

Boundary Intonation: Final, continuing, appeal

In speech, important information is carried in the speakers' intonation, encompassing fluctuations of pitch and other cues. While a discourse transcription can never capture a complete representation of the infinite variety of possible intonation contours, it can nonetheless provide a useful representation of at least the more critical intonational information, by distinguishing broad classes of contours that help to mark the boundaries of intonation units. In DT we distinguish three broad categories of boundary intonation, each of which primarily identify the end (as opposed to the beginning) of a given IU. Understanding these categories not only provides a richer, more informative transcription, it can also help you to identify an IU boundary when other cues are ambiguous.

The system of categories presented below seeks to identify in general terms one aspect of intonational function, that of marking *transitional continuity*. When a speaker arrives at the end of an IU, poised to continue – or not continue – on to the next, the intonation contour usually gives a fairly clear indication of whether the discourse business at hand will be continued, or has finished. This is the *transitional continuity*: the marking of the *degree of continuity* which occurs at the transition point between one intonation unit and the next. The scope of the continuity – the question of what is being continued or finished – is open-ended: a “final” contour may apply to the end of a sentence, the end of a turn, or the end of some other discourse unit. While it may be possible to make finer discriminations in transitional continuity within the broad class of contours covered by each transitional continuity symbol, the distinctions between “final,” “continuing,” and “appeal,” at least, seem to be basic.

While the intonation contour classes in this set are defined in terms of their function, each category will be more or less consistently realized by a specific form: a specific acoustic contour, or set of contours, where each member of the set is determined by its context. The range of phonetic realizations for a given boundary intonation class will differ somewhat from one language to the next, which is one reason for using functionally based categories: they help to ensure that similar intonational functions will be written similarly across languages, facilitating comparison *even where acoustic realizations differ*. Observations in a number of other languages suggest that, remarkably, all languages are likely to make intonational distinctions between the transitional continuity classes presented in this level, though their acoustic realizations may vary.

The symbols used to represent boundary intonation are drawn from those employed in written punctuation. Although using commas and periods in ways that are reminiscent of their function in written language does make it easier to remember them, it also means that the transcriber must guard against slipping into habits of thought associated with written punctuation. In DT as presented here, the punctuation symbols *comma*, *period*, and *question mark* always represent intonation classes, and never grammatical or semantic structure per se.

Final boundary intonation

Period (.) at the end of an IU indicates a class of intonation contours whose transitional continuity is understood to be *final* in a given language. In other words, the intonation contour is such that *while it is being uttered, there is no indication that the speaker intends to continue speaking after the current IU*. For English and many other languages, this means primarily a fall to a low pitch at the end of an IU. It is important to recall that, since this symbol represents a prosodic category rather than a syntactic one, it can appear in places other than the end of a (normative) sentence, and conversely it need not appear at the end of every (normative) sentence.

(1) Final intonation

((SBCSAE 002: 306-306.85))

JAMIE; [A ma:n].

HAROLD; [A ma:n].

(2) Final intonation

((SBCSAE 002: 378.08:380.25))

JAMIE; They're terrible.

(3) Final intonation

((SBCSAE 002: 393.00-396.00))

JAMIE; We're gonna have babies crying.
 In the middle of the night.

Continuing boundary intonation

Comma (,) at the end of an IU indicates a class of intonation contours whose transitional continuity is regularly understood to be *continuing* in a given language. In other words, the intonation contour is such that *while it is being uttered, the speaker intends to continue speaking after the current IU*. The contour is often realized in English as a fall to mid-level pitch, but it may have other realizations as well, each of which presumably has slightly different pragmatic implications (e.g. a terminal pitch that remains level; a very slight rise in pitch at the end of the IU; a pitch that falls slightly but not low enough to be considered final).

In practice the comma represents a broad cover symbol for a variety of nonfinal contours (i.e., the set of contours that are neither final, appeal, or truncated), whose various members may be distinguished to some degree by their terminal pitch direction.

(4) Continuing intonation

((SBCSAE 002: 198.34-204.41))

JAMIE; So they tried on the men's clothes,
 and they had a very small selection of men's clothes,
 [(H)]
PETE; [Mhm],
JAMIE; they try on these really great pants,
 and they look really good .. in them.

(5) Continuing intonation

((SBCSAE 006: 21.31-34.55))

ALINA; (H) Well,
 (0.3)
 cause well,
 he --
 he was a cocaine addict.
 So he's talking about,
 he --
 you know he's,
 yeah man,
 he's gonna show us,
 you know,
 how X not X,
 to protect your car,
 not to get it,
 you know,
 ripped off man.
 Cause,
 you know,
 I --
 yeah,

I was into it,
uh let me show you how easy it was.
(H) He's actually pretty intelligent.

Appeal boundary intonation

Question mark (?) at the end of an IU indicates a class of intonation contours whose transitional continuity is regularly understood to be an *appeal* in a given language. For English, this is generally realized by a marked high rise in pitch at the end of the IU. “Appeal” here refers to when a speaker, in producing an utterance, overtly seeks a validating response from a listener. The most common type of appeal in this sense is a yes-no question, but not all yes-no questions are said with the appeal contour, and in such cases the question should not be written with a question mark. Conversely, the appeal contour may be used in contexts other than a yes-no question, and in such cases the question mark should be used. For example, a speaker may check to see if listeners remember a particular person’s name by uttering that name with an appeal contour (high rising pitch), where the response sought from this appeal may be nothing more than a slight nod of recognition. In such cases, the name will be written with a question mark following it.

(6) Appeal for recognition of a name

((SBCSAE 006: 02.50-04.10))

ALINA; remember Tyke?
 Lived next door to Mom?

It is important to emphasize that the question mark is NOT used for a grammatical question uttered with intonations other than the appeal contour, such as declarative contours. Thus there will be grammatical questions in your transcription (including yes-no questions) that are not written with the question mark, and conversely the question mark will appear in units lacking the morphosyntactic structure of a question.

In addition, the question mark can appear followed by a period or a comma to indicate whether the IU with the appeal contour is considered to be final or continuing, respectively.

(7) Appeal intonation.

((SBCSAE 002: 454.43-456.15))

JAMIE; Oba Oba,
 oh the Brazilian troupe that was here?,
 dancing?.

(8) Appeal intonation.

((SBCSAE 006:549.83-551.53))

ALINA; That’s part of the reason they’re not burning their bridges,
 right?.

(9) Morphosyntactic question with appeal intonation.

((SBCSAE 002: 304.50-306.85))

MILES; Does she have a what?
JAMIE; [A ma:n].
HAROLD; [A ma:n].

(10) Morphosyntactic question with final intonation.

((SBCSAE 002: 328.92-329.92))

PETE; How many of them are there.