UPSPEAK

Upspeak (High Rise Terminal or uptalk) is a feature of spoken discourse in which a high rising intonation contour is observed on the final words of an utterance, as opposed to a standard falling intonation. It is observed in some dialects of English.

Upspeak is a feature of spoken discourse in which a speaker ends their tone units with rising intonation.

The term upspeak is used here to refer to the use of a rising tone in the final tone unit of a declarative clause where in RP a falling tone would be used ... upspeak is characterized by a final rise, sometimes so steep that it is perceived as a lift, on the final word of a tone unit. ...The use of a final rising tone where a falling tone would be expected in RP is an established and well documented prosodic feature not only of upspeak but also non-standard accents in some regions of Britain, e.g. in Wales and Northern Ireland and in the English cities of Bristol, Liverpool, and Newcastle, and the county of Norfolk. (Bradford, 1997)

It has been suggested that the function of upspeak is to (1) act affectively to signal solidarity and empathy towards the interlocutor (2) act referentially to signal that more information is coming. This second usage suggests upspeak can be used to segment the phonological paragraph.

... upspeak as an important referential component, acting as a means of signalling salient chunks of information, and thus encouraging the hearer’s continued involvement in the discourse. ... In this way, the speaker is able to provide cognitive stepping stones in the unfolding discourse to enable the hearer(s) to negotiate the stream of speech. ... ...the use of upspeak may be similar in effect to the use of fillers such as “Right?” or “You know what I mean?”, which are used by speakers to check that there listeners are keeping abreast of the information flow or are sympathetic to what is being said. (Bradford, 1997)

EXAMPLE

A good example of upspeak is given in the following student. An analysis of the terminals of tone units in this student’s spoken monologue indicated 41.4% were rising (up) while 48.6% were falling (down). This is significantly more rising terminals that a standard English dialect would produce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminal</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>up</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, the speaker used the up-down contrast to signal effectively the closing of phonological paragraphs and the opening of new paragraphs. An example of this is given below. In line 3, the falling terminal contrasts with the previous rising terminals to signal the end of the paragraph and the start of a new paragraph. The use of the marker ‘in contrast’ and the high key of the new paragraph act to demarcate it from the previous paragraph. The new paragraph also features a return to rising terminals (upspeak).

1. | its tradeMARKS are er ↗Lo go (0.3) |
2. | that you can see er ↗THERE (0.5) |
3. | and ↗SLOGan just er do it (1.4) | [END OF PARATONE]
4. | in ↗CONtrary (.) |
5. | er ↗adiDAS |
6. | addidas is a GERman ↗COMPany (0.5) |
7. | FOUnded in NINEteen forty ↗EIGHT (0.6) |

The division of paragraphs and upspeak is also illustrated in the pitch trace below. Most tone units are marked with rising intonation. However, the terminal of the tone unit at the end of the paragraph is falling and there is a clear pause between this and the next tone unit. This suggests there is a ‘systematic’ use of upspeak by the speaker as a discourse structuring device.

![Pitch Trace]

**SOURCES**