

# 6 Intonation

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## What is intonation, and why teach it?

The term **intonation** refers to the way the voice goes up and down in pitch when we are speaking. It is a fundamental part of the way we express our own thoughts and it enables us to understand those of others. It is an aspect of language that we are very sensitive to, but mostly at an unconscious level. We perceive intonation, understand it and use it without having to examine the intricacies of everything we say or hear.

In dealing with intonation in the language classroom, we need to examine the nature of these unconscious processes, bring them to the surface and show how we believe they work. To be of use to students, work on intonation in the classroom needs to focus on practice rather than theory. We need to show learners how the choices they make with regard to intonation serve to determine the meaning of utterances. Traditionally, theorists have attempted to show links between grammatical constructions and certain patterns of intonation. Although these theories are not 100 per cent watertight, they give us some useful and teachable rules of thumb for helping students to use intonation successfully.

As well as helping to determine meaning, intonation gives us clues about the attitude of the speaker, or how he feels about what he is saying. When listening to people speaking, we get clear messages about their attitude from the ways things are said. We can get a good idea, for example, as to whether someone is interested, bored, being kind, being honest or lying, and so on.

Such ideas can be used in the classroom to help underline the function of particular phrases and utterances.

Although certain aspects of intonation may be common to many languages, some of the ways in which intonation is used may be specific to particular ones. Scandinavian languages, for example, tend to pronounce unstressed syllables on a higher pitch than stressed ones, whereas we usually do the reverse in English. Italian tends to change the order of words in a sentence to stress a particular word where we would do this through intonation. Spanish intonation tends to have a noticeably narrower range than English. Speakers of these languages will almost inevitably carry their habits of intonation over into spoken English. There are languages in which intonation has quite a specific meaning function, such as the various Chinese languages. These are called **tone languages** and they use the voice in quite a different way. The pitch and movement of the voice on a syllable determines the meaning. An often quoted example from Cantonese is *ma*, which can mean *mother*, *hemp* or *scold*, depending on whether the voice goes up or down or stays level.

Students' difficulties with intonation are not helped by the fact that concentration on grammar and vocabulary often takes their attention away from this feature. Struggling to find the right words will mean that the smooth movement of intonation will be interrupted.

In short, intonation needs to be a feature of classroom language analysis and practice. This will help students towards greater expressiveness and articulation in English, and also help them to a better understanding of some of the subtleties of native-speaker speech.

The main difficulty for teachers and students with regard to intonation is that its links with specific grammatical constructions or attitudes can only be loosely defined. The reason for analysing these links is that the same words and structures can be given different meanings, or convey a different attitude by altering the intonation. Grammatical and attitudinal analyses of intonation can offer no hard and fast rules, but they can help steer students towards appropriate choices of intonation.

More recent theories, particularly those developed by David Brazil, analyse how intonation relates to the surrounding discourse, rather than specifically to grammar or attitude. The term **discourse** defines any meaningful stretch of language. Analysing intonation within discourse means that the wider context of a conversation, or monologue, is taken into account, and enables us to see how intonation conveys ideas and information. Intonation helps us to indicate what is shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener and what is new information. In this approach, intonation patterns are no longer isolated and tied to particular grammar constructions or attitudes, but are related to the context in which they occur. The advantage of this approach is that it is possible to give clear rules with regard to the appropriate choice of intonation patterns in a given context.

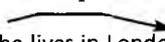
In this chapter, we will look at approaches based on grammar, attitude and discourse, and consider examples of lessons which might be appropriate for each. Before we do that, however, we need to look in a little more depth at the workings of intonation.

**Tones, tonic syllables and tone units**

Utterances are made up of syllables and the syllables where the main pitch movement in the utterance occurs are called **tonic syllables**. The syllables that establish a pitch that stays constant up to the tonic syllable are called **onset syllables**. Thus, in the following example *lives* is the onset syllable, which is conventionally shown in capitals. *Lon* is the tonic syllable, which is conventionally shown in capitals and underlined.

she LIVES in LONdon

As we have done in this book up to now, we can also represent the intonation patterns in this utterance with an arrow:

  
She lives in London.

Notice that in this particular example the voice starts at a certain pitch, then goes up very slightly on the onset syllable and then stays level until the tonic syllable where the pitch falls noticeably. The pitch at which a speaker begins an utterance will depend on their own pronunciation habits, but will generally be higher than their normal habit if they are nervous or excited and lower if they are bored or very relaxed. The pitch that is held from the onset syllable to the tonic syllable is known as the **key**.

In the above example there is only one tonic syllable and we can say that the utterance is therefore composed of one **tone unit**. Tone units are conventionally noted by being enclosed within two pairs of slanted lines. So an utterance consisting of one tone unit is shown like this:

//she LIVES in LONdon//

An utterance with two tonic syllables and therefore two tone units can be shown as:

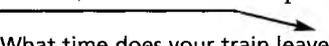
  
She's lived in London since she was twenty.

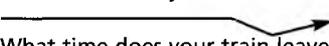
or, as:

//she's LIVED in LONdon// SINCE she was TWENTy//

Note that the tonic syllable is the last stressed syllable in a tone unit.

As we indicated earlier in this chapter, a key feature of intonation is that we, as speakers, can use it to indicate to our listeners what we think is new information in a conversation and what is old, or already shared, information. Consider the following sentences where the intonation pattern is marked, as we have done up to now, with an arrow:

  
What time does your train leave?

  
What time does your train leave?

The first example shows a question asking for new information. The second version shows a question asking for confirmation of something the speaker thinks he has already been told. The words are the same, yet the intonation patterns used show a contrast between the two versions. As we can see the main movement of pitch is on the tonic syllable (in these examples, the

syllable *train*). The main movements of pitch, within a tone unit, are called **tones**. In the first of the two questions above, the tone is described as a **fall**, and in the second as a **fall-rise**. These are shown in a commonly used notation system as  $\searrow$  and  $\searrow\swarrow$ . In this system the arrows are placed at the beginning of the tone unit, but refer to the movement of pitch on or around the tonic syllable (the underlined syllable). It has to be said, however, that the movements of pitch (the tones) are not always tied precisely to the tonic syllable, they can start before and can finish after the tonic syllable.

Employing this system of notation the various utterances used in this section can be expressed as follows:

- 60 //  $\searrow$  she LIVES in LONdon//  
 //  $\searrow$  she's LIVED in LONdon//  $\searrow$  SINCE she was TWENTY//  
 //  $\searrow$  WHAT time does your TRAIN leave//  
 //  $\searrow\swarrow$  WHAT time does your TRAIN leave//

In the classroom, for example when writing on the board explaining an intonation pattern of an utterance to students, teachers might find it more straightforward to use continuous arrows, such as those on page 88, drawn above conventionally written sentences. This approach enables teachers and students to concentrate their attention on the main pitch movements (the tones) within an utterance. The more complex notation system above can be a useful tool for teachers analysing intonation patterns particularly when they are planning lessons.

## Grammar and intonation

Many attempts have been made to show connections between intonation patterns and particular types of grammatical structure, and the following list shows some of these. The reader will find it easy to say these examples in other ways; it should be remembered that these are generalisations rather than rules. They can, however, help in giving students guidance in making appropriate choices with regard to intonation:

- 61 • **Information questions** with *Who, what, where*, etc: Falling intonation (if being asked for the first time), e.g. *What's your name? What's the time? Where do you live?*
- 62 • **Questions** expecting a 'yes/no' answer: Rising (*Is it the blue one? Have you got a pen?*)
- 63 • **Statements**: Falling (*He lives in the house on the corner. It's over there.*)
- 64 • **Imperatives**: Falling (*Sit down. Put it on the table.*)
- 65 • **Question tags** expecting confirmation: Falling (*You're French, aren't you? He's very tall, isn't he?*)
- 66 • **Question tags** showing less certainty: Rising (*You're French, aren't you? Your train leaves at six, doesn't it?*)
- 67 • **Lists** of items: Rising, rising and finally falling (*You need a pen, a pencil and some paper. The stall sells ribbon, beads, elastic and buttons.*)

As we have already seen with the example in the previous section, the same thing can be said in different ways. The question *What time does your train leave?* was used with both a fall, and a fall-rise, for different purposes. There is also more flexibility when it comes to 'yes/no' questions. We can and do sometimes use a falling intonation, for example when eliminating possibilities:

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Is it the blue one? ... No? Is it the red one, then? ... OK, is it the green one?

It is clear that the list above doesn't adequately cover the range of possible intonation choices available to speakers. However, it is also true that the teacher who applies these rules to their treatment of intonation in the classroom is unlikely to lead students astray; that is to say that in using these patterns, students will not go drastically wrong. The rules may not cover the full range of possibilities, but neither do they create problems. To make an analogy, a driving instructor cannot hope to teach all driving manoeuvres that exist to a student, yet those they do teach will enable the student to cope on the road and give them the confidence to discover more as they gain experience. Likewise, in teaching grammar we do not teach students everything there is to know about the present perfect the first time it is introduced. We give some basic rules with the aim of showing students how it can be used in certain situations. If they apply these rules students will not go wrong, but neither will they have covered the full range of possibilities.

The following sample lessons show some different ways in which the links between intonation and grammar can be practically used in the classroom. In line with the classification of lesson types described on page 14, the examples show intonation issues being Integrated with the teaching of a language point, being dealt with Remedially and being Practised in their own right. They also cover a range of different levels.

### Lesson 1: Question tags (Elementary)

Lesson type: Integrated

Materials: Taped listening exercise, questionnaire, role cards

The teacher introduces the theme of nationalities, and checks that students can relate the names of countries to their adjectives (*England – English, China – Chinese*, etc). These can be drilled briefly to give students confidence in saying them. In a multilingual class, the students' own nationalities can be used; in a monolingual class, the teacher can 'assign' nationalities to students for the purposes of the lesson. The teacher elicits the idea of question tags by asking a Japanese student *You're Japanese, aren't you?*, with a falling intonation on the question tag. The same question can then be asked to students of other nationalities to reinforce the intonation pattern. Students, prompted by the teacher, can then ask and answer the question appropriately to each other across the class, and then ask their neighbours. The teacher can correct as necessary.

At this point the teacher can clarify the grammar of question tags by writing on the board:

You're Japanese, aren't you?

and pointing out that a positive statement is usually accompanied by a negative tag. A negative statement would normally be accompanied by a positive tag. The verb *to be* in the statement is repeated in the tag.

Next, in order to focus on intonation, the teacher can ask the question again, and ask the students whether his voice goes up or down on the tag. The downward movement can be practised with a further quick choral drill, and drawn on the board over the original example sentence.

The teacher then checks that the students have grasped the concept by asking them whether he is sure what the answer will be when he asks the question. It should be apparent that he is, from the practice that the students have done so far.

The teacher then asks the question with a rising intonation, saying it a couple of times in order to let the students hear the difference. He then asks the students if they can hear any difference, eliciting from them the fact that his intonation rises. The sentence can be drilled chorally and individually with the new pattern. The teacher then asks the question 'Am I sure?', eliciting from the students the idea that this rising pattern indicates less certainty on the part of the speaker. This can then be noted on the board next to or underneath the previous example.

By way of a further check, a listening exercise might then be used in order to give the students practice in discriminating between the two patterns. After setting the context (in this case a conversation in a student coffee bar) the following dialogue might be played:

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- A: Hello, my name's Koyomi.  
 B: Hi there, I'm Sara.  
 A: Hello Sara, nice to meet you!  
 B: ~~Excuse me, Koyomi, you're Japanese, ↘ aren't you.~~  
 A: Yes, that's right. I'm from Saitama.  
 B: I thought so. Your name sounds Japanese.  
 A: And Sara, you're Italian, ↗ aren't you?  
 B: Yes, that's right, I'm from Torino, in the north-west.  
 A: I see. I thought you were either Italian or Spanish.  
 Would you like a coffee ... (fade)

While listening to the tape, the students answer the following questionnaire:

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Koyomi is from Japan: true/false</li> <li>2 Sara is from Spain: true/false</li> <li>3 Sara is sure that Koyomi is from Japan: true/false</li> <li>4 Koyomi is sure that Sara is from Italy: true/false</li> </ol> |
|--|

Students can compare their answers when they have finished, and the tape can be played again if necessary, before the teacher gets feedback from the whole class. In this example, the correct answers are: 1 true, 2 false, 3 true, 4 false.

After the listening exercise, it is important that the students get some practice in using the new patterns. If the class do not know each other very

well, they can find out each other's nationalities using the rising or falling question tags as necessary. They can use what they have learnt to engage in genuine communication. If the class do know each other they could do the following activity.

In this activity, students are assigned various nationalities. Each student in the class will need a role card. Here are two example cards:

You are Spanish.  
You are sure that:  
Two students are Japanese, one student is Brazilian and one is English.  
You think that:  
One student is Polish, two students are French and one is Chinese.

You are Chinese.  
You are sure that:  
Two students are French, one student is Polish and one is English.  
You think that:  
One student is Japanese, two students are Brazilian and one is Spanish.

While doing the activity, the students make a note of the nationalities they discover through doing the activity. Their task is to find all the nationalities present in the classroom. The activity leads them into using rising and falling question tags according to how sure they are. In either case, they may have their beliefs confirmed or contradicted.

The same lesson might also be done with the focus on another area, such as jobs, names or positions within a company. Subsequent lessons could investigate further the grammar of question tags, in that auxiliary and modal verbs used in the original statement will be repeated in the tag, and other verbs will be replaced by the appropriate form of *do* in the tag.

## Lesson 2: Asking permission (Intermediate)

Lesson type: Remedial

In this lesson the teacher is dealing with some functional language for asking permission, such as:

<i>Do you mind if I</i>	<i>open the window?</i>
<i>Is it alright if I</i>	<i>turn the heating on?</i>
<i>Could I possibly</i>	<i>borrow your newspaper?</i>

In the lesson so far the language has been contextualised, elicited, drilled and concept-checked. The class is engaged in a role-play situation in which there is a need for the language to be used (for example, a student staying in homestay accommodation talking to the host family, or another context similarly relevant to their needs outside the classroom). While monitoring the activity, the teacher becomes aware that some of the students are using an intonation pattern that does not sound very natural. Some, for example, are treating the verb in each sentence as the tonic syllable, for example:

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// ↘do you MIND if i TURN the heating on//

Other possible variations which might sound inappropriate are:

// ↘do you MIND// ↘if i turn the heating ON//// ↘could i POSSibly// ↘BORRow// ↘your newsPAper//

The teacher decides that problems the students have with their intonation need some attention in order to help them complete their task effectively. Dealing with intonation at this point reinforces its role as a part of successful communication.

To do this, once the activity is completed, the teacher elicits the sentences again, one by one, and drills them chorally and individually. She then writes the sentences on the board and asks the students to tell her, for each sentence, where the voice goes down and up. If the students are not sure, the teacher can say the sentences aloud herself, to make things clearer. Once the answer has been elicited, the teacher draws arrows on the board to show the appropriate patterns:

Do you mind if I turn the heating on?

Is it alright if I turn the heating on?

Could I possibly borrow your newspaper?

Students can then copy the sentences with the appropriate intonation pattern into their notebooks for reference when studying. The previous activity might then be tried again, with the intonation patterns fresh in the students' minds, or the teacher can move on to any subsequent activities she had planned.

### Lesson 3: Instructions and questions (All levels)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Tape of two native speakers, typed transcript, worksheets

This activity involves listening closely to native-speaker communication in order to concentrate on intonation patterns, and then imitating them. The patterns are then related to grammatical areas. The lesson involves some preparation, but the resources may be used again with different classes.

The teacher needs to have a tape of two native speakers talking in an unrehearsed and unscripted way. The easiest way is to record yourself and a friend having a chat. (It is always important to get the permission of anyone whose voice you wish to record before using it in the classroom.) The recording needs to be very clear, and ideally the speakers should not talk over each other too much. If possible, the tape should include a variety of statements, questions, question tags, etc. A useful situation to record would be that in which one person is instructing another, who might be engaged in something like cooking, where statements, questions and instructions are likely to be used. The tape should be about 2–4 minutes long. This should

provide enough language for useful study. The teacher will also need to type out the transcript of the tape and worksheets as necessary. The following activities are just suggestions; bear in mind that the activities will ultimately depend on the content of the tape, and the particular needs of the classes you use it with. The same tape might also be used with different level classes, using different tasks.

In class, the teacher can pre-teach any necessary vocabulary for the tape, and also do some work in order to set the context. This is important, as the context could be seen to have an influence on the language and intonation patterns used. The best way to establish the context is to let students listen to the tape for the first time while doing a written task with questions like *Where are they?* and *What are they doing?*, which will help them get a general idea of what the tape is about. Other possibilities depend obviously on the content of the tape, but questions like *Do they agree?* or *Which person is better at cooking?*, for example, can link in nicely with the intonation study that follows. This type of activity can help prevent misunderstanding and disagreement, and help focus the students directly on the important information.

If the teacher feels that these open-ended questions might not work with a particular class, he can focus on the same ideas by setting a multiple-choice task, or an exercise requiring a 'true/false' type answer, such as the following:

1 Bill and Jane are	in the kitchen at an office in the garden
2 They are _____	cooking a meal trying to get a machine to work
3 Who is better at it?	Bill Jane
4 Bill makes some mistakes	true/false

After letting students compare their answers and getting feedback from the whole class, the tape can be played again to ensure all the students understand the key points of the listening passage. This time, the students will have a transcript of the conversation, but with the words which contain the tonic syllables blanked out. Depending on the class, the teacher will either pre-teach the relevant words, or assume that the class will not have too much difficulty with them. While listening, students fill these words in the blanks. The teacher can pause the tape from time to time in order to give the students time to write the words down.

After checking the answers, the teacher tells the students to mark intonation patterns on the tonic syllables. The instruction can be general (i.e. to mark all rises and falls), or selective (e.g. just falls, or just fall-rises), depending on the students' knowledge of intonation, and the aspects that the teacher wishes to focus on. Even if the students have spent a lot of time working on intonation, it is always worthwhile demonstrating the activity

by doing the first one or two examples with the whole class, to ensure that all of the students know exactly what their task is.

At this point, students can have their first attempt at imitating the voices on the tape. Having divided the text into manageable units the teacher plays the tape, section by section, with students repeating after each section. Students can imitate one or both speakers (depending on what the teacher wants to focus on, the quality of the tape, and how much or how little the people speak over each other). Students can repeat chorally, and the teacher can randomly nominate individuals for each line, eliciting any corrections as necessary. The advantage of imitation at this stage is that students' minds are focused only on the intonation patterns.

Once the intonation patterns have been practised, the teacher can ask students to mark on the transcript which of the utterances are statements, which are questions, which are question tags and so on, according to the focus of the lesson. These can then be compared with the intonation patterns already highlighted and practised. Students (depending on their abilities) might simply be asked to describe the intonation patterns, if the teacher feels this is an achievable task. If not, a worksheet might be given in order to narrow down the range of possible answers. Such a worksheet might look something like this:

Match these intonation patterns to the sentence types		
Sentence type	Examples	Intonation pattern
Question	A: How much do I put <b>IN</b> ?	1: ↗ ↗ ↘
Statements	B: You put it in the <b>BOWL</b> .	2: ✓
Lists	C: You need <b>FLOUR, MILK</b> and <b>BUTTER</b> .	3: ↘
Question tags	D: It shouldn't look like <b>THAT</b> , should it?	4: ✓

(The correct answers to this exercise are: A 2/4, B 3, C 1, D 2/4.)

The class can then go back to the tape and do more practice based around this, or they could apply their new knowledge to a different situation, such as being asked to demonstrate or discuss particular skills with a partner. It is very useful if the students can do real demonstrations at this point. Things like making paper aeroplanes, or doing origami, or drawing cartoons can easily be set up in the classroom, and offer a good opportunity to practise giving instructions and asking questions. If these demonstrations can be taped, the teacher then has further material to use for the analysis of intonation (and perhaps for comparison with the original tape).

### Attitude and intonation

Another way of looking at intonation is to consider how it varies according to the speaker's attitude towards a situation. For example, the simple sentence *That would be nice* (in response to an invitation, let's say) might show enormous enthusiasm, mild pleasure, surprise, relief, sarcasm and boredom, amongst other possibilities. In real face-to-face communication

many things contribute to how the message is delivered and understood including, for example, our observation of the speaker's body language, and our knowledge of his personality and likes and dislikes. Intonation gives important indications, but it is also important to appreciate that our choice of grammar and vocabulary can also be a very obvious indicator of our attitude towards a situation!

- 71 The main difficulty in trying to make a link between intonation and attitude in the classroom is that the same intonation pattern can be used to express wildly differing attitudes. When we are speaking in a matter-of-fact way we usually use a succession of falling tones (for example, // ↘ *its over THERE* // ↘ *on the Table* // ↘ *next to the NEWSpaper* //). However we could describe the intonation of someone who is expressing a sense of relief in the same way. There are other differences here, such as the starting and finishing pitch of the speaker's voice and the length of the vowel sounds, but the basic intonation pattern is the same.

72 However, teachers can do some useful work with relating intonation to attitude in the classroom in the same way as we did with grammar and intonation. In dealing with the links between intonation and attitude, the classroom setting allows us the opportunity to work on the confident use of intonation. We can tie intonation work in with teaching and practising particular set phrases, and also work on the range of intonation (how high or low the voice goes) which students feel comfortable using when speaking English; classroom work on intonation sometimes requires students to use patterns which feel alien to them, and they can feel embarrassed about repeating patterns, or be reluctant to use the range the teacher models for them. Also, concentration on grammar and lexis can mean that the range students use is narrower than it might otherwise be.

The following sample lessons show some different ways in which the links between intonation and attitude can be practically used in the classroom.

The first of these deals with the intonation we use with **lexical phrases**. Lexical phrases are phrases which we use in ordinary, everyday communication, but which have the characteristic that they lose their meaning if broken down and analysed. They may be seen to occupy the middle ground between vocabulary and grammar. Some examples are as follows:

How do you do?  
 How are you?  
 See you later.  
 See you soon.  
 At last!  
 Look on the bright side.  
 Don't get me wrong...  
 As for me...

Such expressions are a major feature of our language. The degree to which they are idiomatic varies; that is to say, some may be seen as wholly idiomatic, like *It's all water under the bridge*, whereas others can be more literally analysed for meaning, like *See you later*. Other phrases may be

considered as 'sentence builders', in that they are not complete in themselves; an example of this is *As for me...* .

An interesting feature of lexical phrases from the point of view of intonation is that many such expressions are delivered as tone units, having one main tone movement. For example, on being introduced to someone for the first time, in a relatively formal setting, the following would be an appropriate utterance:

73 // ↘ HOW do you DO //

This is a complete expression, and the falling intonation is itself a part of the message.

The expression *Don't get me wrong...*, which might be used when giving a personal opinion, can often have the following pattern:

74 // ↗ DONT get me WRONG //

The expression will clearly be followed by other information, but is characteristically delivered with a predictable pattern, as shown.

Other expressions may not constitute a complete tone unit (remember that this is an utterance or part of an utterance with one main tone movement) but may be used to introduce one. For example, *I'm not sure whether to...* is often used to introduce a couple of possible choices for a particular action. The phrase is not a tone unit in itself, but can have a relatively level intonation, before the main choices, carrying the tone movements, are introduced:

75 // ↗ I'm NOT sure whether to go to SPAIN // ↘ or PORTugal //

A similar introductory expression is *What do you make of...?* which can be used to elicit a viewpoint from the listener. It is often used with a relatively level intonation pattern, prior to the main information in the utterance:

76 // ↘ WHAT do you make of that new TEAcher //

In the following activity, the fixed expressions used are practised with appropriate intonation patterns, as ways of presenting one's views in a discussion.

#### Lesson 4: Expressing views (Intermediate+)

Lesson type: Practice

Materials: Video/audio tape of television/radio discussion (optional), two worksheets

The teacher chooses, or asks her students to choose, a topic for discussion, perhaps an issue such as the importance of recycling waste, something in the news, or something relevant to the students' current situation, like the food available in a school's coffee bar or the provision of self-study materials. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher canvasses the range of opinions in the classroom, not worrying too much at this stage about the language students use to express themselves. The views can be summarised on the board, using columns to represent opposing views.

The teacher then asks the students to brainstorm different ways of arguing a point, using the opportunity to elicit or give appropriate phrases. Alternatively, a video or audio recording of a discussion from a television or radio current-affairs programme might be used, if available. The following are some suggestions of phrases you might like to use. Onset syllables, tonic syllables and intonation are indicated:

//\∇<sup>1</sup>DONT get me WRONG//  
 // \∇<sub>i</sub> COULDnt agree MORE//  
 //\∇<sup>1</sup>AS for ME//  
 //WHAT do you make of...  
 // \∇<sub>i</sub> DONT think you can SAY that//  
 // \∇<sub>i</sub> THATS not the POINT//

As these are elicited the teacher takes the opportunity to drill them chorally and individually; this is important, as the way the expressions sound will give important clues as to the attitude of the speaker to the discussion. Then students are given the task of listening out for stressed syllables and for intonation patterns. The expressions can be given on a worksheet, and the teacher can say the expressions out loud. The teacher and students should agree on a method of marking intonation. It is important to use the same methods regularly, so that students become familiar with them. The students are then asked to match the utterances with the appropriate attitude, as shown in the following worksheet. If the teacher has been working from a video or audio tape, this can be used again at this point to help the students. If not, the teacher can model them again.

Underline the stressed syllables and mark the intonation patterns:	Match the phrases on the left with these ideas:
As for me...	I'm going to say something you might not like.
I couldn't agree more.	I'm showing strong disagreement.
Don't get me wrong, but...	I'm about to give my point of view.
What do you make of...	I disagree.
I don't think you can say that.	I'm showing strong agreement.
That's not the point.	I'm looking for your opinion.

The students have now had the phrases introduced to them, have practised saying them with appropriate intonation patterns, and have done an exercise to show how the words and intonation combine in terms of the speaker's attitude to the subject matter and to the discussion in general. They are now ready to have a go at using them productively themselves. The teacher can now return the students' attention to the subject introduced at the start of the lesson, and set up a discussion based around the topic. The students now have the opportunity to try using the phrases and accompanying intonation patterns in an appropriate setting. If possible the students' debate should be recorded for later analysis, as this provides a valuable opportunity for further study.

### Lesson 5: Expressing attitudes (Elementary+)

Type: Practice and Remedial

Materials: Cards with imaginary presents written on, prompt cards with adjectives written on, role cards

Close attention to grammar and vocabulary when practising language can mean that intonation suffers. Students' speech may well sound less natural, and the flow may be interrupted, as students search for the right word or construction. This activity gets students working with easy sentences, relieving them of the need to concentrate on grammar or vocabulary and enabling them to concentrate on intonation. A further purpose of this activity is to help students explore the ways in which they use their voice range (how high or low their voice goes) when speaking English, and to introduce various ideas which may subsequently be used remedially, as reminders. Activities like this can help give students greater confidence in their intonation use.

The teacher writes *mmm* on the board, and asks students to think about the different ways they can say it. He elicits a couple of examples (e.g. //↘*mmm*// and //↗*mmm*//) and then gives students a short time to brainstorm other examples. He then elicits these from the students and writes them onto the board, suggesting if necessary, until the following variations are there:

//↘*mmm*//  
 //↗*mmm*//  
 //↖*mmm*//  
 //↕*mmm*//  
 //→*mmm*//

The teacher then asks students to think about what these mean. The first one //↘*mmm*// could indicate *I agree*. //↗*mmm*// indicates *I agree, but...* //↖*mmm*// tells us that the speaker wants the listener to say more. //↕*mmm*// might indicate strong agreement, and //→*mmm*// could reflect boredom or lack of interest. The teacher then asks the students to substitute the word *yes* for *mmm*, and drills the patterns before letting the students experiment with them. The implied meanings are the same.

Each pattern is then drilled again, but exaggerated somewhat; a falling pattern starts higher and ends lower, and a rising pattern starts lower and ends higher. The teacher then asks the students if exaggerating the range affects the meaning; the idea here is to establish that the bigger range indicates a greater degree of emotion.

The teacher writes *thank you* on the board. He gives out present cards to the students. Some of these are quite exciting gifts, like a new Ferrari, or £10,000. Others are quite the opposite, like a tin of peas, or a toilet brush. The students then give presents to their neighbour, saying *Thank you* to each other in accordance with how they feel about their present. The range used should reflect how excited (or not) students are by their presents.

This can be followed up by working on other simple sentences. It is important to choose sentences appropriate to the students' level. These could be sentences which use a structure which the students have recently studied, and which are ambiguous enough to be used in a variety of situations, or flexible enough to be said in a variety of ways, reflecting different attitudes. Examples might be sentences like *I'm meeting her at nine*, *I saw him yesterday*, or *I think that's mine*. It makes sense to avoid sentences in which the words used are themselves direct indicators of attitude (e.g. *I don't like this food*), as different ranges of intonation wouldn't be so appropriate. The example used is *Good morning, Mr Johnson*.

With the whole class, the teacher elicits which syllables within the sentence are stressed. It is important that these remain constant, otherwise the activity will become an exercise in how changing stress affects meaning, which is not the aim here. The teacher asks students to work in pairs or small groups in order to brainstorm, and to practise saying the sentence in a variety of ways. These are then tried out and discussed with the whole class. The teacher uses this opportunity to introduce a set of prompts, which can be written on cards and held up as necessary. Examples might be: *neutral, happy, bored, sympathetic, excited, surprised, friendly, unfriendly, businesslike*, and so on. The teacher drills the sentence according to each prompt card, and students repeat in chorus, and individually. The class can then discuss the range of voice used, which will be wider the more 'extreme' the attitude held, or emotion felt. It is important to bear in mind throughout that the teacher is not teaching the students anything they do not do in their own language, though English does, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, use a wider range of intonation than many other languages. This activity aims to allow students to forget about grammar and vocabulary, and concentrate on different ranges of intonation, gaining confidence in using them.

Students are subsequently given a selection of role cards, outlining their previous relations with Mr Johnson. For example:

- 1 You've never met Mr Johnson before. You want to do business with him.
- 2 Mr Johnson owes you a lot of money.
- 3 You think Mr Johnson is a pleasant man.
- 4 You're secretly in love with Mr Johnson. (optional)
- 5 Mr Johnson is wearing women's shoes.
- 6 You really don't like Mr Johnson.

Students then work in groups, with one playing Mr Johnson, and the others greeting him appropriately. 'Mr Johnson' has to try to work out (roughly, not exactly) the attitudes towards him, from the various ways in which he is greeted. There will clearly be other clues here, such as facial expression and body language, but Mr Johnson can usually get a fair idea from the intonation used.

The prompts introduced earlier in the activity can be kept and used as reminders in subsequent lessons, or, if practical, put up on the wall of the classroom.

## Discourse and intonation

A discourse approach to intonation examines how the stresses we make, and the tone we employ when speaking, relate our utterances to the surrounding language. The term ‘discourse’, as mentioned at the start of the chapter (page 87), refers to a stretch of meaningful language. Intonation can be used to present ideas and information within utterances, conversations or monologues. A simple example is seen in the idea of listing. If we say *You need a pen, a pencil, and some paper* the voice tends to rise on *pen* and *pencil*, indicating that there is something more to come. The voice may then fall on *paper*, to indicate that that is the end of the list.

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The wider context of conversations is important, and we can see how the speaker’s intonation indicates his interpretation of what is shared knowledge and what isn’t. In the sentence:

77

When you get to the office, you’ll see a tall man named Sean.

the name *Sean* is a new piece of information, and the voice falls on this word. A following sentence shows a different effect:

78

When you see Sean, give him this letter.

This time, there is a fall-rise on *Sean*, indicating that the name is now shared knowledge. It also helps indicate that the rest of the instruction is to follow. The choices we make, while being for the most part unconscious, help us to guide and control our conversations. The advantage of this approach over the grammatical/attitudinal indicator approaches is that clear rules can be given with regard to appropriate choices of patterns.

The most basic intonation choice is between what are known as **referring tones (r)** and **proclaiming tones (p)**. The two most frequently used tones in English are the **fall** and the **fall-rise**. A falling tone is called a **proclaiming tone (p)**, and the fall-rise is a **referring tone (r)**. (These terms and ideas were originally developed by David Brazil.)

We can think of the choice between these tones as indicating two alternatives. One alternative is that the speaker is expressing information that is presumed to be new, or is adding something to the discussion. In this case a proclaiming tone is used. We also use the proclaiming tone to give facts, express opinions we believe to be true, or to ask for new information. The other alternative is that the speaker is referring to information that he presumes to be shared between the speakers. In this case a referring tone is used. In questions, we use a referring tone to make sure what we are saying is correct, or to check information. Consider the examples on the next page:

79	Example	Explanation
	//\WHAT time does your <u>TRAIN</u> leave//	I'm asking you for a piece of new information. A <b>p</b> tone indicates this.
	//\^WHAT time does your <u>TRAIN</u> leave//	You've told me the train time earlier, but I have forgotten. I use the <b>r</b> tone to indicate that there has been shared information, and to make sure.
	//\she's <u>LIVED</u> in <u>LON</u> don// //\since she was <u>TWENTy</u> //	I'm telling you some facts about her that you don't know. The <b>p</b> tone indicates that this is new information.
	//\he <u>LIVES</u> in the house on the <u>COR</u> ner//	I'm telling you a fact about him that you don't know. The <b>p</b> tone indicates that this is new information.

Taking the last two examples from the previous table, let's see how a change in tone might reflect the utterances being used in different situations, where there is some shared knowledge:

80	Example	Explanation
	//\^she's <u>LIVED</u> in <u>LON</u> don// //\since she was <u>TWENTy</u> //	We both know that she lives in London; the shared information is shown by the <b>r</b> tone in the first tone unit. You have asked me how long she's lived there. This new information is reflected by the <b>p</b> tone in the second tone unit.
	//\he <u>LIVES</u> in the house on the corner//	We both know that we're talking about the house on the corner. You have just said <i>John's buying the house on the corner, isn't he?</i> I'm telling you something you appear not to know, and this is shown by the <b>p</b> tone on 'lives'.

As we saw on page 88, the onset syllable usually sets a pitch which carries on until the tonic syllable is reached. This constant pitch is called the **key**. Using a high key usually means that the speaker is contrasting something with what has been said before. Starting a conversation with a high key is usually a good way of engaging the interest of the listener. A mid-key usually adds something to what has been said, and a low key indicates that the information is a natural follow-on from before. The key is of course relative, in two ways: it is relative to what has been said before, and also relative to the speaker's voice qualities and typical speaking habits.

The following sample lessons show some different ways in which the relationships between discourse and intonation can be highlighted and practised in the classroom. The examples show intonation teaching being Integrated with the teaching of a language point, being dealt with Remedially, and being Practised in its own right. They also cover a range of different levels.

### Lesson 6: Making deductions (Intermediate to Advanced)

Type: Integrated

In this lesson, students are given a puzzle to solve, and the language they need in order to discuss the possible answers to the puzzle is taught and practised. To start, the teacher sets the context and pre-teaches any vocabulary she feels might be necessary. Any activities which require the students to discuss an issue, put forward suggestions and draw conclusions might be used (for example, trying to interpret ambiguous photographs or drawings). In this example the students have to decide how events have led up to a given outcome.

The teacher sets up the first situation:

A man with a pack on his back entered a field, and died.

The students are given some time in small groups to discuss possible answers, but the teacher does not give one at this point. After students have had the chance to discuss, the teacher asks them to note down the language they used while deciding on their answers. The teacher writes any suitable suggestions on the board, and takes the opportunity to elicit or to give the following language.

He might have been attacked by an animal.

He could have been attacked by an animal.

Perhaps he was attacked by an animal.

If he was attacked by an animal, he could have run away...

He can't have been attacked by an animal. That's too easy.

The students will be clear about the concepts involved in this kind of language as they will have produced it themselves, prompted by the situation itself and with the teacher's assistance. To make sure, however, the teacher asks questions like 'Do we know if this happened?' and 'How sure are we?' First, just one suggestion is worked with, so that the students see the intonation patterns emerging.

The sentences are then drilled, and the students are asked to write the utterances down, and mark the stressed syllables and tone movements. Students can underline stressed syllables, and draw arrows to show tone movements; remember it is important to use notation systems consistently with your students, so that they become familiar with them. The following uses the notation introduced in this chapter:

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//∨he MIGHT have been//↘aTTACKED by an ANimal//

//∨he COULD have been//↘aTTACKED by an ANimal//

// ↗ perHAPS he was// ↘ aTTACKED by an ANimal//  
 // ↗ if he WAS attacked by an animal// ↘ he COULD have run aWAY//  
 // ↘ he CANT have been attacked by an animal// ↘ THATS too EASY//

Consistencies in the intonation patterns can be shown by applying them to another example:

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// ↗ he MIGHT have been// ↘ PARachuting//  
 // ↗ he COULD have been// ↘ PARachuting//  
 // ↗ perHAPS he was// ↘ PARachuting//  
 // ↗ if he WAS parachuting// ↘ he COULD have used a resERVE//  
 // ↘ he CANT have been parachuting// ↘ THATS too EASY//

These too can be drilled chorally and individually, and the consistencies highlighted on the board. Students can do further practice by supplying their own mysteries to be solved.

### Lesson 7: Indirect questions (Pre-Intermediate to Intermediate)

Type: Remedial

A lesson is in progress, and the students are working on an activity involving indirect questions. They are doing a speaking activity where the language being practised is as follows, within the context of seeking information from a stranger:

Do you know where Could you tell me where	the bank the post office the chemist's the doctor's the bus station the police station	is please?
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While monitoring, the teacher notices that some students are using a falling tone on the verbs, and using two tone units, as in:

// ↘ do you KNOW// ↘ where the BANK is please//  
 // ↘ could you TELL me// ↘ where the BANK is please//

A more appropriate way of asking these questions, given the context, would be:

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// ↗ do you KNOW where the BANK is please//  
 // ↗ could you TELL me where the BANK is please//

Here there is one tone unit, with the main tone movement (a fall-rise) being on the noun. The verbs are stressed, and set the key. The teacher writes the nouns on the board (if they are not already written there), and re-eliciting the question forms (*Do you know where...* and *Could you tell me where...*), he drills them chorally, using a high, but level key. He then drills the end of the sentences, using the fall-rise appropriately, on and after the nouns. He then points to each alternative noun in turn, and either repeats a choral drill, or

asks individuals to say the sentences. He then completes the question forms on the board, and draws arrows, as shown below. Tonic syllables are underlined, and in capitals.

<p>—————→ Do you know where</p> <p>—————→ Could you tell me where</p>	<p>the <u>BANK</u> is please?</p> <p>the <u>POST</u> office is please?</p> <p>the <u>CHEM</u>ist's is please?</p> <p>the <u>DOCT</u>or's is please?</p> <p>the <u>BUS</u> station is please?</p> <p>the <u>polICE</u> station is please?</p>
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The pattern here is quite clear. While this is not to say that the sentences must be or will always be said in this way, the suggested intonation is at least appropriate. By pointing out such consistencies the teacher will help students both to recognise them and be more likely to remember and use them. The teacher can then either ask students to repeat the activity, or move on to other practice activities, as he feels is necessary.

### Lesson 8: Tone units (Advanced)

Type: Practice

Materials/Resources: Tape recorder, video camera and player, transcript of student's presentation

A teacher is working one-to-one with a student who needs to give a presentation at a conference. In rehearsing the presentation, the teacher notices that the intonation and tone units used by the student affect the quality of the presentation.

In this kind of situation, if the resources are available, the teacher could either tape-record, or better still video the student giving a trial run of the talk. Using a transcript of the talk, the teacher takes the student through some examples of tone units used, helping her to listen out for the falls and rises made. On a fresh transcript, the teacher helps the student to re-group the tone units, drilling and practising as necessary. Another recording can be made when the student feels confident enough to try the whole thing again; this recording can be listened to and compared with the original.

### How teachable is intonation?

The fact that the same thing may be said in different ways, at different times and for different reasons, leads to a potentially bewildering range of choices for students. A part of the art of successful teaching is in helping students to narrow down the number of available options, and to make appropriate choices with the language they use. This should also be the teacher's aim when teaching intonation. We saw in Chapters 3 and 4 how phonemes

contrast with each other, so that in particular circumstances a sound constitutes an appropriate choice (as seen in minimal pairs, like *hit* and *heat*). Likewise, as we saw in Chapter 5, we can label syllables within utterances as stressed or unstressed, and depending on the circumstances, stressing or not stressing a syllable will be appropriate. If we treat classroom intonation in the same way, we have a system that is workable for students; we can demonstrate which intonation patterns are appropriate for a given situation. Investigating the links between intonation and certain types of sentence, and intonation and attitude, can be helpful to a degree. However, the analysis of intonation in spoken discourse gives a relatively straightforward way of describing and narrowing down a whole range of intonation possibilities. By concentrating on tonic syllables, and by showing an initial choice between referring and proclaiming tones, we divide those possibilities into two groups which can then be analysed further. Most students will not want or need a full analysis of proclaiming and referring tones; teachers can, however, help their students listen out for tonic syllables, and for whether the voice goes down or up, and so help them narrow down the choices. The significance of intonation is best dealt with in clear contexts, and through the analysis of examples, with ample opportunity for both receptive and productive work.

It has been claimed, by some, that intonation is unteachable and that it operates at such a deep level of consciousness that it can only be acquired through long-term exposure to a second language. Language teaching and learning are in part a process of bringing subconscious mechanisms to the surface, studying them, and pointing out patterns. A lot of our language may be considered automatic and the processes of production and interpretation operate at a subconscious level, particularly in ordinary, everyday speech. If we can analyse and show patterns in the grammatical and lexical properties of our language in the classroom, then why can't we do the same for intonation as well?

Many teachers would admit to finding it difficult to hear whether or not their own voice is going up or down. However, it is much easier to spot when a student is using the wrong kind of intonation in practice activities in the classroom. Many teachers already do remedial work on intonation in the classroom without necessarily realising it, through re-drilling sentences, getting students to say things again, and so on. It is really a question of taking time to listen out for intonation yourself, and of gaining an understanding of how it works. Work on intonation can, and should be, built into lessons from beginner level to advanced level.

**Conclusions** In this chapter we have:

- described intonation as the changes of pitch our voices make when we are speaking.
- looked at intonation as being an aspect of language that we are usually only aware of at a subconscious level. We have also seen how intonation is used in different ways in different languages, and that it is therefore an important area of study for language

learners. Working on intonation in the classroom can help students towards a better understanding of English, as well as greater expressiveness and articulation.

- considered three ways of approaching the study of intonation:
  - connecting intonation with grammar
  - connecting intonation with attitude
  - connecting intonation with the surrounding discourse
- looked at the link between intonation and sentence stress, and shown how spoken language can be divided into tone units, each tone unit having one major tone movement. In discourse analysis falling tones are known as proclaiming tones, and rising ones as referring tones. Analysis of intonation with reference to the surrounding discourse can help to illustrate how speakers indicate what is shared, and what is new information.
- seen that while intonation patterns can be linked to certain grammatical constructions, these are not invariable rules. However, we can still use them for valuable practice in the classroom. We have also drawn similar conclusions with regard to the connection between intonation and attitude. Intonation can, at times, help listeners to understand the attitude of speakers to what they are saying. Again, while this may only provide us with a rough guide, useful work can be done with students in this area.
- shown how consistency is important in teaching intonation. We do not need to show students the full range of choices available in a particular situation, but, in applying consistent patterns we can help them to narrow down their options, and use the patterns they have learnt appropriately.
- argued, finally, that intonation is both learnable and teachable.

### Looking ahead

- Chapters 5 and 6 have shown how stress and intonation help us to vary the message conveyed through connecting strings of phonemes. Chapter 7 looks at other aspects of connected speech, and in particular, at what happens when phonemes meet.