

English Intonation – its Structure & the Use

FONOLOGIJA ENGLSKOG JEZIKA

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I. Basic types of English Intonation

- 1. Falling tone
- 2. Rising tone
- 3. Fall-rise tone

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II. Structure of English intonation

P = Pre-head
H = Head
N = Nucleus
T = Tail

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■ Elements in an intonation unit

- **The nucleus:** the stressed syllable of the last prominent word in a tone unit
- **The tail:** any syllable or syllables that may follow the nucleus
- **The head:** the part of a tone unit that extends from the first stressed syllable up to the nucleus
- **The pre-head:** any unstressed syllable or syllables that may precede the head – or the nucleus, if there is no head

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We are **LEARN**ing a **FOR**eign **LANG**uage.

P

H

N

T

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■ Structures of an intonation unit

- PH NT: We are learning a foreign language.
- PHN: I am afraid we can't go.
- P NT: We hope so.
- P N: It was at night.
- HNT: When are they coming?
- HN: Peter has arrived.
- NT: Look at him.
- N: Help!

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Circle the prominent word in each unit.

- A: I'm starved. Let's go and grab a bite to eat.
B: Good idea. Where do you want to go?
A: Well, there's a nice Italian restaurant about a block from here.
B: Do you have your heart set on Italian? What about a Chinese place?
A: Oh, do you know one?
B: I sure do. The food is delicious and it's right around the corner.
A: Great! Let's go.

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Circle the prominent word in each thought group.

- A: I'm starved. Let's go and grab a bite to eat.
B: Good idea. Where do you want to go?
A: Well, there's a nice Italian restaurant about a block from here.
B: Do you have your heart set on Italian? What about a Chinese place?
A: Oh, do you know one?
B: I sure do. The food is delicious and it's right around the corner.
A: Great! Let's go.

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III. The use of English intonation

The falling tone

- indicating 'definiteness' and 'completeness'.

Types of sentences:

- Ordinary statements
- WH questions
- Imperative sentences (strong commands)
- Exclamatory sentences

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The rising tone

- indicating 'uncertainty',
'incompleteness' or 'politeness'.

Types of sentences:

- Yes-no questions
- Statements intended as questions
- Statements intended to be soothing or encouraging
- Repetition questions

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The falling-rising tone

- showing contrast, implication, disagreement, contradiction, or warning, etc.

Types of sentences:

- Statements where contrast is implied
- Statements which imply reservation
- Statements which show disagreement or contradiction
- Warnings

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Utterances	Question ↗	Statement ↘
1. He left already.		
2. Sally's moving.		
3. John missed his flight.		
4. It's snowing in New York.		

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Utterances	Sure ↘	Unsure ↗
1. Your name's George, isn't it?		
2. It's going to rain tomorrow, isn't it?		
3. You wanted to go, didn't you?		
4. We should offer to help, shouldn't we?		

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Utterances	Yes-no ↗	Choice ↗↘
1. Are you coming Friday or Saturday?		
2. Can you meet us at eight or nine?		
3. Would you like beer or wine?		
4. Are you going to Spain or Portugal?		

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IV. The functions of English intonation

1. The accentual function of intonation
2. The grammatical function of intonation
3. The discourse function of intonation
4. The attitudinal function of intonation

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1. The accentual function of intonation

The placement of tonic stress is a function of intonation. The location of the tonic syllable is of considerable linguistic importance. The most common position for this is on the last lexical word of the tone unit. For contrastive purpose, however, any word may become the tonic syllable.

I arrived in London at **last**.
 I arrived in **London** at last.
I arrived in London at last.

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2. The grammatical function of intonation

The following sentence is ambiguous when written and the ambiguity can only be removed by using differences of intonation:

- 'Those who 'sold ↘/quickly ' made a ↘profit.
 (A profit was made by those who sold quickly.)
- 'Those who ↘/sold ' quickly ' made a ↘profit.
 (A profit was quickly made by those who sold.)

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Another example is the use of a rising tone with a statement, i.e. the changing of a statement into a question simply by changing the tone from falling to rising:

You're a ↘ student.

You're a ↗ student?

They're going to ↘ have a picnic.

They're going to ↗ have a picnic?

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3. The discourse function of intonation

The speakers tend to focus the listener's attention on aspects of the message that are most important. The placement of nucleus or tonic stress depends on the "information content": the more predictable a word's occurrence is in a given context, the lower its information content is.

The telephone's ringing.

The kettle's boiling.

-- Did you say a lighter shade?

-- No, a brighter shade.

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4. The attitudinal function of intonation

Intonation is used to convey one's feelings and attitudes.

The same sentence can be said in different ways, which might be labelled 'angry', 'happy', 'grateful', 'bored', and so on. Usually, tone groups with high heads sound more lively, interesting than those with low heads. A few generalisations can be made about the attitudinal functions of some components of intonation. Within tone, for example, the fall could be said to be more often associated with completeness and definiteness; the rise is more often associated with incompleteness and uncertainty or questioning, while the fall-rise is said to have feelings of hesitation, contrast, reservation or doubt.

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Study questions

■ what are the three basic types of the English intonation?

- What are the basic four elements of the English intonation structure? Define them. Give an example.
- What is usually conveyed by the falling tone? In which type of utterances do we commonly find it?
- What is usually conveyed by the rising tone? In which type of utterances do we commonly find it?

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Study questions continued

- What is usually conveyed by the falling-rising tone? In which type of utterances do we commonly find it?
- Explain the four functions of the English intonation.

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'Go and ↘ ask him!

'Go and ↗ ask him.

↘Go and ↗ ask him.

-- What's your opinion of this article?

-- It's ↗ quite o ↘ original.

-- It's ↘ quite o ↗ original

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