

**TEACHING TONES TO ESL/EFL LEARNERS: MUSIC AND CARTOONS AS INSTRUMENTS****Dr. Surya Bhan**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Whenever English is taught, the teaching of acceptable pronunciation becomes an essential part of the curriculum. Pronunciation comprises, besides the articulation of vowel and consonant sounds, the enunciation of right intonation patterns too. Sentence stress and tones have to be rightly highlighted. In this context, this paper recommends cartoons and music as teaching techniques to raise the learner's awareness of different tones and the attitudinal meanings associated with them.*

*Keywords: intonation, tone, pitch, music, tetra chord, cartoon strips.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Intonation is an integral part of any language and has a major communicative function. Hence, it forms an essential part of the teaching of a second or foreign language. It adds a great deal of additional information including the speaker's attitude, to the verbal structure. If the intonation pattern of one language is used while speaking another language, it may convey an unintended and even wrong message. In this context, I find both music and cartoons very helpful in teaching tones and their attitudinal nuances, especially to students with intermediate proficiency. I use music to raise my learners' awareness of the tones first, and then, with cartoons, I familiarize them with the attitudinal function of intonation.

Many phoneticians refer to intonation as melody in speech (O'Connor and Arnold: 1973, Wells: 2006). Halliday considers it to be a network of three choices viz. tonality, tonicity and tone (1967). We convey our thoughts in chunks of speech and these meaningful groups of words are called tone groups. Dividing a long utterance into tone groups is tonality. In each tone group, there is usually one word, which is important for conveying the message. The accented syllable of the word, which has to be highlighted, is the tonic syllable, and placing it correctly in a tone group is tonicity.

**Eg:** I'm leaving for *America* (the second syllable in America is highlighted)

Having located the tonic syllable, a pitch movement has to be initiated on that particular syllable. Tone refers to the choice of tone to be used – either a falling tone, a rising tone or a combination of the two tones.

**Eg:** I'm leaving for A<sup>o</sup>merica (a statement with a falling tone)

Out of the network given by Halliday, teaching tonality and tonicity do not pose as much of a problem as does the teaching of tones. In this context, this paper deals with teaching tones. The concept of tone is the closest to music or melody that these phoneticians talk about. The tone is an essential ingredient of a spoken language. Tench puts it succinctly when he observes that often what matters more is how people say something rather than what they say (Tench, 1996).

**The Techniques**

To draw the attention of the students to the concept of pitch, I asked them, if they had seen **Robot** (an Indian movie) and encouraged them to compare the robot's speech to human speech. This highlighted the fact that the feature of rise and fall in pitch is an essential part of human speech. To reiterate the significance of intonation, I read two sets of interviews between an employer and a candidate using the same dialogue. In one set, I used the right tones to convey enthusiasm, eagerness and competence. On the other, the tones that gave an impression of the interviewee being dull, lackadaisical and uninterested. Here is the example:

**Interview 1**

Interviewer- Would you like to join our team?

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Anita- Oh \yes. I would be \delighted. Thanks for giving me this \privilege.

(a high fall conveys enthusiasm, eagerness and gratitude).

**Interview 2**

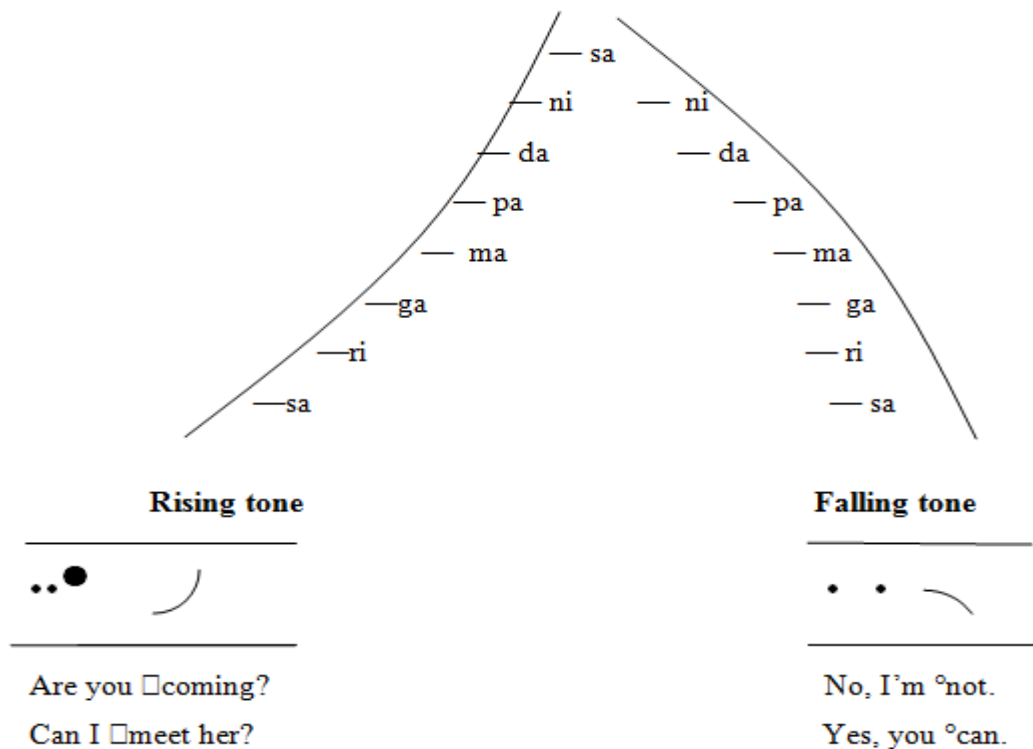
Interviewer - Would you like to join our team?

Reema- Oh °yes Sir. I would be °delighted. Thanks for giving ne his °privilege.

(A low fall conveys a very lackluster response and a routine “thank you” without any warmth).

Then, the students were asked to guess as to whether Anita would be favored or Reema. This way the young students were made to realize how the tones make a difference..

Pitch is generally associated with music. Many phoneticians have used the keys in a piano to demonstrate it. For our Indian students, it was very effective when the teacher demonstrated tone by singing *sa, re, ga, ma, pa, da, ni, sa*, starting from low pitch and going through one octave to the higher pitch. This was related to the rising tone and alternately the teacher uttered a few sentences using the rising tone. In the same way, starting from a higher *sa*, the teacher went down by one-octave *sa, ni, da, pa, ma, ga, re, sa*. By singing thus, the teacher could connect the tone and sentences spoken in the falling tone. If given graphically it would be as follows: (For other non-native speakers *do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do* can be used).

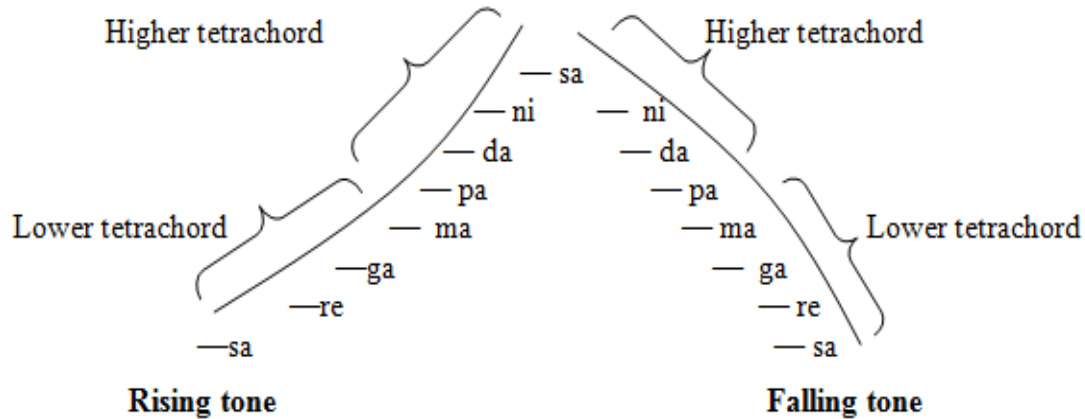


The teacher may also sing some jingles or songs to illustrate different tones.

Apart from being able to effectively perceive the rising and falling tones, this method is a viable one for students to further differentiate between the low rise and low fall and high-rise and high fall. There are a lot of attitudinal nuances associated with the degree of fall or rise. For example, if it is a low fall, it denotes being disinterested, resigned or bored etc. if it is a high fall it signifies indignation, a strong command etc. Students must be able to distinguish between the high and the low fall or rise. In this context, the same series of *sa* to *sa* can be made use of.

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In the series of notes from **sa** to **sa**(one octave), there are four notes at a lower pitch and four at a higher pitch. The notes in the lower pitch are called the lower tetrachord and the notes in the higher pitch are called the higher tetrachord.



As can be seen from the representation given above, a low rise and low fall are in the range of the lower tetrachord and a high-rise and high fall are in the range of a higher tetrachord. In this way the concept of low and high tones can be conveyed to the students.

So far, I have discussed the form of intonation i.e. how it is manifested in speech. In the following section, I will discuss the linguistic application of intonation with the focus on attitude. There are quite a few functions, but three important functions are discussed here- the accentual, grammatical, and attitudinal functions. The accentual function refers to highlighting a particular word in a tone group, to draw the listeners' attention. The grammatical function enables the listener to recognize grammatical structures. Intonation reveals a person's personality, psychological state etc and this is the attitudinal function.

The usual practice is to take up each tone and list the different attitudes that each tone conveys as follows:

**Eg:** Low-fall – It sounds detached, calm, impatient, unmoved, resigned and unconcerned.

°No/°today (resigned)

°Tragic (detached and unmoved)

It's becoming too °much. (Impatient)

°Morning (routine greeting)

This seems very monotonous. Instead, if comic strips are used, learning will be made interesting. Sometimes the teacher might face some difficulty in showing different attitudes through voice or expression. It is at this juncture that the teacher can make use of cartoons with varied expressions and dialogues to suit the context and thus relate the tone to the picture and the dialogue. This approach is not only interesting but also drives the point home. Given here are a few such cartoon strips. The tones conveyed are given in the second part of each dialogue:

**Falling tone sounds detached and unmoved.**



**Wife** : I heard Vera eloped.

**Husband:** °Tragic.

**Tone (low-fall) conveying Impatience**



**Wife** : I am dog tired after a hectic day at office.

Why don't you cook?



**Husband:** You are making me cook almost every other day. It's becoming too °much.

**Tone (high-rise) conveying shock and horror**



**Ben** : Last night I had a very eerie feeling when I saw some apparition near my bed.



**Rita:** You mean you (actually saw a ghost?

In sum, intonation plays a significant role in conveying a message because it gives additional information. Portraying a tone through a picture makes a learner retain in memory the emotion captured in the picture and, thus relate it to the tone used.

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