

**ENGLISH INTONATION**  
**WITH SYSTEMATIC EXERCISES**

**BY**

**HAROLD E. PALMER**

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*"C'est le ton qui fait la chanson."*

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## Preface

The **object** of this book is fourfold:

1. To place on record a characteristic collection of the tones and tone-compounds as observed in the speech of most Southern English people in ordinary conversation.
2. To suggest a scheme of classification and terminology by which these tones and tone-compounds may be divided into classes according to their degree of resemblance or difference.
3. To formulate in a series of laws or rules the facts which have so far been discovered concerning the relation between tones and meanings.
4. To set forth a simple yet adequate system of tonetic notation, in order that tonetic texts may be produced inexpensively and abundantly for the use of teachers and students.

The general **utility** of the book can be gathered by reference to the four objects for which it has been composed. I have more especially designed it for the use of foreign students of spoken English. No one who wishes to use the English language in the manner of English speakers can any more ignore the phenomena of its intonation than he can ignore the phenomena of its pronunciation. It may be no more than a personal opinion of mine, but I am convinced that the two things, pronunciation and intonation, are so bound up with each other that it is futile to teach or to learn one without the other. I base this opinion on psychological grounds. Mimicry is the most potent factor in the study of foreign languages (whether spoken or written). The successful mastery of a language depends on how successfully the student can imitate the models which serve as his standard.

Systematic exercises in pronunciation have the effect of causing students to observe the *sounds* of the language; similarly, systematic exercises in intonation have the effect of causing students to observe the *tones* of the language.

This book should be of equal (or even greater) service to teachers of spoken English. A teacher of pronunciation cannot do efficient work if he is ignorant of the nature (nay, of the very existence) of the sounds of the language he is teaching; but to teach foreigners to pronounce English without teaching them to intone it is an unbalanced procedure. And yet a teacher of intonation cannot do efficient work if he is ignorant of the nature (nay, of the very existence) of the tones of the language he is teaching.

This book may be of interest to the English-speaking person whose intonation differs from that here recorded, for it will enable him to become familiar with the main features of other types of intonation than his own.

The study of English intonation should be of great utility to the English student of foreign languages, if only to put him on his guard against speaking such languages with his native intonation. The effect of the French sentence, "*Je ne l'ai pas vu hier*," intoned as the English "*I did not see him yesterday*," is as remarkable (not to say laughable) as the converse effect.

Furthermore, the English student of Chinese and other "tone-languages" will find his work greatly facilitated by a conscious knowledge of his own tones, for he will thereby be enabled to recognise, distinguish and to reproduce tone-differences which elude the ear and the mimetic capacities of one without such knowledge.

A ready knowledge of the characteristic intonations of English, together with the possibility of reading and writing tonetic transcriptions, must enormously facilitate the work of teachers and students of diction. By referring to the tonetic transcriptions in Part XII. of this book, the reader will notice the ease with which one can read and write sentences intoned in a number of various ways.

The **pronunciation** used in these exercises is in general conformity with that given in Professor Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary*.

**Scope.** As I have already mentioned, I have confined my attention to the study of that system of intonation which is generally used by most of the natives of England. I have taken the data afforded by the

pioneers of tonetic research<sup>1</sup>; collected voluminous data of my own and experimented for some years with a view to making a contribution to the literature of the subject. I have more especially endeavoured to set forth the basic principles of our tone-usage. The conception of *Nucleus, Head and Tail* is my own; I have used this system in actual teaching, and the results seem to justify it. In the following pages I describe the method of approach by which I have obtained these results. The reader will find, graded and arranged in their order of importance, the four groups of tones which seem to stand out distinctly both in form and in function.

As the subject is one which is likely to be unfamiliar to the majority of my readers, I have endeavoured above all to express myself in a clear and simple manner, introducing each element and aspect of the subject in the most appropriate place, and proceeding from the simple and fundamental to the complex and particular. Where I am unable to explain a given phenomenon categorically, I do so tentatively. In the absence of a special semantic terminology expressing what are even fundamental aspects of meaning, I have to content myself with designating some of the tone-functions in a circumlocutory manner. No adequate terms exist (so far as I can ascertain) to express, for instance, the great significative differences between

(1) I *can* see him.

— ↘ — —

(2) I *can* see him.

— — — —

(3) I *can* see him.

— — — —

<sup>1</sup>I am particularly indebted to Mr. H. O. Coleman (*Intonation and Emphasis* International Phonetic Association); Professor Daniel Jones (*Outline of English Phonetics*—Teubner; also *Intonation Curves*—Teubner) and, in certain aspects, to Mr H. Klinghardt (various works).

The difference between these three modes of strong assertion is so great that no native English speaker would ever use one for the other: we all feel that each expresses a different sort of assertion, a different attitude towards the person addressed. But they are all assertions, each of the three may constitute a contradiction to or a denial of the sentence "You can't see him." Great as these differences are, and strongly as we realize them and invariably observe them in actual conversation, we feel that no existing semantic terms are adequate to describe them. And this is only one case out of many<sup>1</sup> In some cases I suggest appropriate terms, but suggest them with diffidence, being only too well aware that such terms may not evoke in the reader's mind the particular significance which I wish them to convey.

What I do wish to emphasize, however, is the fact that we all recognize immediately and without effort each of the attitudes associated with the tones; we use them and respond to them, we express or conceal our thoughts by choosing the tone or tone-compound most likely to serve our purpose. And all this we do with such complete unconsciousness that most of us are ready to assert either that we have no tone-system in English, or that we have tones but no system, or that our tone-system is so elementary that no difficulty can possibly be experienced by any foreign student in "picking it up."

The contents of this book may convince those who are not already convinced that we have in English a most remarkable series of significative tones, that it constitutes a distinct and coherent system, and that its difficulties are such that few foreign students are likely to speak as English natives do until they have trained themselves to observe and to reproduce what they hear. This last consideration is the chief function of these Systematic Exercises in English Intonation.

<sup>1</sup> See the alternatives and variants given in the pages devoted to tonetic transcription of texts, part xii.

## Phonetic Symbols.

The phonetic transcription used is that of the International Phonetic Association, in its simplified or "broad" form.

Key words are not required for: p, b, t, d, k, m, n, l, r, f, v, s, z, h, w.  
The remaining phones are:

### *Consonants.*

g	give.	ʒ	measure.
ŋ	long.	j	yes.
θ	thin.	tʃ	chin.
ð	then.	dʒ	jam.
ʃ	ship.		

### *Vowels.*

i:	see.	u	put.
i	it.	u:	too.
e	get.	ʌ	up.
æ	cat.	ə:	bird.
ɑ:	father.	ə	china, cathedral
ɒ	hot.		
ɔ:	saw.		

### *Diphthongs.*

ei	day.	iə	here.
ou	go.	ɛə	there.
ai	fly.	ɔə	four.
au	how.	uə	tour.
ɔi	boy.		

### *Various Signs.*

Isolated words in phonetic transcription and isolated tone-marks are enclosed in brackets [ ].

[:] The length mark.

[˙] indicates that the vowel by which it is preceded may be long, half-long or short.

Phonetic symbols printed in *italics* represent sounds which are sometimes inserted and sometimes omitted.

For further details concerning the phonetic notation see Professor Jones' *Pronouncing Dictionary*, his *Outline of English Phonetics*, or my *First Course of English Phonetics*.

The symbols relating to tonetics will each be explained in the course of the exercises.



DEDICATED TO  
MY FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE  
H. O. COLEMAN,  
TO WHOSE INITIATIVE AND INVENTIVE GENIUS IS DUE  
MUCH VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE  
ON THE SUBJECT OF  
ENGLISH INTONATION.






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







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## Section I. Introduction

If anyone wrote the following sentence in a letter to you:

“He doesn’t lend his books to *anybody*,”

what meaning would it convey to you?

At first sight you might interpret it as:

“He lends his books to *nobody*.”

But it may also mean:

“He is rather particular as to the persons he lends his books to; he doesn’t lend them to everybody.”

Now how would you know which of these two meanings was intended? The sentence being a *written* one, you could only judge from the *context* which of the two ideas your correspondent wished to convey.

Let us now imagine that the sentence is used by someone who is *talking* to us. In this case we need no context to help us; the sentence itself will now contain an element which will adequately differentiate the two meanings.

What is this element? It is not a difference in the words, for in both cases the wording would be identical. It is not a difference in the stress or emphasis, for in both cases the stress falls on the first syllable of the word *anybody*. But there *is* a difference, a difference perceptible to all whose mother-tongue is English; it is a difference of *tone* or *musical pitch*.

In the first case, on the first syllable of the word *anybody*, the voice falls from a relatively high to a relatively low note, and remains low during the emission of the following three syllables.

In the second case the voice will probably rise from a lower note to a higher one during the emission of the first syllable, pitch the syllables *nybo* on a very low note, and conclude with the syllable *dy* approximately on the same level as the beginning of the word.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or, as an alternative, the first syllable may be pitched on a mid-tone, the second on a high tone, the third on a low tone, and the last on the mid-tone. Let us add, however, that a Scottish speaker may intone the word in neither of these manners.

Let us express this difference graphically.

1. A-NY-BO-DY

High Note → —

Mid Note →

Low Note → — — —

2. A-NY-BO-DY A-NY-BO-DY

High Note → —

Mid Note → — or possibly — —

Low Note → — — —

We see, then, that the meaning of a given word or sentence may depend upon the relative pitch of the note or notes upon which it is sung.

Here is a second example. Let us take the sentence:

"He didn't come on account of the *rain*."

If we sing the word *rain* on a falling tone, the sentence means:

"It was on account of the *rain* that he didn't come."

If we sing the word *rain* on the mid-high-low-mid combination of tones [1], the sentence will mean:

"It was not on account of the *rain* that he came."

If anyone were to say to us:

"I *say* it's warm,"

with the word *say* on the falling tone, we should interpret his sentence as

"I don't *think* or *believe* that it's warm; I merely *say* it."

Intoned in a different way, the sentence would mean:

"Goodness gracious! Do you notice how *warm* it is?"

Expressions such as "Good morning" or "Good evening" are sung in different ways according to whether they are used as a greeting to someone we meet, or to someone we are leaving.

Consider the different shades of meaning we may give even to single words such as "here" or "now" by singing them in different ways. With the falling tone, "here" means "I tell you *this* is the place"; on a

rising tone the same word means "Is this the place?" With the mid-high-low-mid combination [ʌ] the same word means "Not in the place you mention, but in *this* place."

Coleman has furnished me with the following interesting example:  
 They wouldn't get far if it *did* (fall on *did*) = It wouldn't matter...  
 They wouldn't get far if it *did* (rise fall rise on *did*) = It would hinder them.

The science which is concerned with the nature and meaning of this tone-play is called *Intonation*. That part which is concerned chiefly with the tone-curves irrespective of their meanings has been called *Tonetics*.<sup>1</sup>

Whether Tonetics is a branch of Phonetics or whether it is an independent science, does not appear to be a vital question. We need only note that what Phonetics does for speech-sounds, Tonetics does for speech-tones.

In both cases the rational application of these sciences (or branches) to language-teaching has, among others, the following effect: it makes us conscious of what we already do unconsciously in our native tongue; it enables us to use and to quicken our powers of observation, and affords us opportunities for systematic ear-training.

We are no longer at the mercy of the "hit-or-miss" method; our desultory, haphazard and generally unsuccessful attempts at reproducing foreign speech phenomena is replaced by progressive and systematic exercises based on positive data; we proceed by sure steps from the known to the unknown. The path of the student is still beset with difficulties, but there is at least a path for him to follow, a more or less clearly defined track, whereas without such linguistic sciences there is no path at all; the student has to grope his way across a treacherous ground without guides or indications of any sort.

With the development of the science of intonation, the foreign student of spoken English is shown exactly what the English tone-system is, and what steps he must take in order to speak as the English do. The

<sup>1</sup>By Professor D. M. Beach, of the University of Peking, whose remarkable studies on Chinese Intonation are likely to have important effects on the teaching and learning of Chinese.



English student of French is told not only what the French tone-system is, but (what is perhaps more important) that he must refrain from using his English tone-system when he is speaking French.

The English student of Chinese will not only be told in what respect Chinese intonation differs from English, but he will also be shown in what ways he can utilize his English tone-habits as an aid to learning the Chinese system. Whether they like it or not, students of Chinese, Bantu, and other groups of languages must necessarily master the tone-systems as an integral part of the vocabulary and grammar of such languages. The science of intonation thus comes to supply a want which is already keenly felt, and to regularize and codify what has hitherto been done on more or less empirical lines.

What is often diagnosed as a foreign "pronunciation," or foreign "accent," frequently turns out to be a foreign *intonation*. Many foreign speakers of English may be faultless in their English sounds, and even English stress, but they intone in such a manner that we at once detect that they are not English, and often we fail even to understand the meaning of what they are saying. I often have occasion to say to my foreign students: "I quite understand your sentence, as a sentence, but, excuse me, I cannot see what you wish to convey. Was your sentence an assertion, a comment, an exclamation, a contradiction, a corroboration, or a question?"

One of the aims of Phonetics proper is to cause us to speak the foreign language in such a way as not to betray our nationality. This is also one of the aims of Tonetics. Many characteristic tones are as important as or even more important than characteristic sounds. If we say to a very young child, "Aren't you a nasty wretched little brat!" in the same intonation as "Aren't you a dear precious little angel!" the effect produced will be that of the latter sentence. Observers have also frequently remarked that dogs and other animals react not so much to the words we use but to the tones on which the words are pitched. "*C'est le ton qui fait la chanson.*"