

Intonation matters: “Sorry” seems to be the hardest word

Competition number:

CH 31

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Target Students:

First year English majors in College

Course:

English Pronunciation

Corpus Used:

Youghlish (<https://youglish.com/>)

Duration:

Single lesson (45 minutes)

Lesson objectives:

After this lecture, students are expected to get familiar with:

- 1) Definition of intonation
- 2) Structure of intonation
- 3) Function of intonation
- 4) Application of intonation

Note:

This note is added to address concerns with engaging students from comments made by a couple of colleagues. Due to the space constraint of this document, authors will focus on the teaching content to the maximum possible extent. However, the actual implementation of this teaching plan will center on students' learning experience by including multiple highly interactive teaching and learning activities.

(Teaching design continues on next page)

Teaching Design

Step 1: Warming-up

1.1 Students are presented two responses with different intonations to a request “Could you pass me the newspaper?”.

Could you pass me the newspaper?

Response A: I am **sorry**. (with a **falling tone**)

Response B: I am **sorry?** (with a **rising tone**)

Step 2: Brainstorming

2.1 Students are required to comment on the two responses, interpret the implications of the two different responses then will be invited to share their understandings.

2.2 Students are encouraged to imitate the two responses and discuss the reasons behind of the two different response versions.

Step 3: Elaboration on definition

3.1 Instructor summarizes, comments on students’ answer and highlights the reasons behind the two responses -- *intonation*.

3.2 Instructor gives more examples of sentences with same lexical meaning but different intonations to familiarize students with intonation by using **YouGlish**.

3.3 Instructor elaborates on the definition of intonation.

The screenshot shows the YouGlish website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with 'sorry' entered and a 'Say it!' button. Below the search bar, there are tabs for 'All', 'US', 'UK', and 'AUS'. The search results show 'How to pronounce sorry in English (1 out of 88825):'. A video player is embedded, showing a man in a suit speaking. The video player has a progress bar and a speed control set to 'normal'. Below the video player, the text reads: "She said, 'Sorry. He's a busy man. He doesn't have time to meet you.'" The word 'Sorry' is highlighted in yellow. Below the text, it says '(video 1)'.

The screenshot shows the YouGlish website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with 'sorry' entered and a 'Say it!' button. Below the search bar, there are tabs for 'All', 'US', 'UK', and 'AUS'. The search results show 'How to pronounce sorry in English (4 out of 88825):'. A video player is embedded, showing a man in a suit speaking. The video player has a progress bar and a speed control set to 'normal'. Below the video player, the text reads: "and I'm sorry, your ground zero of uh,". The word 'sorry' is highlighted in yellow. Below the text, it says '(video 2)'.

Step 4: Elaboration on structure of intonation (tonality, tonicity, and tone)

4.1 Tonality¹

4.1.1 Instructor raises question on how to break the utterance up into chunks? Students are invited to break the sentence “*I said I am sorry.*” into chunks.

Possible ways to break the sentence are:

I said / I am sorry.

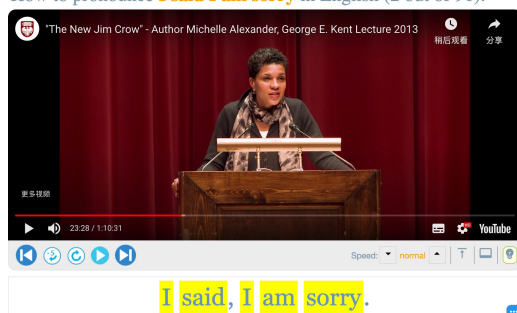
I / said / I / am / sorry.

I said I am sorry.

4.1.2 Instructor demonstrates more examples by searching “*I said I am sorry*” on **YouGlish** and reinforces the impression on how to break the utterance into chunks. (*Not based on single word but on tone unit, or simply thought group²*)



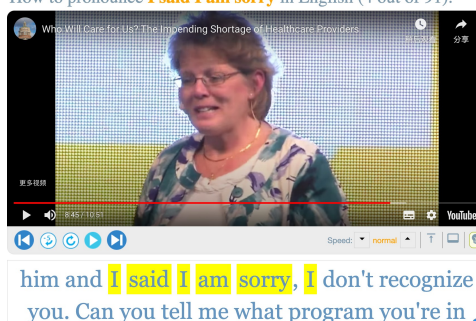
How to pronounce **I said I am sorry** in English (2 out of 91):



(video 3)



How to pronounce **I said I am sorry** in English (4 out of 91):



(video 4)

4.1.3 Students are required to identify the number of tone units of the same sentence read in different ways.

I said / I am sorry. (2 tone units)

I said I am sorry. (1 tone unit)

4.2 Tonicity³

4.2.1 Instructor continues to ask students to identify the location of the most prominent syllable in a tone unit.

I said / I am sorry.

/ˈaɪ ˈsed ˈaɪ əm ˈsɔri/

¹ Tonality represents the way the speaker perceives all the information and then organizes it into units of intonation.

² A thought group is a group of approximately two to five words that form a unit of meaning. Thought groups allow you to organize your speech into groups of words that make up a single idea.

³ Tonicity is the location of the most prominent syllable in an intonation unit.

4.2.2 More examples from **Youglish** are given to students so that they can identify placement of stressed syllables within an intonation phrase.

How to pronounce **I am sorry** in English (2 out of 2429):

"Yes, your honor. **I** do have something to say. **I'm sorry**. **I am sorry** that **I** caused so much...

(video 5)

How to pronounce **I am sorry** in English (3 out of 2429):

Oh, **I am sorry**, yes, oh, two more things.

(video 6)

4.3 Tone⁴

4.3.1 Students are required to identify the specific tone used in each video -- level or moving tone.

Tone type:

- 1) Level
- 2) Moving: rising, falling and combination

4.3.2 Students are required to imitate different tones in each video clip.

Step 5: Elaboration of different functions of intonation

Instructor elaborates on the different functions of intonation by using different tones and ask students to imitate different tones.

5.1 Students are put into groups of 4 to come up with their own authentic examples of using different intonations to indicate different meanings.

5.2 Instructors will listen to students' examples then conclude that intonations do have a function in our discourse or communication, which will be explained in sections below.

[We acknowledge our colleague Pengju Guan's contribution to 5.1 and 5.2.]

5.3 Semantic function: to differentiate the meaning of an utterance.

I am not sorry because she didn't come.

Version 1: I am sorry but **not because she didn't come.**

Version 2: I am not sorry, the reason being that she didn't come.

⁴ Tone is the level and movement of pitch within an intonation unit.

5.4 Attitudinal function: to express our attitudes and emotions

I am sorry. (level tone: boredom)

I am sorry. (rising tone: question)

I am sorry. (falling tone: apologetic)

I am sorry. (fall-rise tone: awkward)

5.5 Grammatical function: to identify grammatical structures

I am sorry. (falling statement)

I am sorry? (rising question)

He washed and fed the dog.

He washed (falling) / and fed the dog.

(He washed himself and fed a dog.)

He washed (rising) and fed the dog.

(He both washed and fed a dog.)

5.6 Accentual function: to imply the placement of the tonic syllable.

I am sorry.

I am sorry.

5.7 Discourse function to:

(1) substitute signals of visual information in written text

I am sorry. (falling)

I am sorry and regretful. (rising)

I am sorry for the trouble. (level)

(2) regulate conversational behaviour

Version 1:

A: *Ouch, you stepped on my foot.*

B: *I am sorry?* (rising: inviting response)

Version 2:

A: *You stepped on my foot.*

B: *I am sorry.* (falling: completeness)

(3) indicate new or given information

A: *Are you happy now?*

B: No, I am sorry. (rising: new information)

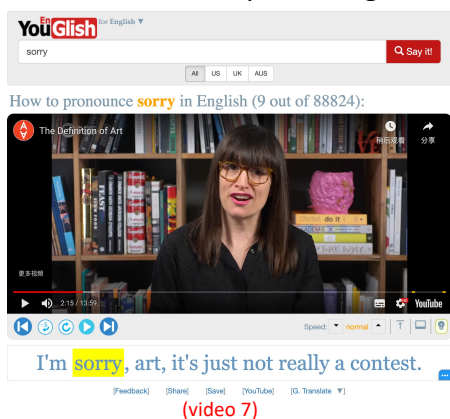
Step 6: Application of different intonations

6.1 Students are required to identify the number of tone units in each video clip.

6.2 Students are required to identify the placement of stressed syllables within an intonation phrase in each video clip.

6.3 Students are required to identify types of tone in each video clip.

6.4 Students are required to guess the intonational meaning in each video clip.



Step 7: Assignment

7.1 Students are formed into groups of 3 to design a short role-play dialogue to demonstrate their knowledge and ability of expressing different meanings using the word “sorry” with various intonations.

[We acknowledge our colleague Eric Valladares’s contribution to this idea.]

7.2 Students are required to use **Youglish** to search more examples with the keyword SORRY and categorize them into different groups based on the tones used and identify the number of tone units, placement of stressed syllables and implied intonational meaning.

Website of video clips	Tone (level/moving)	Number of tone units	Placement of stressed syllables	Implied intonational meaning

7.3 Students are required collect more examples with other key words to get familiar with intonation.

References:

Tench, Paul. 2011. *Transcribing The Sound of English: A Phonetics Workbook for Words and Discourse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Website of each video demonstrated in the teaching design:

Video 1: https://youtu.be/7bB_fVDlvhc

Video 2: <https://youtu.be/qc6ctN5-xX0>

Video 3: <https://youtu.be/Gln1JwDUI64>

Video 4: <https://youtu.be/C7QvSUKQxLA>

Video 5: <https://youtu.be/rRu9CWI8to8>

Video 6: <https://youtu.be/8JLd9WhYU7U>

Video 7: <https://youtu.be/b2VpNx5ZxSA>

Video 8: <https://youtu.be/4-JlooqlyFM>