

Tone in Linguistics and Phonetics

1. Definition: Tone refers to the use of pitch to distinguish word meaning in a language. It is a phonemic feature, meaning that changing the pitch pattern of a word can change its meaning.

2. Tone vs. Intonation:

- **Tone** affects the meaning of individual words

For example: In **Mandarin Chinese**, the word *ma* can have four different meanings depending on tone:

1. **mā** (妈) – "mother" (high-level tone)
 2. **má** (麻) – "hemp" (rising tone)
 3. **mǎ** (马) – "horse" (falling-rising tone)
 4. **mà** (骂) – "scold" (falling tone)
- **Intonation** affects sentence-level meaning, such as conveying emotion or distinguishing between a statement and a question.

3. Types of Tone Languages

Tone languages fall into two broad categories:

- **Register Tone Languages:** These languages have level tones, where each syllable is pronounced with a relatively stable pitch. Example: Yoruba has high, mid, and low tones. For example (Yoruba):
 - *bá* – "to meet" (high tone)
 - *bà* – "to spoil" (low tone)
- **Contour Tone Languages:** These languages have complex pitch movements within a single syllable, such as rising or falling tones. They have tones that glide up or down within a syllable. For example: Mandarin Chinese has four distinct tones, including rising and falling tones like *mā* (high), *má* (rising), *mǎ* (falling-rising), *mà* (falling).

4. Tone Systems in Different Languages

- **African Languages:** Many Bantu and Niger-Congo languages, such as Yoruba and Igbo, use tone extensively for lexical and grammatical distinctions. Example (Yoruba):
 - *ó lọ* (He went)
 - *ò lọ* (He didn't go)
- **Asian Languages:** Mandarin has four tones, Thai has five, and Cantonese has six to nine, depending on the analysis. Example (Thai):

- *mâi*– "wood"
 - *mái*– "silk"
 - *mãi*– "new"
 - *màai*– "sign"
 - *mâai*– "burn"
- **Indigenous American Languages:** Many languages, such as Navajo, employ tone to mark distinctions in meaning.

5. Functions of Tone

a. Lexical Distinction

- Many languages use tone to **differentiate words** with the same phonemes.
 - Example (Vietnamese):
 - *ba* (father) vs. *bà* (grandmother) vs. *bá* (aunt).

b. Grammatical Function

- Some languages use tone to **mark grammatical distinctions**.
 - Example (Mazatec, Mexico):
 - Tone changes indicate verb tense or mood.

c. Pragmatic and Expressive Functions

- Tone can **express emotions** or **add politeness**.
 - Example (Thai):
 - *kà* vs. *ká* are used differently in politeness strategies.

6. Tone Perception and Production

- **Challenges for Second-Language Learners:** Speakers of non-tone languages often struggle to distinguish and produce tones accurately.
- **Cross-Linguistic Influence:** L1 tonal systems may affect how learners perceive tones in a second language.

7. Think and write

Based on the lecture, how can we determine whether tone is phonemic or allophonic in a given language? Provide an example to support your answer.