

# **The Role of Intonation in Arabic and English Grammar**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present paper tries to analyse the correlation between the clause type of an utterance and the intonational features associated to it. The main objectives of this study are to describe and analyse the intonation patterns in Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA) and Standard English (henceforth SE) depending on grammatical bases in a contrastive way. It is hypothesized that the two languages (henceforth MSA and SE) differ from each other in terms of both the clause structure and the intonational features associated to it. It is found that the intonational differences are more effective than the syntactic ones. It is also found that MSA and SE use almost all the types of tones established by Halliday (1970), and that the choice of intonation patterns is mainly and fundamentally determined by grammatical factors

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## KEY TO PHONETIC SYMBOLS IN MSA AND SE

### Modern Standard Arabic Vowels

/i:/	as in	/ti:n/	‘fig’
/i/	as in	/sin/	‘tooth’
/æ/	as in	/mæ?/	‘water’
/a/	as in	/dam/	‘blood’
/u/	as in	/dub/	‘bear’
/u:/	as in	/su:q/	‘market’
/aj/	as in	/bajt/	‘house’
/au/	as in	/kaun/	‘universe’

### Standard English Vowels

/i:/	as in	/fi:l/	‘feel’
/ɪ/	as in	/sit/	‘sit’
/e/	as in	/red/	‘red’
/æ/	as in	/mæn/	‘man’
/ɑ:/	as in	/kɑ:/	‘car’
/ɒ/	as in	/hɒt/	‘hot’
/ɔ:/	as in	/mɔ:/	‘more’
/ʊ/	as in	/fʊt/	‘foot’
/u:/	as in	/mu:v/	‘move’
/ʌ/	as in	/bʌt/	‘but’
/ɜ:/	as in	/bɜ:d/	‘bird’
/ə/	as in	/ə'hed/	‘ahead’
/eɪ/	as in	/deɪ/	‘day’
/əʊ/	as in	/nou/	‘no’
/aɪ/	as in	/maɪ/	‘my’
/aʊ/	as in	/naʊ/	‘now’
/ɔɪ/	as in	/tɔɪ/	‘toy’
/hɪə/	as in	/hɪə/	‘here’
/eə/	as in	/keə/	‘care’
/uə/	as in	/puə/	‘poor’

### Modern Standard Arabic Consonants

/b/	as in	/ba:b/	‘door’
/t/	as in	/tall/	‘hill’
/d/	as in	/da:r/	‘house’
/dʒ/	as in	/'dʒamal/	‘camel’
/k/	as in	/kalb/	‘dog’

**The Role of Intonation in Arabic and English Grammar**  
**Dr. Mohamed-Basil Kasim Al-Azzawi & Fuad Jasim Mohamed Al-Heeti**

/q/	as in	/ħa'ri:q/	'fire'
/ʔ/	as in	/ma:ʔ/	'water'
/ḍ/	as in	/ʔarḍ/	'land'
/ṭ/	as in	/ja'ti:r/	'to fly'
/f/	as in	/faʔr/	'mouse'
/θ/	as in	/ʔa:bit/	'consistent'
/ð/	as in	/ðanb/	'sin'
/s/	as in	/ʔasad/	'lion'
/z/	as in	/zæra/	'he visited'
/j/	as in	/jahr/	'month'
/x/	as in	/xubz/	'bread'
/ɣ/	as in	/ɣɪ'næʔ/	'singing'
/ħ/	as in	/ħarb/	'war'
/ʕ/	as in	/jaʕmal/	'he works'
/ð/	as in	/ðahr/	'back'
/ʕ/	as in	/ʕaif/	'summer'
/m/	as in	/min/	'from'
/n/	as in	/namla/	'ant'
/l/	as in	/ka'la:m/	'speech'
/h/	as in	/ha:ða/	'this'
/w/	as in	/walad/	'boy'
/r/	as in	/ħarf/	'letter'
/j/	as in	/jad/	'hand'

**Standard English Consonants**

/p/	as in	/pleɪ/	'play'
/b/	as in	/blu:/	'blue'
/t/	as in	/ti:/	'tea'
/d/	as in	/desk/	'desk'
/tʃ/	as in	/tʃi:p/	'cheap'
/ɑːʒ/	as in	/eɪdʒ/	'age'
/k/	as in	/kaɪnd/	'kind'
/g/	as in	/leg/	'leg'
/f/	as in	/fæt/	'fat'
/v/	as in	/verɪ/	'very'
/θ/	as in	/θri:/	'three'
/ð/	as in	/ðɪs/	'this'
/s/	as in	/sli:p/	'sleep'
/z/	as in	/legz/	'legs'
/ʃ/	as in	/ʃɪp/	'ship'
/ʒ/	as in	/viʒn/	'vision'
/h/	as in	/hæt/	'hat'

/m/	as in	/mi:t/	'meat'
/n/	as in	/nu:n/	'noon'
/ŋ/	as in	/sɪŋ/	'sing'
/l/	as in	/led/	'led'
/w/	as in	/wɪnd/	'wind'
/r/	as in	/ri:d/	'read'
/j/	as in	/jet/	'yet'

## **1. Introduction:**

Speech is characterized by fluctuations of pitch levels. These are termed as intonation. This suprasegmental phenomenon contributes to the perception as well as production of utterances. It shapes and determines the speaker's intention and helps the hearer to understand the purpose of the message. One method of analyzing intonation is by studying its features as part of grammar. In other words, to investigate those features as seated deep in grammar. This could be mainly done by dealing with intonation as a device of disambiguation. "Intonational differences frequently correlate with sentence types and sometimes intonation is the only overt marking of these types" (Langacker, 1972: 294). It is to be noted that there has been research work dealing with intonation in relation to grammar (see for example, Bolinger, 1948; Halliday, 1972; O'Connor & Arnold, 1972; Brazil, 1980; Al-Duri, 1998; Chunn, 2002; Kollen and Funk, 2006, to cite but a few).

## **2. Data:**

The data for English are about seventy minutes of tape-record situational dialogues prepared for teaching aims entitled "What to Say". The data for Modern Standard Arabic, are taken from two different sources: a previously recorded M.A. thesis discussion in Arabic, and a tape recording of situational dialogues. Following the prosodic framework proposed by Halliday (1970), the data have been analysed auditorily and perceptually, after listening to the utterances chosen a quite enough number of times. Random utterances representing the clause types have been chosen from the data.

### **3. Analysis Procedures:**

Since the model followed in the study is that of Halliday's (1970), the data analysis is achieved by dealing with utterances on clause level. The utterances are auditorily and perceptually analysed by means of the three variables adopted by Halliday, which are:

Tonality (division of the utterance into tone-groups).

Tonicity (the placement of the tonic syllable in the tone-group), and

Tone (the type of the pitch movement).

The third variable (Tone) will be emphasized to reveal the use of each tone with regard to the clause type.

Since the present paper follows Halliday's (1970) model especially with regard to intonation, it is necessary to review here the main symbols used by him which are followed in the analysis of data.

// tone-group (this stands for tonality)

boundary

/ foot boundary (this stands for a short pause within a tone-group)

— tonic syllable (this is drawn under the tonic syllable and stands for a big dot used by other researchers and represents tonicity)

(1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13 and 53) (these numbers represent the type of the tone associated with an utterance and put at the beginning of the tone-group. They stand for tone as follows:

1. Falling
2. High rising
3. Low rising
4. Falling-rising
5. Rising-falling
13. Falling plus low rising
53. Rising-falling plus low rising

## **4. Discussion:**

### **4.1 Indicative Declarative Utterances:**

In both languages, these clauses are said to have similar intonation features. They have neutral tonality, neutral tonicity, and in both languages such clauses are produced with tone 1 (falling) which tends to be the neutral tone (see, Majid, 1987). Examples are:

//He de'cided on the 'house in the \country//

الطبيب مشغول دائماً

//aʦ ʦa'bi:bu maʦ'ɣu:lun \da:ʔ ima:n//

The doctor is always busy.

In both languages, these clauses are used to convey information in a straightforward manner. In addition, they have related pragmatic features in that they are subject to be analysed in terms of truth values (Al-Samara'ee, 1998: 194; Al-Jerjani, 1978: 101) and (Crystal, 2003: 99).

As far as this clause type is concerned, Arabic and English differ in terms of the clause patterns they use: The simple structure of an indicative declarative clause is S (Subject) + P (Predicate) constructing minimal clause structure (Quirk et al., 1973: 724), whereas an indicative declarative clause in Arabic is constructed of two main parts, viz. (المسند) Subject and (المسند إليه) Predicate (Wright, 1971: 250). The subject of a nominal clause is represented by a noun phrase called (المبتدأ), while that of a verbal clause is called (الفاعل) (Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 44).

### **4.2 Negative Utterances:**

In both languages, these clauses have similar intonational features (Majid, 1987). Tonality is a neutral one. As far as tonicity is concerned, negative clauses in both languages have the same features in that the placement of the tonic depends on pragmatic factors and the theory of given vs. new information is the most important one in this respect. Examples are:

//1 She has 'finished her \work//

//1 She has 'not 'finished her \work//

ما أنا

بقائل هذا

//5 'ma: '?ana bi'qa:?'ilin 'ha:ða //

I did not say this.

Tone 1 (falling) tends to be the neutral one associated with negative unemphatic clauses in both languages. This tone carries features like definiteness, completeness sincerity and most important the sense of certainty.

Intonationally, negative clauses in both languages have different features. Though tonicity in both is marked, the difference is in terms of which item carries the tonic. In Arabic, it is the negative particle which usually carries the tonic as in:

لين أبرح مكاني

//3 'lan '?abraħa ma'ka:ni//

I won't leave my place

While in English it usually falls on the main verb as in:

//3 He 'doesn't study the 'lesson//

//5 I can't 'under<sup>v</sup>stand it 'very 'well//

They also differ in terms of the tone used. Tone 5 (rising-falling) is associated with negative clauses in Arabic while tone 3 (low rising) and 5 (rising falling) are related to these of English

### **4.3 Interrogative Utterances:**

In both languages, such clauses are used to obtain information directly and literally. They too, can be analysed in terms of truth values. As far as their main categories, interrogatives in both languages fall into the same types.

#### **4.3.1 Yes-No Questions:**

These tend to have neutral tonality whether in English or Arabic. Yes-No questions in English and Arabic both are produced with tone 1 (falling). Though in some cases Yes-No questions in both languages may be produced with tone 3 (low rising) as in:

// Have you booked a \room? //

// Have you any \jam? //

هل كتبت الدرس؟

//3 hal kat'abtad ,dars?//

Have you written the homework?

By form, Yes-No questions in both languages are constructed differently. In Arabic they are made by adding a particle at the beginning of an affirmative or a negative sentence where the particle (hal) is restricted to affirmative questions. In English, on the other hand, a question is usually formed by a subject verb inversion (Crystal, 1969: 338). Examples:

//Are you going home?//

Yes-No questions in English have neutral tonicity as in;

//1 Can you \type?//

Whereas in Arabic they have marked tonicity and the placement of the tonic is determined by the kind of particle used, i.e. when a question is introduced by (hal هل) preceded by a conjunction like (wa و) or (fa ف), these altogether represent the tonic as in:

فهل أنتم مصريون على ذلك؟

//1 fa \hal ?antum mušir'ru:n ?'ala: 'ða:lik//

Do you insist on that?

If a question is introduced by the particle (?a أ) followed by a negative particle then the negative particle carries the tonic as in:

ألم تكن واحداً منهم؟

//3 ?a lam 'takun 'wa:hidan 'minhum? //

Aren't you one of them?

#### **4.3.2 Wh-questions:**

These have neutral tonality whether in Arabic or English. In wh-questions in English and those in Arabic which have an exclamatory mood, tonicity is neutral as in:

//1 What is it \called?//

'Where are you 'coming to ,see us?

ماذا قال الأستاذ؟

//3 \ma:ða: 'qa:lal ul?us'ta:ð? //



What did the teacher say?

The formation of these questions in Arabic is done by putting a suitable particle at the beginning of the statement. On the other hand, those in English are accompanied by a subject-verb inversion following the particle. As for tonicity, wh-questions in Arabic have the tonic on the question particle, while in English it falls on the last lexical item. Wh-questions in Arabic are produced with tones 3 (low rising) and 5 (rising-falling). Those in English use tone 1 (falling) or tone 2 (high rising).

### **4.3.3 Tag Questions:**

Grammatically, the formation of these questions is made in both languages in almost a similar manner, i.e. it is resulted by adding a tag to an affirmative or negative clause. A tag utterance is thought of as "an interrogative signal appended to one of the other types of clause" (Downing and Locke, 2003: 202) as in:

//1 The door is open, is it?//

//2 He is your friend, isn't he?//

In Arabic, the most common expression used to make a tag question is ('alaysa ka'tha:lik). Examples:

طارق اسم عربي.  
أليس كذلك؟

//2 ta:riqun ?ismun ?arabijjun ?alajjsa ka'ða:lik //

Tariq is an Arabic name, isn't it?

In both languages, tag questions have neutral tonality in that most of them have separate tone-groups. As for tonicity, it is marked in both languages where the tonic falls on the last lexical item in the tone-group. They differ in terms of tone only, i.e. in Arabic they are uttered using tone 2 (high rising) and tone 3 (low rising), while in English tones 1 and 2 are used.

### **4.3.4 Declarative Questions:**

In both languages, these usually have similar tonality and tonicity which are neutral ones though some times declarative questions can have marked tonicity in both

languages. On the other hand, the majority of the declarative questions have neutral tonicity. Example:

//3 They will all ,come?//

ركبت بالدرجة الأولى؟

//2 rakibta bid daradzatil u:la: //

You travelled first class?

While declarative questions in Arabic are produced with tone 2 (high rising), those in English are produced with tone 3 (low rising).

#### **4.3.5 Alternative Questions:**

In English these correspond to those in Arabic which are introduced by the particle (?am) in that in both languages they have neutral tonality. On the other hand, those in English correspond to the Arabic ones introduced by the particle (aw) in having marked tonality as in;

// 13 Is 'your car \nice or ,not?//

هل هي تدرس التاريخ القديم  
أم التاريخ الحديث؟

//53 hal hija tadrusut ta?ri:xal qa^di:m ?amit ta?ri:xal ha,di:θ//

Does she study ancient history or modern history?

The placement of the tonic in both languages is determined by the type of tonality, i.e. when the question has neutral tonality it has marked tonicity and vice versa.

As far as tone is concerned, English uses tones 2 (high rising), 13 (falling plus low rising).

//2 Is 'school a 'nice 'place or /not?//

Arabic uses tones 3 (low rising) and 53 (rising-falling plus low rising).

#### **4.3.6 Echo Questions:**

Grammatically, these have a form of declarative clauses. What distinguishes them as questions in both language is the tone used.

//I've bought an electric tooth-brush//

//3 You've 'bought a /what?//

في غير الآية؟

//4 fi: γajril ?a:ja? //

Not in the verse?

Those in Arabic have marked tonicity. In English they have neutral tonicity. Tones 1 (falling) and 4 (falling-rising) are associated with echoic questions in Arabic. On the other hand, tones 2 (high rising) and 3 (low rising) are used with these in English.

#### **4.4 Imperative Utterances:**

By form, an imperative clause in the two languages begins with a verb whose subject is implicit or elided. In the sections that follow the shared features of imperative clauses in both languages will be reviewed.

##### **4.4.1 Requests:**

Structurally, requests in both languages have two elements, viz. predicate and complement. Requests in both languages can have one or two separate tone-groups. Therefore, they are uttered with neutral tonality as in:

// Would you mind telling me when we 'get there?//

أعطني أربعة مناديل من فضلك

//3 ?aʕtini: ?arbaʕat mana:di:l min ʕaḍlik //

Give me four handkerchiefs, please.

The correspondence between tonality and clause in both languages is determined by grammatical factors. It is to be mentioned that in SE some requests do not have separate two-groups, example:

//3 Would you sign it?//

Tonicity of requests in both languages is marked where the tonic usually falls on the imperative verb of the clause as in:

أعطني الكتاب

//1 ?aʕtinil ki:ta:b //

Give me the book.

Requests in Arabic having an interrogative form (introduced by the particle "hal") have the tonic on such a particle as in:

هل تحضر معي إلى البيت  
لنتأه؟

//3 /hal tahḍur maʿi: ?ilal bajt litara:hu?//

Could you come home with me to see him?

As far as tone is concerned, requests in both languages are produced with tone 3 (low rising). In certain cases where the utterance is divided into two tone-groups, tone 4 (falling-rising) is associated with requests in English.

// How an'other 'cup ᵛplease //

#### **4.4.2 Commands:**

Usually, a command in both languages has neutral tonality. While tonicity is marked where the tonic falls on the imperative verb of the clause. Concerning tone, it is tone 1 (falling) which is related to commands in Arabic as in:

دعك من هذا

// \d aʕk min 'ha:ða //

Leave us.

while Commands in English use tone 1 (falling) or 5 (rising-falling) as in:

// 'Shut the \window//

//5 'Shut the ^window//

#### **4.4.3 Warnings:**

Warnings in both languages have neutral tonality. Tonicity is marked in that the imperative verb carries the tonic. As far as tone is concerned, English usually uses tone 4 whereas that in Arabic usually uses tone 3. Examples are:

//4 You will be late //

//4 No standing inside//

لا تلعب في الشارع

//3 'la: 'talʕab fi] ]a:riʕ //

Do not play in the street

#### **4.5 Vocatives:**

Vocatives in both languages are said to have similar features. Grammatically, they have the possibility of

occupying initial, medial, or final positions in a clause. They indicate or have similar functions. Drawing the addressees' attention is the most important one. In both languages vocatives are mainly realized by personal nouns, common nouns, and titles. In addition, Arabic has a more complicated number of realizations of Vocatives in that it is frequently done by using one of the particles (ya, 'a, a:, haya, ay, wa:) (Al-Azzawi, 2002: 141).

#### **4.5.1 Initial Vocatives:**

In both Arabic and English, these are produced with neutral tonality in that a vocative divides the utterance into two tone-groups as in:

//1 Driver// //1 I've got to catch a train at ten twenty//

Initial vocatives in Arabic have the tonic on the last lexical item and they are produced with either tone 2 (high rising) or 3 (low rising) as in:

//2 ja: šajdali: // hal 'indaka ha:ðad dawa:? //

Chemist. Do you have this drug?

In English, on the other hand, initial vocatives have marked tonicity and are produced with tone 1 (falling). Example is:

//1 Driver//

#### **4.5.2 Medial Vocatives:**

Occurring medially within a clause, a vocative in both languages has neutral tonicity as in //And you// //2 My 'friends// //Will have to work harder//

and:

هذه هدية عظيمة يا والديّ. أشكركما

//3 ha:ðihi hadijjatun 'aði:matun ja:wa:liddajja ?aʃkurkuma: //

This is a great gift my parents, thank you.

MVs in Arabic with separate tone-groups are rare and are produced with tone 3 (low rising). English, on the other hand, has separate tone-groups and are produced with tone 2 (high rising).

### 4.5.3 Final Vocatives:

In both languages, these are not necessarily used to draw the hearers' attention, instead, they are usually added to an utterance as expressions of courtesy. Intonationally, they have marked tonality when they are included as components within a larger tone-group. Tonicity of final vocatives in both languages is neutral as in:

//3 Five new pence, please miss//

قولي أمين بدون أستاذ. يا نبيلة

//1 qu:li: ?ami:n bidu:n ?usta:ð ja: nabi:la //

Say Ameen without Mr., Nabeela.

Though FVs in both languages have neutral tonicity, Arabic vocatives have the possibility of having marked tonicity where it falls on the title preceding the name of the addressed person, as for example:

يظهر أنك تحب القيادة السريعة يا أستاذ أمين

//3 jaðharu ?annaka tuhibul qija:das sari:ʔa ya: ?usta:ð 'ami:n

//

It seems that you like speedy driving, Mr. Amen?

FVs in Arabic are produced with tones (1 and 3).

In English the only possible tone is 3 (low rising).

## 5. Conclusions:

The study has come up with the following conclusions: Both MSA and SE make use of all the primary tones whether simple or complex. In both languages most of the utterances investigated are produced with neutral tonality. In both languages the most important and influential factor determining the choice of the tone is the grammatical structure of the utterance. Grammatically, the two languages are structurally different in almost all the clause types dealt with. Such differences are related to word order, elements building the clause as well as transformational processes.

In most of the clause types analysed, MSA has more varieties and manifestations to express each clause. This is mainly caused by the different intonational features used. With regard to most of the utterances analysed, the differences in

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the two languages are restricted to tonicity and tone rather than tonality.

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## دور التنغيم في النحو العربي والنحو الانكليزي

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### الخلاصة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل وبياننا لترابط بين أنواع الجملة المحكية ومظاهر التنغيم في اللغة التي تصاحبها. إن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو وصف وتحليل نماذج التنغيم في اللغة العربية الفصحى واللغة الانكليزية بالاعتماد على الأسس النحوية وبطريقة مقارنة. وتفترض الدراسة بأن اللغتين تختلف إحداهما عن الأخرى فيما يتعلق بنوع الجملة ومظاهر التنغيم المتصلة بها. وخلصت الدراسة بان الاختلافات في التنغيم هي أكثر تأثيرا وفعالية عن تلك الاختلافات النحوية، كما أن الدراسة خلصت إلى أن اللغتين العربية والانكليزية تستخدم تقريبا كل أنواع نماذج التنغيم التي استخدمها(هالي داي) في دراسته للتنغيم عام ( 1971) وان اختيار نماذج التنغيم تقررها بشكل أساس عوامل نحوية وتركيبية.

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