

## 2. Intonation: An introduction

### 2.1. Definition

Intonation refers to the rise and fall of the voice in speaking. It deals with how we say things, rather than what we say, the way the voice rises and falls when speaking, in other words the music of the language.

### 2.2. Functions of intonation

In English, intonation has a variety of functions in spoken language. English makes more elaborate use of intonation to signal meaning than do most other languages. This is a further reason why it should not be neglected by learners and teachers of English as a foreign language (Well, 2006, p.11).

Some of these functions include:

**A) Attitudinal:** the most obvious function of intonation is to express our emotions and attitudes- to show shock or surprise, pleasure or anger, interest or boredom, seriousness or sarcasm, reproach and many others.

**B) Grammatical:** It is used to mark the beginning and end of grammatical units. It is also used to distinguish types of sentences. For example:

Statements	↘ falling	E.g. I worked on Monday
Yes/no questions	↗ rising	E.g. Did you go to school?
Wh questions	↘ falling	E.g. Where does your friend live?

**C) Focusing:** Intonation helps to show what information in an utterance is new and what is already known.

**D) Discursive:** Intonation signals how sequences of clauses and sentences go together in spoken discourse. It enables us to signal whether we have come to an end of the point we are making; whether we want to keep talking or are ready to give another speaker a turn.

**E) Psychological:** Intonation helps us organize speech into units that are easy to perceive, memorize and perform. For example, the utterance “You can have it in red blue green yellow or black ↘” is more difficult to understand and remember than the same utterance divided into tone units as in “You can have it in red ↗, blue ↗, green ↗, yellow ↗, or black ↘.”

**F) Indexical:** Just as other pronunciation feature, intonation may act as a marker of personal or social identity. Each situation and each social group may have a particular characteristic of intonation. For example, someone speaking like a teacher, doctor, lawyers ...etc.

### 2.3. Types of intonation patterns

There are four main patterns of intonation, namely: falling intonation, rising intonation, fall-rise intonation, and rise-fall intonation.

#### 2.3.1. Falling intonation (↘)

Falling intonation describes how the voice falls on the final stressed syllable of a phrase or a group of words. Falling intonation is the most common intonation pattern in English. It is commonly found in statements, commands, wh-questions (information questions), confirmatory question tags and exclamations.

<b>1. Statements</b>	
E.g. She doesn't live here anymore. ↘	E.g. I'm going for a walk in the park. ↘
<b>2. Wh-questions</b>	
E.g. Where's the nearest post office? ↘	E.g. What time does the film finish? ↘
<b>3. Commands</b>	
E.g. Write your name here. ↘	E.g. Put your books on the table. ↘
<b>4. Questions tags that are statements requesting confirmation rather than questions.</b>	
E.g. He thinks he's so clever, doesn't he? ↘	E.g. It doesn't seem to bother him much, does it? ↘
<b>5. Exclamations</b>	
E.g. What a beautiful voice! ↘	E.g. You don't say! ↘

There are two types of falling intonation:

- **Low fall:** It may start from mid pitch to the lowest pitch. For example: How are you? ↘
- **High fall:** It may start from the highest pitch of the voice to the lowest. It may be used for extra emphasis in informal situations to express lively interest and friendliness in statements, for example, in greetings and exclamations. Oh ↘ hi! I'm glad to ↘ see you!

### 2.3.2. Rising intonation (↗)

Rising intonation describes how the voice rises at the end of a sentence. Rising intonation invites the speaker to continue talking. It is normally used with yes/no questions, and question tags that are real questions.

<b>1. Yes-no questions</b>	
E.g. Are you thirsty? ↗	E.g. Do you have any magazines? ↗
<b>2. Questions tags that show uncertainty and require an answer (real questions)</b>	
We've met already, haven't we? ↗	E.g. You're a new student aren't you? ↗

There are two types of rising intonation:

- **Low Rise:** It may extend from low to mid pitch or from mid to high pitch or with other variations. For example: Carry on ↗. Will you open the door, please? ↗
- **High Rise:** it may extend from low pitch to high pitch. For example: You said what? ↗. What? (elliptical questions). You did? ↗

### 2.3.3. Fall-rise intonation (↘↗)

Fall-rise intonation describes how the voice falls and then rises. The main function of fall-rise intonation is to show that the speaker is not certain of the answer they are giving to a question, or is reluctant to reply (as opposed to a falling tone used when there is no hesitation). It is also used in polite requests or suggestions.

<b>1. Hesitation/reluctance:</b> We use fall-rise intonation at the end of statements when we want to say that we are not sure, or when we may have more to add:	
A: So, you'd be willing to confirm that? B: Well, ↘ I suppose so ↗	I don't think ↘ that's true. ↗
<b>2. Politeness-Doubt-Uncertainty</b>	
Perhaps we could ↘ visit the place? ↗	Should we ↘ copy the list? ↗
<b>3. Questions, especially when we request information or invite somebody to do or to have something. The intonation pattern makes the questions sound more polite:</b>	
E.g. Is this your ↘ camera? ↗	E.g. Would you like another ↘ coffee? ↗

### 2.3.4. Rise-fall intonation (↗↘)

The pitch of the voice starts relatively low, moves upwards and then downwards again. We use rise-fall intonation for choices, lists, and conditional sentences.

<b>1. Choices</b>	
E.g. Are you having ↗soup or ↘salad?	E.g. Does he speak ↗German or ↘French?
<b>2. Lists</b>	
E.g. We've got ↗apples, pears, and ↘oranges	E.g. I like ↗football, basketball and ↘volleyball.
<b>3. Conditional sentences</b>	
E.g. If he ↗calls, ask him to leave a ↘message.	Unless he ↗insists, I'm not going to ↘go.
<b>4. Feelings of approval, disapproval or surprise. It may also be used to show gossip and sarcasm.</b>	
How nice ↗ for you! ↘	You spoke ↗ to her! ↘

### Reminder

- The above-mentioned patterns are not strict rules, but only patterns generally used by native speakers of English. Just remember that content words are stressed, and intonation adds attitude or emotion.
- It should be remembered that a written explanation can never be a substitute for a 'live' conversation with a native speaker.
- Attitudinal intonation is something that is best acquired through talking and listening to English speakers.

### ACTIVITY ONE

Indicate the intonation direction in each of the following statements.

SENTENCES	INTONATION DIRECTION	JUSTIFICATION
1. Take your hands out of your pockets.		
2. Do you sell stamps?		
3. Do you think it's allowed?		
4. Dad wants to change his car.		
5. Whose bag is this?		
6. Have you finished already?		
7. Here is the weather forecast.		
8. If you have any problems, just contact us.		
9. What country do you come from?		
10. The view is beautiful, isn't it?		
11. That's a surprise!		

**ACTIVITY TWO**

Indicate the intonation direction in each of the following statements.

***At the bank: Asking about fees***

<b>STATEMENTS</b>	<b>INTONATION</b>	<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>
<b>A:</b> Do you have any questions?		
<b>B:</b> Yes, I want to know about fees.		
<b>A:</b> Which fees?		
<b>B:</b> Overdraft fees.		
<b>A:</b> You will be required to pay a small fee for everytime of your draft.		
<b>B:</b> How much is the fee?		
<b>A:</b> You'll have to pay \$25 every time you overdraft.		
<b>B:</b> That's a small fee? High rise		
<b>A:</b> It should stop you from overdrafting.		
<b>B:</b> You would think it would, but it most likely won't.		
<b>A:</b> Can I help you with anything else?		
<b>B:</b> That's it for today. Thank you.		