

# INTONATION AND DISCOURSE COHERENCE IN ENGLISH

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## Abstract

Intonation is known to be a fundamental aspect of human language. It influences not only the structure of sentences but also the coherence and connectivity of discourse. Despite its universal presence, the functions of intonation vary significantly across languages, making it a critical area of study in linguistics. This article explores the multifaceted roles of intonation, particularly its grammatical, relational, accentual, and discourse-related functions, and examines the prosodic markers that actualize these functions within discourse structures. By analyzing the relationship between prosodic components and the structural elements of discourse, this study aims to demonstrate the interdependence between the expression and content planes of discourse.

The importance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, bridging linguistic analysis with sociolinguistic and contextual factors to provide a comprehensive understanding of how intonation facilitates communication. The expected outcomes include identifying the structural-functional alignment between prosodic markers and discourse components, shedding light on how intonation contributes to coherence, emphasis, and meaning in both spoken and written discourse. This research underscores the critical role of intonation as a communicative tool, offering insights for further studies in linguistics, as well as language teaching, and discourse analysis.

**Key words:** education, interdisciplinary, intonation, discourse, sentence structure, coherence, cohesion

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intonation is universally acknowledged as a fundamental feature of human language. There is no language devoid of intonation or pitch variation during speech. However, intonation serves distinct functions across different languages. It is a misconception to regard intonation as merely a "cosmetic" or "decorative" element of speech. Rather, intonation plays a pivotal role as a communicative tool in the process of interaction. Its significance in a speech act lies in the interplay of its components and their functions, which become active and meaningful within the context of communication. Every variation in intonation conveys a specific communicative purpose, reflected in the speech. In other words, intonation is not simply an "addition" to verbal expression but an essential mechanism for ensuring accurate transmission of meaning.

In contemporary linguistics, the study of intonation can be categorized into two primary directions. The first focuses on the various functions of intonation within a specific language or through comparative studies across languages. The second explores the interdisciplinary relationships of intonation with other fields, such as music, medicine, and biology (Antipova, 1986:122).

From a linguistic standpoint, the concept of "intonation" is explained through two main approaches. The first approach defines intonation as changes in pitch during speech, such as rising and falling intonations, which are often equated with melody. This view tends to treat intonation as a single-component phenomenon, overlooking other elements like sentence stress, tempo, timbre, rhythm, and pauses.

The second approach adopts a broader perspective, defining intonation as a composite system comprising melody, sentence stress, tempo, timbre, rhythm, and pauses. This comprehensive view is supported by various foreign linguists, including L.R. Zinder, O. Dikushina, G.P. Torsuyev, V.A. Vasilyev, M.A. Sokolova, A.M. Antipova, Y.A. Dubovski, and others, as well as Azerbaijani linguists such as F.Veysalli, F. Aslanov, F. Zeynalov, S.B.Mustafayeva and others.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last decade, several important studies have been conducted on intonation and its role in discourse. E. Couper-Kuhlen (2015) investigated the prosodic functions of intonation in conversation, focusing on its role in discourse structure and rhythm ("Prosody in Conversation: A Methodological Framework for the Analysis of Intonation"). H. Gussenhoven (2017) explored the relationship between intonation and meaning, showing how intonation is used to highlight new information in discourse ("The Phonology of Tone and Intonation"). M.A.K.Halliday and M. Ismailov

(2016) examined how intonation is linked to the expression of social and emotional states. J.R. Searle and H.P. Grice (2018) analyzed how intonation shapes communicative intentions and speech acts. Finally, D. Patel (2021) explored how intonation conveys emotional expression through sound and its importance in social interactions ("Intonation and Emotion in Discourse").

Sahila Baghir Mustafayeva (2018:18) wrote her PhD thesis on experimental phonetic analysis of discourse intonation. Sahila Mustafayeva studied discourse from the perspective of intonation and noted that research conducted in English and Azerbaijani languages proves that discourse arises from the unity of linguistic and extralinguistic components in the act of communication. Therefore, discourse cannot be realized without communication. In addition, analyzing discourse, it is important to take a cognitive-discursive stance, along with anthropocentric parameters (intention, emotional state, social status, cultural background, attitude towards cognitive and communicative structures, etc.).

### 3. DISCUSSION

#### Functions of Intonation

The functions of intonation have been approached from multiple perspectives in modern linguistics. A.M. Antipova (1986:124) categorizes these functions as follows:

1. Communicative function
2. Emotional-modal function
3. Personal-social function
4. Aesthetic function
5. Rhythm-organizing function
6. Organizing function
7. Style-organizing function

The communicative function of intonation has been extensively examined by English and American phoneticians, such as H. Suit, D. Counz, L. Armstrong, A. Gimson, K. Paik, and D. Bolincher. The emotional-modal function involves the expression of emotional and modal meanings through intonation. This function emphasizes how sentences with identical syntactic structures can convey different emotional-modal nuances depending on the intonation pattern. This aspect has been comprehensively modeled in studies by English phoneticians O'Connor and G. Arnold (1967:72). The variety of intonation patterns in American English that express emotional-modal content has been elaborated by P. Roach (2009:31).

The personal-social function examines intonation in relation to local and social dialects. Here, prosodic features are used to identify the speaker's personality and sociolinguistic characteristics.

The aesthetic function of intonation relates to the art of oratory. It involves employing intonation and its prosodic elements to influence listeners. Historical figures like Cicero and Quintilian highlighted the importance of intonation in creating harmony, emotional impact, and aesthetic pleasure in speech. Features such as pitch range, voice quality, and variability in loudness play a critical role in engaging the audience and evoking emotional responses (Antipova, 1986:125).

The rhythm-organizing function concerns the rhythmic structuring of speech. Languages typically fall into one of two rhythm categories: syllabic rhythm or stressed rhythm.

- In syllabic rhythm languages (e.g., French, Spanish, Azerbaijani), syllables are pronounced at approximately equal intervals, irrespective of stress. Thus, the syllable serves as the rhythmic unit.
- In stressed rhythm languages (e.g., English, German, Russian), stressed syllables occur at regular intervals, with varying durations for stressed and unstressed syllables. English rhythm, for instance, is founded on the pronunciation of stressed syllables within consistent time frames.

The organizing function of intonation addresses the structuring of sentences and texts. While much research has focused on sentence-level organization, its role in discourse or text-level organization remains underexplored (Antipova, 1986:127).

The style-organizing function pertains to variations in intonation patterns across functional styles, including informational, academic, journalistic, oratorical, and conversational contexts.

Among these functions, the communicative function is widely regarded as the most fundamental. The meaning of an utterance is shaped not only by its grammatical structure, lexical content, and phonetic composition but also by the prosodic elements of intonation. Consequently, some linguists consolidate other functions under the communicative function, referring to it broadly as the "function of communication" (Veysalli & Tarasova, 2007:149).

#### 4. The Role of Intonation in Text-Discourse Relations

In discussing text-discourse relations, D. Crystal (1969:116) observes that traditional linguistic analysis has predominantly focused on sentence construction. However, recent years have witnessed a growing interest in analyzing sentences in sequential and interconnected orders. In this context, two primary approaches have emerged: text analysis and discourse analysis. Text analysis is concerned with the structure of written language, while discourse

analysis focuses on the structure of natural spoken language. Discourse manifests as conversations, interviews, commentaries, and speeches, whereas text takes the form of essays, notes, signposts, and chapters. Despite these distinctions, the boundary between text and discourse remains blurred. Some linguists refer to "spoken" and "written" discourse, while others differentiate between "spoken" and "written" texts.

Recent advancements in linguistics have led to the establishment of text linguistics as an independent field. This development has shifted the study of intonation from the sentence level to the text-discourse level, resulting in the identification of a new function of intonation. Consequently, the "discourse" function of intonation is frequently highlighted in contemporary linguistic research.

Changes in prosodic parameters of intonation at both the sentence and text-discourse levels significantly impact the semantic plane. For example:

- a) /If 'Mike leaves / 'let me' know at once//.
- b) /If Mike, leaves / 'let me' know at, once//.

In the first example (a), the intonation pattern, characterized by a High Fall followed by a Rise, suggests that the arrival of several individuals is anticipated, but the speaker is particularly focused on Mike's actions. In contrast, the second example (b), marked by a Head and Low Rise tone, indicates that only Mike's actions are relevant.

The grammatical function of intonation operates in two primary ways:

1. Differentiating syntactic relations and sentence components.
2. Resolving ambiguities within sentences.

The placement of stress within a sentence is influenced by factors such as semantic load, syntactic function, and situational context. For instance:

- 'Children 'turn the' light, on (Subject).
- ,Children, 'turn the 'light on (Address).
- 'Turn the 'light, on, children (Address, unstressed).
- 'Turn the 'light on ,children (Subject, stressed) (O'Connor & Arnold, 1967:73).

Dividing a sentence into intonation groups further clarifies syntactic relationships between words. For example:

- a) 'Tom, thinks | his brother is' good at, playing the guitar.
- b) ,Tom thinks his brother | is' good at, playing the guitar

Similarly, differences in intonation can alter syntactic roles:

- a) The book | 'on the ,shelf | is' quite, old (Adverb of place).
- b) The 'book' on the ,shelf | is' quite, old (Attribute) (O'Connor & Arnold, 1967:77).

Additionally, the comparison of static and kinetic tones within sentences demonstrates how intonation affects syntactic and semantic roles:

- a) 'Laughing Sarah | 'brought the, cake (Attribute).
- b) ,Laughing | 'Sarah 'brought the, cake (Adverb of manner).

In the first example, "Laughing Sarah" functions as an attribute, describing Sarah. In the second, the intonation-shift causes "Laughing" to act as an adverb of manner, explaining how Sarah brought the cake.

Similarly:

- a) 'Please, listen, Professor Smith (Address).
- b) 'Please 'listen Professor, Smith (Object).

In the first case, "Professor Smith" is the addressee, the person being spoken to. In the second, "Professor Smith" becomes the object, the person being listened to.

Sentence stress closely interacts with the melodic component of intonation, serving as a guide to melody. Changes in sentence stress inevitably alter the placement of the nucleus tone, as shown in the following examples:

- a) These 'students are studying for the ,final exams.
- b) These s'tudents are studying for the ,final ,exams.

These examples highlight the interplay between prosodic parameters and syntactic relationships, illustrating how intonation governs the organization of meaning within sentences and discourse.

## 5. The Role and Coherence of Intonation in Text-Discourse Relations

Discourse, whether spoken or written, incorporates prosodic and intonation tools as integral components. V. Cheyff conceptualizes discourse structure as an intonation unit, with punctuation in written discourse serving as an analogue to intonation in speech. These tools facilitate coherence, signal "new" and "old" information, enhance syntactic structure, reveal semantic relationships, and reflect the cultural identity of discourse participants.

Linguistic units operate at various levels, with phonemes, morphemes, and lexemes defined as lower-level units. However, determining higher-level units, such as those in discourse, presents challenges due to the complexity of larger syntactic structures. F. Danes suggests distinguishing the structural level of discourse within syntax as separate from levels such as word combinations and sentences (Mammadov, 2007:42).

Textual coherence encompasses categories like expression, temporal structure, and internal connectivity. T. Givón identifies several types of coherence—referential, temporal, spatial, aspectual, and modal—emphasizing the cognitive

interpretation of coherence. Referential coherence, for example, includes retrospective coherence (relating to previously established referents) and prospective coherence (focusing on indefinite referents) (Mammadov, 2007:43). S. Ford highlights the significant role of adverbial subordinate clauses in shaping discourse structure (Mammadov, 2001:49). Furthermore, coherence is rarely achieved through isolated meaning relations; instead, multiple meaning connections interact dynamically within a discourse.

The linguistic means employed to ensure coherence are influenced by deep linguistic processes and sociolinguistic factors. These factors include the conventions of functional styles and their specific requirements, which dictate the selection of appropriate linguistic units. As discussed, coherence relies on two fundamental principles: cohesion and coherence.

Some linguists define cohesion as the mechanisms established through formal elements such as connectors, articles, anaphora, cataphora, substitution, ellipsis, word order, and inversion, which link sentences and their components. Coherence, in contrast, does not refer to these formal mechanisms but rather to the semantic relationships and the process of inference.

Cohesion and coherence are regarded as critical standards for the analysis of texts. These concepts form the foundational framework for examining textual structure and semantics. As noted earlier, cohesion and coherence are subsumed under the broader term "relatedness." According to N. Enkvist, relatedness is conceptualized as a cognitive event associated with mental processes in relation to a text. Cohesion pertains to the formal relationships between sentences, while coherence reflects the semantic interconnectedness within the text.

## 6. Formal Relationships in Text Structure and the Ensuring of Cohesion

Formal relationships act as indicators of semantic connections between textual components. The semantic structure of a text is constructed from logical relationships that contribute to the context in which these components function. These relationships and their semantic parameters are pivotal in text linguistics. In discourse analysis, understanding the relationship between segmental units is a key area of study. This relationship is influenced by various factors, including the selection of linguistic tools, sociolinguistic considerations, and the specific characteristics of functional styles. Linguistic tools within the general structure and content of discourse are grounded in two primary factors: cohesion and coherence. While cohesion is achieved through formal elements such as connectors, articles, anaphora, cataphora, and ellipsis, coherence refers to the underlying semantic relationships.

Different approaches to text cohesion have been proposed. T. Nikolayeva (1978:6) identifies three primary tools for text creation:

1. Intonation,
2. Word order,
3. Explicit segment markers, such as pronouns, connectors, and articles. Similarly, I.R. Galperin (2007:73) includes formal-grammatical linking tools, connectors, repetitions, deictic elements, retrospection, and prospection, as well as anaphora and cataphora, in the inventory of tools for text creation. J. Tyler (2012:26) provides a comprehensive categorization of formal linking tools, dividing them into six groups:

1. Phonetic repetition, including stylistic devices like alliteration and assonance,
2. Morphological repetition, involving repeated use of gender, tense, and case markers,
3. Lexical repetition, encompassing full and partial repetition of words or phrases,
4. Syntactic repetition, involving repeated sentence structures,
5. Lexical-grammatical tools, such as conjunctions, prepositions, and determiners,
6. Deixis elements, including pronouns, articles, and other referencing tools.

S.B. Mustafayeva highlights the usage of intonation patterns, their usage of frequency in speech and the role of context in corpus linguistics (2025: 739).

## 7. Structural and Compositional Parallels in Text and Discourse

Despite structural and compositional similarities - both text and discourse follow a tripartite structure of beginning, middle, and end - their expression varies. Discourse is more characteristic of spoken language due to its reliance on social, contextual, and situational parameters.

In discourse, the opening phase often involves greetings, farewells, small talk, or observations about the weather. For example:

- Good morning, Mrs. Green, how have you been?
- Oh, quite well, thank you. And you, how are you doing?
- Not too bad, thanks. Are you enjoying the weather today?
- Yes, it's lovely, isn't it? I've been spending a lot of time outside.
- That's great to hear. So, how's your family?
- They're doing well, thank you. The kids are busy with school.
- I'm glad to hear that. How's work going for you?
- Oh, it's been a bit hectic, to be honest. Lots of projects piling up.

- I understand. I hope things settle down soon.
- Yes, I hope so too. Let's keep our fingers crossed!

The middle phase elaborates on the main content introduced in the opening phase. This phase conveys the most critical information, concretizing the abstract ideas introduced earlier.

The final phase serves a dual purpose. On one hand, it clarifies the transmitted information, and on the other, it provides an abstract characterization of the content. This phase completes the structural and semantic trajectory of the text or discourse.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the relationships between the components of discourse structure, the functions of intonation, and the prosodic markers that actualize these functions demonstrates that each component of discourse structure is correlated with prosodic elements in the expression plane. These meaningful prosodic markers serve as carriers of specific types of information - linguistic, attentional, and intentional. They transform into prosodic correlations within the discourse structure, thereby encoding and representing information in the content plane.

Consequently, it can be concluded that the functions of intonation - grammatical, relational, accentual, and discourse-related - and the prosodic components that realize these functions in the expression plane exhibit a structural-functional alignment with the components of discourse structure in the content plane. This indicates that, at the perceptual level, there exists a clear interdependence and correlation between the prosodic components of intonation and the elements of discourse structure across both content and expression planes.

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