

## International Phonetic Alphabet School

DAY 2: INTONATION

THURSDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY

with Catherine Lord

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Streams, puffs, and breaths of air become consonants and vowels, that form phonemes, that form words. And these spoken words make up phrases that can be timed and intoned in a way that makes meaning. This 'song', generally known as '**intonation**', **can lend to the most basic or insecure speaker of a language an impression of fluency or authority.**

Intonation patterns are anything but universal, but there are patterns that are well recognized among speakers of English as a vehicular. I want you to listen out for them today.

This here is interlinear representation, one of the many types of intonation notation. It analyses intonation through rhythm and pitch. The top line represents the highest pitch that you can reach with you voice. The bottom line the lowest pitch. These lines are absolutely relative to the person speaking. Every dot is a syllable and the larger dots a stressed syllable. In the majority of languages, every other syllable is stressed, in a regular rhythm. In other languages, like native varieties of English, syllables are stressed according to quite complex grammatical rules.

Here are three common patterns.

**The mid-level pattern: you stay in the middle pitch of your voice and sound a bit staccato.**

It is how you finish a statement. "We'll start again in half an hour."

**The rise-fall pattern: you go up a little and then you fall.** It results in more authoritative, argumentative sound. "It's true because I say so." With the rise-fall you are likely provoke some kind of response. "Two plus two equals five."

**The low-rise pattern: you start low and you go up.** "Do you?" The low-rise carries a subtext of disbelief. "Oh yeah?" But repetitious use of the low rise can result in something called 'uptalk'. It is a popular phenomenon gives you the impression that you don't believe your own words or that you need to seek permission to say what you say. "Is it, like, what you want to hear?"

**Listen out for these patterns today in other people's or your own speech.**

MID-LEVEL: STATEMENT OR HESITATION

RISE-FALL: ARGUMENT

LOW-RISE: SCEPTICISM

- Do you agree with these descriptions?
  - Are there other patterns do you, yourself, use?
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