

## Intonation in English and Arabic

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### Abstract

*Intonation is an essential component of both English and Arabic languages, particularly in the case of questions. In English, rising intonation at the end of a sentence is commonly used to indicate a question, while falling intonation indicates a statement. However, the use of intonation is more complex and relies on a combination of pitch, duration, and stress. Arabic employs a wider range of pitch variations to indicate a question. In both languages, intonation plays a critical role in conveying meaning and can affect the interpretation of a sentence. Understanding the nuances of intonation in both English and Arabic is crucial for effective communication in these languages*

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### Chapter One

#### Introduction:

Intonation can be illustrated by the simple and commonly heard lament, "It's not what you said, it's how you said it". Of course, this is in reference to the intonation pattern of words or phrases being uttered rather than their lexical content. Equally significant is the fact that native speakers are often unaware of intonation and its role in their language. This applies to English as well as to Arabic. Simply put, it means that while native English speakers can easily recognize the grammatical and pronunciation difficulties faced by non-native speakers, and thus make allowances for their errors, they are unable to do so for intonation. More often than not, intonation errors made by non-native speakers may not be recognized and, hence, may lead to misunderstanding. An example in point is when non-native speakers mistakenly use intonation patterns which convey to native hearers unintended notes of rudeness. Unaware of possible intonation errors, native hearers may take the perceived rudeness to be deliberate (Taylor, 1993).

Intonation is a strong aspect of language which has always had its effect on communication. Pike in (Hewings, 1995) clarifies this point with the contention that "We often react more violently to . . . intonational meanings than to . . . lexical ones; if a man's tone of voice belies his words, we immediately assume that the intonation more faithfully reflects his true linguistic intentions" (p. 251).

## **1. What is Intonation:**

According to Kreidler (1989), it is well known that English utterances are seldom spoken in monotones. For one, native English speakers produce melodies of varying kinds, with the voice rising and falling. Such melodies are technically called intonation.

Intonation can be described as the movements or variations in pitch to which we attach familiar labels describing levels (e.g. high / low) and tones (e.g. falling / rising), etc. (Ranalli, 2002).

It is common knowledge that speakers use pitch to send various messages. Wahba (1998) provides the following example which illustrates the significance of pitch in everyday communication. If Ali says: "There isn't any salt on the table," Layla might repeat the same words but with gradually rising pitch. This would have the effect of sending a message such as: "Are you sure? I am amazed. I am sure I put it there." Alternatively, Layla might want to send the message: "There is salt somewhere, but not on the table," in which case she could do this by using a falling then rising pitch on the word "table" (p. 32).

Many phonologists believe that another important component of intonation is the phenomenon called prominence. This is the tendency for speakers to make some syllables more noticeable than others. Such action is usually accomplished by pronouncing syllables louder and longer, assigning them a different pitch, or articulating their phonemes - especially the vowels - more distinctly. Prominence is also referred to as emphasis, focus, main stress, nucleus, or tonic accent. Equally important is to stress that pitch level, pitch movement, and prominence are all relative values. For example, "one speaker's 'mid' pitch would be another speaker's 'low' pitch". Values do vary from speaker to speaker and in accordance to the context of the situation (Ranalli, 2002).

Researching this topic, Kumaki (2003) cites Brazil who believes that the tone unit is a stretch of speech which carries the intonational features of certain binary choices; a choice of one meaning rather than another. The beginnings and ends of tone units are marked by the symbol // . This should demonstrate that if either one or two syllables in a tone unit is made more emphatic or noticeable than the others, the syllables are then believed to have prominence. Such a feature should distinguish them from all other syllables and, thus, draw the listener's attention to the particular word or message being conveyed. Producing prominence also involves complex changes in loudness, pitch, and length in such a way that syllables with such features are described as prominent syllables, where a meaningful either/or choice has been made by the speaker.

## **2. Forms of Intonation:**

The basic forms of intonation, in English and Arabic, consist of three simple tones: falling, rising and level, and two complex ones: falling-

rising and rising-falling. The basic functions are attitudinal, accentual, grammatical and discourse.

#### Simple Tones:

These tones have a single nucleus with a single pitch movement in one direction.

**The Falling Tone:** The falling tone is one which descends from a higher to a lower pitch. Collins and Mees (2003: 126-127) suggest that falling tones express: (a) finality, (b) unloading of information. They also associate this tone with statements.

**The Rising Tone:** Gimson (1970: 269-281) states that the rising tone is a rising glide, which may extend from low to mid, or from mid to high. They are essentially unfinished and continuative, often with over tones of politeness, encouragement, pleading, diffidence, suspicion, etc.

**The Level Tone:** This tone is used when the pitch remains at a constant level. There is no pitch change that accompanies the production of utterances. The majority of scholars tend not to mention the level tone, or restrict it to monotone contexts, like Gimson (1970: 261), Halliday (1970: 281) and Kingdon (1958a: 29). A number of linguists allow level tone into their description. Crystal (1969: 216) and Roach (2000: 158). Similarly, this tone is used in Arabic. Al-Azzawi (2002: 111) states that this tone may carry the meaning of boredom or uncertainty.

#### Complex Tones:

These tones have a single nucleus with a bidirectional pitch movement.

**Falling-Rising:** This tone consists of two pitch movements: fall and then rise. Halliday (1985: 282) states that it is “the most frequently occurring tone in English after the falling tone”. Palmer and Blandford (1969: 28) state that the falling-rising tone conveys an implication, apology or warning, or to soften utterances that might sound too harsh.

For example:

1. He \may be /there (but I <sup>∨</sup>doubt it)
2. I'm <sup>∨</sup> sorry

**Rising-Falling Tone:** This tone consists of a rise followed by a fall. Like the fall-rise, the whole tone movement may occur on a syllable or may spread over the syllables of that tail.

Quirk et al. (1985: 1600) state that it is used to express strong feeling, sarcasm, emphasis, impatience, surprise, and disapproval. For example:

3. <sup>∨</sup>Hello! (surprise)
4. <sup>∨</sup>No. (vehement denial)
5. <sup>∨</sup>How nice of you! (ironic)

### **3- The Functions of Intonation:**

It goes without saying that intonational choices made by speakers - native and otherwise - carry linguistic information and perform a variety of functions. Kumaki (2003) makes it clear that phonologists do differ on intonational functions.. Roach proposes four: attitudinal, grammatical, accentual, and discourse; with the contention that the last two could be grouped into one. Halliday suggests three functions: grammatical, informational, and attitudinal. It is clear that three basic intonational functions attitudinal, grammatical, and informational or discourse are commonly suggested by the above researchers. However, these functions have seen their share of praise as well as criticism.

#### **2.1 Attitudinal Intonation:**

Generally speaking, discussions of the function of intonation in English often center on the relation between intonation and attitudes. In fact, the main function of intonation is seen by many phonologists as conveying attitudes. This is reflected in O'Connor and Arnold's classic discussions of English intonation in Taylor (1993). While it is undeniable that intonation does convey attitudes and that there is a strong and important relationship between intonation and attitude, it is very difficult to say anything sensible about it, simply because there is no general consensus on how to describe or define attitudes. This is an extremely subjective issue. Similarly, there is no agreement on how to associate particular intonation patterns with particular attitudes. There seems to be no consistent relationship.

While many of the examples given by O'Connor and Arnold are quite convincing, it seems impossible to draw any general conclusions. Too much depends on individual circumstances. Taylor (1993) states that in part, the reason for such difficulties lies in the fact that intonation is not the sole factor involved in conveying attitude. Many other factors, such as loudness, quality of voice, speed of delivery, facial and bodily gestures, etc., also contribute significantly to the conveying of attitude. The result of all this is that we cannot really say anything constructive about intonation and attitude. Hence, it is far better, especially when it comes to teaching and learning, to deal with intonation in terms of information structure, grammar, and discourse.

The conjunction of utterance types and phonological choices plays an important part in conveying attitude and emotion. According to (Corbett2004), this type of intonation isolates intonation tones and gives them labels, such as 'surprise, agreement, disagreement etc.,' (p. 1) thus defining our emotions at the time of speaking. Corbett also questions the usefulness of attitudinal intonation. An example in point is the following interaction: " Student A: Did you know that Marco Polo discovered

China? Student B: Really!” (p. 1). As can be surmised, there is no real context for Student B’s surprise. Such encounters are often criticized for lack of context and their need of lexical and contextual information to make sense.

## **2.2 Grammatical Intonation:**

Describing grammatical intonation, Crystal, in Kumaki (2003), declares that it helps to identify grammatical structure in speech, performing a role similar to punctuation in writing. It may also identify clause and sentence units and contrasts questions/statements. According to Halliday, as cited in Kumaki (2003), grammatical intonation relates to grammatical mood (question/statement, etc.) as well as to modality (possibility, validity, etc.). Kumaki also cites Roach who believes that “grammatical intonation helps language speakers and learners to recognize the grammar and syntactic structures, e.g. boundaries between phrases, clauses, and sentences. It also facilitates our knowledge of the differences between questions and statements as well as the intricacies of grammatical subordination” (p. 10).

Although many phonologists strongly endorse grammatical intonation, several of them believe that this function is incapable by itself to provide adequate account for certain intonational patterns. For example, some, such as Blum (2001), suggest that there is a strong tendency to have rises in ‘yes/no questions’ and falls in ‘wh-questions’, but they are by no means the only patterns possible. These conventional intonation contours, or as Blum calls them “defaults”, may be overridden by various contextual factors and, hence, the interrogative intention must be inferred from other elements present in the utterance. The speaker’s attitude, such as incredulity, amazement, a high level of interest or lack of it, etc., may also influence the contour and, in particular, the pitch height of the utterance.

## **2.3 Discourse (Informational) Intonation:**

Since people communicate over a stretch of language, it only follows that intonation should be examined at discourse level. Recent phonological research tends to define intonation as a speaker's way of organizing and relating meanings throughout the discourse. Perhaps more importantly, this approach does not label but interprets various meanings that are based on the choices of the speaker.

It is suggested by Ranalli (2002) that almost all intonation choices are tied to the context in which they occur, it is impossible in the discourse approach to isolate a stretch of speech from its context and, hence, make reasonable generalizations about intonational meaning. Particularly associated with the work of David Brazil at the University of Birmingham,

discourse intonation proposes a simple and flexible system with a small and finite number of choices. First and foremost is the tone unit, which is the basic building block of speech and which is used widely as a discourse intonation provides a manageable tool as there are four options associated with tone units: prominence, tone, key, and termination; each of which adds a different type of information. Prominence is a syllable on which there is a major pitch movement. Tone pitch movements are distinguished by their particular direction or contour. Brazil suggests five movements: falling, rising, fall-rise, rise-fall, and level. Key is the relative pitch level chosen by speakers for each tone unit. Three choices are proposed: low, middle, and high. These choices can be recognized in reference to the key of the immediately preceding tone unit. Termination, on the other hand, is a low, middle, or high pitch level choice made by speakers at the beginning or end of a tone unit.

Equally important is the increasing evidence that out of the four most common intonational functions (attitudinal, grammatical, accentual, and discourse) there is a noticeable movement towards adopting the discourse view of intonation (DI), particularly in teaching new language learners. This seems to be the case because according to Hewings (1995), DI tends to view speech as “a purpose-driven activity where speakers and hearers cooperate to reach the desired goal of shared understanding. It also refers to the common ground that exists between speaker and hearer as the area in which their world views converge.” (p. 61).

Discourse intonation is credited with the distinction between new and old or given information to which a speaker has already referred. Taylor (1993) observes that this approach is primarily based on the ability to distinguish between 'proclaiming tones' and 'referring tones'. Proclaiming tones usually introduce 'new' information and, thus, consist of either falling tones or rising-falling tones. Referring tones, however, point to the information that is already mentioned or present in some way in the total context of the utterance (e.g., 'old' or 'given' information) and, hence, consist of either rising tones or falling-rising tones. Furthermore, this approach means that intonation is dealt with not as attitudinal or grammatical function mode but as a communicative value of the interaction between the speaker and the hearer. The following example provided by (Kumaki, 2003, p. 14) illustrates the difference between proclaiming and referring tones.

“While // p WHAT TIME is it // (wh-question with proclaiming tone) projects complete ignorance of the time, as if saying: ‘I don’t have the slightest idea of what time it is’; the referring tone // r WHAT TIME is it // signifies that the speaker is trying to elicit a yes/no answer to an anticipatory question such as: ‘Is it as late as I think it is?’ or ‘Isn’t it time we leave?’

## Questions in English :

- **Questions**: are sentences that seek information of some kind. They are followed by a question mark (?)
- **There are seven main types of questions in English:**  
( Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2014),202)

### 1) **Yes-no questions**

Yes-no questions are designed to seek a reply in the affirmative or negative, whether the reply is just ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or whether this is amplified in some way, as in:

- Is the house occupied just now? o No.
- Has the doctor arrived yet?
- Yes. He’s just arrived. □ Are we ready to begin?
- Let’s get started. Yes.

### 2) **Tag questions**

Some yes-no questions are tag questions in which the questioning part is in the tag at the end of the sentence. The following are examples of tag questions, with the tags in bold:

- She’s a lawyer, **isn’t she?**
- He’s not here yet, **is he?**

### 3) **Wh-questions**

Wh-questions begin with a word beginning with wh, such as why, where, when, who and what, ( O’Connor (1980),122 ) as in:

- What do you want?
- Where did he go?

### 4) **Alternative questions**

Alternative questions require a reply that refers to the options given in the sentence. They contain the conjunction ‘or’. The following are examples of alternative questions:

- Did you come by bus or train?
- o By train.
- Is the party on Friday or Saturday?
- o It’s on Saturday.

### 5) **Exclamatory questions**

Exclamatory questions are sentences which have the structure of questions but which are actually used as exclamations and end with an exclamation mark. They are really seeking the listener’s agreement rather than seeking an answer. ( Kirkpatrick with Kirkpatrick(2014),202 ) The following are examples of exclamatory questions:

- Wasn’t that a wonderful meal!

- Hasn't she changed!

### 6) Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical questions are also sentences that have the structure of questions and they end in a question mark. However, the speaker does not require an answer to these questions. (Declarck(2008),345).

The following are examples of rhetorical questions:

- Why should I care?
- Who does she think she is?
- How should I know?

### 7) Question by tone of voice

A yes-no question can have the structure of a statement, rather than a question, uttered in a questioning tone of voice and ending with a question mark. The following are examples of this:

- Anne told you I was going? o Yes, she did.
- Tom has actually left her?  
o He went today. Yes.
- The house is no longer for sale?
- No. It's been sold.

### **Question in Arabic:**

- **There are seven main types of questions in Arabic :**  
(Aziz(1989),260)

### 1. Polarity Questions

(Yes-No question) are realized by means of two particles, هل and أ As in:

- هل الطائرة وصلت؟
- هل تتحدث الفرنسي؟
- أسوف تذهب الى القرية؟

### 2. Positive Oriented Questions

Positive oriented questions are realized by using the particle followed immediately by the element which is the focus of polarity. As in:

- أ رواية اشتريت؟
- أ في الدار احد؟

### 3. Negative Oriented Questions

Negative questions have negative orientation. Such questions have additional meanings of surprise, displeasure, etc. As in

- ألم يخبرك بذلك؟
- ألم يأتي معك احمد؟



#### **4. Tag Questions in Arabic**

Tag questions in Arabic have one frozen form, As in:

- □ (He is at Home, isn't he?) ؟ انه في الدار, اليس كذلك ؟
- There is nobody in the office, Is there? ) لا احد في المكتب, اليس كذلك ؟

#### **5. Content Questions wh-questions**

Content questions ask about one of the elements of the sentence. As in :

- (Who did you see?) من رأيت هناك؟
- (What is this?) ما هذا؟

#### **6. Alternative Questions**

Alternative questions in Arabic, like English, may be either a subtype of polarity questions or of content questions, joined by *am* or *aw*. As in: (Do you want the green or the red colour?) أتريد اللون الاخضر او الاحمر؟ (Did you arrive today or yesterday?) اليوم وصلت أم البارحة؟

#### **7. Intonational Questions**

Polarity questions are sometimes realized by means of intonation only: the interrogative particle. Such questions are closer in style to spoken Arabic. As in:

- (Has Ali arrived?) وصل علي؟
- (Have you written the letter?) كتبت رسالة؟

#### **□ Comparison of Questions in English and Arabic : (Aziz1989,260)**

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**A.** English questions are realized by placing the operator before the subject in polarity questions. Arabic questions are realized by means of particles (او, هبل). These questions have 'normally rising intonation in English and Arabic.

**B.** Content questions are realized by placing the question word in the initial position and using falling intonation in both languages. English, however, also uses Inversion (Op + S), except when the question word is subject of the sentence.

Ex: (You want what : What do you want ? ) أتريد ماء ؟

**C.** In English, questions may be positively oriented if they contain an assertive word; or negatively oriented if they contain a negative word. In Arabic, these questions are normally realized by means of the word order (by placing the item immediately after the particle *I* and by means of intonation.

Ex: ( Did anyone see you ? ) الم يرك احد ؟

**D.** Tag questions are widely used in English, they have complicated structures and convey a variety of meanings. In Arabic, they have a stereotyped form and are used on a limited scale.

E. English declarative questions and Arabic intonational questions are structurally similar; but they are functionally different.

## Chapter two

### Intonation of Questions in English

In English, the intonation pattern of a question typically rises towards the end of the sentence. This rising intonation signals to the listener that a question is being asked and that the speaker is seeking some kind of response or feedback.

For example, consider the following sentence:

"Do you want to come with me to the movies"?

In this sentence, the pitch of the speaker's voice rises on the words "movies", indicating that they are asking a question and seeking confirmation or a response from the listener.

In addition, the intonation pattern of a question can also be affected by factors such as the speaker's attitude, emphasis on certain words, or the level of politeness used in the question. (Levis, J. , 2002).

Overall, intonation plays a crucial role in conveying meaning and intention in English, particularly when it comes to asking questions.

### Definition of intonation of Question in English

In addition, the use of appropriate stress and rhythm patterns can also impact the intonation pattern of a question. For example, a speaker may emphasize a particular word in a question to indicate a particular focus or intent, such as "Why did YOU do that"?

In English, when asking a question with a degree of uncertainty or doubt, the intonation pattern typically rises towards the end of the sentence. This rise in intonation indicates that the speaker is seeking confirmation or clarification (Wang, J., 2003) For example, consider the following sentence:

"Is this the right way to the train station"?

In this sentence, the intonation rises towards the end, emphasizing the word "station" and signaling to the listener that the speaker is unsure about the direction and wants confirmation.

The intonation pattern of a question typically rises towards the end of the sentence. This rising intonation signals to the listener that a question is being asked and that the speaker is seeking some kind of response or feedback. (Bolinger, D. , 1986) For example, consider the following sentence:

"Do you want to come with me to the movies"?

In this sentence, the pitch of the speaker's voice rises on the words "movies", indicating that they are asking a question and seeking confirmation or a response from the listener.

### **Types of intonation of Questions in English**

There are several types of intonation patterns used in asking questions in English. The most common types include (Pierrehumbert, J., 1980) :

1. **Yes/No Questions:** These are questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." The intonation pattern for this type of question rises towards the end of the sentence. For example, "Are you coming to the party"?
2. **Wh-Questions:** These are questions that begin with a wh- word (who, what, where, when, why, how). The intonation pattern for this type of question also rises towards the end of the sentence, but the rise is typically more pronounced on the wh- word. For example, "What time is the party"?
3. **Alternative Questions:** These are questions that offer two or more options. The intonation pattern for this type of question rises on the first option and falls on the second option. For example, "Do you want coffee or tea"?
4. **Tag Questions:** These are questions that are added to the end of a statement to seek confirmation or agreement. The intonation pattern for this type of question rises on the tag question. For example, "You're coming with me, aren't you"?
5. **Rising Declaratives:** These are statements that are said with a rising intonation pattern, making them sound like questions. The intonation pattern rises towards the end of the sentence, but the sentence is not actually a question. For example, "You're coming to the party tonight"?

Overall, the appropriate use of intonation patterns is important in effective communication in both spoken and written English, and understanding the different types of intonation patterns used in asking questions can help to make spoken language more engaging and expressive.

### **Intonation of Questions in Arabic**

Intonation of a question in Arabic refers to the rise in pitch of the speaker's voice at the end of a sentence, which indicates that a question is being asked. It is an important aspect of the Arabic language as it helps to distinguish between a statement and a question. In addition to the rising intonation, the use of specific question particles such as "هل" (hal) or "أ" (a) at the beginning of a sentence also indicates that a question is being asked. By changing the tone of their voice, Arabic speakers are able to convey a variety of meanings and emotions when asking questions, such as curiosity, concern, or urgency.

In Arabic, the intonation of a question is indicated by the use of specific question particles, such as "هبل" (hal) or "أ" (a), which are placed at the beginning of the sentence. The tone of the speaker's voice can also be used to indicate a question, with a rising intonation at the end of the sentence. For example:

هبل أنتب بخير؟ (hal anta bikheir?) - Are you okay? (literally: "Are you well?")  
ماذا تفعل؟ (mada taf'al?) - What are you

doing?

هل يمكنك مساعدتي؟ (hal yumkinuka musa'adati?) - Can you help me?

أين تذهب؟ (ayna tathhab?) - Where are you going?

In all of these examples, the use of the question particle indicates that the sentence is a question, and the speaker's rising intonation at the end of the sentence emphasizes this further.

In Arabic, the type of intonation used for a question is typically a rising intonation. This means that the pitch of the voice goes up at the end of the sentence to indicate that it is a question. The rising intonation is used for both yes/no questions and wh-questions (questions that begin with words like who, what, where, when, why, how). However, it is worth noting that the use of intonation in Arabic can vary depending on the dialect and region.

#### □ **The forms and function of intonation in English and Arabic.**

##### **1. Similarities** (Aziz 1989,260)

- A.** English questions are realized by placing the operator before the subject in polarity questions. Arabic questions are realized by means of particles. These questions have 'normally rising intonation in English and Arabic.
- B.** Content questions are realized by placing the question word in the initial position and using falling intonation in both languages. English, however, also uses Inversion (Op + S), except when the question word is subject of the sentence.  
Ex: (You want what : What do you want ? )
- C.** English declarative questions and Arabic intonational questions are structurally similar.

##### **2. Differences** (Aziz 1989,265)

- A.** In English, questions may be positively oriented if they contain an assertive word; or negatively oriented if they contain a negative word. In Arabic, these questions are normally realized by means of the word order (by placing the item immediately after the particle I and by means of intonation).  
Ex: ( Did anyone see you ? )

- B.** Tag questions are widely used in English, they have complicated structures and convey a variety of meanings. In Arabic, they have , stereotyped form and are used on a limited scale.
- C.** English declarative questions and Arabic intonational questions are functionally different.

### Conclusion

The intonation of questions in English and Arabic can be quite different. In English, a question typically ends with a rising intonation, where the pitch of the voice goes up at the end of the sentence. This rising intonation signals that the speaker is asking a question and expects a response.

In contrast, in Arabic, the intonation of a question may not always have a rising intonation at the end of the sentence. Instead, questions can be formed using specific question words or by using the Arabic equivalent of "do" or "does" in English. Additionally, questions in Arabic may also be distinguished by a change in word order, rather than relying solely on intonation.

It's important to note that the intonation of a question can also depend on the context and the speaker's tone. For example, a speaker may use a rising intonation for a rhetorical question, where they don't expect an answer. Ultimately, the intonation of a question in both English and Arabic can vary based on a variety of factors, and understanding these nuances can improve communication and comprehension.

### Glossary

word	meaning
Intonation	التنغيم
Question	سؤال
Illustrated	يتضح
Tone	نغمة
Syntax	بناء الجملة
English	انكليزي
Speech	حديث
Form	استمارة

Function	وظيفة
Grammar	قواعد
Attitudinal	الموقفية
Discourse	الحوار
Conclusion	خاتمة
Similar	مشابه
Differences	اختلافات

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