

INTONATION STRUCTURE OF RESPONSE TO WH-QUESTION

In order to understand the rules and laws of speech segmentation into phrases, words and syllables one should refer to phonetic characteristics dealing with prosody. Prosody is distinctive alternations of pitch, intensity, duration, tempo, etc. in combination of which forms intonation.

Intonation is present in every sentence and sometimes how we say something is more important than what we say. "Intonation is the soul of language, while the pronunciation of its sounds is its body and the recording of it in writing and printing gives a very imperfect picture of the body and hardly hints at the existence of a soul". Intonation is present not only in written and oral speech but in "inner" speech as well.

Different authors define intonation differently. Russian phoneticians (V. A. Vassilyev, G.P. Torsuev, E.V. Antipova and others) state that intonation is complex unity of (1) speech melody or pitch of the voice, (2) sentence-stress (3) rhythm, (4) voice timbre, (5) pausation and tempo (rate). Most foreign authors consider intonation as pitch variations only.

D.Jones writes: "Intonation may be defined as the variations which take place in the pitch of the voice in connected speech, i.e. variations in the pitch of the musical note produced by the vibration of the vocal cords"¹.

Lilias Armstrong and **Ida Ward** define intonation as follows: "By intonation we mean the rise and the fall of the pitch of the voice when we speak"². They also point out the inseparable connection between what they define as intonation and stress. These two elements, stress and intonation, are very closely connected. So close is the connection that it is often difficult to decide whether stress and intonation or a combination of the two is responsible for the certain effects.

A.C. Gimson also interprets intonation as "variations of pitch", "rises and fall in pitch level", emphasizing the fact that various degrees of accentuation in an utterance may be singled by means of intonation.

V.A. Vassilyev suggests that the term "intonation" can be viewed (1) in narrow sense (pitch variations, speech melody) in the broad sense (a complex unity of all its components). In the latter case the term "intonation" should be replaced by the term "prosodation", in this case it is to be analyzed on the supra-segmental level³.

¹ D.Jones. *An Outline of English Phonetics*, Cambridge, 1957, p. 275

² L.E. Armstrong, I. C. Ward. *Handbook of English Intonation*. Cambridge, 1926, p. 1.

³ Vassilyev V.A. *English Phonetics. A normative course*. M., 1980.

A more complete definition of intonation was given by one of L.V. Scerbas pupils, **S.I. Bernstein**: "Speech intonation is a conglomeration of the phonetic factors of language"⁴.

On the perceptual level sentence intonation is a complex unity of four components formed by communicatively relevant variation in: 1) voice pitch or speech melody, 2) the prominence of words or their accent (loudness), 3) the tempo (rate), rhythm and pausation of the utterance and 4) voice-tember, this complex unity serving to express adequately, on the basis of the proper grammatical structure and lexical composition of the sentence, the speaker's or writer's thoughts, volition, emotions, feelings and attitudes towards reality and the contents of the sentence.

G.P. Torsuyev has suggested the term **communicative types of sentence** to designate different types of sentence distinguished from each other by intonation alone. Such communicatively different types of sentences shouldn't be confused with **syntactically different** types (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory) although the two types often coincide. A complete inventory of communicatively different types of sentence hasn't yet been established, but the following principal types suggest themselves. They are often distinguished from each other mainly by the opposition of terminal tones, while whatever other differences in such minimal pairs of sentences are observed are indispensable concomitant (distinctively irrelevant, conditioned) ones.

In English, not only sentence types, but also the actual meanings of two sentences belonging to the same syntactic and communicative type may be differentiated through the opposition of terminal tonemes. In this case, the sentences have different meanings because one and the same word in them is pronounced with different terminal tones and has, therefore, two different meanings, although as a vocabulary item pronounced in the citation form it has only one meaning. An example of this given by H. Palmer: the sentence- He doesn't lend his book to anybody; is said with the falling tone in-**anybody** means **He lend his books to nobody**. If, however, the word **anybody** is pronounced with the falling-rising tone, the sentence will mean: **He does lend his books to some people, although not to all**.

There is no general agreement about either the number of the headings of the functions of intonation which can be illustrated by the difference in the approach to the subject by some prominent Russian phoneticians.

T.M. Nikolayeva names the three functions of intonation **delimitating, integrating and semantic** functions.

L.K. Tseplitis suggests the **semantic, syntactic and stylistic** functions the former being the primary and the second latter being the secondary functions.

⁴ Л.В. Щерба. Фонетика английского языка, М., ИЛИЯ, 1952

L.K. Cheremisina singles out the following main functions of intonation: communicative, distinctive (or phonological), delimitating, expressive, appellative, aesthetic, integrating. Other phoneticians display some difference in heading the linguistic functions of intonation.

Summerizing we may say that intonation is a powerful means of communication process. The communicative function is the main function of intonation. One of the aims of it is the exchange of intonation between people. This function makes it "the salt of an utterance". Without it a statement can be understood but the message is tasteless, colourless.

J. O'Conner and G. Arnold assert that a major function of intonation is to express the speaker's attitude to the situation he is placed in.

We can roughly divide the information in a message into **given** or **retrievable** information and **new** information. **Given** information is something which the speaker assumes the hearer knows about already. **New** information can be regarded as something which the speaker doesn't assume the hearer knows about already. Here is an example:

A. What did John say to you?

B. He was → talking to Mary → not me.

In the response "He was talking" conveys **given** information, "not to me" conveys **new** information.

In the following case there is a breakdown of communication and the listener will probably seek clarification:

A. There isn't anyone playing.

B. Who said there was?

A. Nobody.

Dialogues like this, though not uncommon, are unsatisfactory because vital information is missing. By putting the nucleus on "isn't" speaker **A** took "anyone playing" as retrievable information. **B**: response with a request for an explanation, which **A**: fails to fulfill. If **A** had put the original nucleus on "playing", the conversation could have proceeded normally.

Probably the most important grammatical function of intonation in the language is that of tying the major parts together within the phrase and tying phrase together within the text-showing, in the process, what things belong more closely together than others. Where the divisions come, what is subordinate to what, and whether one is **telling, asking, commanding or exclaiming**.

Intonation is one of the means that fulfill connection or integrating function. A phrase usually occurs among other phrases. A phrase is most closely connected to its context phrases. It is useful to say that a phrase is a response to its context and is relevant to that context. These notions can be illustrated with the following dialogue:

A. Where is John?

B. He is in the garden.

A is the context for phrases. B, conversely, is a response to A and is relevant to A. This particular relevance may be called "**answer to a special question**". Relevance is the phenomenon that permits humans to converse. It is clear that if we treat a phrase like B in isolation, with their contexts shipped away, relevance evaporates. That fact alone is a powerful agreement for the propriety of dealing with phrases in context, for without context there is no relevance. But even more powerful agreement is this: a context phrase acts as a floodlight upon the response, revealing details about the response and clarifying its structure and meaning. If we remove a phrase from its context we shut off that light. The very facts that we are trying to understand may be obscured.

If we take an utterance like "John" we can't discern much about its structure or meaning. But the moment we make it relevant to a context, the structure and meaning leap into focus, as in the following:

- Who is in the bus?
- John.

Instantly the observer sees that the response is **elliptical** and that it has the underlying structure "John is in the house". It is context that allows this interpretation. But the very same phonetic sequence "John" is taken in a different context is revealed to have a completely structure and meaning, as in the following:

- Who did they see?
- John (the full response is "They saw John").

The responses may be divided into the following group:

Statements used as responses

1. 'Whom are you looking at? I'm 'looking at the children.
2. 'Who do you want to see? I 'want to see the doctor.
3. 'What do you 'see in my eyes? I 'see sorrow.

These are statements which convey information in a straightforward manner without any implication. **Low Fall** is characteristic of such statements. Above mentioned examples are used with Low Fall which conveys a cool phlegmatic attitude on the part of the speaker.

Responses expressed by imperative sentences

1. 'Where do I ,sign? 'Sign, 'here please.
2. 'When would you 'like me to ,come? If you 'can I 'come right ,now.
3. 'What shall I ,wear? 'Put on your very 'best ,dress⁵.

Imperative sentences comprise the following subtypes: **Commands, requests and warnings.**

⁵ D. Jones. An Outline of English Phonetics, Cambridge, 1957, p. 121

Structurally both commands and requests have the form of an imperative sentence. They express the speaker's attitudes towards people addressed by him and are differentiated by their intonation alone: commands take the following tones, while requests take the rising tones. Serious commands take the **Low Fall**, if the speaker's attitude is warm and friendly commands take **High Wide Fall**.

Echo questions used as responses

1. ' When can you , come? ' When can I ' come?
2. ' What do you , want? ' What do I ' want?
3. ' When did you see him? ' When did I ' see him?'

In these questions we see that the speaker has heard the original utterance but wants to temporize before committing himself to a comment or an answer. The examples have the minimum response designed to keep the conversation going.

' What do you , want?

' What do I want?

This speaker thinks he hasn't heard the original utterance correctly but wants to confirm his impression. This type of response is pronounced with **High Narrow Rise**.

Exclamations used as responses

1. ' What do you ' think of the , picture?
' Fine!
2. ' What did you ' tell him while I was away?
' Nonsense!
3. ' Where did he come from?
' France!'

This response which takes rise-fall conveys the impression that the speaker is mocking the hearer.

Other responses are pronounced with **High-Fall** and convey interest, surprise. They show how responses convey speaker's mood, feelings and emotions and pronounced with **Low Fall** or **High Wide Fall**.

Elliptical (short) answers

1. ' Who wrote this , letter?
' I did.
2. ' Who the hell , are they?
My , pupils.
3. ' What maga , zines do you read?
' Fashion.

⁶ D. Jones. An Outline of English Phonetics, Cambridge, 1957, p. 132

These responses are pronounced with **Low Fall** or **High Fall**. E.g.

'When are you 'having your holiday?

'Very soon.

The hearer doesn't want the speaker to know about his further plans; he doesn't give the exact time, but answers in a cool manner for the speaker not to continue the conversation anymore.

'Who were they , all?

Oh, 'nobody special.

The answer is perfunctory.

As a result of our study some practical conclusion was made:

1. The most natural response for **wh-** questions is an answer to the question, giving the speaker the information he needs.
2. From the point of view of answers **wh-**questions are **unlimited**, because any number of answers can be given, so long as they give information required by the **wh-word**.
3. **Statements** are typically sentences by which someone answers a **wh-question**. Statements take **Low Fall**.
4. There is a less common type of answer, which is expressed by an imperative sentence, which takes **Low Fall**.
5. Questions can be used as responses to **wh-question**. These are **Echo-questions** in which we ask the speaker to repeat some information (usually because we failed to hear it, but sometimes also because we can't believe our ears). These answers take **High Narrow Fall**.
6. Another type of answer is an exclamatory sentence. It usually takes **Low Fall** or **High Wide Fall**.
7. The answers can generally be shortened by omitting some of the information already contained in the question.

It is worth mentioning that though these answers in some way lack the structure of a complete sentence, they are acceptable in communication, because the structure omitted contains information already understood.

Bibliography

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