations** used in this quarter century of intonation teaching.

Intonation teaching materials:

- Tench, P (1981) *Pronunciation Skills* London: Macmillan
Thompson, I (1981) *Intonation Practice* Oxford: OUP
Baker, A (1981) *Ship or Sheep?* 2nd ed. Cambridge: CUP
Baker, A (1982) *Tree or Three?* Cambridge: CUP
Haycraft, B & Lee, W R (1982) *It Depends How you Say it* Oxford: Pergamon
Bradford, B (1988) *Intonation in Context* Cambridge: CUP
O'Connor, J D & Fletcher, C (1989) *Sounds English* Harlow: Longman
Bowen, T & Marks, J (1992) *The Pronunciation Book* Harlow: Longman
Bowler, B & Parminter, S (1992) *Headway: Pre-intermediate Pronunciation* Oxford: OUP
Taylor, L (1992) *Pronunciation in Action* Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall
Gilbert, J B (1993) *Clear Speech* 2nd ed. New York: CUP
Hewings, M (1993) *Pronunciation Tasks* Cambridge: CUP
Brazil, D (1994) *Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English* Cambridge: CUP
Underhill, A (1994) *Sound Foundations* Oxford: Heinemann
Fitzpatrick, F (1995) *A Teacher's Guide to Practical Pronunciation* Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall
Cunningham, S & Moor, P (1996) *Headway: Elementary Pronunciation* Oxford: OUP
Kelly, G (2000) *How to Teach Pronunciation* Harlow: Longman
Hancock, M (2003) *English Pronunciation in Use* Cambridge: CUP
Cauldwell, R (2003) *Streaming Speech* Birmingham: Speechinaction
Hewings, M (2004) *Pronunciation Practice Activities* Cambridge: CUP

I was happy (Tench 1981:96-107) to use Halliday (1970) as a basis of an understanding of intonation, but it was not organized for a second language learner; it was descriptive, and presented practice in recognizing and producing forms in connection with their functions, but not in contexts of ordinary language use. I sought to introduce well tried techniques like same/different discrimination, interpretation, transformation and even discussion, as well as straight imitation. I covered neutral and marked forms of tonality, tonicity and tone, including pre-tonic variation. However, I feel that my main contribution was the formulation of three principles in the teaching of intonation:

- 1 Establish accurate imitation of intonation right from the beginning
- 2 Use the more normal intonation forms in initial practice
- 3 Introduce a new intonation form carefully and deliberately.

I did not advocate the design of special materials for intonation, but felt that the implementation of these principles should simply be directed to materials designed for other language purposes, since intonation is always present in every speaking event. But now I reckon that some intonation forms might best accompany a dialogue specially designed for them.

Thompson and Haycroft & Lee concentrated on dialogues in familiar situations. The latter relied wholly on listening and imitation, with diagrams to show pitch movements. The former was much more imaginative and cleverly treated the learner as a participant in practice dialogues, with explanations of what is happening. No doubt that is why Dolores Ramírez Verdugo chose to use it (see her presentation in this issue). Neither course, however, provided anything like a scheme of intonation, in which the intonation patterns are presented as selections from the whole system. For that reason, they have not been included in the accompanying table (Table 1).

Baker (1981, 1982) O'Connor & Fletcher and the *Headway* materials (Bowler & Parminter, 1992, and Cunningham & Moor, 1996) all introduce intonation forms as part of a comprehensive programme of pronunciation teaching, and present and practice different forms in a range of situations. There is a commendable attempt to contextualize intonation.

Bradford (1988) broke new ground in designing materials that matched Brazil's simpler description of English intonation and in explaining the meaning of tonic prominence, proclaiming and referring tones, etc. Hewings (1993, 2004) follows suit but includes intonation into a general programme of pronunciation practice, as did Taylor, and also Cauldwell in a highly acclaimed and innovative programme, as well as Brazil himself (Brazil 1994). Taylor also ventured into spoken genres ('monologue restyles') by comparing news reading, drama and story telling.

Bowen & Marks provided advice on classroom techniques to develop learners' performance in pronunciation, including intonation. Underhill encourages a holistic approach, based on awareness and making classroom communication genuinely interpersonal. Fitzpatrick provides a brief discussion on tones and their functions and encourages the teacher to provide simple explanations in simple metalanguage, avoid exaggeration but engage intonation regularly – little, often and integrated. Kelly presents a Brazil view of intonation in an accessible way with 8 lesson plans. All four books treat intonation as an integral part of a comprehensive programme in pronunciation teaching.

Gilbert is one of the outstanding American contributors to the development of pronunciation materials and promotes intonation as a top priority. She provides good explanations of the patterns in the teacher's edition as well as good, varied material in the student's edition. Unusually, she also gives attention to 'thought groups' (tonality).

Finally, Hancock has provided a wealth of good material and has ventured beyond the usual inventory of forms to include not only tonality contrasts, but the forms that accompany discourse formulae like *anyway, well, I mean, you know, kind of, right, OK* and *look who's talking*. The situations chosen, and the exercises, have got a good contemporary feel about them.

	Baker 1981/82	Bradford	O'Connor & Fletcher	Headway	Bowen & Marks	Taylor	Gilbert	Hewings 1993	Brazil	Kelly	Hancock	Hewings 2004
Prominence/tonic		√	√		√		√	√	√		√	√
Contrastive/marked tonic		√		√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Statements/proclaiming \	√	√	√			√		√	√	√	√	√
Responses \	√		√			√			√			
Exclamations \	√											
Incomplete information /	√		√								√	
Lists /	√		√	√		√						
Referring /minor information /		√				√		√	√	√	√	
yes/no questions /	√		√	√			√		√	√	√	√
yes/no questions \									√	√		√
wh-questions \	√		√	√		√	√				√	√
Echo questions /	√		√				√				√	√
Alternative questions /,\	√		√	√							√	
Question tags \	√		√							√	√	
Question tags /	√		√							√	√	
Polite rise (social interaction) /			√	√						√		
Level tone									√			
Correcting \			√	√	√						√	
Correcting √			√		√			√				√
Implications, reservation, etc √			√									√
Commands \	√											
Requests /				√								
Suggestions /	√											
High key		√							√		√	
Low key/quoting		√							√		√	
Backchannel	√									√	√	
Tonality		√					√		√		√	√
Discourse formulae											√	

Table 1

Content

Table 1 provides an overview of the intonation system presented in each of the cited teaching materials; it shows what has been selected, what is common to them, and what is not. It seems to be generally accepted that it is important to identify the important, prominent words in a message and particularly the tonic word in the intonation unit. The contrastive function of marked tonicity features highly in these courses; this is the item of intonation that Jenkins (2000) highlights as particularly important.

Falls for statements (proclaiming), responses and exclamations are not always practiced, since this is common in other languages. Attention is nevertheless drawn to it to provide a point of contrast for other tones, such as rises for incomplete information, or shared information (referring), or to provide background for understanding the choice of tones with question tags. Lists and incomplete information are not always singled out for attention; very often, rises are found in other languages for this function, and therefore, it might not need practice. The rise for *yes/no* questions is usually contrasted with the fall for *wh*-questions; echo questions with rises are often introduced as a contrast to the latter, as are ‘conductive’ questions (*yes/no* questions with a fall). Question tags with a choice of rise or fall, and alternative questions with a sequence of rise and fall are often included. List questions do not appear to be considered important. Consider the difference between

/ tea | or \ coffee (an alternative question, limiting the choice of response)
/ tea | or / coffee (an open list question, *not* limiting the choice of response)

The term ‘correcting’ is used both for the incorrect information being corrected, with a fall-rise, and for the correct information, with a fall. Fall-rises are also practiced to indicate that extra information is implied, though not given; the term ‘reservation’ is also used for this with its sense of *but* It seems important to me that a fall-rise is practiced with this meaning, because there are many languages where nothing comparable is found and then learners with such mother tongues do not know how to cope with either the form or its function. Dolores Ramírez Verdugo’s article in this issue is a clear example of how Spanish learners of English have to learn to cope with it.

The subtle difference between commands and requests and the like also deserve some attention, to attune the learner’s ear to cultural expectations. Backchannel is a ‘fun’ thing to practice and has its value in interpersonal relationships.

High key does not feature widely; maybe it is viewed as a common cross-linguistic feature. Low key likewise; Hancock’s section on ‘quoting speech’ is essentially a case of low key.

Tonality for ‘thought groups’ gets some attention. Some tonality contrasts are introduced by Gilbert and Hancock, but by no means on the scale of Helen Beer’s material (in this issue).

Finally, no one but Hancock deals with regular discourse formulae like *anyway*, *well*, *you must be joking*, which are such an essential feature of contemporary colloquial talk.

Techniques

What classroom procedures have teachers used to develop learners’ performance in intonation? It depends on particular aims; some techniques are needed to help stimulate learners’ awareness of the forms and functions of intonation; other techniques are needed to

practice the production of forms and relate them to functions, and others again to develop confidence in independent communication.

The basic technique in all pronunciation practice is imitation, listening to and repeating a model as accurately and fluently as possible. The model is either the teacher or a recording; the teacher is either a native speaker or could be a good, confident, proficient non-native speaker. Imitation provides a model and a target form for the learner to aim at. It helps to build up confidence as a preparation for independent talk. A native speaker model, or near-native, helps to counteract phonetic differences between the learners' mother tongue and the target language in expressing identical meanings. One study observed how Greek speakers maintain a higher pitch than English speakers do in the pretonic element of a statement. Plain imitation could help to counteract this phonetic difference (and thus reduce the British impression that Greek learners of English always sound insistent!).

You can draw attention to the pitch movements of intonation by humming the 'tune'. Gilbert recommended using a 'kazoo' for this purpose; it is a toy instrument which amplifies the pitch of humming (Gilbert: Teacher's edition, p.34-5). Bowen & Marks (p.73-4) recommended 'shadowing' a piece of natural, unscripted, conversational English. After listening to a short section, they practise imitating it and eventually talk along with the voice in the recording. This can lead to 'putting on the accent', deliberately imitating a native speaker known to them (see Bowen & Marks, p.75).

Imitation is the basic technique for developing expertise in the intonation forms themselves. If some learners are not able to cope, it may be because their ability to discriminate needs attention through ear training. Exercises are required that pinpoint differences in tones and pretonics, tonicity and tonality, such as 'same/different' routines, writing tones with arrows, tonics with underlining and tonality with upright lines.

Discrimination and imitation are important basic techniques for developing awareness and articulation of forms, and all the published materials engage in them. Transformation exercises bring in differences in meaning. *Listen to this, which means x, now change it to that to mean y.* For instance, a rising tag on a clause means "I think I know, but I need you to confirm"; *now change it to a fall to mean "You are sure and you expect the other person to confirm it".* Or, *Listen to this and then change the focus to x.* This kind of transformation exercise must only be used when the learner is competent and confident to produce the required utterance, and that means imitation (and, possibly, discrimination) must precede.

An extension to transformation exercises are 'matching' exercises, in which a learner has to match what they hear to a written form or to an appropriate context or response. Or they produce a spoken form from a written source or prompt. Transformation and matching exercises develop a degree of independence once imitation has developed a degree of competence; see the example below, from Kelly, p 95.

Match these intonation patterns to the sentence types		
Sentence type	Examples	Intonation pattern
Question	A: How much do I put <u>IN</u> ?	1: ↗ ↗ ↘
Statements	B: You put it in the <u>BOWL</u> .	2: ↘
Lists	C: You need <u>FLOUR</u> , <u>MILK</u> and <u>BUtter</u> .	3: ↘
Question tags	D: It shouldn't look like <u>THAT</u> , should it?	4: ↗

(The correct answers to this exercise are: A 2/4, B 3, C 1, D 2/4.)

Discussion can also be of great value where it is possible. How many different ways are there of saying a message? What kinds of context, or what situations, does a particular interpretation suggest? Here is an example of a similarly worded statement occurring in different contexts within a single dialogue:

Young customer: a beer please
 Bar tender: I'm sorry, but I can't serve you if you're not over sixteen
 Young customer: What? I can't be served if I'm not over sixteen?
 Bar tender: I'm sorry, but under no circumstances can you be served if you're not over sixteen.

How would the similarly worded statement be pronounced in each case?

Listening to a recording could prompt the question "Why did they say it like that?" This kind of analysis is often called 'noticing'. Explanations of the choices available to the speaker might be appropriate in certain learning environments.

All these techniques still focus on form, and functions in isolation; they do not constitute independent talk, which is the ultimate aim, but they are preparatory to it. Involving the learner in real responses, with real information, needs further preparation. One technique is to provide a model in a given situation and to expect the learner to apply that model themselves in another. On the right is a simple example from Baker (1981:5):

<p>Questions with 'or'</p> <p>These have a falling tune at the end. The parts of words which are in blacker type are louder, or stressed.</p> <p>Would you like coffee or tea? Would you like veal or beef?</p> <p>Would you like coffee or milk or tea?</p> <p>Now practise with somebody, using this menu.</p> <p>Example</p> <p>Would you like leek soup or pea soup? Leek soup, please.</p>	<p>MENU</p> <hr style="width: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p><i>Soup:</i> leek soup OR pea soup</p> <p><i>Meat:</i> Veal OR beef</p> <p><i>Vegetables:</i> beans OR peas</p> <p><i>Sweets:</i> cheesecake OR ice-cream OR peaches</p> <p>coffee OR tea</p> <hr style="width: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"/>
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Unit 50 Predicting tones

1 In some of the lines of these conversations, the TONE is shown. Predict what it is going to be in the other lines. Draw arrows starting at the TONIC WORD.

1 A: Was it **EXPENSIVE**?
 B: **QUITE** expensive.
 A: How **MUCH**?
 B: A thousand **POUNDS**.

2 A: Is it still **RAINING**?
 B: I **THINK** so.
 A: **HEAVILY**?
 B: Not **VERY**.

3 A: What's on **TV** tonight?
 B: A **HORROR** film.
 A: Is it **GOOD**?
 B: I've **HEARD** it is.



2 Listen and check your answers.

A similar technique is prediction. Given a particular context, a learner listens to one turn and then is expected to predict the tone in the next turn of a (printed) dialogue. On the left is an example from Hewings 1993:70. Also, a learner can be expected to provide the wording as well as the intonation, given a particular context (Gilbert: 105-6). These techniques ensure active involvement of the learner.

Thompson used this technique very successfully. Here is his very first example (the ■ means "repeat"; the ● means "respond"):

3 Now listen to two close friends when it is time to go:

David Ah! Here's my bus. Cheerio, Harriet.

Harriet Cheerio, David.

Here they are again, in slow motion: be ready to repeat:

David Cheer+o, Harriet. ■

Harriet Cheer+o, Davi/d. ■

Now back to normal speed: be ready to answer:

David Cheerio, Jø. ●

Harriet Cheerio, Jø. ●

In the same way:

David Bye-bye, Jø. ●

Harriet Bye-bye, Jø. ●

And for people you do not know so well:

Harriet Goodbye, Mrs Hopkinson. ■

David Goodbye, Mr Matthews. ■

Mrs Hopkinson would like to say goodbye:

Mrs H Well, it was nice to meet you, Jø. Goodbye. ●

Another type of analysis or 'noticing' involves learners recording themselves talking in the target language and then listening to and assessing their performance.

It should be possible to employ any of these techniques with any monologue or dialogue material in any coursebook. The advantage of doing so is to show that intonation is relevant in all spoken language, and it avoids giving the impression that intonation is only useful when it is linked to certain kinds of dialogue. But material can also be usefully created to concentrate attention and effort to a particular item of intonation. Bradford did this to great effect as the well known opening sequence of her coursebook shows:



1.2 Now listen to this short extract from the conversation. In the transcript below draw a box round the words which you think are most noticeable.

Alan: Turn slightly towards me.
Your head slightly towards me.
Louise: Right?
Alan: No – only slightly towards me.

Compare your transcript with a partner. Try to say why the same word is sometimes highlighted and sometimes not.

1.3 Listen to the conversation again. Listen for more examples (find at least three) where a word which occurs more than once is sometimes highlighted and sometimes not.

This technique is often referred to as ‘seeded conversation’, a constructed dialogue deliberately devised for the ‘planting of a seed’ of a particular phonological feature as many times as possible, to ensure rigorous practice. Teachers are needed with good imaginations of situations where a particular item of intonation would naturally occur. The material under review has good examples of not only contrastive (‘marked’) tonics, but also of echo questions, polite rises, correcting and discourse formulae.

All these techniques should appear in material that is as communicative as possible. Random lists of examples are best avoided, even where the focus is on imitation and discrimination. The aim is independent talk displaying communicative competence with appropriate intonation. Bear in mind Underhill’s emphasis on language learning as a holistic experience, engaging real people in real interpersonal relationships – even in the classroom! And bear in mind also Cauldwell’s successful use of real talk that was not designed specifically for teaching.

Situations

Rather than practicing any language item with a random, unrelated, set of utterances, it is always better to use material that is coherent and contextualized, because it matches a possible scenario in real life and is then more relevant and interesting. Even if the focus of attention is an intonation *form*, setting it in a simulation of real life makes an exercise appear relevant and thus adds to motivation. If we can imagine a situation in which a particular intonation will naturally occur, we can create an environment even in the classroom that resembles real life. And if the situation requires multiple instances of a particular intonation, so much the better. The aim is to encourage learners to use the language, including its intonation, competently, confidently and independently.

Some situations are used widely in intonation teaching materials. For neutral and marked tonicity, one situation is to add more specific information to what has just been given, such as (borrowed from Hewings 2004:142):

the name s \ Bond | \ James Bond
he works as an \ agent | a \ special agent
etc

Another is to emphasize different parts of a message in response to mistakes, like Bradford’s photo shoot situation, or the inattentive waiter getting orders wrong.

For alternative questions, a commonly used situation is to choose from a menu (see Baker above), or to offer something to eat or drink (eg Headway 1992:24). Another is to check on information just given (O’Connor & Fletcher, p.113-4).

For statements/proclaiming, O’Connor & Fletcher (p.47) used the situation of a customer returning an item to a shop with complaints – all the things that had happened. To contrast proclaiming and referring (ie shared information), Bradford used the situation of thinking of presents for people (referring to what was known about each person), asking how an interview went (referring to what was already known), reporting and commenting on an event, and also remonstrating with someone. Hancock (p.122) used the situation of varying opinions on the relative merits of television sets, with one person capping information given by the other.

Rises for incomplete information were practiced with *if* clauses in Baker (1981), *before* clauses, in ‘before’ and ‘after’ situations in O’Connor & Fletcher (p.63), and in story telling.

Polite rises were handled in reception situations in *Headway* (1992:12 and 1996:16); similarly in O’Connor & Fletcher, who also used shop assistants (p.33) and customers asking for information (*excuse me*) (p.83).

Question tags involve comments and opinions about, for instance, choosing purchases, and commenting on wedding photos, and on the qualities of doctors when making an appointment (all in O’Connor & Fletcher), and the relative merits of football and golf (Hancock).

Fall-rises for implications/reservations were illustrated in ‘yes, but ...’ reports of good and unhappy events on holiday O’Connor & Fletcher, p.78), and correcting mistakes in schedules (p.112-3).

Tonality was related primarily to units of information (‘thought groups’) in story telling (Bradford, Gilbert, Hancock, Hewings 2004). Hancock draws attention to the ‘pronunciation’ of punctuation, but also to potential contrasts (p.94) like

I bought a shirt | and a tie
He was wearing a shirt and tie

Gilbert does too (p.113-4): *house, boat and car* | *houseboat and car* amongst a number of tonality ‘minimal pairs’; she also uses contrasts in pronouncing telephone numbers and arithmetics (p.108-9).

Lists also received a good deal of attention, but I was surprised to see how often this was practised in games (memory games, alphabet games) rather than in ordinary talk; but O’Connor & Fletcher provided the situation of selecting from a menu (p.99).

I realize that this is but the briefest of overviews of the kind of situations that writers have used to illustrate the variety of intonation forms and functions that feature in ordinary colloquial English, but it may nevertheless help the reader to think creatively about new situations that they could exploit for practising intonation in English. The materials themselves should act as a stimulus in this respect, but observant teachers will notice in everyday life how certain situations lend themselves to ways of saying things in English. I noticed especially how little the fall-rise was featured in the material despite its particular significance in implications; we can say one thing and mean two! And I am sure that it is not just Dolores Ramirez Verdugo’s students who have difficulty in hearing and using it. That is one area that could do with attention.

References (in addition to the list at the beginning of this article)

- Halliday, M A K** (1970) *A Course in Spoken English: Intonation* Oxford: OUP
Jenkins, J (2000) *The Phonology of English as an International Language* Oxford: OUP
O’Connor, J D & Arnold, G F (1980) *Intonation of Colloquial English* 2nd ed. London: Longman

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