

INTONATION OF ENGLISH AND POLISH DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

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In the present paper an attempt will be made to outline briefly the chief intonational features of English and Polish declarative sentences. It seems reasonable enough to begin our discussion by stating in what sense the terms "intonation" and "declarative sentence" are to be used.

A declarative sentence is sometimes defined as an utterance which reports the state of affairs, but conveys no emotional involvement on the part of the speaker, whose attitude to the information expressed in the statement remains neutral and detached. This definition, if accepted, implies that a declarative sentence is characterized by a single intonational pattern only. As a matter of fact that pattern is similar in both languages: the sentences sound rather monotonous and a regular fall on the last prominent word of the sequence is easily perceived. For the purposes of our present investigation we therefore suggest a somewhat broader definition which differs from the one mentioned above in that it takes into account the speaker's attitude to the thought expressed in his statement. The clue to the interpretation of the statement is provided by intonation. Since there are dialectal variations among intonations and each may have its own melody, it should be noted that we shall deal only with the intonation of RP English used by the educated Southern British speakers on the one hand, and the intonation of standard educated Polish on the other.

As Daniel Jones put it "intonation may be defined as the variations which take place in the pitch of the voice in connected speech, i.e. the variations in the pitch of the musical note produced by the vibration of the vocal cords" (Jones 1964: 275). In other words the rises and falls in pitch level produce intonation in any language.

When we talk about the intonation of any language, we usually have in

mind the pitch patterns, the speech tunes or melodies, the musical features of the language. But the pitch patterns or tunes of a given language are not necessarily the same in form as those of other languages. Consequently, the effects produced also differ, although, in some cases they may be very similar, if not the same. Moreover, in any language there is a limited number of pitch patterns used to produce definite meaningful effects. This makes it possible to describe the most frequently recurring patterns of pitch. It will be noted that intonation is always systematic and specific. This means that, though languages may, to a certain degree, resemble one another in this respect, there is no universal intonation. Intonation also contributes in a great measure to our understanding of a given sentence, because it provides us with additional information concerning the attitude of the speaker to the idea conveyed in his statement.

Basically, there are two functions of intonation: accentual and non-accentual. In the first one intonational changes are the best means of rendering prominent for a listener those parts of an utterance on which the speaker wishes to concentrate attention. In its non-accentual function, intonation distinguishes among different types of sentences and, moreover, provides us with some information as to the speaker's personality or emotional attitude, either to the listener or to the topic of conversation.

The tunes of language also constitute important active intonational elements. Tunes, strictly speaking, are the complete pitch patterns of sense groups. In English they always occur in association with stresses which are used on the words to which it is desired to give prominence in the sentence, but to which no particular feeling is attached. Stress is simply the energy of articulation which is used while uttering a word. It should not be confused with accent which additionally has a pitch-change. In English we have both accent and stress, the latter one is free. In Polish we have only fixed accent, falling generally on the penultimate syllable of a word.

The present author assumes that there are six basic tunes in Polish and in English. Some of them differ considerably in pitch. All English high tunes are medium tunes in Polish. The six tunes are:

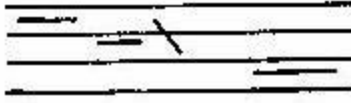
1. Low fall, marked [$_$]; appears in Polish and English. The voice falls from a medium to a very low pitch.
2. High fall, marked [$\^$]; typical of English. The voice falls from a high to a very low pitch.
- 2a. Medium fall, marked [\sim]; typical of Polish. The voice falls from a little above medium to a very low pitch.
3. Rise-fall, marked [\wedge]; the voice first rises from a fairly low to a high pitch in English and less than high in Polish, and then quickly falls to a very low pitch. To make the expression "less than high" more precise, we may say that the pitch is here half way between medium and high.

4. Low rise, marked [$_$]; appears both in Polish and English. The voice rises during the word from a low pitch to a medium pitch or a little above.
5. High rise, marked [$\^$]; typical of English. The voice rises during the word from a medium pitch to a high pitch.
- 5a. Medium rise, marked [\sim]; typical of Polish. The voice rises from a little above low to a little above medium pitch.
6. Fall-rise, marked [\sim]; the voice falls from a fairly high in English and less than high in Polish to a rather low pitch, and then, still within the word, rises to a medium pitch.

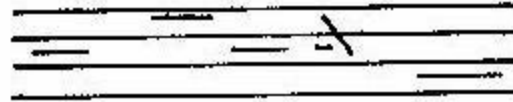
The system of notation used here is the same as used by I. D. O'Connor and G. F. Arnold, except for the markers of typically Polish tunes, which are introduced by the present author. Additional symbols used in the present paper are as follows. Each syllable is marked [$-$] and a vertical line | is used to divide a sentence into sense groups. Above each sentence a diagram illustrating pitch variations appears.

At this point of our discussion let us go through the different types of declarative sentences and see which tunes are the most common in both languages. The division into the types of statements is that of Kingdon's, although some modifications have been made.

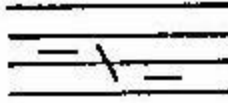
The most popular type of declarative sentences is a straightforward statement.



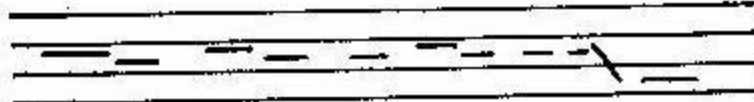
John's smoking.



He's coming tomorrow.



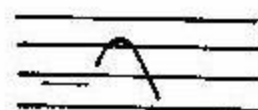
Jan pali.



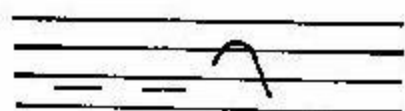
Dzisiaj mamy piątego listo\pada.

Straightforward statements sound light and airy in English. It is probably due to the high fall end of the sentence and considerably high beginning. Polish sentences sound more monotonous, their beginning is a little higher than the level tune and the fall at the end is from a medium to a low pitch.

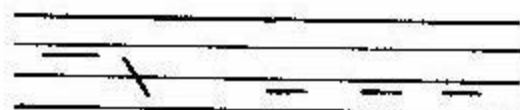
Another type of declarative sentences is a mocking or impatient statement. Its intonation is different in English and Polish. In English the rise-fall tune is generally used. In Polish the sentence starts with a medium pitch and falls to a very low pitch on the most prominent word and stays there.



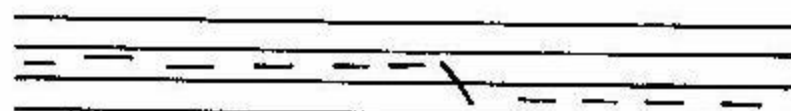
I [^]know.



They're [^]there.

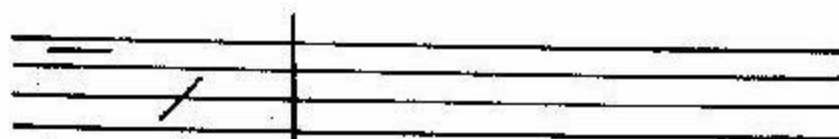


¹Nie [\]znam tej ₁książki.



O¹bawiam się, że nie [\]będą po ₁żrebne.

Occasionally statements are unfinished. This results in a different pattern. Such sentences in both examined languages start with approximately the same tune, but they end differently. English sentences usually end with a low rise tune. Polish sentences for the most part have very levelled intonation and the final tune is the same as the opening one.



¹After ₁dinner we will have some music.



If you ¹want ₁this one it'll cost you double.

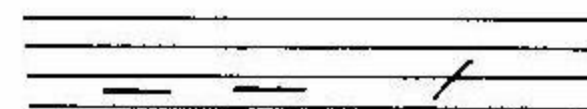


Je ¹żeli ¹deszcz ¹będzie ¹padal zostaniemy w domu.

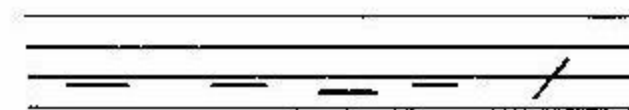


Wtedy ¹słońce ¹zaczęło ₁przyszywać i ptaki śpiewać.

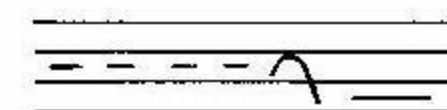
There are also statements in which the intonation pattern indicates the speaker's lack of interest in, casual attitude towards, or detachment from the subject matter. They are called perfunctory statements. Their pitch pattern are different in Polish and English. Thus, for the latter the intonation remains on a very low level and takes a low rise pitch on the last prominent word of a sense group. In Polish the last prominent word takes a rise-fall pitch and the preceding words of an utterance are on a medium pitch level.



I ₁don't think it ₁matters.



You've got ₁plenty of ₁time.

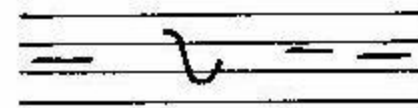


Może to i ¹prawda.

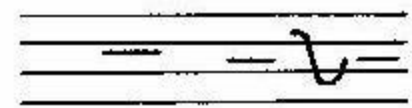


Nie ¹sądzę ¹żeby to ¹miało zna¹czenie.

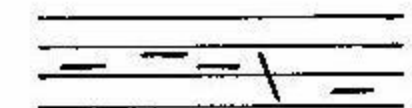
Another type of declarative sentences, the implicatory statements, have a fall-rise pitch in English, where it sometimes suggests an analogy, and a medium fall pitch in Polish. The fall-rise intonation is very rarely used in Polish. In the implicatory statements the speaker intends his hearer to understand more than the words themselves convey.



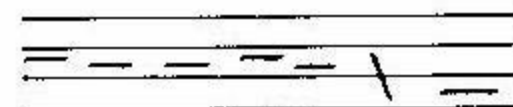
We pre^vfer 'coffee.



It 'won't be 'easy.

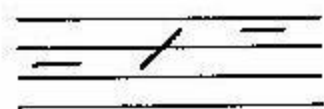


Wo^limy 'kawę.

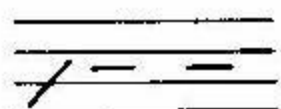


'Janek powrócił wczoraj.

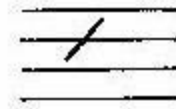
The implicatory statements with interrogative force are very widely used. Although, they are given the grammatical structure of a statement, they are psychologically questions.



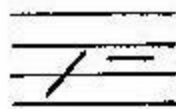
You 'like him.



'Lubisz go.



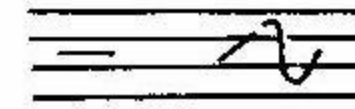
'Sugar.



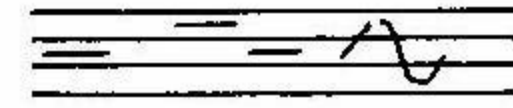
'Cukru.

In English a high rise pitch is used and in Polish a medium rise pitch.

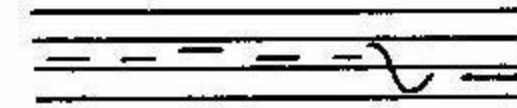
Still another type of declarative sentence is the insinuating statement. In English such statements take a fall-rise pitch, but it is preceded by an initial rising stress which emphasizes the insinuation contained in the tune. An analogous sentence in Polish would have a fall-rise intonation pattern.



They've ar^vrived.



He's 'coming tómo^vrrów.

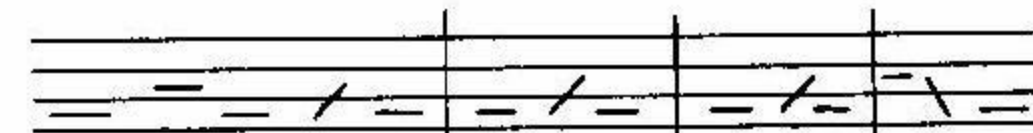


To za^latwisz tę^vsprawę.

Finally, the enumerations. The intonation pattern is the same for both languages. When the items in enumeration are alternative they all have a low rise pitch except the final one, which takes a high falling tune, in Polish a medium falling one, to indicate that the list is complete.



You can have ,coffee, or ,tea, or 'cocoa.



Mam papier ,biały, ,czerwony, ,niebieski i 'żółty.

As this brief analysis of Polish and English declarative sentences intonation shows, the falling intonation is used in Polish for the majority of cases. In Polish more words are uttered on a level tune which evokes the effect of monotony to some non-Polish speakers. Moreover, an average Pole's pitch of voice does not go as high as that of an Englishman. This also accounts for the relative paucity of those characteristic ups and downs heard in an English utterance. Even Polish women use lower high tunes than Englishwomen. The present

author is inclined to believe that in Polish the force of articulation combined with greater loudness of the prominent word gives intonational meaning to the utterance. Since the accent in Polish is fixed and a pitch is in a way bound to it, the effect of pitch change is not produced. Sometimes the loudness of the accented words is such that even the most prominent pitch change in the sentence could not be possibly perceived.

In both language intonation consists basically of a slowly descending series of level tunes. The stresses in English and the accents in Polish fall on more important words in an utterance and are interspersed with unstressed or unaccented syllables. Both meaning and feeling are added to this framework by replacing the level tune of the most prominent word by a different tune.

As we have seen from the above examples, the pitch patterns of English and Polish statements are on the whole different. The only similarity in the intonational pattern can be noticed in straightforward statements and the patterns used for enumeration. Even then, the similarity is only apparent, as the Polish tunes, the high fall especially, are lower than those of English.

The study of Polish sentence intonation has, so far, been largely neglected. Only a handful of scholars took enough interest in the matter to produce some rather sketchy and general observations concerning the intonation of Polish statements and questions. The tentative preliminary analysis undertaken in this essay, short and inexhaustive as it must needs be, has also been greatly hampered by the paucity and inadequacy of reliable scientific material dealing with the problem of Polish sentence intonation. It is to be hoped, however, that this interesting question will soon receive due scholarly attention.

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