

## SIGNIFICANT AND NONSIGNIFICANT IN INTONATION

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The field of investigation usually associated with the title above is typically marked out by the following statement: "Intonation is the linguistic form which conveys information about the speaker's emotional attitudes to the subject-matter, attitudes such as doubt, agreement, questioning, affirmation, continuing interest, etc." (*Language and Speech*, 2, 106). If the implication is that the intonation continually present in the languages concerned is continually conveying information of this sort, such an estimate of the importance of the tune (= intonation, not limited to pitch) is somewhat exaggerated. Far the greatest part of intonation surely conveys no information whatever. Conversation is mostly among people who know each other and speak and understand the same dialect; they mostly put into words what they have to say; the communication would mostly be exactly the same if the words were written and so without intonation. The tune that must accompany the words when spoken is merely appropriate, not informing.

It is only when the intonation denies the straightforward meaning of the words that it can be said to have any function. It has been suggested that language becomes useful only when someone tells a lie (E. H. Sturtevant, *Introduction to Linguistic Science*, 48). If she says "I'll scream" and screams, that is not a use of language; but if she says "I'll scream" and doesn't do so, then there is a use of language. So a man may say, with intonation appropriate to the words, "His name is 'John'". There is no information in the tune that is not in the untuned words. But if he says "His name is 'John'" with an inappropriate rising tune, the tune says that the words lie and the speaker intends some other sort of message.

It is the basic noninforming tune that needs most attention for any dialect that is being investigated, and needs to be established first as the basis for further inquiry. While we do not have many studies demonstrating the validity of generalizations about basic tunes, the tendency being to correlate many tunes with many meanings, we do have several generalizations. Daniel Jones (*Outline of English Phonetics*<sup>8</sup>, 279) and others, including myself, have found two fundamental tunes for English. The difference between the interpretations is, aside from minor details, that Jones et al. speak of end-rising and end-falling intonations correlated with several kinds of functional clause types whereas I would distinguish between not-low-ending, open, and low-ending, closed, intonational shapes and correlate on the basis of occurrence

rather than function with noncompletion or completion in the clause text shapes. Dr. František Daneš of Prague, in the most illuminating theoretical discussion that has come to my attention (*Word*, 16, 34-54), classifies the basic contours of Czech as final and continuative, the former with two subclasses, non-special and special interrogative.

When it comes to the matter of deciding what categories of clauses fit in with each of the basic noninforming intonations and how one tune can be attached to several kinds of clauses, my explanation has been that the structural shapes and form-word signs take care of the differentiations. Daneš does it rather better, I think, by noting, e.g., that the statement is an unmarked category and other intentions fitting into the same tune have "their marked intention sufficiently signaled by other means". The reason why he has to set up a separate class of special interrogative finals for Czech is, if I understand rightly, that there is no other signal than the tune. I can call yes-or-no questions noncompletion clause shapes, although they appear finally, because in English such clauses are structurally marked as noncompletion.

Although all the preceding comment has been in terms of the conspicuous end turn of the clause intonation, the whole clause shape is also fixed by the custom of the dialect, as Klinghardt pointed out long ago. It should be noted that for English there are sub-units within the clause which may be intonationally marked by variations somewhat like end turns but not be identified with them. There is a certain range of tolerance – again one of Daneš's nice terms – for indifferently rising, falling, or level clause-interior turns. The range of tolerance has not been and needs to be investigated. There is also a range of tolerance for the clause-end turn of the open tune, which I therefore call not-low rather than rising.

Now we turn from the basic intonation, which is not significant as conveying information, to the significant departures from this tune which are informing. Merely for convenience I divide into two groups labelled unintentional and intentional. Unintentional departures from or lack of conformity with the basic tunes communicate information about the speaker. We need not be concerned with the revelation that the speaker is an outsider who is not at home in the dialect, except to note that nine tenths of the effort put into learning the tune of a new language goes into avoiding communication of this sort. The revelation of personality, e.g., the tune of the always angry or always querulous man, might well be studied more than it has been, both as significant in itself and as not significant for other kinds of investigation. The information about personality is of course efficient only when the speaker is previously unknown to the hearer; among old acquaintances the personality variation on the intonation is the basic tune for that individual and communicates only, and only when other cues are wanting, identification of the speaker.

It is the momentary emotional state and its intonational reflexes that has attracted most attention, as the multiplicity of careless statements as well as careful investigations testifies. The great deficiency is that no one has ever got hold of actual utterance in a situation where the emotional attitudes of the speaker could be deter-

mined in some way quite independent of the intonation being studied. Perhaps the best one can do is the kind of imitation setting where the emotions are presumably to come out of the assumed situation, as in Dr. Hadding-Koch's admirable instrumental analysis of the reading of a long dramatic passage by ten informants (*Acoustico-Phonetic Studies in the Intonation of Southern Swedish*). But here the best one could do to discover the emotions would be to ask each performer what emotion he thought the dramatic person ought to have at any particular moment. The reaction of the hearers, which Dr. Hadding-Koch got by asking ten listeners to note the emotional coloring, is only half the picture.

It we have to get along with identification by reaction, surely the best technique of investigation is something like the application of Osgood's semantic differential used by Mrs. Uldall ("Attitudinal Meanings Conveyed by Intonation Contours", *Language and Speech*, 3, 223-34). The semantic differential not only gets away from direct judgments in a most loosely defined vocabulary, but also turns out answers in statistically manageable form. Always the basic tunes must be kept in mind. It is easy, e.g., to see why Mrs. Uldall's observers found end rises pleasant for her yes-or-no question, question-word question, and command, but not for her statement. For the first it is the normal basic tune and pleasant in contrast to an intentional reversal such as noted below, which for this clause shape is usually taken as demanding. The second and third are text shapes that make a demand upon the hearer and the end rise is a reversal that may be, and *ceteris paribus* is, taken as mollifying the demand. For the statement the rise reversal can hardly be taken as other than query conversion for such a colorless text, and the question of pleasantness or unpleasantness simply does not come up as between statement and query.

Intentional departure from the basic tune can hardly be tied in with attitudes or emotions, for intention is the denial of emotion. One kind of such variation is that illustrated earlier, the reversal of an appropriate end intonation. The other is the displacement beyond the limit of basic tune tolerance of the intonation – usually higher pitch, louder, and longer – at some point in the clause tune. This I take to be pointing to where there is information in the technical sense of choice in the wording of the clause. The pointing has no meaning in itself, but helps the hearer to understand the communication. I have discussed the technical details of these intentional variations elsewhere (e.g. *Phonetica*, 4, 107-20); here I comment only on the intent.

In the example cited the intent is pretty obvious; the speaker means to say something different from what his words by themselves, i.e. with routine tune, would be taken to mean. An even simpler case occurs when the speaker ties together a loose sentence such as "He'll get into trouble, if he does that". The first clause is completion in text shape. The speaker knows, however, that the qualification is coming and holds the ending up by reversing the text-appropriate closed tune. What makes this tune reversal significant is that it is not obligatory. Some speakers don't do it, and we say of them that they are difficult to follow.

The classification intentional has to be strained a bit to include the normal information pointing. The speaker cannot so much be said to intend to point up the information as to be aware of the fact that that is where the information is. The point itself can, I think always, be predicted from the whole context. What the speaker will say may not be, and in theory is not, predictable, but where he will say it is predictable as soon as the shape of the clause is established. Here again it must be noted that the point is in fact often missed because the speaker is not aware of it, does not have his mind on what he is saying. But then, much intonation is quite wrong anyway, especially but not exclusively when the speaker is using somebody else's text. A slightly different kind of pointing, in iterative emphasis where the predictability of the choice denies information and the intent is clear, has the same kind of departure from basic tune. I think that it is more economical to describe all pointing in terms of departure from the basic intonation than to make the pointing the center of some kind of an intonational unit that cannot be independently defined

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