

## **Intonation and Accented Speakers**

Intonation, known as the rhythm and melody of speech, is the most important skill to master for reducing your accent and sounding more American. Intonation is purely a cultural trait and is different across languages. Different intonation styles across cultures are one of the main reasons people speak with accents. Without using American intonation when speaking American English, your speech will present with accented traits such as being fast, choppy, forceful or monotone. This unit will teach you how to speak using the American style of intonation. It is necessary to master intonation before addressing specific sounds so you can apply your new sounds with sentences using the new intonation style.

Some people are surprised to learn that accent reduction is not only about learning to make individual sounds that are missing from their first language. Rather, all of the sounds must be used together coupled with correct intonation to sound more American. Making a simple adjustment to your speech rhythm will significantly improve your sound quality and decrease the intensity of your accent before you ever learn how to say one specific sound. When your American speech lacks an American intonation pattern, your message may sound accented to the listener because you are not speaking English in the American cultural style; you are speaking English in your native cultural style from your first language with accented traits that can interfere with clarity. American speech must be spoken with American intonation if your goal is to reduce your accent. The good news is that you can be conversational and enjoy clearer speech in about three weeks with daily practice.

Every culture has its own pattern of how the people speak their language and use intonation. It is natural for speakers to bring their intonation pattern from their first language into their American speech. Although you may have learned the sounds and rules of grammar for English, if the American intonation pattern is not a part of your speech, you will speak with an accent. Your speech will seem foreign because you are not speaking in the American cultural style. Many accented speakers are pleasantly surprised when the intensity of their accents significantly decrease after learning how to use American intonation.

### **Cultural Examples of American English Accented Traits**

- When Middle Eastern, Hindi or Asian speakers keep the intonation pattern of their first languages, their English sounds choppy, monotone and too fast for the listener.
- Some European or Spanish speakers will sometimes have a rise in pitch on vowel sounds. This creates a speaking pattern with many deliberate pitch rises and gliding on sounds that are different from the American style, which sounds foreign to a listener.
- Some European speakers sound as if they are speaking from the back of their lower throat with forceful pronunciation.

- Many speakers from the Caribbean Islands will have a sing-song intonation pattern, producing a distinct accent due to frequent and clear rises in pitch patterns.
- Regional accents in America have distinct qualities. Many American speakers from the South often place their voices too high in the nasal cavity, creating nasal resonance, and inflect upward on vowel sounds. This is due to placing too much muscular force high in the back area of the throat.

However, once the standard American intonation is adapted, the accent can be significantly improved. It is amazing how changing intonation can increase overall speech clarity and immediately and significantly reduce accent and foreign traits.

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