The Intonation Patterns of English and Persian Sentences: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract: Different intonation pattern is one of the factors affecting the learning of L2 pronunciation. The contrastive analysis of English-Persian intonation patterns has shown that both languages are similar in sentence-final intonation while they are different in incomplete sentences. To this end, this paper describes English-Persian intonation patterns to look at the differences and similarities of the two languages to improve the effectiveness of L2 learning.
Keywords: Intonation; Contrastive analysis; Pronunciation; Sentence pattern.

1. Introduction

The term contrastive analysis (CA) was first proposed by Whorf (1941) named contrastive linguistics. Contrastive linguistics stresses on comparative study in linguistic differences. Later on, in 1957 Lado expanded comparative studies over linguistic differences and start the trend of modern applied contrastive linguistics. In later studies the term contrastive linguistics changed to contrastive analysis. Hadlich (1968) defined CA as "seeks to catalogue, through the comparative analysis of the native and foreign language systems, the points of difference, so that more effective language-learning materials, based precisely on these learning problems, can be developed" (p. 26). In other word, contrastive analysts try to find differences and similarities between languages to improve language teaching and learning. According to them, these differences and similarities make the most difficulties and simplicities for learners in language learning. They proposed that learners' errors often follow the pattern of the native language. While learning, learners often transfer their L1 patterns to L2 wherever they face difficulties. Moreover, they may transfer the pattern of L1 to the target language on their habit. This kind of transfer is called negative transfer. Interferences can also be positive. Wherever two languages have identical patterns, learners don't change L2 model and implement it as in their mother tongue.

These transfers can be lexically, syntactically, semantically and phonologically. Lexical transfer can be incorrect use of an adjective in Persian as an adverb in English. Similarly, different pattern of constructing adverbs, for example, make problem for learners. Sometimes learners make mistakes in sentence patterns and structure of clauses and phrases. Subject+object+verv pattern of Persian interfere subject+verb+object pattern of English. Such interferences are happened syntactically. Semantic interference results in inaccurate assignment of Persian meaning to English words. For example, the replacement of speech acts of apology in Persian instead of English result in confusion. Finally, learners may positively or/and negatively transfer Persian patterns of intonation and accent to English language. They speak English in a way as if they are speaking Persian. In this research, we try to have a comparative study on the intonation patterns of the English and Persian languages. It is needed to compare L1 and L2 sound systems to predict and describe the pronunciation problems of Persian language learners of English. Showing similarities and differences both help teachers and learners to be aware of intonation structure of two languages. Dissimilarities show learners which structure is correct and what they should do while they communicate in English.

2. English and Persian Intonation Patterns

To define intonation, we can refer to it as sentence music. Speakers usually raise and drop the pitch of their voices. In other words, they form and change pitch patterns (Soltani, 2007). They put more emphasis on some syllables and pronounce them more loudly. It is in a close relation with speech rhythm and word and sentence stress. They give a melody to the speech when one talk. This act of changing pitch patterns and speech rhythms is called intonation (Nolan, 2005). According to Cruttenden (1997), " intonation involves the occurrence of recurring pitch patterns, each of them which is used with a set of relatively consistent meanings, either on single words or on groups

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of words of varying length" (p. 7). Therefore, intonations are based on distinct patterns related to their structure and functions and they don't take haphazardly. A sentence may raise and increase to its end or it may have a smooth low intonation. According to Roach (2000), the intonation pattern of English has four main functions as:

First, the attitudinal function (affect), in which intonation is used to express emotional state or attitude.

Second, the accentual function (focus), in which intonation is used to make specific words or syllables stand out in a stream of speech.
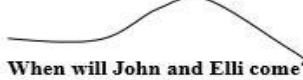
Third, the grammatical function, in which intonation is used to discriminate grammatical units or, for example, disambiguate defining versus non-defining relative clauses, and indicate complex clause structure (chunking)

Fourth, the discourse function (interaction), in which intonation is used to regulate conversational behaviour, or to focus a listener's attention on specific elements of a spoken message. (Setter *et al.*, 2010).

Moreover, Setter *et al.* (2010) pointed out that intonation play an important role in transactional and interactional functions but difficult to teach and learn. In most parts, teachers are not confident about intonation patterns to teach them and consider it as impossible pattern to explain. Similarly, students don't pay much attention to intonation patterns of sentences and try to focus more on vocabulary and structure of language. Settar et al. (ibid) also asserted that the emotional and affective essence of intonation is a separate matter. To speak means to express emotion means to present intended meaning which is difficult to consider in teaching.

Despite its difficulty, there are lots of program and software which help learners improve their intonation. Intonation patterns are various worldwide. One language may have rising intonation for most of its structure like Korean or it may have different patterns like Persian and English. Intonations vary between languages, variety of languages and even sexes and age groups (Richards, 1987). Persian spoken in Tehran is different from the one in Mashhad. People in Mashhad put extra stress on the last syllable of verbs which change the intonation of their utterances. Similarly, women and men follow different intonation patterns. Women try to have a smoother and gentler intonation while speaking; on the other side, men aren't as gentle as women are. At length, children utter a question different from an old man. As children grow up, their speech intonation becomes more familiar to common form of that language.

As stated above, each type of sentences has its own intonation pattern which is different from one language to another (English Language Services, 1973; Fallahi, 1991; Swan and Smith, 1987). In the following, the intonation patterns of different types of sentences will be compared between English and Persian languages.

ENGLISH **PERSIAN**

Declarative sentences

She'll come to school today. (او) به مدرسه می آید.

Mid Hide Low Low Mid Mid

Students had studied for their exam. دانشجوییان برای امتحانشان درس خواننده بودند.

The manager fired all staffs. مدیر تمام کارمندانش را اخراج کرد.

Affirmative/negative and questions

Why did she go? چرا رفت؟

Mid High Low Low Mid Mid

How many children do they have? (آنها) چندتا بچه دارند؟

When will John and Elli come? جان و الی کی میاند؟

Yes/No Questions

Are you studying?

Mid   High   Extra High

داری درس میخونی؟

High   Mid   Mid

Did they fight?

(آنها) دعوا کردند؟

Is Minoo going to divorce?

مینا قراره طلاق یگیره؟

Tag questions for confirmation

They don't steal money, do they?

Mid   High   Low, High   Low

آنها پولورا ندزدیدن، مگَه نه؟

Low   Mid, Low   Mid   Mid

Adele is one of the best singers, isn't she?

ادل یکی از بهترین خواننده‌ها ست، درست میگَم؟

War wont be finished in Syria, will it?

جنگ تو سوریه تموم نمیشه، غیر از اینه؟

Tag questions for asking

He slept, didn't he?

Mid   High   Mid, Mid

خوابید، درسته؟

Low   Mid, Low   Mid   Mid

Behnam will pass, won't he?

بهنام (درستشو) پاس میشه، اره؟

Incomplete sentences

Before they imagine

Mid   High   Low

قبل از اینکه تصور کنند

High   Mid   Mid

Because Ali told

جون علی گفت

If she were molested

اگَه اذیت یشه

Direct address

Good morning Miss Azari   صبح بخیر خانم آذری

Mid   High   Mid   High   Low   Mid   Mid

Merry Christmas dear friend   کریسمس مبارک دوست عزیز(م)

Regarding declarative sentences, the English sentence students had studied for their exam show a falling pattern which follows a high intonation. On the other side, the Persian sentence بر ای ام تحاد شان درس خواد نده بر ودذد داد شجوی یان prefers a falling pattern which follows a middle intonation. In affirmative sentences, English follow a middle pattern to increase and then decrease the intonation such as how many children do they have?, while the Persian language begin with a middle pattern and continue it to a falling one e.g. چ نندد ا بر چه (آنها؟) دارد د. However, in yes/no question English language adopts a raising intonation. Are you studying? sentence begin with a middle intonation to a high and higher intonation. On the other side, Persian sentence اریو درس ؟ مر یخوذ ی goes to middle pattern to high intonation.

Tag question patterns show interesting intonation. In order to clarify an issue, tag question for clarification indicates Middle-High-Low intonation for the declarative sentence and High-Low pattern in tag question part. As it is indicated in English sentence Adele is one of the best singers, isn't she?, English language nearly follow a falling pattern in tag clarification question. The Persian sentences, however, accept a lower intonation pattern with regard to English sentences. The sentence ادل کی یر از ن تریب به ندها خواد ست، در ست مر یگم؟ follow a Middle-Middle-Low to pronounce the declarative part and Middle-Low to indicate the truth value of the sentence. Referring to tag question for asking, English language follows a higher intonation pattern to Persian. The English native speaker articulate the following sentence as Behnam WILL pass, won't he?, and Persian native speakers articulate that sentence as بهنام پ اس (در سرشو) مر یشه، پ اس ؟ اره؟ in falling moode of Middle-Middle-Low and Middle-Low. As it is shown English has a higher intonation pattern both in tag question for clarification and asking to Persian language.

Concerning incomplete sentences, the sentences begin with since, when etc., surprisingly intonation falls in English sentences while increase in Persian language. An English speaker may say Because ALI told, from a middle intonation to high and finally low pattern. A Persian speaker articulates the same sentence as چون علی فت گ, increase from a middle pattern to a high intonation. Finally, when directly addressing someone, English speakers say Merry CHRISTMAS dear FREIND to focus on incident and person, however, Persian speakers say (سمس ک رید م) عزیز دو ست مر بارک to focus on incident.

As it is shown above, the basic final patterns of Persian are similar to those used in English with a fall typical for a completed statement and interrogative word, and a rise for a yes/no question. However, there are a fall for direct address and a rise for incomplete sentence which are different from English with a rise for direct address and a fall for incomplete sentence. When these different patterns carry over into English, some of these intonation patterns can produce an unusual high-pitched "whining" effect, which is disconcerting (Swan and Smith, 1987). In addition to intonation patterns, Hayati (1996) stated that stress placement is another source of interference to intonation which causes intonation problems of Persian learners. Various stress situations in English and Persian result in positive or negative of interferences and difficulty in learning process. Finally, women/men's intonation patterns in situations can be another source of intonation problems. It is essential to have strict intonation in formal situations which are distinct from manner of speech in vocational sites. Table 1 clearly summarizes differences and similarities in intonations of both languages.

Table-1. English Persian Intonation Patterns

	English	**Persian**
Declarative sentences	Middle-Hide-Low	Middle-Middle-Low
Affirmative/negative and questions	Middle-High-Low	Middle-Middle-Low
Yes/No Questions	Middle-High-Extra High	Middle-Middle-High
Tag questions for confirmation	Middle-High-Low, High-Low	Middle-Middle-Low, Middle-Low
Tag questions for asking	Middle-High-Middle, Middle	Middle-Middle-Low, Middle-Low
Incomplete sentences	Middle-High-Low	Middle-Middle-High
Direct address	Middle-High-Middle-High	Middle-Middle-Low

To this end, teachers should deal with this divergent phenomenon in foreign language teaching more effectively. Comparative analysis can help teachers to design teaching and learning materials, engage learner in activities to be good user of target language, and pay attention to conversation in its regular pattern in different situations.

3. Conclusion

It has long been established that learning second language is different from acquiring first language. Differences between languages produce interference problems for L2 learners, and similarities may facilitate learning. One of the areas of problem is intonation. Similar sentence-final intonation patterns of English and Persian ease L2 pronunciation for Persian learners, however, divergent intonation patterns may carry over to English and create trouble. Comparative studies of English and Persian intonation patterns help teachers improve language learning and ease its process which ultimately results in learners' success.

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