9 Stress, rhythm and intonation

A Warm-up

1 Work in pairs. Do the activity and discuss what it demonstrates.

Imagine you are in a bar or café, and you've both just finished a drink, or a slice of chocolate cake. Have a conversation in which you both use only the word *Well.* The conversation should convey these meanings:
A: That was nice!
B: Shall we have another one?
A: I shouldn't really.
B: I'm going to have another one, even if you're not.
A: If you're going to insist …
B: You're easily persuaded – you surprise me!

2 Discuss whether learners would find this activity easy or difficult. Give reasons for your opinion.

B Stress

Stress is the prominence that is given to particular syllables (in a word) or to particular words (in an utterance).

1 Work in pairs. Read these invented words and try to predict which syllable is stressed in each one. Decide what the results of this exercise suggest about the way words are stressed in English.

pawler
veddle
malmish
pandiful
loomitive
loomition
imbelist
imbelistic
geon
geonetics
geonetology
geonetological

2 Identify six to eight vocabulary items relating to a particular theme (such as jobs, food and drink, clothing, etc) in the coursebook you are currently using with your teaching practice class. Then answer the questions.

a Which is the stressed syllable in each of these words?
b What techniques could you use to highlight the stress?

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3 a Work In pairs. Mark the main stressed syllable in the second part (i.e. after the |) of each of the following sayings and catchphrases. Then answer the question.

i Don't worry | be happy.
ii You win some | and you lose some.
iii You can run | but you can't hide.
iv It's not what you know | it's who you know.
v Don't just stand there | do something.
vi The bigger they are | the harder they fall.
vii Two steps forward | one step back.
viii You scratch my back | and I'll scratch yours.

b What determines which word is stressed?

4 Study this coursebook activity. How does your answer to the last exercise apply to this one? (Note that 'the words in pink' are: *Susie owns a flat in Leeds.*)

HELP WITH PRONUNCIATION
Stress and rhythm (4): emphasis and meaning

1 a CD3 24 Listen to these sentences. Notice how the extra stress on one word affects the meaning.

1 I **THOUGHT** Ann would come.
(She's here. My prediction was right.)
2 I thought Ann would **COME**.
(She's not here. My prediction was wrong.)

b Listen again and practise.

2 a Read the sentence in pink. Then match responses 1–5 to meanings a–e.

Susie owns a flat in Leeds.

1 I think she's **RENTING** it.
2 I **THOUGHT** she owned that flat.
3 **JAMES** owns that flat.
4 I thought she owned a **HOUSE** there.
5 I think the flat's in **BRADFORD**.

a Tom said she didn't, but I knew I was right.
b I don't think she owns it.
c You're thinking of the wrong person.
d I don't think it's in Leeds.
e I don't think it's a flat.

b CD3 25 Listen and check.

c Listen again. Take turns to say the sentence in pink in **2a** and responses 1–5 and a–e.

face2face Upper Intermediate

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C Rhythm

1 Work in pairs. Take turns to read aloud the following sentences so that each sentence takes the same number of beats as the first sentence (which you should read fairly slowly and deliberately). Repeat each sentence before moving to the next. It may help to beat the rhythm with your hand. Then answer the questions.

■	■	■
Words	take	stress.
Words	should take	stress.
Words	should take	the stress.
Some words	should take	the stress.
Some words	should've taken	the stress.
Some of the words	should've taken	the stress.

1 What happens to the individual words as the sentence becomes longer?
2 Why might this create a problem for students – in terms of both listening and speaking?

2 Work in pairs. Study this coursebook activity.

1 Decide what aspect of pronunciation it targets.
2 Discuss how this aspect of pronunciation might be connected with rhythm.

HELP WITH PRONUNCIATION

1 CD2 ▸ 44 Work in pairs. How do we say these strong and weak forms? Listen and check. Listen again and practise.

strong	weak	strong	weak
was /wɒz/	was /wəz/	does /dʌz/	does /dəz/
were /wɜː/	were /wə/	do /duː/	do /də/

2 **a** Work in pairs. Look at this conversation. Do we usually say the strong (S) or weak (W) forms of the words in blue?

A Sorry we're late. We [1]were (W) having lunch. Right, [2]do ( ) we need anything for the meeting?
B Yes, we [3]do ( ). We need these reports. [4]Does ( ) Lisa know about the meeting?
A Yes, she [5]does ( ).
B OK. [6]Were ( ) you at the last meeting?
A Yes, we [7]were ( ).
B [8]Was ( ) it a very long meeting?
A Yes, it [9]was ( ).
B What [10]was ( ) it about?
A I don't know. I [11]was ( ) asleep!

b CD2 ▸ 45 Listen and check. When do we use the strong and weak forms of the words in **1**?

c Work in pairs. Practise the conversation.

face2face Pre-intermediate

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D Intonation

> Most learners of English as an additional language […] are not taught intonation and do not study intonation. Yet they do not speak English on a monotone. […] How can this be?
>
> It must be because the principles of intonation in language are sufficiently universal for us to be able to rely on them even in a foreign language.
>
> J.C. Wells, 2014

1 Work in pairs. Say each of these sentences aloud in two different ways, conveying two different meanings.

1 What is the difference in meaning, in each case?
2 How is this difference conveyed?

For example: *I like Chinese art and opera*
1 I like | Chinese art and opera| (= Chinese art and Chinese opera)
2 I like | Chinese art| and opera| (= Chinese art and any kind of opera)

a the people who left suddenly started running
b when shall we eat grandma
c the mouse which ate the cheese escaped
d he's a nurse
e Sigrid is not Swedish is she
f I'll have it with ham basil olives pineapple
g hi
h thanks a million

2 In the light of the above exercise, identify ways that intonation affects meaning.

3 Study this coursebook material and answer the questions.

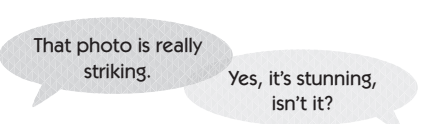
a 1.38 Listen to the examples. Does the tone go up (↗) or down (↘) on the question tag? What's the difference in meaning?

1 No, it isn't very quick, is it?
2 No, they weren't helpful, were they?
3 Yes, you need to make things easy, don't you?

b Practise saying the exchanges in 2e. Try to use the correct tone in the reply.

c Discuss people and things you and other students know – for example, a person, a café, a film or a car. Use the adjectives below and question tags to agree.

- amusing – funny
- cheerful – happy
- interesting – fascinating
- frightening – terrifying
- exhausting – tiring



Empower B2

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1 What feature of intonation does the material target?
2 Look at exercises a and c again. Which of the following activities would be useful after a and before c?
   a A 'read aloud' task, where learners read a number of sentences that include question tags, attempting to apply the appropriate intonation.
   b A gap-fill exercise where learners write in the missing question tag.
   c A dialogue activity, in which learners write dialogues that include question tags, and then perform them.

KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *stress (word stress, sentence stress)*
- *rhythm*
- *strong and weak forms*
- *intonation*

REFLECTION

Discuss these questions in pairs or groups.

1 Which of the following areas do you think is most critical in ensuring communicative effectiveness? Why?
   a accurate production of individual sounds (i.e. vowels and consonants)
   b accurate stress placement in words
   c accurate stress placement in utterances
   d native-like rhythm
   e accurate use of intonation
2 Which of the above areas do you think is the most easily learnable? Why?

Reference

J.C. Wells (2014) *Sounds Interesting: Observations on English and general phonetics*. Cambridge University Press, p.133.

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