

THE ROLE OF INTONATION IN EXPRESSING MEANING IN ENGLISH SPEECH

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Abstract. This article examines the role of intonation in expressing meaning in English speech. It analyzes the grammatical, emotional, and communicative functions of intonation and highlights its importance in theoretical phonetics and in teaching English.

Key words: intonation, theoretical phonetics, pitch, stress, rhythm

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada ingliz nutqida intonatsiyaning ma'no ifodalashdagi o'rni yoritiladi. Intonatsiyaning grammatik, emotsional va kommunikativ funksiyalari tahlil qilinadi hamda uning nazariy fonetika va ingliz tilini o'qitishdagi ahamiyati ko'rsatib beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: intonatsiya, nazariy fonetika, ohang, urg'u, ritm

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается роль интонации в выражении значения в английской речи. Анализируются грамматические, эмоциональные и коммуникативные функции интонации, а также ее значение в теоретической фонетике и преподавании английского языка.

Ключевые слова: интонация, теоретическая фонетика, тон, ударение, ритм

Introduction. The study of theoretical phonetics is essential for understanding how spoken language functions in real communication. Among the main components of spoken language, intonation occupies a special place because it helps speakers organize meaning, show attitude, and express different communicative intentions. A sentence is not understood only through its words or grammatical structure. In actual speech, meaning is also shaped by pitch movement, stress placement, rhythm, and pauses. For this reason, intonation is one of the most important suprasegmental features in English.

In English, the same sentence may express different meanings depending on the intonation pattern used by the speaker. A neutral statement, a question, surprise, doubt, politeness, irritation, or confidence can all be communicated through changes in tone. This shows that intonation is not only a phonetic ornament of speech but a meaningful element of language structure. In theoretical phonetics, it is studied as a functional phenomenon which connects sound form with communicative purpose [1].

The relevance of this topic is connected with the growing importance of spoken communication in modern foreign language education. Many learners of English know grammar and vocabulary quite well, yet they still experience difficulties in oral communication because they do not use intonation naturally. As a result, their speech may sound incomplete, overly direct, or pragmatically inappropriate. Therefore, the study of intonation is important not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a practical one.

The aim of this article is to examine the role of intonation in expressing meaning in English speech. The objectives are to describe the main functions of intonation, to

explain its connection with grammatical and emotional meaning, and to show its significance for theoretical phonetics and English language teaching.

Literature Review and Methodology. The problem of intonation has attracted the attention of many linguists and phoneticians. Scholars such as D. Crystal, P. Roach, A. C. Gimson, J. D. O'Connor, and J. C. Wells have made an important contribution to the description of English intonation and its role in communication. Their works show that intonation is a complex system involving melodic movement, prominence, tempo, and pausing, all of which participate in meaning formation [2].

This article is based on descriptive and analytical methods. The descriptive method is used to explain the theoretical nature of intonation and its main components. The analytical method is used to interpret examples and show how different intonation patterns influence meaning in English speech.

Discussion. Intonation is commonly defined as a combination of pitch, sentence stress, rhythm, tempo, and pauses functioning together in spoken language. These elements create the melody of speech and help listeners understand not only what is said but also how it is meant. In English, intonation is especially important because grammatical form alone does not always fully express communicative intention.

One of the clearest functions of intonation is grammatical differentiation. For example, the sentence *You are coming.* with a falling tone is normally understood as a statement, while *You are coming?* with a rising tone is interpreted as a question or a request for confirmation. The lexical structure remains almost the same, but the meaning changes because of intonation. This demonstrates that oral grammar in English cannot be fully explained without reference to tone patterns [3].

Intonation also plays an essential role in expressing emotion and attitude. The sentence *That's interesting* may sound sincere, doubtful, surprised, or ironic depending on how it is pronounced. In such cases, the words alone are insufficient for identifying the speaker's true intention. The emotional colouring of speech is created by intonation, and this colouring has a direct effect on interpretation. This is why spoken communication often depends as much on phonetic realization as on lexical choice.

Another important function of intonation is informational organization. In connected speech, not every word carries the same weight. Speakers usually highlight the most important element through sentence stress. Compare these examples:

I wanted the RED book.

I WANTED the red book.

I wanted the red BOOK.

In each case, the main stress changes the focus of information. In the first sentence, the emphasis falls on the colour; in the second, it highlights the speaker's intention; in the third, it contrasts the object with something else. Thus, intonation helps organize meaning and directs the listener's attention to the communicative centre of the utterance.

From the point of view of theoretical phonetics, intonation belongs to suprasegmental means of speech. Unlike vowels and consonants, which are segmental units, intonation extends over larger parts of speech such as phrases and sentences. This broader scope explains why intonation is closely related to syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. It does not merely accompany speech; it shapes the way speech is interpreted.

In addition, English is often described as a stress-timed language. This means that stressed syllables tend to occur at relatively regular intervals, while unstressed syllables are compressed between them. Such rhythmic structure influences the characteristic flow of English speech and supports its intonation patterns. Learners whose native language has a different rhythm may find English intonation difficult, even if they pronounce separate sounds correctly [4].

In practical language learning, insufficient attention to intonation often leads to communicative problems. A student may build grammatically correct sentences but still sound unnatural or inappropriate. For example, using a falling tone in a context where a polite rising tone is expected may make the speaker sound rude or too categorical.

Another important point is that intonation contributes to coherence in longer stretches of speech. In presentations, conversations, and classroom interaction, speakers use pauses and pitch changes to divide information into meaningful parts. This makes speech easier to follow and more effective. Without proper intonation, even a grammatically correct message may sound monotonous and unclear.

Results. The analysis shows that intonation performs several important functions in English speech. It helps differentiate sentence types, express feelings and attitudes, organize information, and structure spoken discourse. It also demonstrates that intonation is inseparable from meaning and should be treated as a functional component of language rather than a secondary feature.

The article also makes it clear that intonation has strong practical value in foreign language teaching. Learners who understand English intonation patterns are better able to interpret spoken messages and express themselves more naturally. As a result, their communicative competence improves, especially in speaking and listening.

Conclusion. In conclusion, intonation is one of the key means of expressing meaning in English speech. It performs grammatical, emotional, communicative, and discourse-organizing functions. Through pitch movement, stress, rhythm, and pauses, it shapes the communicative value of an utterance and helps listeners understand the speaker's intention.

The study of intonation is highly important in theoretical phonetics because it explains how sound structure interacts with meaning in spoken language. At the same time, it is equally important in English language teaching, where correct intonation supports more natural and effective communication. Therefore, intonation should be regarded as an essential part of both phonetic theory and speech practice.

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