

English as a Foreign Language



English Pronunciation

A student's guide to intonation

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BH 2010

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!

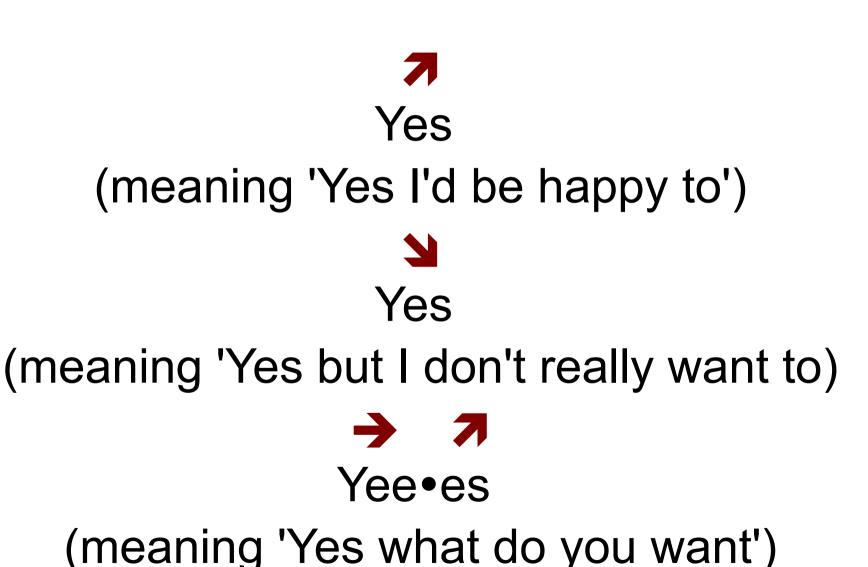
Intonation: words

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



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 'l'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



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.

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Further practice

Practice activities and more examples can be found in;

"English Pronunciation in Use. Intermediate" by Mark Hancock.

Cambridge University Press.