

Phonetics and phonology: 2. Prosody (revision) Part II: Intonation

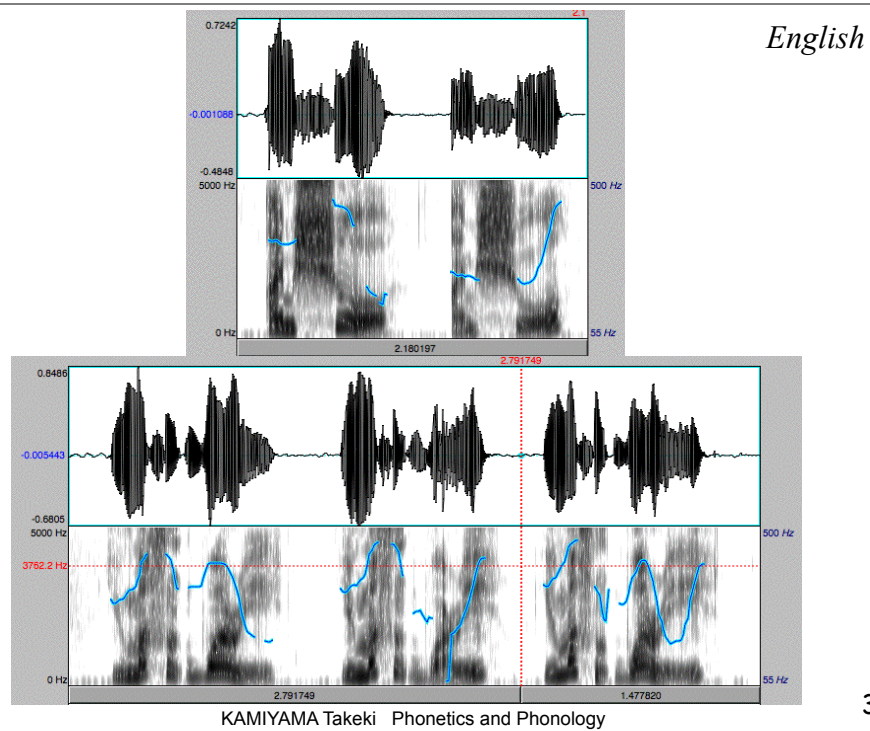
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Intonation?

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Functions of intonation

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Functions of intonation

- Syntactic function: segmentation
- Pragmatic function: old and new information, focus, contrast, politeness, turn taking
- Modality: question/answer
- Expressive functions:
 - attitudes (controlled)
 - emotions (spontaneous)

Components of intonation

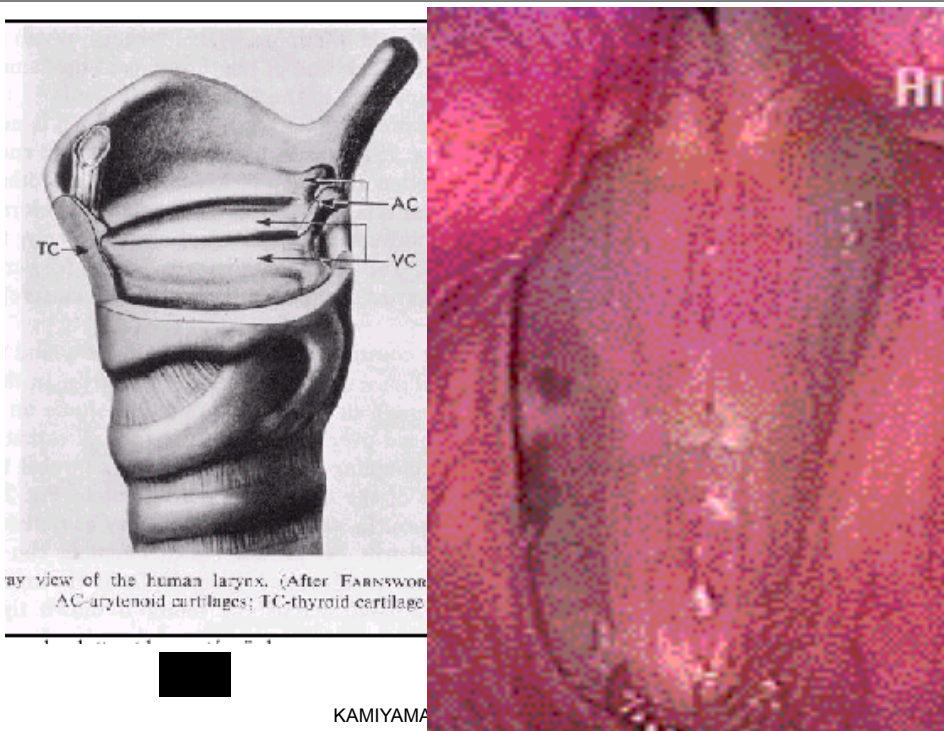
- Tones: rise, fall, fall-rise, rise-fall, level ...
- Tonicity: placement of the nucleus (nuclear tone)
- Tonality: how to segment into intonation phrases?

1. Tones in monosyllabic utterances

Utterance: a continuous piece of speech beginning and ending with a clear pause

Tones: articulatory characteristics

- The vocal folds may vibrate faster or slower.
- When the vocal folds are tense, they vibrate fast (heard as a high pitch).
- When the vocal folds are lax, they vibrate slowly (heard as a low pitch).



Peter Ladefoged
Vowels and Consonants

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Photographs of the vocal folds producing a sound at three different pitches

(compare figure 2.16)



120 Hz 160 Hz 200 Hz

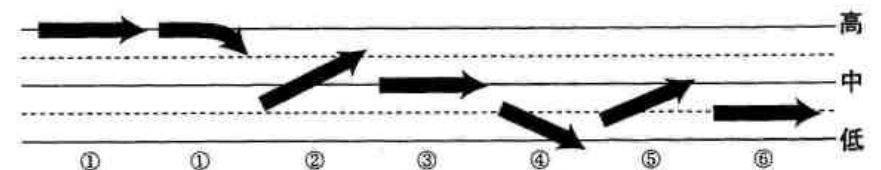
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Tones

- English is not a tone language (such as Cantonese: difference of tone leads to totally different words with different dictionary meanings).

Cantonese: a tone language

- Six tons associés à chaque syllabe



“poésie” “histoire” “essayer” “temps” “ville” “fait”

詩 史 試 時 市 事

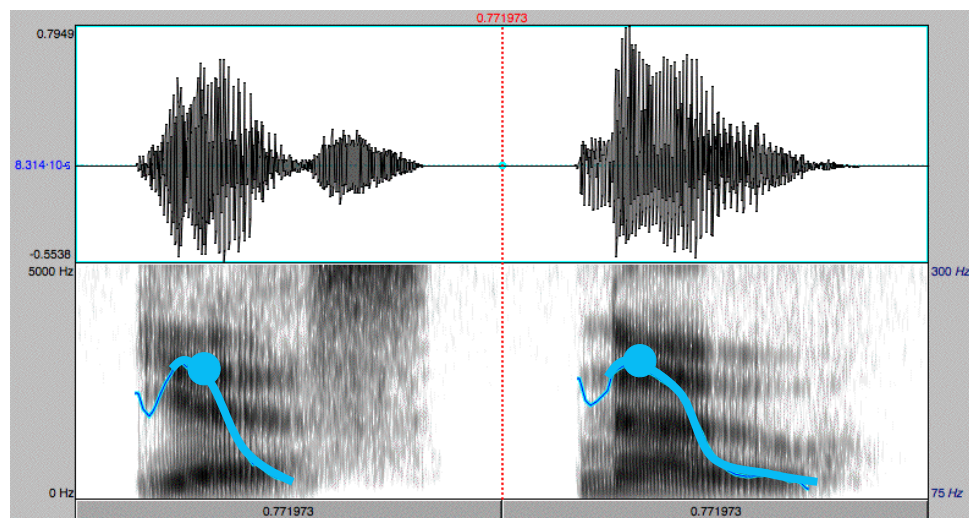
Tones

- English is not a tone language (such as Cantonese: difference of tone leads to totally different words).
- But utterances can be said with different tones, with different pragmatic meanings (modality, politeness, attitudes, ...).

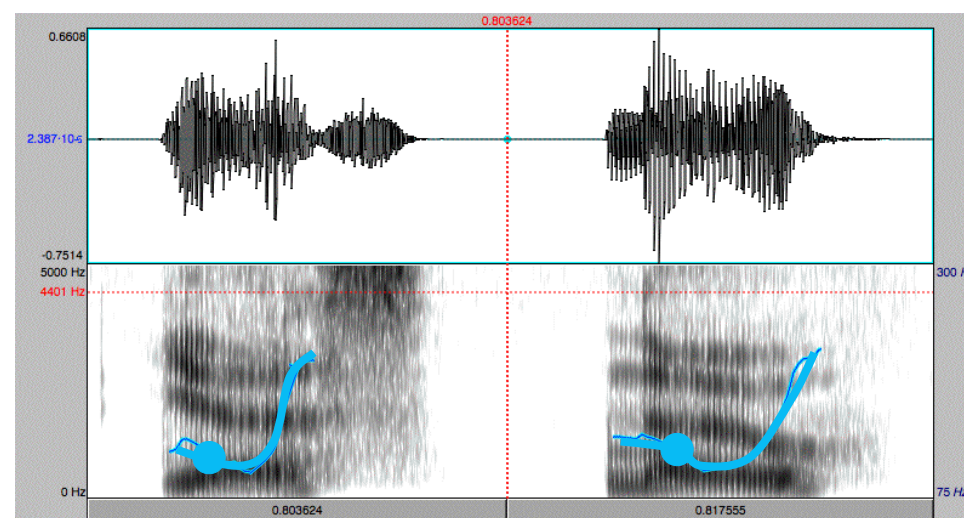
Tones in monosyllabic utterances

- The utterance “yes”, “no” can be said with different tones.
- Fall: \ yes \ no
- Rise: / yes / no
- Fall-rise: v yes v no
- Rise-fall: ^ yes ^ no
- Level: _ yes _ no

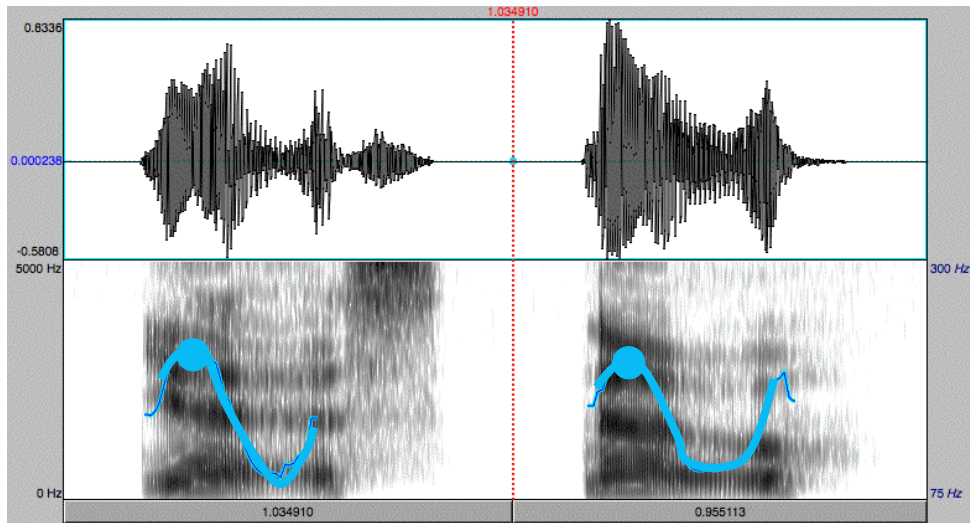
Fall



Rise



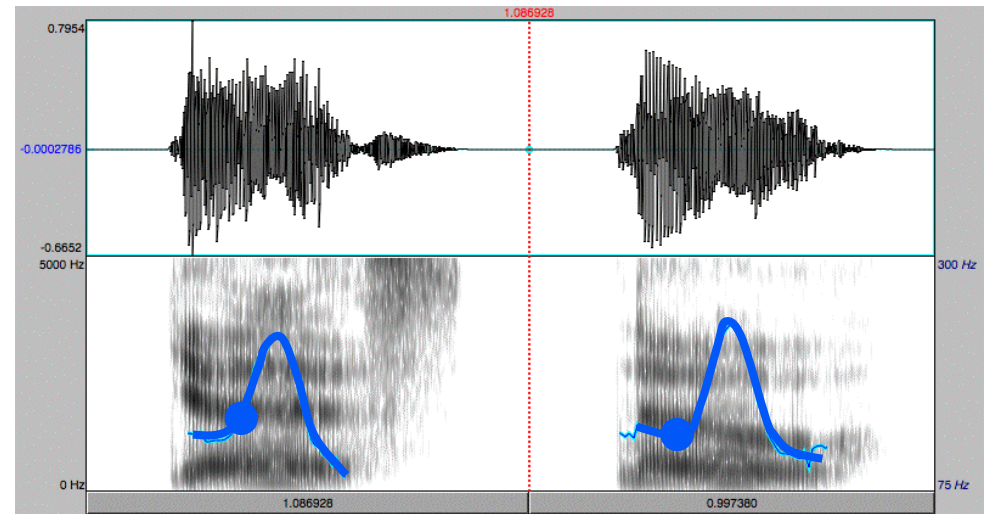
Fall-rise



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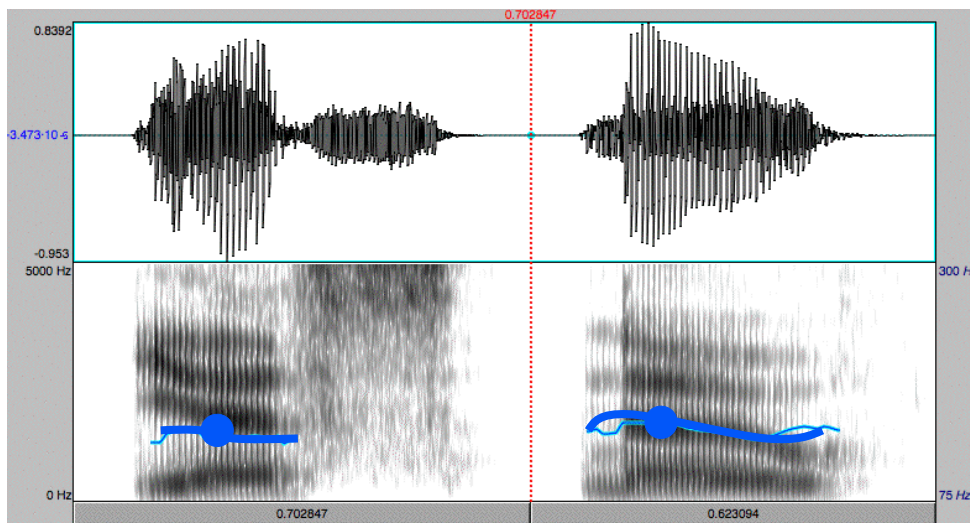
Rise-fall



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Level



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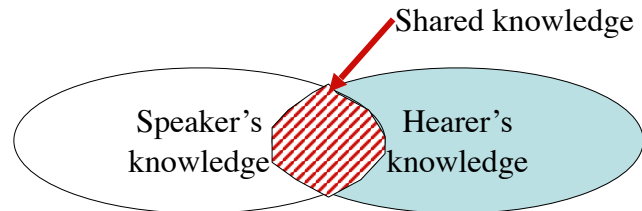
2. Some basic meanings of tones

With monosyllabic tone units “yes” and “no”

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Fall

- Fall: _yes _no
- Basic meaning of fall: ‘major information’ or ‘primary information’.



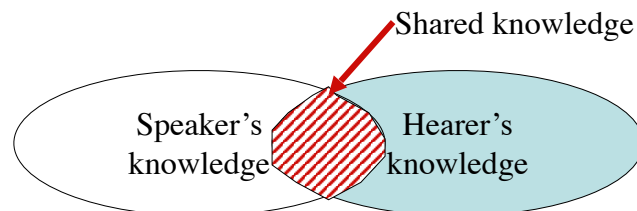
- The speaker declares that the proposition is now part of the shared knowledge.

Fall

- Fall: _yes _no
- The question is now answered and there is nothing more to be said.
- The fall could be said to give an impression of “finality”.

Rise

- Rise: /_yes /_no
- 1. ‘incomplete information’, ‘minor information’, ‘secondary information’.



- 2. The speaker leaves it to the hearer to decide whether the proposition is part of the shared knowledge.

Rise

- Rise: /_yes /_no
- This tone conveys an impression that something more is to follow:
- A (wishing to attract B's attention): Excuse me.
- B: /_yes
(B's reply is, perhaps, equivalent to ‘what do you want?’)
- A: Do you know John Smith?
- B: /_yes / _yes

Rise

- A: Do you know John Smith?
- B: yes
- > B would invite A to continue with what she intends to say about John Smith after establishing that B knows him.

- A: Do you know John Smith?
- B: yes
- > yes would give a feeling of “finality”, of “end of conversation”; if A *did* have something to say about John Smith, the response with a fall would make it difficult for A to continue.

Rise

- A: Have you seen Ann?
- B: no
- > B implies quite clearly that he has no interest in continuing with that topic of conversation.

- A: Have you seen Ann?
- B: no
- > The rising no would be an invitation to A to explain why she is looking for Ann, or why she does not know where she is.

Rise

- A question that implies readiness to present some new information:
- A: Do you know what the longest balloon flight was?
- B: no
- > B is inviting A to tell him.

- A: Do you know what the longest balloon flight was?
- B: no
- > B does not know and is not expecting to be told.

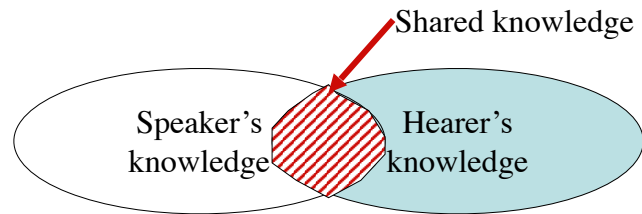
Rise

- Similar “invitations to continue” can be found in someone’s response to a series of instructions or directions:
- A: You start off on the ring road...
- B: yes
- A: turn left at the first roundabout...
- B: yes
- A: and ours is the third house on the left.

- Whatever B replies to this last utterance of A, it would be most unlikely to be yes again, since A has clearly finished her instructions and it would be pointless to “prompt” her to continue.

Fall-rise

- Fall-rise: yes no
- 1. ‘limited agreement’, ‘response with reservations’ (implication: “yes, but ...”).



- 2. The speaker reminds the hearer that the proposition is already part of the shared knowledge.

Fall-rise

- Fall-rise: yes no
- ‘limited agreement’, ‘response with reservations’ (implication: “yes, but ...”).
- A: I’ve heard that it’s a good school.
- B: yes
- B would not completely agree with what A said, and A would probably expect B to go on to explain *why* he was reluctant to agree.

Fall-rise

- Fall-rise: yes no
- ‘limited agreement’, ‘response with reservations’ (implication: “yes, but ...”).
- A: It’s not really an expensive record, is it?
- B: no
- no indicates that he would not completely agree with A.

Fall-rise

- Fall-rise: yes no
- Fall-rise in such contexts almost always indicates both:
 - something “given” or “conceded”and at the same time
 - some “reservation” or “hesitation”.

Rise-fall

- Rise-fall: [^]yes [^]no
- Rise-fall is used to convey strong feelings of approval, disapproval or surprise.
- A: You wouldn't do an awful thing like that, would you?
- B: [^]no
- What if B replies: ^vno ?

Rise-fall

- Rise-fall: [^]yes [^]no
- Rise-fall is used to convey strong feelings of approval, disapproval or surprise.
- A: Isn't the view lovely!
- B: [^]yes
- A: I think you said it was the best so far.
- B: [^]yes

Level

- Level: ⁻yes ⁻no
- Level tone conveys (on single-syllable utterances) a feeling of saying something routine, uninteresting or boring.
- A teacher calling the names of pupils from a register often do so using a level tone on each name.
- The pupils would be likely to respond with ⁻yes when their name was called.

Level

- Level: ⁻yes ⁻no
- Similarly, if one is being asked a series of routine questions for some purpose such as applying for an insurance policy, one might reply to each question of a series like:
- Have you ever been in prison? - ⁻no
- Do you suffer from any serious illness? - ⁻no
- Is your eyesight defective? - ⁻no
etc.

Tones

- We have looked at some basic meanings of tones in monosyllabic utterances.
- Each tone may have many more meanings.
- The examples studied here do not show the only possible choices of tone.