

英语语调  
的结构、功能及应用



# ENGLISH INTONATION:

Its Form, Function and Application

卜友红  
编著

ENGLISH INTONATION

外语教学与研究出版社

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# Preface

English intonation is often presented as a system, which has an important communicative function in any interaction between speaker and listener. Effective speaking, whether it takes place in a formal public setting or in a relaxed social context, involves more than pronunciation. In fact, incorrect intonation may seriously hamper communication at any levels. In this sense, intonation deserves more serious attention than it gets. It is on the basis of the awareness of its place in communication that the present book has come into being, aiming to make Chinese learners of English aware of the main features of intonation and help them perceive the system of intonation used by native speakers and ultimately incorporate the system into their own performance.

In the speech of English native speakers, intonation patterns are planned at a deeply subconscious level. It is, therefore, intrinsically difficult to make learners manipulate English intonation without conscious learning. Now the problem is what we have to know about it.

For the Chinese learners of English, we should, first of all, have a general knowledge on intonation, which is described in **Chapter One**. Since we may transfer the tonal structure of our own language to the production of English words, we should adjust ourselves to the very different intonational structure of English and acquire the pitch movements of each tone, listen, imitate and

practise it until we get it. **Chapter Two** describes in details the intonation contours and offers practice on various tones. Having familiarised ourselves with each tone, we ought to investigate what functions English intonation normally exercises. **Chapter Three**, therefore, describes five functions of intonation—semantic function, attitudinal function, grammatical function, accentual function, and discoursal function, aiming at facilitating learning and communicating.

As the discourse context generally influences which stressed word in a given utterance receives prominence, questions concerning what unit or units can be brought into focus by different nucleus placements are discussed in **Chapter Four**. These four chapters and **Chapter Five** that explicates the different meanings each tone conveys prepare the learners for the proper applications of intonation as a means of communication. Though all usages may not be included in **Chapter Six**, I do hope they will help our learners to get some ideas of how intonation works and be aware of and concerned about intonation. In order to assist learners to be sensitive and able to recognize patterns, the book offers a lot of ear-training and sensitization practice in producing them. Through systematic acquisition of English intonation: its form, function and application, it is certain that learners will be able to account for, and in turn, to build into our own communicative competence, all the choices that native speakers make when they select the forms of intonation which will convey the meanings they intend.

This book is intended as both a reference manual and a textbook for teachers or learners of English. It is based on accumulated experience of teaching English intonation to generations of

students – undergraduates and teacher-trainers. It is hoped that the book, along with two cassettes, will have a great deal to offer the enthusiastic learners of English intonation.

Bu Youhong

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# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ON INTONATION

### I Definition of Intonation

Intonation is often called the melody of language since it refers to the pattern of **pitch changes** that we use when we speak. By pitch changes we mean the rise and fall of the voice in connected speech. Consisting of different pitch changes, intonation is the musical feature of an utterance. Pitch changes on stressed syllables determine the intonation patterns of an utterance. Thus, intonation is actually the combination of stress and pitch variations.

### II Tone Language and Intonation Language

The pitch changes play an important role in conveying meaning. Some languages like Chinese use pitch to distinguish word meanings. Changing from one pitch to another will not only completely change the meaning of the word, but sometimes can also change the lexical class. For example, *shu* said with a level tone means *book*, with a rise means *ripe*, with a fall-rise means *to count*, with a fall means *tree*. Languages that use pitch to signal a difference in meaning between words are referred to as tone languages (声调语言).

On the contrary, in many other languages, of which English is one, the pitch does not belong to the word. Any English word can be said with any of the existing pitches, but the fundamental meaning of that word will remain unchanged. Similarly, if we say

the word **book** with a level tone, or a rise tone, or a fall-rise tone, or a fall tone, it is still a book. There is not a difference in meaning in such a clear-cut way as in Chinese.

However, when we examine the function of tone within one-word utterance in connected speech, we find that it will have quite different implications with different tones. For instance, the one-word utterance *now*, produced with a rising tone, could signify a question: "Do you want me to do it now?" Produced with a falling tone, this same word could signify a command: "Do it now!"

From the above examples we can get to the conclusion that English tones function at the level of utterances (or discourse), not at the lexical level as in Chinese. Languages in which tones function at sentence level are called intonation languages (语调语言). In an intonation language, tones can not only change the meaning of a sentence, but also help to show the speaker's attitude, feelings, particular emotions and mood.

### III Pitch Range (音幅)

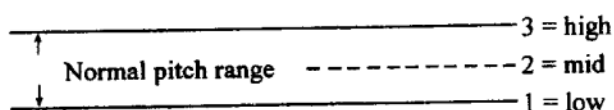
The word **pitch** (音调) is often used to describe the relative highness or lowness of the voice. Every individual has a level of pitch which is normal, and which we can recognize as his/her middle pitch level. He/She can change it to make the voice high or low in relation to this middle level.

From the phonetic point of view, it is true to say that each speaker operates within a pitch range which is comfortable for him or her. The relative height of this pitch range will depend on the frequency of vibration of the vocal cords: the higher the frequency of vibration, the higher the pitch. Consequently a woman will have a *higher* and probably a wider pitch range than a man since she has shorter vocal cords, which will vibrate more quickly. Children

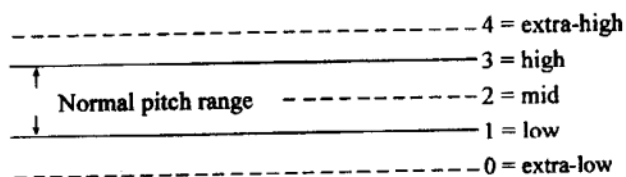
have very short vocal cords which vibrate rapidly and result in their high-pitched voices. Usually men with longer vocal cords, have lower ranges and operate within a narrower range than women.

In fact, pitch in its phonetic meaning corresponds quite closely to the definition of pitch in music, like ascending *do*, *re*, and *mi* which represent progressively higher tones, or musical pitches.

For English, three pitch levels have often been recognized: normal pitch level, higher than normal level, lower than normal level. Two parallel lines are conventionally used to represent the normal high and low limits of the pitch range. The top and bottom lines represent the top and bottom of the speaker's pitch range. Three levels are differentiated for the convenience of description.



In ordinary speech, we usually keep within the normal part of our pitch range, but if we want to express stronger feelings, or involvement, such as enthusiasm or surprise, one of the signals we can use is extra pitch height, which is illustrated like this:



Pitch is important in the way people manage conversation: high pitch (↑) can be a signal for the introduction of a new topic sequence, and low pitch (↓) can serve to indicate that the speaker has finished with a topic. For example:

1. “↑ Today I want to tell you about some useful research// on the way English speakers help their listeners. // ↓”
2. In the following conversation between Chris and his boss, Diana, she uses high pitch when she adds something else, and low pitch when she has finished what she wanted to say. In the same way, Chris responds “Yes” when he thinks Diana will add something else; when he thinks she has finished, he says “Right”.

Diana: Oh, Chris, it's about the visitors ... ↑

Chris: Yes?

Diana: They're coming on Thursday. ↓

Chris: Right.

Diana: They should get here in the afternoon ... ↑

Chris: Yes?

Diana: At about 3 : 30. ↓

Chris: Right. Who exactly is coming?

Diana: Well, there's Mr Nakashi and Mr Misoko ... ↑

Chris: Yes?

Diana: And Miss Lin. ↓

Chris: Right.

Diana: They're staying at the Hotel Concordia ... ↑

Chris: Yes?

Diana: It's not a particularly nice hotel ... ↑

Chris: Yes?

Diana: But it's all we could get at such short notice. ↓

Chris: Right.

Diana: So, anyway, I'll pick them up at the airport on Thursday. ↓

Chris: Right.

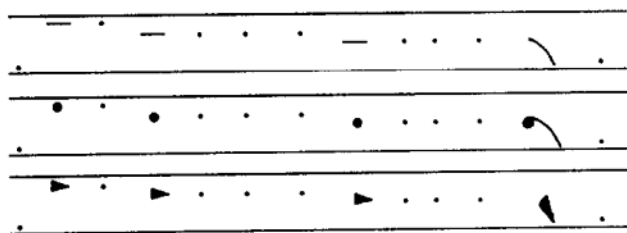


## IV Systems Devised for Transcribing English Intonation

### 1. Armstrong & Ward's Scalar System

The Scalar System is also known as Interlinear System of dots, horizontal lines, etc. on a scale. It shows the intonation on an interlined scale or stave between two parallel lines, using small dots to stand for unstressed syllables, horizontal lines (or larger dots or wedges) for stressed syllables, and \ or ˘ or ˙ for nuclear tone. For example:

I 'enjoy 'practicing the 'piano in the `morning.



*Advantages*: Pitch changes and stress can be shown with considerable accuracy.

*Disadvantages*: The drawing and filling-in of the stave is too slow a process to be used in class, the staves occupy a lot of space, and lengthy tonetic texts using this system are fatiguing to read and uneconomical to produce.

### 2. Roger Kingdon's Tonetic Stress-Mark System

The Tonetic Stress-Mark System (示调重音符号) is the most practical system of marking intonation. The tonetic stress marks occupy the same positions as the ordinary stress-marks used in phonetic transcriptions. They are quite distinctive in that they not only indicate the intonation by their form and position, but show stresses more effectively than do the ordinary stress marks, since