

MATERIALS AND METHODS FOR TEACHING

INTONATION

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1 Intonation is important. It cannot be ignored. To convince students of the importance of intonation, we can use sentences with two very different interpretations according to intonation. Example: "I thought it would rain" with a fall on "rain" means it did not rain, but with a fall on "thought" and a rise on "rain" it means that it did rain.

2 Although complex, intonation is structured. For both teacher and student, the big job of tackling intonation is made simpler by remembering that intonation can be analysed into systems and units.

There are three main systems in English intonation:

- Tonality (division into phrases)
- Tonicity (selection of accented syllables)
- Tone (the choice of pitch movements)

Examples:

Tonality: My brother who lives in London is a doctor.

Tonicity: Hello. How ARE you. Hello. How are YOU.

Tone: Ways to say "Thank you"

3 In deciding what to teach, we must distinguish what is universal from what is specifically English. This is where contrastive studies of intonation are very valuable. Usually, for instance, division into phrases (tonality) works in broadly similar ways across languages. Some uses of pitch are also similar across

languages - for example, very high pitch may signal excitement or urgency.

4 Although most people think that intonation is mainly about pitch (the tone system), actually accent placement (tonicity) is probably the single most important aspect of English intonation. This is because it is connected with information focus, and the effects on interpretation are very clear-cut.

Example: They asked for coffee, so I made them coffee.
(The second occurrence of "coffee" must not be accented).

5 Ear-training is the beginning of intonation training in the UCL approach. First, students learn to identify fall vs rise vs fall-rise. To begin with, single words are used, then phrases and sentences. When learning tones, the first words used should have unstressed syllables after the stressed syllable (Saturday) to make the pitch movement clearer.

6 In production drills, the first thing is to establish simple neutral patterns. There should be no drama or really special meanings. Simple drills can be used to teach important patterns:

Example: A: Peter likes football B: Yes JOHN likes football TOO
 A: Mary rides a bike B: Yes JENny rides a bike TOO

7 The teacher must be systematic and let learners KNOW what they are learning. It is no good using new patterns and hoping that students will "pick them up" without noticing.

8 Visual feedback of fundamental frequency with a computer display can help students learn correct patterns. The teacher can use the display to demonstrate patterns, or students can practise by themselves, imitating recorded models.