

Lecture 7

Tones

- Tones and tone languages
- Tones and functions of tones in English
- Tone units

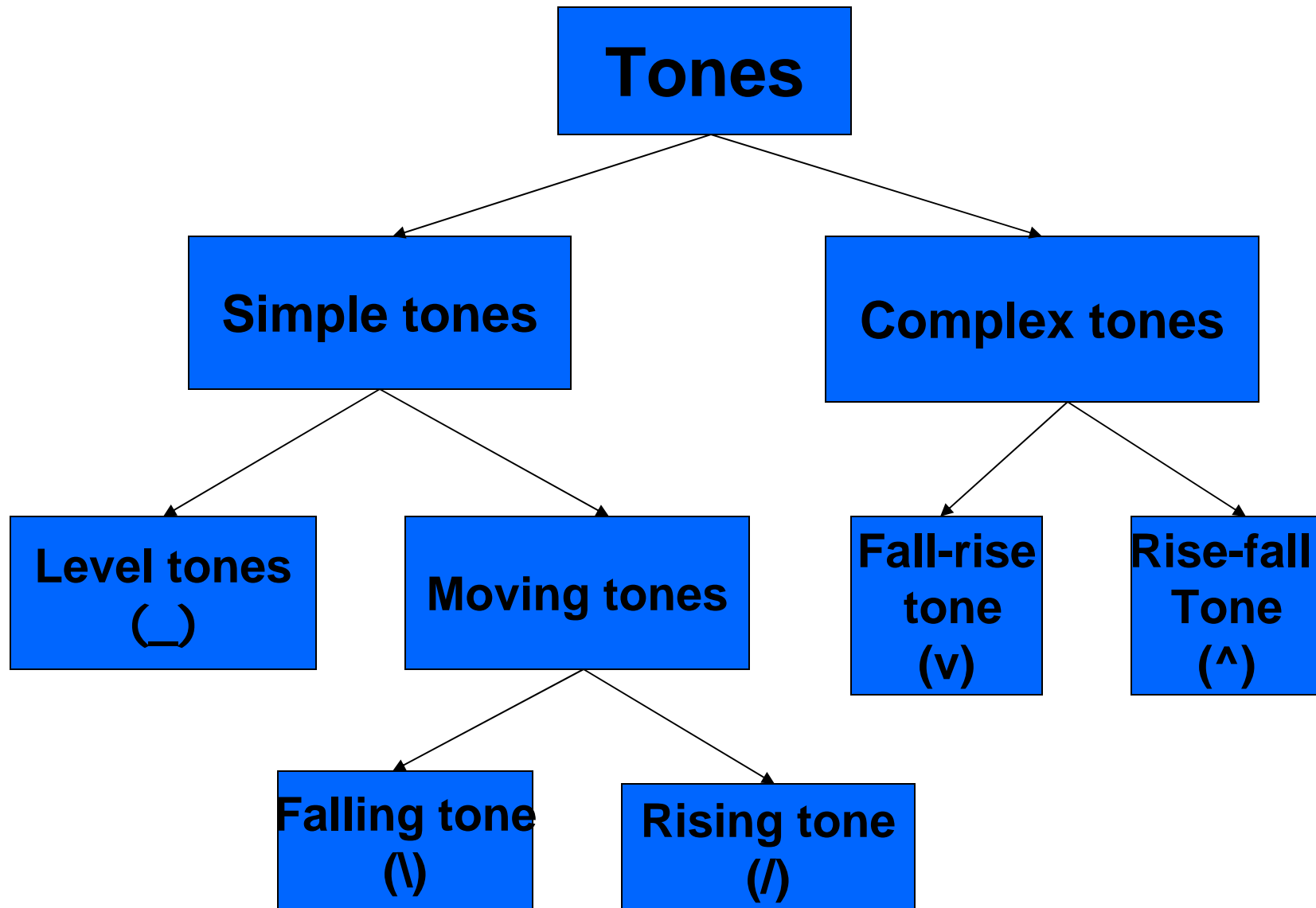
Tones and tone languages

- When we speak, we constantly vary the pitch of our voice. Tone is the overall behaviour of pitch in a syllable.
- Although in English, a word such as 'yes' and 'no' can be spoken with different tones, no English speakers would say that the meaning of the word is different with different tones.
- English is one of those languages that do not use tone to distinguish the meanings of words, though tones or pitch differences are used for other purposes. Such languages are called intonation languages.

Tone languages

- A tone language is one in which the tone can determine the meaning of a word and a change from one tone to another can completely change the meaning of a word. In other words, substituting one distinctive tone for another on a particular word can cause a change in lexical meaning of that word.
- E.g. Vietnamese, Chinese

Tones



Description of tones

- ***The level tone*** is one in which the pitch remains at a constant level
- ***The falling tone*** is one which descends from a higher to a lower pitch
- ***The rising tone*** is a movement from a lower pitch to a higher one
- ***The fall-rise tone*** is one in which the pitch falls and then rises
- ***The rise-fall tone*** is one in which the pitch rises and then falls

Functions of English tones

1. *The level tone.*

- This tone almost always conveys a feeling of saying something routine, uninteresting or boring. E.g.
- A teacher's calling the names of the students from a register and the students respond the teacher with 'Yes'.
- Respondents answer surveys or questionnaires.

2. *The falling tone.*

- This tone is usually regarded as more or less neutral. It is said to give an impression of 'finality'.
- If someone is asked a question and replies 'yes' or 'no' with a falling tone, it will be understood that the question is now answered and there is nothing more to be said.
- How many dogs have you got? Two
- What was the weather like? Wet
- Have you finished? Yes

3. *The rising tone*

- This tone conveys an impression that something more is to follow or an invitation to continue.
- Excuse me. Yes?
- Have you talked to her? Yes? No?
- Hello, is that John? Yes?
- First you type in your user name. Yes?
Then you type in your password Yes?
and finally click “Log in”

4. *The fall-rise*

- This tone is usually used to show 'limited agreement' or response with reservations.
- Isn't he handsome?
Yes, (but he is not very manly)
- She looks beautiful
Yes, (thanks to her make-up)
- It's not very difficult, is it?
No, (but remember that I'm just a beginner)

5. *The rise-fall*

- This tone is used to convey rather strong feelings of approval, disapproval or surprise.
- Isn't he intelligent? Yes.
- Have you ever heard such a story? No.
- She has won the contest. Great.