

THE ART OF INFLUENCE: THE PRAGMATIC POTENTIAL OF INTONATION IN APPLE PRESENTATIONS

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The paper focuses on the role of intonation in achieving the pragmatic effect in Apple presentations. The choice of the material is driven by Apple's longstanding position as one of the world's most successful and prosperous companies. Their annual events, where they unveil new gadgets, pose significant influence on customers worldwide. The company's presentations are marked by a distinctive tone that fosters strong connections and emotional bonds with their target audience. The study undertakes an analysis of intonation, alongside other linguistic means, contributing to the creation of this unique tone of voice.

Key words: *intonation, pragmatic potential, pragmatic effect, prosodic features, audience, Apple presentations.*

Numerous studies on intonation prove that it is a powerful tool in conveying messages, engaging audiences, and facilitating effective interaction (see Kalyta, 2015; Taranenko & Schaefer, 2018; Valigura, Kozub & Monashnenko, 2020; Tomlinson, Gotzner & Bott, 2017). The problem how intonation works is still as relevant today as it has ever been. Given the multi-facet nature of intonation, it is undeniable that “there is still a long way to go before perception of intonation yields all of its secrets.” (Vaissière, 2005).

According to R. Mathew, “intonation is important to make the speech more vibrant and interesting” (2023), while R. Zulfugarova considers it “a language universal” (2018). One cannot help but agree with O. Ayvazyan, who asserts that words convey messages only partially. It is primarily the ‘tune’ or ‘melody’ in the voice that confirms to the listener the true meaning behind the words. The author further suggests that “confident speakers mostly use clear speech and a falling intonation at the end of a sentence, communicating a sense of certainty and decisiveness” (2024).

Analysing the success of Apple, O. West focuses on the company's ‘tone of voice,’ highlighting its unique blend of casual and serious elements that convey both respect and enthusiasm. Described as confident, aspirational, and polished, Apple's communication is characterized by its stylish and innovative nature, generating excitement while embracing qualities of compassion and commitment. According to O. West, this distinctive tone facilitates a strong connection with Apple's “target audience of affluent, tech-savvy consumers,” creating “an emotional bond with customers worldwide” (West, 2023).

The questions arise: What are the linguistic means that contribute to creating that tone of voice? What is the role of intonation in achieving the pragmatic effect in the presentations of Apple?

The research material is based on the annual Apple event – The Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC) – held in June 2023 where the company unveiled their latest products (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYkq9Rgoj8E>).

Presenting Apple devices, speaking about their specifications and compatibility with other devices, the speakers prefer to use falling tones. These tones not only enable them to convey facts but also sound authoritative and knowledgeable about the advertised products, establishing themselves as reliable sources of information:

The \Mac § has been com|pletely trans|formed § by the tran|sition § to \Apple \silicon. |;

\Apple \silicon § has \also enable de\velopers § to \take \their \apps § \further than \ever. |;

And it's \easy § to \carry around | at just over \three \pounds. |

Falling tones are also observed when speakers enumerate some features of the device, sounding rather confident and assertive, thus not allowing customers to question the presented information. In this case, speakers prefer to slow down their speech slightly by using short pauses, making the presented information more noticeable and emphatic:

With its in|credible per|formance, | \brilliant display, | \all-day \battery |life, | and \striking de|sign | it's our \most \loved \Mac. |;

It \features § \Mega|Safe \charging, | \two \Thunderbolt \ports | and a \headphone \jack § for \versatile \conne|ctivity. |

With \six \speakers, | in|cluding \force-canceling \woofers, | it de|livers i|mmersive § \Spatial \Audio. ||

The pragmatic potential is achieved through the use of a number of emotive lexical units (*in|credible per|formance, \brilliant display, \striking design, extra|ordinary \battery |life, \gorgeous \finishes, \great \camera, a|mazing performance*), combined with intonation that makes the speech not excessively emotional and expressive, but persuasive at the same time: *And it's \also | the \world's \best- | \selling | \laptop. ||* One more thing that characterizes the speech of Apple presenters is cutting logically finished intonation groups into even shorter ones, consisting of falling nuclear tones. These intonation groups form a pattern that allows speakers to sound convincing and make the audience trust the presenters, believing that the advertised products represent state-of-the-art technology in the

world market. This cutting-edge technology, for example, consists of ‘the *world’s best-selling laptop*’ and Apple silicon enables developers to ‘do *things that simply weren’t possible before*.’ Using the described intonation pattern along with normal loudness, normal tempo of speech, regular rhythm, and a bright, relatively sharp timber of voice, the speakers sound clearly and distinct, effectively communicating their important message to the audience.

A variety of prosodic features are observed when the speakers introduce their new devices: short intonation groups consisting of a nucleus and a stressed syllable and a nucleus, a range of nuclear tones: Mid-Level, Low Rise, Low Fall, High Fall, perceptive, short, medium, and long pauses. This combination of prosodic features allows speakers to sound enthusiastic and intriguing:

>Well, *to day, we have even bigger news to share on another product made possible by Apple silicon.* ||;

>And *it gets an astonishing eighteen hours of battery life.* |

The presenters alternate between Low Fall and High Fall nuclear tones as they discuss their new achievements – the improved features of the devices. The normal rate of speech, in this case, is accompanied by very short and short pauses: *And it’s power-efficient performance enables us to create new systems we could only dream of making in the past.* |

To prevent monotony while discussing the technical specifications of the company’s products, the speakers vary their tone by incorporating both low and high tones, such as Low Fall and High Fall, as well as falling and rising tones, like Low Fall and Low Rise. Additionally, they alternate between perceptive and very short pauses, thereby maintaining the audience’s engagement:

The new Air has everything you could want in a 15-inch laptop. It starts with a design that’s astonishingly thin and light; yet feels incredibly solid and durable. It’s only eleven point five millimeters thin making it the world’s thinnest 15-inch laptop. ||;

And it comes in four gorgeous finishes, including Midnight and Starlight. ||;

And the new Air sounds awesome! |

Presenting Apple products, speakers often use compound adjectives. These combinations of two adjectives serve to provide a more specific and vivid description of the advertised products, enhancing the customers’ understanding or perception of the presented devices:

... *everything looks remarkably rich and vibrant* |;

*It has a \great § |10'80'p \camera § for \video |calls |... So you |come \through §
|loud and \clear. |*

....yet |feels in|credibly \solid | and \durable. |

The pragmatic influence on the addressee could be achieved through a combination of intonation and various lexical or stylistic means. An example of this can be seen in a play on words, as observed in the following sentence: *In \fact, | the
|new \Air § is |12 \times \faster | than the \fastest § |Intel-\based |Mac\Book \Air. |*

We may also observe the combination of Low Fall, Low Rise, and High Fall followed by Low Rise in one rhetorical question: *So |what \makes § the |new \Air | the
|world's \best | |fifteen-\inch \laptop? |*

The research results prove that intonation plays a crucial role in achieving the pragmatic effect that presupposes the influence on the addressee. The pragmatic potential of Apple presentations, particularly during their annual event in 2023, is realized through a variety of prosodic features: short intonation groups consisting of a nucleus and a stressed syllable and a nucleus, a range of nuclear tones (such as Mid Level, Low Fall, High Fall, and Low Rise), Descending Stepping Head, Ascending Stepping Head, or Sliding Head, normal to increased loudness, normal to relatively slow speech tempo, regular rhythm, a bright, relatively sharp timber of voice, very short, short, medium, and long pauses, and a wide (from high to low) and narrow (from mid to low) pitch range.

Overall, a variety of prosodic features used in the presentation, combined with various lexical and stylistic devices such as compound adjectives, emotive words, rhetorical questions, repetitions, and enumerations, contribute to the maximum influence on the addressee. They allow speakers to sound authoritative, persuasive, and knowledgeable regarding the advertised products, effectively conveying their important message to the audience. Furthermore, appropriate intonation facilitates the audience's comprehension of the presented information, helps them become better aware of the features of new gadgets and, perhaps, even imagine their functionality without testing them firsthand.

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