

Applied Phonetics & Phonology

Suprasegmentals Part II: Prosody and Intonation

T. Payne, TESOL at Hanyang University 2007

Prosody: The Melody and Rhythm of Speech

In this unit:

- Prominence – The use of extra stress to draw special attention to various parts of an utterance.
- Intonation – Pitch patterns are used systematically by speakers to add to the communicative content of an utterance.

Prosody: The Melody and Rhythm of Speech

According to some linguists and learning theorists, prosody is actually *more important* than segmental phonetics in developing comprehensible pronunciation in a second language.

Prosody: The Melody and Rhythm of Speech

“Content words” vs. “Function words”

(p. 153 of text. Called “lexical vocabulary” and “grammatical morphemes” in the LPEG course.):

- Content words . . .
 - have “rich” lexical meaning.
 - are “open” in class membership.
 - are phonologically “large.”
 - almost always receive stress, and often attract sentence prominence.

Prosody: The Melody and Rhythm of Speech

“Content words” vs. “Function words”

(p. 153 of text):

- Function words . . .
 - have “bleached” grammatical meaning.
 - are relatively “closed” to new members.
 - are “small” in phonological size.
 - are usually not stressed, and seldom attract sentence prominence.

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Prominence in a dialog:

- X I've lost an **umbRELLA**.
- Y A **LADy's** umbrella?
- X Yes, a lady's umbrella with **STARS** on it.
GREEN stars.
- Y Which **TRAIN** did you lose it on?
- X I lost it on the **BUS**. The **TEN o'CLOCK** bus.
- Y Please fill out this **REPORT**. Be sure to fill in your **NAME** and **TElephone** number so we can contact you.

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Given vs. New information:

“I’ve lost an **umbRELLa**.”

Normal prominence places sentence stress on the last primary stressed syllable of the sentence.

“A **LADy**’s umbrella?”

Contrastive prominence puts sentence stress on the primary stressed syllable of the new information.

“Yes, a lady’s umbrella with **STARS** on it. **GREEN** stars.”

A sentence with normal prominence, and a

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What is new and given information in the following exchanges? How would the responses be stressed?:

Question:	Response:
What happened?	Lucretia ate the turnips.
What did Lucretia do?	She ate the turnips.
What happened to the turnips?	Lucretia ate them.
Who ate the turnips?	Lucretia did.
What did Lucretia eat?	She ate the turnips.
Which turnips did she eat?	She ate my turnips.

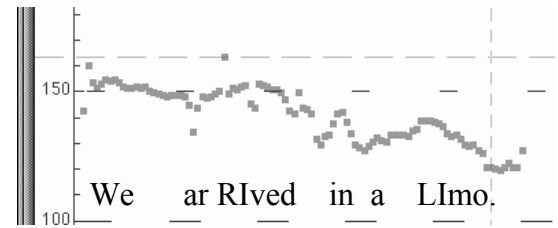
Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

Intonation varies from one part of the English speaking world to the other.

On the following slides are three diagrams of “normal” intonation from three varieties of English, British, Northern Irish and Australian.

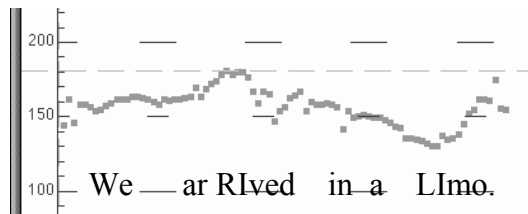
The diagrams illustrate “F0” frequency, i.e., the speed at which the vocal folds are vibrating. These diagrams give a fairly accurate “etic” picture of the phonetic reality that constitutes intonation:

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning



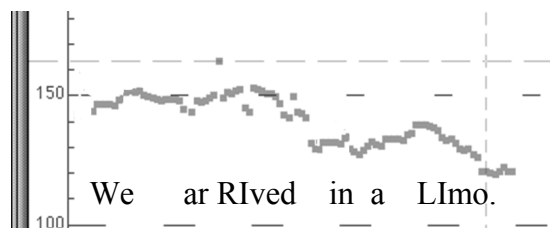
Speaker from London, England.

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning



Speaker from Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning



Speaker from Sydney, Australia.

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

As in most languages, variations in intonation can be used to express different speaker attitudes or emotions toward the information expressed in the utterance, for example:

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

From Page 185 of text:

Great (perfunctory)
 Great! (enthusiasm)
 Great. (irony)

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

The identifiable intonation “contours” described in chapter 6 are “emic” representations of the continuously varying “etic” reality that constitutes intonation.

They also describe something like “standard” North American English norms.

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

Intonation can be understood in terms of four emic “levels” of pitch:

4. extra high (strong emotion)
3. high (primary stress)
2. middle (normal)
1. low (terminal)

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning



These four emic pitch “levels” are useful for diagramming more-or-less standard intonation.



They can also be useful for training one’s own ear, and helping students acquire recognizable intonation contours.

It must be kept in mind, however, that these emic patterns vary considerably from one person to another, and one utterance to another.

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

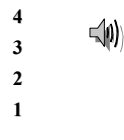

The 2-3-1 contour: “Certainty”



Step: Linguistics is **F**ascinating.  

Glide: Linguistics is **FUN**.  

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning





Variations on this contour can express various attitudes and emotions:

2-3-2: Linguistics is **DIF**icult,  
(but fascinating!)

2-4-1: Linguistics is **FAS**cinating!  



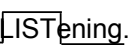
Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

Exercise: What do you think the differences in meaning are among the following utterances?:

- a. Mary said she was **SICK**. 
- b. Mary said she was **SICK**. 
- a. They **CUT** open the **WATERMEL**lon. 
- b. They **CUT** open the **WATERMEL**lon. 

Intonation: Using Pitch, Length and Volume to Express Meaning

Exercise: What do you think the difference in meaning is between the following utterances?:

- a. **SALLY** made the **SAL**ad. 
- b. Sally made the **SAL**ad. 
- a. I'm **LIST**ening. 
- b. **I'M** listening. 