

Getting Your Intonation Right: More than Ups and Downs

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What's intonation?

- Intonation is variation of pitch while speaking which is not used to distinguish words. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intonation_\(linguistics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intonation_(linguistics))
- Intonation is the production of musical tones by voice.
<http://onelook.com/?w=intonation&ls=a>
- Intonation is the sound changes produced by the rise and fall of the voice when speaking, especially when this has an effect on the meaning of what is said.
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=41671&dict=CALD&topic=ways-of-speaking>

Why is it important?

- It's perceived as attitude, not language.
- Intonational problems come across as rudeness and impoliteness.
- Students must be made aware of that!!

What is intelligibility?

- The degree to which a message can be understood (...)
Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics
- The degree to which speech can be understood. With specific reference to speech communication system specification and testing, intelligibility denotes the extent to which trained listeners can identify words or phrases that are spoken by trained talkers and transmitted to the listeners via the communication system.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

- “There has been a recent growth of interest in a related area of the study of English pronunciation, sometimes referred to as English as an International Language. Since English is now used by so many people around the world for international communication, it is possible to see pronunciation varieties emerging which are not based primarily on the native-speaker accent of some part of the English speaking world. Instead, they show English as a global ‘common property’ in which key phonetic and phonological distinctions are retained, but choosing to sound, for example, English or American seems irrelevant.”

Roach, P. (2001) Phonetics. OUP

When teaching...

Make sure you know which aspects of pronunciation are meant for:

- Production
- Recognition

Production might never happen!

How to do it

Focus on production:

- 1) Awareness raising
- 2) Sound discrimination (perception)
- 3) Practice (repetition)
- 4) Predicting (contexts for them to analyze)
- 5) Production

Awareness Raising

Break it down

- Word level
- Thought groups
- Sentence level

Word Level

Pronounce these words stressing the syllables in red. Reduce the other syllables.

about	major	professor
suppose	nature	remember
perhaps	culture	temperature
ballad	beautiful	development
hundred	ahead	marriage
standard	chemical	direction
focus	arrangement	banana
responsible	permanent	customer
purpose	famous	circus

Compare the intonation in Portuguese and in English in these two exchanges.

A: Qual fruta você mais gosta?

B: Banana.

A: B-A-N-A-N-A ? ? ! ! !

A: What's your favorite fruit?

B: Banana.

A: B-A-N-A-N-A ? ? ! !

How do we mark stress in Portuguese?

- duration/length
- pitch
- no reduction (schwa reduction)

How do we mark it in English?

- pitch
- duration/length
- schwa reduction

Practice these other conversations. Make sure to use pitch rather than duration for emphasis.

A: How many hours a week do you work?

B: About sixty.

A: Sixty!?

A: How often do you have lunch at home?

B: Never.

A: Never!?

A: What are you going to wear?

B: Nothing.

A: Nothing!?

Thought Groups

'When we speak, we need to divide speech up into small 'chunks' to help the listener understand messages. These chunks or thought groups are groups of words which go together to express an idea or thought. In English, we use pauses & low pitch to mark the end of thought groups.'

Rogerson and Gilbert

Practice pausing to differentiate the pairs.

twenty-five meter tubes

twenty / five-meter tubes

four-week-long vacations

four / week-long vacations

$(A + B) / \times C / = Y$

$A / + (B \times C) / = Y$

Words = Thought Groups

A word said by itself is like a small sentence. It must have all the rhythm and emphasis of a sentence.

One stress in a word: other syllables are “schwas:”

- abOVE, POSSible, atTRActive, resPONsible, (but...electrifiCAtion)
- atTRActive – I’m ACtive, how ARE you?
- electrifiCAtion – Just go to the STAtion, I’m all out of PAtience.

The small sentences and words above HAPPEN to rhyme, but they don’t have to. Look at the following groups of sentences:

- They kissed her. / He drank it.
- I left. / He’s dead.
- That’s her name. / Go away.

Practice the stress patterns below.

• ●	They’re here.	I’m ten.
● ●	Don’t speak.	Park here.
• ● •	I’m working.	a hotdog
• ● • •	What time is it?	a specialist
• • ●	Can you come?	Is it true?
● • • ●	Where are you from?	two and a half
● • ● •	Nice to meet you.	five umbrellas
• ● • ●	The car is black.	a nice embrace

Function x Content Words

- Content words: nouns, adjectives, main verbs and adverbs
- Function words: articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs and pronouns

Read the sentences reducing the words in black.

1. Try to call me when you need me.
2. She is as ugly as sin.
3. I could have danced all night.
4. You can do better than that.
5. The woman hit her husband with an umbrella.

Sentence Level

- Intonation patterns are different from Portuguese.
- Remember that wrong intonation can be perceived as the wrong attitude!

Main Intonation Patterns

- Falling:
 - Wh- questions
 - Statements (+ or -)
 - Commands (+ or -)
- Rising
- Yes/No questions

Variants

- Pronunciation, including individual sounds and supra-segmental features like rhythm and intonation varies regionally.
- Stick to the system!!
- Ignore individual patterns.
- Accents are directly related to identity. That includes ours!!

Convince Students

- Use authentic materials.
- Set your personal and realistic goals.
- Let students make their own choices.
- Accent reduction makes no sense in a globalized world!
- Effective communication is the ultimate goal!