

Intonation: Definition, Classification and Function

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What is intonation? What are the functions of intonation?

Intonation is the rise and fall in pitch level when we speak. It adds melody to our speech. To be aware of intonation, let us study the difference between when a singer sings in an isolated place without any musical instrument and when he sings on a stage with his choir using all the musical instruments. Likewise, intonation in our speech sounds lively, but when intonation is lacking, our speech becomes dull.

Types of Intonation: Intonation occurs depending on the four things: Pitch, stress, rhythm, and the speaker's intention. There are three main patterns of intonation in English: falling intonation, rising intonation, and fall-rise intonation.

i) Falling Intonation: Falling intonation is how the voice falls on the final stressed syllable of a phrase or a group of words. It is apparent in wh-questions. For example: Where is the nearest inn?

ii) Rising Intonation: Rising intonation refers to the rise of voice at the conclusion tone of a sentence. It generally happens in question sentences (yes-no questions, tag questions). This is also used in statements to encourage the audience to complete sentences. For instance, Are you a student, aren't you?

iii) Fall-Rise Intonation: This intonation studies how our voice falls and rises when we speak. This intonation is used to show our doubts regarding a matter.

Function of Intonation: Intonation works to clarify the speaker's feelings when he speaks. In English, we find numerous functions of intonation, which are as follows:

Emotional Function: A Human being is an emotional creature. They behave emotionally when speaking to someone. Emotion is their conscious mental reaction to a circumstance happening around them. Intonation helps us share feelings like happiness, sadness, excitement, or anger. For example, our tone rises when we are in a joyous mood.

On the other hand, when we are in sadness, our tone gets slow. Besides, it shows our attitude. Our voice might sound lively and cheerful if we are sincere about something. Conversely, our

intonation might be flat and monotone if indifferent or bored.

Grammatical Function: Grammar is the system and structure of a thing. In linguistics, grammar is the systematic study of a language. The grammatical function of intonation is to identify grammatical structures in speech, instead of as punctuation does in writing. It distinguishes different types of sentences. Generally, intonation happens in a question sentence. For example, "Are you coming?" rises at the end to show it is a question. Intonation helps listeners understand the speaker's intentions and sentence structure.

Accentual Function: It focuses mainly on the location of the tonic syllable. Intonation in English, accentual or informational, helps highlight new and known information in speech. It uses tonicity and accent placement to focus on specific parts while leaving others less emphasized. This function is essential in language learning and teaching, as it helps learners understand how to emphasize different parts of a message. This also makes it easier to communicate effectively.

Discourse Function: Discourse means spoken or written words. It is about how well we communicate. The discourse function of intonation is to differentiate between clauses in a sentence. It grabs attention, shows which parts of our speech are essential, and reveals emotions in conversations. The principal clause gets emphasized in a complex sentence, whereas the subordinate clause experiences a lower pitch. So, not just the words we say but how we say them matters in communication.

In summary, intonation bears multifunctional values in linguistics. Intonation guides interactions between various classes of people, such as doctors and patients or teachers and students. People often use intonation to indicate that their speech is completed and want to listen from the other side.