Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Dato' Razali Ismail

Stress and Intonation in Spoken English

A PowerPoint Lesson plan for IPG students

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Contents
Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 2
Stress and Intonation in Spoken English................................................................................................ 2
  Tonic Syllable........................................................................................................................................ 2
  Emphatic Stress ..................................................................................................................................... 2
  Contrastive Stress ............................................................................................................................... 3
  New Information Stress ......................................................................................................................... 3
Intonation ............................................................................................................................................... 4
Tonal Patterns ......................................................................................................................................... 4
Describing Tone...................................................................................................................................... 6
Pitch ....................................................................................................................................................... 6
Introduction
These are the PowerPoint notes for a lesson on Stress and Intonation in English.

Stress and Intonation in Spoken English

In normal speech, certain types of words are stressed and others are not. Content words are stressed, Function words are not stressed.

Tonic Syllable
The main stress and intonation in a sentence lands on the peak or tonic syllable. Normally this is right at the end of the sentence – utterance final.

Which syllable in each of these sentences is the tonic syllable – in NORMAL speech?

Emphatic Stress
When something needs to be emphasised, the tonic syllable (carrying the stress and intonation) moves to a new position.
This time, use emphatic stress to say each of these sentences.

- Fast automobiles make dangerous friends.
- Variety is the spice of life.
- Why don’t we catch a film tonight?
- Janet silently turned the page.
- I’ll make sure to give him a ring the next time I’m in town.

**Contrastive Stress**
Contrastive stress is of course a type of emphatic stress, making a correction to what has been said or implied.

Use contrastive stress when you say these sentences.

1. David stole the money, not Max.
2. I didn’t smell the money; the desk clerk smelt it.
3. I haven’t seen the film; David has.
4. Don’t blame the monkey; the spider taught it to do this.
5. We need a new toilet; the old one is broken.

(Sometimes there is more than one possible answer.)

**New Information Stress**
When new information is presented another type of emphatic stress can be heard, as in these examples.

In your group create some question and answer dialogues to demonstrate New Information Stress.
See how many different ways you can say each of these sentences using different stress patterns.

**Intonation**

Intonation is of course closely linked to stress with the tonal pattern occurring mostly on the stressed (tonic) syllable.

Intonation is the music side of language.

The simple word, ‘Hello’ is spoken with different intonation, depending on who we are speaking to.

When describing intonation scientifically, an intonation unit is defined by pauses rather than by punctuation and sentences necessarily.

**Tonal Patterns**

There are many patterns and many variations. Here are four of the main ones that have been described by linguists.
Stress and Intonation in Spoken English

A falling tone can indicate completion, finality, and that it is time for the other person to respond. (Sometimes when someone fails to use the falling tone, listeners are not sure whether they have finished or not.)

Try saying these examples with a falling tone. Remember the falling part happens on the tonic syllable.

Here are some more falling tone examples to try.

When someone is asking a question that they do not already know the answer to, they tend to use a rising tone.

High rise tone starts high and goes higher – it can really hurt your ears! It is an expression of surprise, asking the other person to clarify or repeat what they just said.
The fall-rise tone goes first down and then up. Besides being common as a regional dialect in some areas, there is a hint that the speaker does not mean exactly what they say – in fact possibly the opposite.

**Describing Tone**

There are a number of different ways to describe tone in written form – here is one commonly used form (because it can be easily created on a keyboard). Note the slashes //, remember that / is used for phonemes and [ ] for phones. The capital letters indicate the tonal syllable where the tonal pattern is applied. The underlined words are also stressed.

The teacher will read a few sentences. Try to write them down with the tone stress indicators just shown.

**Pitch**

With intonation there is a variation of pitch. However, everybody has their own normal pitch range. And some languages tend to be spoken at a higher or lower pitch than others.

In situations of extreme excitement most peoples voices raise in pitch.
Think of some things that you might say in an emotional situation with a high pitch.

We sometimes use a very low pitch when we are adding some information that may not be important.

Remember – there are no simple rules for intonation. But there are some general guidelines, and you need to be aware of it and it’s good if you can also describe it accurately.

Otherwise – practice! (Watch a LOT of movies in English!)

Try applying what you have learnt to the short dramas your teacher will give you.

Well done!