

The Importance of Intonation In The Performance of Different Speech Acts

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Abstract. *There are many pieces of substantial evidence that many world languages employ intonation to perform a lot of daily life actions. Recent studies indicate that intonation is part and parcel of any practical analysis of linguistic components. However, it was only in the 1990s until we start to see studies on intonation and speech act. The link between intonation and speech act has not met the required attention. Moreover, the lack of sufficient knowledge about intonation among non-native English language speakers shows non-native English proficiency. This then may have effects on the teaching and learning of the English language on students. The study aims at examining the role intonation plays in the performance of different speech acts. Thus, the paper provides further explanations and illustrations to understand the role intonation has in speech act theory.*

Keywords: *analysis; intonation; linguistic*

A. INTRODUCTION

Intonation is a distinguishing characteristic of the spoken language, which includes a continuous pitch changing and a variation of a speaker's voice to convey meaning (Bradford, 1988). Intonation, in intonational languages like English and Arabic, does not denote lexical meaning, but it, instead, delivers additional meanings, which would only be concluded from the intonational patterns. In Jordanian Arabic, for example, the word *ʔahlaw sahla* (English: welcome) can be delivered (said) with different tones to indicate various meanings. If such an expression is displayed with a falling tune, it might indicate a warm greeting. On the other hand, if it is said with a rising tune, it might be a sign for a cold greeting. Thus, the intonation plays a significant role in language and language communication. On the whole, it represents extra ways by means of which we can convey both our emotions and state of mind.

Furthermore, to lay down the paramount significance of intonation, imagine a language without intonation. Could its speakers communicate their feelings and emotions properly? Such a language will look like a robot's communication system, which lacks any sort of real human emotions and feelings. Consequently, intonation and other supra-segmental features are essential things by which human beings can communicate well.

B. Defining Intonation

In spite of the fact that there are no satisfactory definitions or specifications for intonation, it can be totally attributed to the vocal cords' vibration and pitch variation characteristics. Ladd (2008) points out that intonation is "the use of suprasegmental phonetic features to convey post lexical or sentence-level pragmatic meanings in a linguistically structured way"(p.4). Wells (2006) defines intonation as "the melody of speech". He states: "In investigating intonation, we focus on how the pitch of the voice rises and falls and how speakers use this pitch variation to deliver linguistic and pragmatic meaning"(p. 1). Moreover, Robinett (1972) claims that "intonation is the tune of what we say. More specifically, it is the combination of musical tones on which we pronounce the syllables that make up our speech" (p.38). Bradford (2005) says that "intonation is a feature of the spoken language. It consists of the continuous changing of the pitch of a speaker's voice to express meanings"(p.1). Moreover, Bhatnagar (2010) portrays intonation as follows:

Intonation is the music of a language and is perhaps the most crucial element of a correct accent. When we speak, our vocal cords vibrate, and the frequency of vibration decides the pitch of the voice. Sometimes, the pitch rises, and sometimes it falls or remains level. The way the pitch of the voice varies forms the intonation of a language. In other words, intonation is the word used for some pattern in a speech which is related to the rise and fall of the voice in speaking, affecting the meaning of what is being said. (p.142)

In general, intonation refers to the mechanism by means of which the vocal cords are manipulated to produce a pitch that might have different configurations. To put it differently, if the rate of vibration increases, this will lead, in turn, to a high pitch, whereas if it decreases, a low pitch will be the natural result (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2010). These pitch configurations are not haphazardly produced. Every language has a limited number of pitch patterns that are systematically used to deliver definite meanings (Arnold & O'Connor, 1973).

The Form of Intonation

Intonation is by and large regarded as a system that plays a vital part in contextualizing utterances in their conversational context. Unlike grammarians who divide a text into certain linguistic sections including sentences, phrases and words, phonologists, in terms of the intonation analysis, divide a text into intonational groups or units (Katamba, 1989). Cruttenden (1986) introduces some basic criteria that would help us determine the intonational group. He considers a pause, anacrusis (more known as unstressed syllables) and final syllable lengthening as marks which show the boundaries of the intonational group concerned. It is supposed that every intonational group has a systematic internal structure. Phonologists like (Couper-Kuhlen, 1986; Katamba, 1989; Rouch, 2009) state that the intonational group is primarily envisaged to have these components: Pre-head, head, tonic syllable, and tail. For example, Katamba (1989) uses the following sentence to get these divisions clearer.

(Pre- head) (Head) Nucleus or tonic (Tail)

He will phone you when all the children are back.

However, it is also argued that the nucleus component is the only compulsory component in the intonational group, whereas the pre-head, head, and tail are optional. To be more elaborative, these four components are characterized as follows:

- 1- **The pre-head** usually contains the unstressed syllables, and it comes directly before the head constituent or the tonic syllable (Wells, 2006). Ball and Muller (2005) indicate two types of pre-head: the low pre-head and the high pre-head. They claim that the low pre-head is the commoner and can be found before all other kinds of head.
- 2- **The head** stretches from the first stressed syllable until the starting point of the tonic syllable. Crystal (as cited in Couper-Kuhlen, 1986) identifies four types of head: falling heads, rising heads, falling rising heads and rising-falling heads. Generally speaking, the head is the element that holds stressed syllables and precedes the tonic syllable.
- 3- **The tonic syllable (Nucleus)** is unanimously viewed as the essential constituent of the intonational group since it stands as the locus of the most significant pitch movement. Katamba (1989) pretends that the nucleus is the fundamental element in the tone unit. It does, in reality, embrace the syllable in an utterance that expresses the essential pitch movement and is, accordingly, more prominent than the remaining components. Thus, the process of assigning a word in an utterance to be the most prominent one is similar to that of setting a syllable in a word to be the stress carrier; this analysis provides us with an interpretation of why some writers call it "sentence stress".
- 4- **The tail** comes directly after the nucleus, and it might contain stressed or unstressed syllables. Crystal (as cited in Bolinger, 1972) assumes that one prominent feature of the tail is the fact that it proceeds in the same direction of the nucleus with continuous falling or rising. Hence, this part is not deemed as an important constituent in the intonational group because of its dependent or subordinate feature of movement.

Nuclear Tones

Following the assumption that every intonational group usually contains a stressed syllable (a nucleus), which is the center of the most significant pitch movement, the intonational group's pitch movement would be traced by following the pitch curving and changes which occur presumably at the nucleus and its surroundings. Hawkins (1984) maintains that "the tones depend on the pitch movements, centred around the nucleus in addition to any words that follow in the post-nucleus" (p.204). More specifically, the shape of the tone is identified by the way in which the pitch is processed in the whole intonational group. Arnold & O'Connor (1973) define the tune (tone) as "the complete pitch treatment of a word group" (p. 7). Cruttenden (1986) introduces three factors to determine the nuclear tones: the initial movement from the nucleus (fall, rise, or level), the beginning point of this movement (high or low) and a second change of the pitch direction following the nucleus (complex tones). As a result, following the pitch direction, the tone of the intonational group can be identified.

Rouch (2009), for instance, identifies five kinds of tones: Fall, Rise, Level, Fall-Rise, and Rise-Fall, whereas Hawkins (1984) offers four types: the falling tone, the rising tone, the fall-rise tone, and the compound fall-rise tone. Furthermore, Couper-Kuhlen (1986) divides nuclear tones into three main divisions: simple, complex, and compound. The simple tones consist of fall, rise, and level, whereas the complex tones comprise fall-rise, rise-fall, fall-rise-fall, and rise-fall-rise. The compound tones, on the other hand, are divided into fall+rise and rise+fall. Other researchers divide the falling into high-fall and low-fall, whereas the rising into high-rise and low-rise.

The Functions of Intonation

Intonation is an integral part of the linguistic analysis since it constitutes a method for interpreting linguistic constructions. In fact, intonation represents additional ways by which

it is possible to express our attitudes and our ideas. Couper-Kuhlen (1986) states that intonation has six prime functions: informational, grammatical, illocutionary, attitudinal, discoursal, and indexical. Chun (2002) subsumes these functions into four major categories: grammatical, attitudinal, discoursal, and sociolinguistic.

The Grammatical Function.

Intonational patterns can be used to differentiate between syntactic structures and sentence types (statements vs questions). For example, a rising contour is usually assigned to items in preference to the falling one, which is often assigned with statements. Further, intonation can be employed to disambiguate miscellaneous grammatically ambiguous structures (Wells, 2006). To illustrate this disambiguation function, Katamba (1989) uses the following example.

Old men and women

If we say the utterance *old men and women* without an intonational break, the adjective *old* modifies the whole utterance, with the consequence that both *men* and *women* are old. On the contrary, if the utterance, per se, is said with an intonational break after men, the adjective *old* will modify only the noun *men*, not *women*.

The Attitudinal Function.

Intonation represents additional strategies via which it is likely to guess and interpret human attitudes and emotions. For instance, a more comprehensive pitch range is mainly used to indicate excitement and enthusiasm, whereas a slower pitch is majorly used to indicate tiredness and boredom (Roach, 2009). Arnold & O'Connor (1973) focus on the attitudinal function and assume that every utterance contains some needed information about our attitude under the intonation patterns used.

The Discourse Function.

Intonation highlights certain pieces of information and marks boundaries in the discourse, such as those between sentences, topics, and conversational turns (Chun, 2002). Moreover, intonation facilitates structuring the discourse's information and marks the shared knowledge between both the speaker and the listener. Roach (2009) argues that intonation points out, in terms of information, what is new and what is given. In sum, intonation helps us achieve successful encounters by focusing on the information and its types. To clarify such a function, consider the following example from Katamba (1989).

A. Do you like **books**?

B. I **like** books.

The noun *books* in A receives tonic stress because of carrying new information, but in the B's reply, *books* represent the given information; thus, the verb *like* is instead highlighted because it brings the new information.

The Sociolinguistic Function.

Like other pronunciation features, intonation identifies people and social groups (Wells, 2006). Couper-Kuhlen (1986) states that "Speakers of many socio-regional groups can be identified from their intonational patterns" (p.113). She adds that the intonational contrast identifies speakers themselves due to the claim that every single individual has his/her own intonational characteristics.

Speech Act Theory

One of the most critical concepts in pragmatics scope is the speech act theory. Such an approach is mainly based on the assumption that language has more functions than the mere aspect of conveying information. Instead, language can perform actions. Language can be

used to do an unlimited range of daily activities. We can simply obtain information, share ideas, make requests, give orders, give warnings, make threats, express feelings, ask questions, and so on.

In his famous book, "*How to things with words*" Austin (1962) is the first scholar to propose the notion of speech act and the idea of performative utterances. That is, when a certain speaker says something, he intentionally does something with his utterance. Thus, saying the utterance *I warn you, there is a snake near your car* is not meant only to convey a piece of information. Instead, it is intended to perform the speech act of warning. Accordingly, Austin makes an obvious distinction between performatives utterances which can be judged as felicitous or infelicitous and constative ones describing reality and can be judged true or false.

To be more precise, performatives are those types of utterances that do not express truth. They are specifically used to perform actions (Mey, 2009). Performatives are usually used with certain types of verbs that are called by Austin as performative verbs as well, consider the following examples:

(A)

1. I name this girl Mariam.
2. I order you to open the door.
3. I warn you not to come late again.

The above examples in (A) show that the sentences in (1), (2), and (3) perform the speech act of naming, ordering, and warning, respectively. By contrast, constative is merely the conventional statements that are utilized to describe some state of the affair or a certain event.

See these examples:

(B)

1. I have three cars.
2. Salma bought a red carpet.
3. Ali is taller than Mohammad.

The examples in (B) do not perform any kind of action. They only describe events that might be true or false. Unlike performatives, which can be addressed concerning the fact that whether they are felicitous or infelicitous, constative are to some extent related to the fact of the statements or the truth of the descriptions that might be true or not.

Speech Act and Intonation

Irrefutable pieces of evidence prove that intonation is an integral part of speech acts analysis. Siemund (2018) states that "If it is correct to say that intonation is largely independent of clause type, we may still suspect there to be correlations between intonation and specific speech acts"(p. 82). In a similar vein, Kasher (1998) maintains, "It goes without saying that no survey of the illocutionary devices of natural language could be complete if it failed to mention intonation"(p.161). In fact, prosody introduces speech at different pitch levels and diverse pitch range. Intonation features can be altered and modified to affect the quality of speech. Prosody can deliver the speaker's intention to the hearer. Different intonation patterns can convey different interpretations of meanings (Cercone & Naruedomkul, 2013). For example, the high pitch is usually associated with friendliness, politeness, vulnerability or protectiveness, whereas the low pitch is correlated with aggression or rudeness (Warren, 2016).

A lot of assumptions point out that communication barriers, remarkable misconceptions, and unsuccessful interacts might stem from misused intonational patterns, which are specially produced by foreign learners of a language. Rozaimie (2014) argues that voice and pitch contours (tone) play an essential role in the effectiveness of interpersonal relationships and communication. He suggests that one of the several speaking skills required for effective interpersonal communication is stressing appropriate rhythmic patterns to avoid misinterpretations and misuse of intonation, leading to various unintended meanings such as arrogance, annoyance, and insulting.

It is of crucial importance for learners of L2 to perceive and understand that speech acts have various realizations since the social relationships in L1 may not apply to L2; consequently, they might not be understood by the addressed (Bani Kalef, Qarqz, Suliman & Zeriqtat, 2010). Thus, studying speech acts in different cultures and contexts can help speakers of various languages to overcome possible pragmatic domains and communication problems that may be caused by social, pedagogical, and translation fields. Such studies may also help people of foreign languages and cultures prevail over essential communication obstacles (Arif & Mugaleb, 2013).

Exclamation & Wh-questions

Exclamation delivers the intense emotions and excitement of the speaker. According to Sturman (2019) there are three main characteristics of exclamation. Exclamations use L+H* pitch accent primarily, they have extra-high pitch targets, and they have more intermediate phrase boundaries than the default declarative prosody. As a matter of fact, these three features share the presumption that they increase acoustically and perceptually the phonetic prominence of the words they are connected with. The steep rise found in the L+H* bitonal pitch accent makes the most prominent of other pitch accents types. Accordingly, using the bitonal L+H* pitch accent raises the accented words' salience compared to the simple H* pitch accent. Moreover, every intermediate phrase in the pitch contour includes a nuclear pitch accent that is the most prominent accent of any given intermediate phrase.

In the same vein, Repp (2019) points out that the wh-exclamatives and wh-questions in German can be distinguished by many prosodic features on the basis of the global prosodic characteristics (duration, intonation contour) besides the prosodic features which are considered as Germanic specific accent distribution in the clause-initial and clause-final areas, pitch, duration, intensity on different elements in the clause, like the subject pronoun

and the direct object that are more salient in exclamations and the verb-second auxiliary, that is more prominent in question. Exclamatives generally indicate a highly fixed prosodic contour; they are recognized with an accent on the subject pronoun and the object having a falling pitch contour. Whereas, questions are more flexible; they are produced with rising and falling shapes. They yield a more various structure in the clause-initial and clause-final areas. The two speech acts have an information-structure that affects givenness marking. However, the effects of exclamatives are fragile. Male and female speakers have differences in their preferred accent contours for both acts, with some acoustic differences exclusive for female speakers.

Yes/no Questions

In English, there are two major types of questions: yes-no questions and wh-questions. The tag questions are involved in the yes-no questions. Regarding the use of intonation, very young children use rising intonation and facial expression to ask questions before they can formulate their full syntactic questions forms (Heidinger, 1984). In Catalan, for example, there is a difference in pitch scaling on the leading H tone of the bitonal nuclear pitch accent H+L* and !H+L* that are used by Majorcan Catalan listeners to distinguish confirmation questions from information ones. Thus, the nuclear pitch accent H+L* (up stepping) is assigned to questions that require information as opposed to the other nuclear pitch accent !H+L (down stepping) is assigned to questions that need confirmation (Vanrell, Mascaró, Torres-Tamarit, & Prieto, (2013).

Directive

Directives are the acts in which the speaker intends to make a listener commit himself to a specific course of future action. They aim at provoking the addressee to perform a particular action: orders, commands, requests, and so on. Directive speech acts do not endeavor to cause an action, but they try to offer reasonable reasons for the hearer to act to the given situation

(Kissine, 2013). Haverkate (as cited in Flor & Juan, 2010) distinguishes between two groups of directive speech acts: impositive and non-impositive. Impositive acts include more threatening acts, such as requesting, pleading, and ordering. Meanwhile, non-impositive ones involve suggestive and instructional acts. The main distinction between them can be figured out in terms of the fact that the advantages brought about by performing these acts. In impositive acts, the speaker is absolutely the beneficiary, whereas the hearer, in non-impositive speech acts, is the one who benefits by carrying out these acts. As for intonation, Vaysi & Abbaszadeh (2014) reveal that pitch contours are fundamental discourse strategies to communicate effectively with the directive speech act category.

Regarding directive speech acts like the imperatives, orders, and requests intonation Falé & Faria (2007) in European Portuguese clarify that the pitch span and pitch register play an essential role in grammatical and pragmatic distinctions. The imperatives indicate an initial rise from the onset to the F0 peak. After that rise, the peak begins to fall from the large amplitude, remarkable at the final pre-stressed vowel, the last stressed vowel to the last vowel, or voiced consonant. Regarding the distinction between declarative and imperative intonation contours, the study finds out that a clear difference is on the F0 levels and intonation contour shapes. Requests and orders differ in pitch register and pitch span. The illocutionary force of these two varieties of speech act is, therefore, dependent on these phonetic factors. However, from a perceptual perspective, the typical production of an imperative utterance does not meet the need of the required phonetic intonation features to be categorized as a good directive speech act as an order. So, it is hard to differentiate this pragmatic difference with ways other than the sentence type.

Commissives

In his reclassification of speech acts verbs, Searle (1969) keeps the commissives category as it is employed by his predecessor Austin. Commissive speech act refers to the acts in which the speaker puts himself under an obligation to do some act in the future. Ruiters (1993)

mentions that the satisfactory performance of commissives speech acts offers a valid commitment of the speaker to fulfill some related future action in the future. If the hearer carries out the related future action, the commitment can be fulfilled. Thus, commissives completely contradict the impositive nature of some speech acts; since it is the speaker's mission to perform the action, rather than the hearer, the hearer fundamentally takes advantage by carrying out the action. The threatening speech act is classified under this category. Al-Salim (2010) states that the threatening speech act in American English and Jordanian Arabic can be performed with if- clause type one, imperative order, imperative command, imperative prohibition, declarative, interrogative yes/no question, and if- clause type two. Although both languages adopt the same strategies, they use different intonational patterns in performing the threatening speech act. For example, 75% of Arabic speaking subjects use a rise-fall tune with if clause type one, meanwhile 75% of American speaking subjects use a rise- fall- rise tune with if clause type one.

C. CONCLUSION

This overview of different speech acts and intonation shows how intonation can be used to perform these acts. Confiding speech acts to the mere aspect of producing utterances with an intended purpose to elicit an action might not be enough to understand the real meaning of utterances. For example, if the requesting utterance “would you pass me the salt, please?” is produced with a rising rather than falling intonation, it might be interpreted as an insult to the hearer. Eventually, this can affect the illocutionary force of the utterance or change it to be interpreted differently. As a matter of fact, there seems to be a kind of outstanding interaction between intonation and the performance of these illocutionary forces successfully. Although intonation is an intrinsic characteristic of speech acts, it has been lately given attention in researches. This study, in fact, explores more features that can be added to the concept of speech act theory by highlighting the role intonation plays in carrying out these warning acts

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