# Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners› Performance in Using Intonation to Express Emotions

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## Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the performance of Iraqi EFL learners in using intonation to express emotions and personal attitudes through pitch contrasts. Moreover, the study tries to find out whether learners' performance differs with the difference of their gender. To achieve these aims, the literature about intonation and its functions is surveyed and a test is conducted on thirty fourth year students, as a sample, to test their performance with regards to the topic of the study. One of the conclusions arrived at after conducting the test is that Iraqi EFL female learners are more inclined to express their emotions through the use of intonation; this is reflected in their excellent performance in the test.

# 1. Introduction

Although intonation is primarily a matter of pitch variation, the functions attributed to intonation, such as the expression of attitudes and emotions, almost always involve concomitant variation in other prosodic features. Crystal (1975: 11), for example, says that "intonation is not a single system of contours and levels, but the product of the interaction of features from different prosodic systems- tone, pitch-range, loudness, rhythmicality, and tempo in particular".

Roach (2000: 183) states that unless the speaker uses intonation appropriately in a given situation, there is a risk that he may unintentionally give offence, for example, the speaker might use an intonation suitable for expressing boredom or discontent when what is needed is an expression of gratitude or affection. Thus, the present study deals with intonation focusing on its attitudinal function through which various emotions are conveyed. The study hypothesizes that students face difficulties in using the appropriate tones to convey certain emotions and their performance differs with the difference of their gender. Thirty fourth year students at the University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English are chosen to perform the test.

## 1.1 Intonation/ A General Overview

In linguistics, intonation is a variation of spoken pitch that is not used to distinguish words; instead it is used for a range of functions such as indicating the attitudes and emotions of the speaker, signaling the differences between statements and questions, focusing attention on important elements of the spoken message and also helping to regulate conversational interaction (Cruttenden, 1997: 8).

Carr (2008: 78) states that intonation refers tothe kinds of pitch modulation which are found in whole utterances and used to highlight certain elements in an utterance, to bundle words together into information chunks, and to convey the speaker's attitude to what he is saying. For Crystal (2008: 252), intonation is a term used in the study of suprasegmental phonology, referring to the distinctive use of patterns of pitch, or melody.

Intonation is often described impressionistically as a matter of "musical features" or "speech tunes or melodies". This is sometimes linked with the

conception of intonation as something superimposed upon the intrinsic meaning of words themselves, conveying the speaker's attitude rather than any fundamental meaning (O'Connor and Arnold, 1973: 1). It is true that the prosodic features of utterances signal attitudinal factors such as the speaker's anger or tiredness. Besides providing an overlay of feelings or emotions, intonation is in fact a crucial part of language carrying important semantic functions. These functions may be attitudinal in the sense that they express, for instance, definiteness or tentativeness (Clark and Yallop, 1999: 358).

## 1.2 Analyses of English intonation

Early in the 20th century, the dominant approach in the description of English intonation was based on a small number of basic "tones" associated with intonation units. In a typical description, tone 1 is falling, with final fall, while tone 2 has a final rise (Jones, 1964: 275).

Phoneticians broke up the intonation of such units into smaller components, the most important of which was the nucleus, which corresponds to the main accented syllable of the intonation unit, usually in the last lexical word of the intonation unit. Each nucleus carries one of a small number of nuclear tones, usually including fall, rise, fall-rise, rise-fall, and possibly others. The nucleus may be preceded by a head containing stressed syllables preceding the nucleus, and a tail consisting of syllables following the nucleus within the tone unit. Unstressed syllables preceding the head (if present) or nucleus (if there is no head) constitute a pre-head. This approach was further developed by Halliday and by O'Connor and Arnold, though with considerable variation in terminology. This "Standard British" treatment of intonation in its present-day form is explained in detail by Wells and in a simplified version by Roach (Web source 1).

Halliday saw the functions of intonation as depending on choices in three main variables: Tonality (division of speech into intonation units), Tonicity (the placement of the tonic syllable or nucleus) and Tone (choice of nuclear tone). Research by Crystalemphasized the importance of making generalizations about intonation based on authentic, unscripted speech, and the roles played by prosodic features such as tempo, pitch range, loudness and rhythmicality in communicative functions usually attributed to intonation (ibid.).

The transcription of intonation in such approaches is normally incorporated

into the line of text. A typical example would be:

We looked at the ↗sky | and saw the ↘ clouds

An influential development in British studies of intonation has been Discourse Intonation, an offshoot of discourse analysisfirst put forward by Brazil (1975: 14).This approach lays great emphasis on the communicative and informational use of intonation, pointing out its use for distinguishing between presenting new information and referring to old, shared information, as well as signaling the relative status of participants in a conversation (e.g. teacher-pupil, or doctor-patient) and helping to regulate conversational turn-taking. The description of intonation in this approach owes much to Halliday. Intonation is analyzed purely in terms of pitch movements and "key" and makes little reference to the other prosodic features usually thought to play a part in conversational interaction (Halliday and Greaves, 2008: 67).

1.2 Functions of Intonation

Intonation performs several functions in language. Its most important function is as a signal of grammatical structure, where it performs a role similar to punctuation in writing, but involving far more contrasts (Gussenhoven, 2004: 94). The marking of sentence, clause and other boundaries, and the contrast between some grammatical structures, such as questions and statements, may be made using intonation. For example, the change in meaning illustrated by 'Are you asking me or telling me' is regularly signaled by a contrast between rising and falling pitch, e.g. "He's going, isn't he?" (= I'm asking you) opposed to "He's going, isn't he!" (= I'm telling you). A second role of intonation is in the communication of personal attitudes: sarcasm, puzzlement, anger, etc., can all be signaled by contrasts in pitch, along with other prosodic and paralinguistic features. Other roles of intonation in language have been suggested, e.g. as one of the ways of signaling social background (Crystal, 2008: 252).

Lee (1958: 45) argues that all vocal languages use pitch pragmatically in intonation, for instance, to emphasize, to convey surprise or irony, or to pose a question. Many writers have attempted to produce a list of distinct functions of intonation. Perhaps, the longest was that of Lee which is given below:

- Grammatical function to identify grammatical structure. It is claimed that in English, a falling pitch movement is associated with statements, but a rising

pitch turns a statement into a yes-no question as in "He's going ↗home?"

- Focusing to show what information in the utterance is new and what is already known. For example: in English "I saw a ↘man in the garden"answers "Whom did you see?" or "What happened?", while "I ↘saw a man in the garden"answers "Did you hear a man in the garden?".

- Discourse function to show how clauses and sentences go together in spoken discourse. forexample: subordinate clauses often have lower pitch, faster tempo and narrower pitch range than their main clauseas in the case of the material in parentheses in "The Red Planet (as it's known) is fourth from the sun".

- Psychological function to organize speech into units that are easy to perceive, memorize and perform, for example: the utterance "You can have it in red blue green yellow or ↘black" is more difficult to understand and remember than the same utterance divided into tone units as in "You can have it in ↗red | ↗blue | ↗green | ↗yellow | or ↘black".

- Indexical function to act as a marker of personal or social identity. For example: group membership can be indicated by the use of intonation patterns adopted specifically by that group, such as street vendors or preachers. The so-called high rising terminal, where a statement ends with a high rising pitch movement, is said to be typical of younger speakers of English, and possibly to be more widely found among young female speakers.

- Attitudinal function for expressing emotions and attitudes. For example, a fall from a high pitch on the "mor" syllable of "good morning" suggests more excitement than a fall from a low pitch.

1.2.1 Roach's Functions of Intonations

Roach (2008: 183-4) identifies four functions of English intonation. These are the following:

1. The accentual function

Intonation helps to produce the effect of prominence on syllables that need to be perceived as stressed, and in particular the placing of tonic stress on a particular syllable marks out the word to which it belongs as the most

important in the tone-unit

2. The grammatical function

The listener is better able to recognize the grammar and syntactic structure of what is being said by using the information contained in the intonation; for example, such things as the placement of boundaries between phrases, clauses or sentences, the difference between questions and statements and the use of grammatical subordination may be indicated. This has been called the grammatical function of intonation.

3. The discourse function

Intonation can signal to the listener what is to be taken as "given", can suggest when the speaker is indicating some sort of contrast or link with material in another tone-unit and, in conversation, can convey to the listener what kind of response is expected. Such functions are examples of intonation's discourse function.

4. The attitudinal function

Intonation enables speakers to express their emotions and attitudes as they speak, and this adds a special kind of "meaning" to spoken language. Attention will be concentrated on the attitudinal function of intonation since it is the concern of the present study.

1.2.1.1 Roach's Attitudinal Function of Intonation

The attitudinal function has been given so much importance in past work on intonation. It overlaps considerably with discourse function (Roach, 2000: 184). Roach (ibid.) argues that intonation is used to convey feelings and attitudes; for example, the same sentence can be said in different ways, which might be labeled "angry", "happy", "grateful", "bored", and so on.

Roach (ibid.) adds that the attitudinal function becomes clear when it is related to the meanings in different contexts; the same attitudinal meaning may be conveyed by a range of different intonations. The attitude may be towards the listener, what is said, some external event or situation. Attitudes may be expressed on purpose or involuntarily. Moreover, the range of attitudes is hard to outline, e.g., a sentence like "I want to buy a new car" may be uttered in such a way that it indicates that the speaker is pleading, angry, sad, happy,

impatient, etc.

Furthermore, intonation is understood here in the broader sense, not only as a change in pitch, but also loudness, speed, voice quality, pitch range (narrow or wide), and key (neutral pitch). This may be accompanied by paralinguistic variables such as facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and vocal effects (laughs, sobs, etc.) (ibid.).

Roach (ibid. 188-189) gives the following basic meanings of English tones:

1. Falling tone is used to express finality, definiteness, and certainty:
- That is the end of the ↘news.
- I'm absolutely ↘ certain.
2. Rising tone (most functions attributed to rising tone are nearer to grammatical than attitudinal, for example:

- General question: Is it ↘over?
                    Can you ↘ elp me?
-Listing: ↗Red, ↗brown, ↗yellow, or ↘blue (Fall is normal on the last item)
- To indicate that there is more to follow:
I phoned them right a ↗way(and they afraid to come).
-To encourage: It won't ↗hurt.

3. Falling-rising tone
-To express uncertainty and doubt: You ˇmay be right.
                                    It is ˇpossible.
4. Rising-falling tone is used to indicate the feeling of being surprised and impressed: You were ˆfirst.
ˆAll of them.

5. The level tone is used in English, but in a rather restricted context: it almost always conveys a feeling of saying something routine, uninteresting or boring. A teacher calling the names of pupil from a register will often do so using a level tone on each name, and the pupils are likely to respond with _Yes when their name is called. Similarly, if one is being asked a series of routine questions for some purpose, such as applying for an insurance policy, one might reply to each

question of a series like: Have you ever been in prison? Do you suffer from any serious illness?, etc. with _No (ibid. 158).

### 1.2.2 Gimson's Attitudinal Function of Intonation

In the same vein, Gimson (1975: 277) argues that the attitudinal function of intonation applies equally to utterances consisting of more than one word and to those of a single word. Gimson (ibid.) attempts to assign generalized verbal descriptions to the attitudes conveyed by intonation patterns in respect of various types of utterances. The main types of utterances are: assertions, questions containing an interrogative word, questions expecting yes or no as an answer, question tags, commands, requests, greetings, exclamations, etc.

For Grimson (ibid. 278-9), the falling nuclei is generally a mater of fact, separative, and assertive. No explicit appeal is made to the listener; yet, the pattern is not necessarily impolite; a conversation among people who are intimately acquainted might, for instance, exhibit a preponderance of falling intonations, without the exchange being querulous or lacking the social courtesies of speech. Thus, the falling nucleus expresses the following feelings or meanings:
- Unexcited and detached: ↘Yesterday.
- Weak insistence: ↘How are you going to do it?
- Impatient, testy, curt: ↘Are you coming?
- Sympathetic or distant and unmoved: ↘Tragic!
- Perfunctory: ↘morning.
- Polite, neutral: Put it over↘there.
- Blunt to strangers, but a common unemotional form among intimates:   What do you want to ↘do?
- Phlegmatic, mild: What a ↘mess!
- Bored: What are we going to ↘do?
- Uninvolved, perfunctory: Have you got the ↘ticket?
-  Sarcastic: You are a fine↘friend!
- Routine, perfunctory greeting: Good ↘morning.

Gimson (ibid. 280-1) mentions that the rising nucleus- essentially unfinished

and continuative, often with overtones of politeness, encouragement, pleading, diffidence, suspicion, etc- is used as follows:

- Introducing a topic or an uninterested question form: ↗Well
- Gentle command or request: ↗Hold it.
- Doubtful, asking for information: He's got one, ↗hasn't he?
- Reassuring statements: She won't be ↗long.
- Polite inquiry: What's the ↗time?
- Pleasant, encouraging invitation: Sit ↗down.
- Polite, interested: Can you ↗come?
- Cheerful good wishes: Good ↗luck. All the ↗best.
- Cheerful, friendly greeting: Good ↗morning.

The rising nucleus also signifies complaint, suspicion, veiled threat, and lack of interest or enthusiasm, etc.

-Unsympathetic, menacing, threatening: What have you been ↗doing?
- Routine request, peremptory: Try a ↗gain.
- Long-suffering, complaining: Don't leave the ↗door open.

A high-rising nucleus, rising to a high pitch, is associated essentially with questions, for example:

- An elliptical question showing eagerness, brightness, enthusiasm, or asking for a repetition: ↗Coffee? (=Will you have some more coffee?)
- A question showing great excitement, concern, indignation, etc. :
- Indignation, surprise, horror: You actually ↗saw him? What ↗me?
- Dismay, surprise, indignation: It wasn't ↗yours!

The falling-rising nucleus combines the dominant effect of the fall with any of the emotional or meaningful attitudes associated with the rise. Both fall and rise may occur within one word (ibid.282):

- Warm, sympathetically appreciative: ↘Well ↗done!
- Pressing request: ↘Do sit ↗down.
- Strong but sympathetic warning: ↘Mind how you ↗go.
- An appealing, inviting summons: ˇJohn! ˇLook!

In a rising-falling nucleus, the initial rise may reinforce the meaning of any high fall, often with additional warmth, indignation, sarcasm, etc. (ibid. 279):

- Ironical greeting: Good ˆmorning.

- Sarcastic: How nice for you.
- Mocking, indignant: Doesn't he?
- Suspicious, indignant interest: What does this father do?

## 1.3 Research Methodology

The research methodology followed in carrying out this study is a test administered to a number of respondents with the researcher available for clarification and guidance. The test consists of two questions, the first of which tests respondents' performance at the recognition level, while the second of which tests their performance at the production level. This research primarily uses qualitative and quantitative analyses. The answers are corrected and the percentages of each choice are calculated using Microsoft Excel.

## 1.4 Sample of the Study

The sample of the study encompasses thirty fourth year undergraduate Iraqi EFL learners from the University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English during the academic year 2018-2019. The participants are males and females whose native language is Arabic. They all have been studying English as a foreign language; therefore, they have been considered as having familiar knowledge in English language. The reason behind this variation in the gender of participants is to show whether their performance differs with respect to their gender.

## 1.5 Results and Discussions

After conducting the test in which participants are requested to answer two questions, each of which contains ten items, the researcher takes the responsibility of correcting and scrutinizing the responses of the participants. Thus, what follow is the results of the test and the discussion of these results:

**Table (1): The Performance of the Subject at the Recognition Level**

| Item | No. of correct items | Percentage | No. of incorrect items | Percentage |
|------|---------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1 | 10 | 33% | 20 | 67% |
| 2 | 9 | 30% | 21 | 70% |
| 3 | 17 | 57% | 13 | 43% |
| 4 | 15 | 50% | 15 | 50% |
| 5 | 11 | 37% | 19 | 63% |
| 6 | 14 | 47% | 16 | 53% |
| 7 | 13 | 43% | 17 | 57% |
| 8 | 17 | 57% | 13 | 43% |
| 9 | 14 | 47% | 16 | 53% |
| 10 | 8 | 27% | 22 | 73% |
| Total | | 43% | | 57% |

Total          43%          57%

The first question, which reads as (In the following bits of conversation, you are supplied with an opening line and a response that you must imagine saying. You are given an indication in brackets of the feeling or attitude expressed, and you must mark on the text the intonation you think is appropriate), is set to measure the subjects' performance at the recognition level. It consists of ten items aiming at measuring the students' ability at using the correct tones. In each item, the students are given bits of conversation with an indication in brackets of the feeling or attitude expressed. The students are required to mark on the text the appropriate intonation. After performing a statistical analysis of the students' performance at this question, it has been founded that the percentage of the correct answers is (43%), while the percentage of the incorrect answers is (57%). This means that the student's performance at the recognition level is poor. They face profound difficulties in marking the

correct tone what means that they really fail in expressing their emotions and attitudes. After conducting a separate analysis of males and females' responses, it has been noted, that almost all females (98%) have responded correctly to the question. This indicates that females, in general, are more prone to express their sentiments because they are sensitive. In a nutshell, they are better at expressing emotions than males who are always tough; thus, they pay attention to learning how to express emotions (whether these of love, grief, loss, anxiety, etc.) through the use of tones at whatever language they learn. Males, on the other hand, usually hide their feelings because they are taught that real males are emotionally stoic and those who express a wider range of emotions are called sissies. Thus, males do not pay much attention to learning how to use appropriate tones. This is reflected in the percentage of their correct responses which is (2%) only.

Table (2): The Performance of the Subject at the Production Level

## Table (2): The Performance of the Subject at the Production Level

| Item | No. of correct items | Percentage | No. of incorrect items | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 10 | 33% | 20 | 67% |
| 2 | 14 | 47% | 16 | 53% |
| 3 | 16 | 53% | 14 | 47% |
| 4 | 6 | 20% | 24 | 80% |
| 5 | 9 | 30% | 21 | 70% |
| 6 | 11 | 37% | 19 | 63% |
| 7 | 13 | 43% | 17 | 57% |
| 8 | 8 | 27% | 22 | 73% |
| 9 | 17 | 57% | 13 | 43% |
| 10 | 15 | 50% | 15 | 50% |
| Total | | 40% | | 60% |

The second question, which aims at measuring the subjects' performance at the production level, reads as "Exemplify for the following putting the suitable tone on the tonic syllable". The students are given certain situations expressing certain feelings and are asked to provide an example about each of the situations providing the suitable tone on the tonic syllables. After correcting the responses, it has been found that the percentage of the incorrect responses is more than that of the correct ones (40%) and (60%) respectively. No male participant has correctly marked the tonic syllable in each of the examples they have been provided. This is an indication of the fact that males always tend to process their emotions inwardly; they always attempt to burry their feelings inside so that they are unaware of learning how to use intonation to express their emotions

Accordingly, the results of the test as a whole shows that male students have serious difficulties in using appropriate English tones to convey emotions. Thus, they should be trained to use them appropriately. This difficulty may be attributable to the fact they are not native speakers of English so they can not use English intonation correctly. One solution would be to focus on using intonation appropriately inside the classroom. At the same time, teachers should concentrate on this topic.

1.6. Conclusions

It has been concluded that intonation is not a single system of contours and levels, but the product of the interaction of features from different prosodic systems such as tone, pitch-change, loudness, rhythmicality, and tempo. It is used for a range of functions such as signaling the differences between statements and questions, focusing attention on important elements and so on. The most important role of intonation is the communication or the expression of personal attitudes such as sarcasm, puzzlement, anger, etc. All these can be signaled through contrasts in pitch in spoken language, and through tone marks in writing.

Intonation enables speakers to express their emotions and attitudes; this adds a special kind of meaning to language. Thus, the attitudinal function overlaps considerably with the discourse function. Attitudes or emotions may be expressed on purpose or involuntarily.

After testing thirty fourth year students at the University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English in assigning the correct tone on the basis of the emotions given in brackets and in exemplifying for certain situation through marking the tonic syllable and using a correct tone depending on the emotion highlighted in the situation, it has been found that the students' performance is poor. As such, more attention should be given to the study of intonation, whether by the students or by their teachers.

Female respondents are more adept at managing emotional communication through the use of opportune intonation at different occasions. They can correctly use intonation to express a range of emotions. This is made clear through their performance in solving the two questions. Male respondents, on the other hand, stuff all their feelings inside that is why their performance at both questions is poor if compared with the performance of their female counterparts.

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Web source (1): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intonation-(Linguistics).

Appendix

(The Test)

Q.1/ In the following bits of conversation, you are supplied with an opening line and a response that you must imagine saying. You are given an indication in brackets of the feeling or attitude expressed, and you must mark on the text the intonation you think is appropriate:

1. A.　It looks nice for a ↘swim.

　B.　It's rather cold. (Doubtful)

2. A.　Why not get a ↗car?

　B.　Because I can't afford it. (Impatient)

3. A.　I have lost my ↘ticket.

　B.　You are silly then. (Stating the obvious)

4. A.　You can't have an ice-cream.

　B.　Oh please. (Pleading)

5. A.　What times are the ↗buses?

　B.　Seven o'clock, seven thirty and eight.

6. A.　She got four ↘'A' levels.

　B.　Four (impressed)

7. A.　How much ↘work have you got to do?

　B.　I've got to do the shopping (and more things after that)

8. A.　Will the ˇchildren go?

　B.　Some of them might (Uncertain)

9. A.　Have you ever been to ↗ prison?

　B.　No (Routine)

10. A.　Let's go.

　B.　What are we going to do? (bored)

Q/2 Exemplify for each of the following putting the suitable tone on the tonic syllable

1. Express your uncertainty to Kim concerning the day of the exam.

2. Indicate the feeling of surprise concerning the number of the participants in the race.

3. Request someone to help you lift the box.

4. Encourage your sick child to take the medicine.

5. With boredom, ask your friend what you are going to do tonight.

6. Cheerful good wishes

7. Ironical greeting

8. Pressing request

9. Express your indignation, surprise, and horror in a question.

10. Ask your friend what he wants to drink giving him options.