

The Intonation of Negation in Modern Standard Arabic with Reference to English

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ABSTRACT

The form and function of the intonation of negative particles in Modern Standard Arabic are investigated in this paper. The paper is an attempt to show whether the negative particles are accentuated in Arabic or not. Also, the relation between the tones used and the negative particles is examined in this study. Among the conclusions the study has come up with is that Arabic tends to accentuate the negative particles. Further, the strength of intonation depends on the tone used. So, speakers may strengthen or mitigate the meaning of negation through the tone used.

1. Introduction

Intonation is generally defined as the fall and rise of pitch while speaking. These pitch movements are attributed to the vibration of the vocal cords (see Pike, 1945: 5; Bansal, 1978: 66; Hawkins, 1984: 193; Tench, 1996: 1). Roach (1992: 56) states that intonation has two rather different meanings. Firstly, it refers to the variations in the pitch of the speaker's voice which are used to convey or alter meaning. Secondly, it is equivalent to *prosody* where variations in such things as voice quality, tempo, and loudness are included. In this study the former concept of intonation

is adopted since it is too difficult to show prosodic features other than pitch in the transcription of the tone groups.

Pitch variations are attributed to the vibrations of the vocal cords. Hence, intonation is a feature of all natural languages. In spite of this, every language has its own intonation system. In this connection, O'Connor (1980: 108) states that "English intonation is English. It is not the same as the intonation of any other language".

The study is motivated by the fact that Arabic intonation has not received enough investigation and that the intonation of negation in Arabic has hardly received any investigation. The study aims to produce a formal description of the different tones used with negative sentence in Modern Standard Arabic. Also, the positions the negative particles occupy in the tone group structure, the meaning of the tones identified in the data are investigated. It is hypothesized that the negative particles are accented since negation is the marker form and since negative particles introduce new information into an utterance. Further, it is hypothesized that the strength of a particular meaning is influenced by the tone used. The study is limited in scope. It is limited to investigating the simple tone groups of syntactically negative declarative sentences identified in the data.

2. Background

2.1 English Intonation Studies

Many studies have been conducted on the field of English intonation. These studies fall into two approaches:

The British Approach

The need for material appropriate for language teachers stimulated many writers investigate this relatively new area. Hence, followers of the British approach are mainly pedagogically oriented. Generally, they deal with intonation in relation to grammar (see Halliday 1963). They prefer describing intonation in terms of configurations which reflect a non- phonemic/morphemic view of intonation. Meaning for them, especially that related to sentence types, is given a special consideration. For them, a falling pitch signifies that the sentence is a statement while a rising pitch may signify that it is a question. Broadly speaking, British scholars are mainly concerned with the functions of intonation. For more details, see Sweet (1906), Palmer (1922), Armstrong & Ward (1926), Jassem (1952), Kingdon (1958), Crystal (1969) and Halliday (1967 and 1970) among others.

The American Approach

The American approach to intonation focuses on the form of intonation more than it does on its function. This orientation may be attributed to the influence of the American structural school. The American phonologists try to describe the American intonation on a phonemic basis. Hence, pitch levels are counted as phonemes. These phonemes are organized into meaningful sequences called pitch morphemes which have the strict analogues of segmental morphemes which are in turn composed of segmental phonemes. This, however, does not mean that followers of the American approach ignored dealing with meaning. They emphasize the grammatical function of intonation with less interest in its semantic function. However, they consider the non- grammatical function of intonation as irrelevant. Their descriptions are conducted in terms of pitch levels rather than configurations of meaning. For more details

see Bloomfield (1933) pike (1945), Wells (1945), Trager & Smith (1951) and Bolinger (1949, 1951 and 1958 a).

2.2 Arabic Intonation Studies

During the first four centuries following the Hejira, old Arab grammarians studied intensely the language of the Glorious Quran. It is argued that the interest in reciting the Glorious Quran is behind the interest in Arabic phonetics and phonology (Semaan, 1968: 9). Furthermore Ibn Jinni (933-1005A.D.) recognizes intonation. He states that saying an utterance with different tones can change its meaning (Al- Khalil, 1993: 197). Old Arab grammarians studied intonation within the field of /ʔattajwiid/ (recitation). As such intonation is closely linked to recitation (Ghalib, 1977: 203). Al-Hamad (1986: 567) argues that specialists in recitation recognized intonation referring to it as the 'music of speech'. The oldest reference to intonation was made by Al- Hamathany (d.643 AD) who called it 'ʔallahnul xafi (the hidden tone). He argues, for instance, that this tone determines the difference between statements and questions.

2.3 The Form of Intonation

The tone group is the basic unit according to which intonation is analyzed. It can be defined as having one peak of prominence in the form of a nuclear pitch movement. After this peak there is a boundary which is indicated by a perceivable pitch change and / or by the presence of junctural features at the end of every tone unit (Crystal, 1969: 4). The tone group is structured out of four elements arranged in the following order:

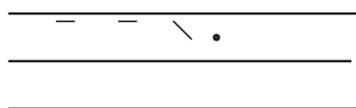
Pre head Head Nucleus Tail

The prehead includes the unstressed syllables preceding the first stressed syllable in the tone group which constitute the head. The tone group comprises a syllable which carries a tone of some kind. This syllable is called the nucleus. The tail refers to the syllables following the nucleus to the end of the tone group.

The Tones of English

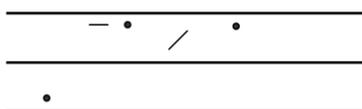
The basic tones of English are five. They are falling, rising, level, falling-rising, and rising-falling tones. The falling tones start at a certain pitch level moving downwards to a lower pitch level. e.g.

1. 'John 'isn't \going (Cruttenden, 1997:35)



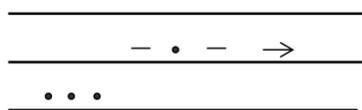
Rising tones start from some point at a certain pitch level ascending to a higher pitch level, e.g.

2. He 'hasn't /told you (O'Connor and Arnold, 1973: 209)



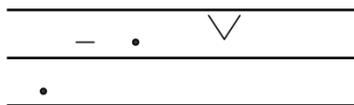
Level tones begin at a certain pitch level and end at the same level with no rising or falling e.g.

3. If it is 'not a 'rude question (O'Connor and Arnold, 1973:249)



Falling-rising tones start at a certain pitch level and descend to a lower one where they change direction and ascend to a higher pitch level, e.g.

4. I 'can't this ^vmorning (Wright, 1973: 58)



Rising-falling tones begin from a certain pitch level and ascend to a higher pitch level where they turn down to a lower pitch level, e.g.

5. He wasn't a _∧lone (Gimson, 1962: 247)



3. Method

The data of the study are recordings of conversations from radio and television satellite channels. These conversations are about different subjects. The other part of the data is recordings of five senior staff members of the Arabic department, college of Arts, university of Mosul. Without being informed of the purpose of the study, the subjects have been given thirty sentences which they were asked to read in different attitudes. The English accent which is chosen as the basis of reference is the 'Received Pronunciation' (RP). The data of the study has been analyzed perceptually. No acoustic analysis has been made. The system used to mark the different tones is the diacritic one. A system of horizontal lines and small dots are used in transcribing the tone groups. The horizontal lines stand for the stressed syllables while the small dots stand for unstressed syllables. The diacritics used are (\), (/), (-), (v) and (^) which stand for the falling, rising, level, falling-rising and

rising-falling tones respectively. Three degrees of pitch range are used to show the pitch height. The tone group boundaries are marked by the double bar (/ /).

4. The Syntax of Arabic Negation

Negation is a means used to reserve the meaning of a sentence so as to deny or exclude its normal meaning (Francis, 1965: 53). Negation in Arabic is maintained by different negative particles. These negative particles either negate verbal sentences or nominal sentences. A verbal sentence contains a verb or more in its predicate e.g.

/wasala ?axii/

My brother has arrived.

While a nominal sentences contains no verb in its predicate e.g

6. /?albaytu jamiilun/

This house is beautiful.

4.1 Verbal Sentence Negators

Negation of verbal sentences can be achieved through certain negative particles. These are /lam/, /laa/, /maa/, /lan/ and /lamma/.

/lam/ negates affirmative sentences with the perfect form of the verb. It changes the verb following it into the imperfect form with the jussive mood. As far as its time reference is concerned, it is used to express negation in the past.(Nahas, 1979: 99) e.g.

7. /'saafarar 'rajulu 'maei/

(The man travelled with me)

8. /lam yu'saafirir 'rajulu 'maei/

(The man did not travel with me)

The negative particle /laa/ negates verbs in the imperfect form. It does not change the form or mood of the verb. So, the verb following it remains in the imperfect form and the indicative mood e.g.

9. /'ʔabdaʔul 'ʔaan /

(I start now)

10. /laa 'ʔabdaʔul 'ʔaan /

(I do not start now)

The particle /maa/ resembles /lam/ in that both can be followed by the imperfect form of the verb. However, they differ in that while /maa/ can be followed by the perfect form, /lam/ can only be followed by the imperfect form of the verb (Al-Makhzumi, 1964:249)

11. /'laɛibal fa'riiqu bil'ʔams/

(The team played yesterday)

12. /maa 'laɛibal fa'riiqu bil'ʔams /

(The team did not play yesterday)

13. */lam 'laɛibal fa'riiqu bil'ʔams/

Thus, the negative particle /maa/ expresses negation in the present or in the past.

/lan/ negates verb phrases introduced by /sa-/ or /sawfa/. It changes the verb following it from the indicative mood to the subjunctive mood. Also, /lan/ expresses negation in the future (Hasan, 1963/b: 426)

14. /sa'ʔaktubu ri'saalatan 'kula 'ʔahr/

(I will write a letter every month)

15. /lan 'ʔaktuba ri'saalatan 'kulla 'ʔahr/

(I will not write a story every month)

Finally, the negative particle /lammaa/ introduces the imperfect form in the jussive mood. It expresses negation in the past but with present relevance (Nahir, 1987:340 and AlSamira'i, 1991:560) e.g

16. /qad 'waşala ?almu'diiru/

(The manager has arrived)

17. /lam'maa 'yaşilil mu'diir/

(The manager has not arrived yet)

4.2 Nominal Sentence Negators

Nominal sentences are negated by certain negators. These are /laysa/, /laa/, /maa/ and /ğayr/. The negative particle /laysa/ is followed by an indicative subject and a subjunctive predicate. The subject is called the noun of /laysa/ while the predicate is called the predicate of /laysa/ (Al-Baqari, 1989: 81) e.g.

18. /?at'talibu ða'kiyyun/

(The student is clever)

19. /laysat 'taalibu ða'kiyyan/

(The student is not clever)

Like /laysa/, the negative particle /maa/ is also followed by an indicative subject called the noun of /maa/ and a subjunctive predicate called the predicate of /maa/ (Nahir, 1987: 322). e.g.

20. /'xaalidun řa'biibun/

(khalid is a doctor).

21. /maa 'xaalidun řa'biiban/

(khalid is not a doctor)

The negative particle /laa/ falls into two main types: /ʔannaafiyya lijjins/ (the negator of the genus) and /ʔalmuʃabbaha bilaysa/ (similar to /laysa/). The negator of the genus is followed by a subjunctive subject and an indicative predicate. The noun following this type of /laa/ is always the subject (Al-Sa'idi, 1982: 69) e.g.

22. /ʔal'maʃhadu ja'miilun/

(The scene is beautiful)

23. /laa 'maʃhada ja'miilun/

(No scene is beautiful)

/laa/ that is similar to /laysa/. It is followed by an indicative subject and subjunctive predicate (Al-Duri, 1977:254) e.g.

24. /ʔat'taalibu 'haadirun/

(The student is present)

25. /laa taalibun 'haadiran/

(No student is present)

The last particle that negates nominal sentences is /ɣayr/. This negative particle can only negate the predicate when it is an adjective phrase (Bishai, 1971: 129) e.g.

26. /ʔassu'ʔaalu 'sahlun/

(The question is easy)

27. /ʔassu'ʔaalu ɣayru 'sahlin/

(The question is not easy)

Negation in Arabic can be intensified by the use of one of the intensifiers /ʔalbatta/, /mutlaqan/, /ʔabadan/ or /qatt/. It is to be mentioned that /ʔabadan/, and /qat/ differ in their time reference,

/qat/ refers to the past whereas /ʔabadan/ refers to the present or future (Deeb, 1984: 104 and Nahir, 1987: 114) e.g.

28. /lam ʔaral ʔasrata ʔat/

(I have never seen Basra)

29. /lan yasʔaslama ʔabada/

(He will never surrender)

5. Data Analysis

The Tones of Modern Standard Arabic

5.1 Falling Tones

The data reveal that four types of falling tones are there. They are the

high falling, mid falling, low falling, and high-low falling tones. This classification of tones is made according to the level at which the pitch movement starts and that at which it terminates. The examples investigated prove that these tones have their counterparts in English.

A negative particle can take different positions in tone groups with falling tones. It can occur as a prehead in the tone group structure. This occurrence, however, is restricted to low preheads since no negative particle that functions as a high prehead is recognized in the data. But, it is not a common case for the negative particle to be a low prehead in a tone group with a falling tone.

30. //Maa ʔaħabtu//

• • \ •

(I did not go)

The head of the tone group can also be occupied by the negative particle. e.g.

31. // 'laa tata\kallam//

- . . \ .

(Do not speak)

The negative particle can very frequently occur as the nucleus of the tone group with a falling tone. e.g.

32. // 'lasta sa'diiqi//

\ . . - .

(You are not my friend)

The tail of the tone group with a falling tone can be occupied by a negative particle. This occurrence is not common though. e.g.

33. //alqi\taalu 'laysa 'hallan//

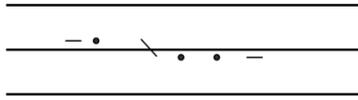
. . \ . - . -

(Fighting is not a solution)

5.1.1 The Meaning of Falling Tones

It is found that when the negative particle is the nucleus of the tone group, the speaker emphasizes the meaning carried by the negative sentence. e.g.

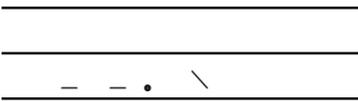
34. // 'haaða \laysia sa'hiih//



(This is not true)

Also, the emphasis of meaning can even be stronger when an intensifier is present. The data show that when any of the negation intensifiers (like ?albatta, mutlaqan, ?abadan or qatt) is present, it mostly becomes the nucleus e.g.

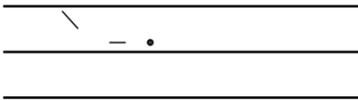
35. // 'lam '?akðib \qatt//



(I have never told a lie)

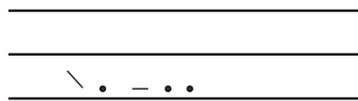
It is also found that the emphasis of negation may also depend on the pitch high at which the tone is said. So, the higher the pitch, the more emphatic the meaning is. e.g.

36. // \lan 'yaerif//



(He will not know)

37. // \lastu 'maazihan//



(I am not joking)

In a sentence which ends with an adverbial, it is found that the scope of negation is determined by the tone group boundaries and by the position of the nuclear syllable. So, the adverbial lies outside the scope of negation when it falls in a separate tone group e.g.

38. // \lam yata'kallam//lisaaæa\tayn//

\ . . - \

(He kept silent for two hours)

Equally, the adverbial lies outside the scope of negation when the sentence is said as a single tone group provided that the adverbial receives the nuclear syllable e.g.

39. //'lam yata'kallam lisaaæa\tayn//

- . . - \

(He did not talk for two hours)

Contrary to this, the final adverbial lies inside the scope of negation when the negative particle carries the nuclear syllable e.g.

39. // \lam yata'kallam lisaaæa'tyn//

\ . . - -

(He did not talk for two hours)

Clearly, the scope of negation highly determines the meaning of an utterance. When the adverbial lies outside the scope of negation as in examples (38) and (39) the meaning is that 'he said

nothing for two hours'; whereas when the adverbial lies within the scope of negation as in example (40), the meaning is that 'he did not talk for about two hours'.

5.2 Rising Tones

The rising tones identified in the data of the study are the low-high rising, the high rising, the mid rising and the low rising.

The data reveal that the negative particle can occur as a low prehead in tone groups with rising tones. No high prehead that is occupied by a negative particle is recognized in the data of the study.

41. //lan ʔaqbal//

• / •

(He will not accept)

The negative particle can also occur as the head of a tone group with a rising tone e.g.

42. //ʔanaa ʔayru mustaʔid//

• • - • • /

(I am not ready)

The negative particle can be the nucleus of the tone group. This is clear in the following example:

43. //huwa ʔayru musʔaaʔ //

- • / • • -

(He is not upset)

The Arabic negative particle may also occupy the tail position in a tone group with a rising tone e.g.

44. //huwa 'ɣayru mas?'uul//

— / . . . —
—
—

(He is not responsible?)

5.2.1 Meaning of Rising Tones

When used as questions, Arabic declarative sentences are associated with rising tones. Such questions are not used to ask about new information but to show astonishment, exclamation or surprise. For this, they are called denial questions (?al?'istifhaamul ?inkaari). e.g.

45. //lastu 'saadiqan//

— . / . .
—
—

(I am not sincere?)

Unlike Arabic, English declarative sentences, when uttered with a rising tone, may be used to ask about new information. That is, the speaker in such questions merely asks about something. It is found that Arabic speakers, when they ask using a declarative sentence, tend to place the nuclear syllable on the last word in the utterance. e.g.

46. //laa nam'talikul ,maal//

—
—
— . . . /

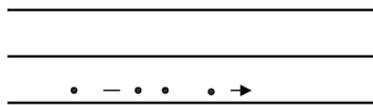
(We do not have the money)

5.3 Level Tones

Three types of level tones are recognized in the data of the study.

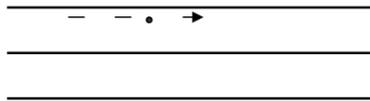
They are the high level, the mid level, and the low level tones. The data of the study reveal that the negative particles can occur as a prehead, head, nucleus or tail in tone groups with level tones. The following examples show these functions respectively:

47. //laa 'yaeriful miθaal//



(He does not know the example)

48. //lam 'yakun sahlān//



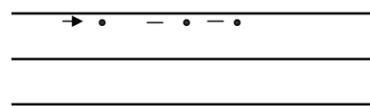
(It was not easy)

49. //laa 'ʔadri//



(I do not know)

50. //ħaaða 'laa yaε'niini//

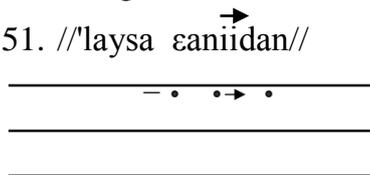


(This does not concern me)

5.3.1 Meaning of Level Tones

The speaker using a level tone may merely state things neutrally showing that he/she is not involved in the situation he talks about. e.g.

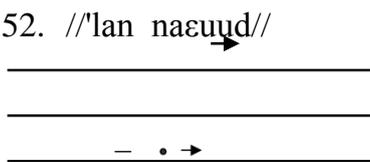
51. //laysa ɛaniidan//



(He is not obstinate)

It is also found that in a formal conversation, speakers tend to use a level tone e.g.

52. //lan naɛuud//

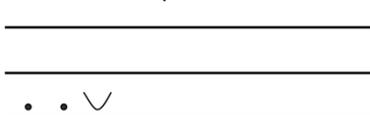


(we will not come back).

5.4 Falling-Rising Tones

It is found that four types of falling-rising tones exist in Arabic. These are high falling rising, mid falling rising, low falling-rising and finally high low falling-rising tones. Negative particles can occur as prehead, head, nucleus or tail in tone groups with falling-rising tones. These positions are shown by the following examples respectively:

53. //lan nuyaadir//



(We will not leave)

54. //laa ya_vxaafuk//

—
—
— . √ —

(He does not fear you)

55. //√laa hal//

—
— √ —
—

(There is no solution)

56. // ?ajja^vmiieu 'laa yaqba'luun//

—
—
— . . √ - . . - —

(They all do not agree)

5.4.1 Meaning of Falling-Rising Tones

A speaker may use a falling-rising tone when he/she is careful not to disturb the co-participant or not to sound so rude. In other words, the speaker may want to mitigate the meaning carried by the utterance whether the meaning is refusal, denial, or rejection e.g.

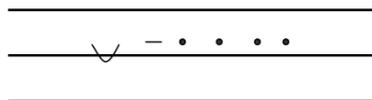
57. //√laa 'halla la'day//

—
—
— √ - . . - —

(I have no solution).

It is argued that this tone indicates some degree of familiarity and informality. As such, it is hardly used in formal conversations e.g.

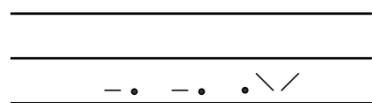
58. //vlaa 'ʔaḏhabu maʕak //



(I do not go with you)

It is found that some utterances, when semantically considered, may be counted as refusal; but due to the falling-rising tone used, they are counted as approval. e.g.

59. //ʔana 'ɣayru mu_vwaafiq//



(I do not agree)

5.5 The Rising-Falling Tones

The types of rising-falling tones recognized are high rising-falling, mid rising-falling, low rising-falling and high low rising-falling tones.

The negative particles can occur as a prehead, head, nucleus, or tail in tone groups with rising-falling tones. These positions taken by the negative particles are shown by the following examples respectively:

60. // lan ?u[^]jiib //

(I will not answer)

61. // 'ɣayr mu_Λriih //

(Not comfortable)

62. // _Λmaa 'saadat //

(She did not come back)

63. // _Λ?anta lastu saadiqan //

(You are not sincere)

5.5.1 The Meaning of Rising-Falling Tones

The data of the study show that in a rising-falling tone the speaker emphasizes the meaning the negative sentence conveys e.g.

64. // _Λmaa ra?ay'naahum//

(we did not see them)

Intensifiers, when present in a tone group with a rising-falling tone, tend to carry the nuclear syllables e.g.

65. //lam 'yaɕtarif [^]muɕlaqan//



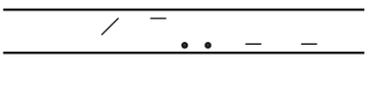
(He has not confessed at all)

It is found that shifting the nucleus from the non-assertive form to the negative particle brings about an interesting difference in meaning, e.g.

66. //laa 'ʔaqbalu [^]ʔayya 'ɕawn//



67. // [^]laa 'ʔaqbalu 'ʔayy 'ɕawn//



The speaker in example (66) shows that 'he/she does not accept any type of help'; while in example (67) he/she shows that 'he/she is ready to accept help provided that it is genuine'.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of data reveals that the negative particles carrying the nuclear syllable are more frequent than non-accented ones. This may be attributed to the fact that negative particles introduce new information into an utterance. Also, the strength of negation depends on the tone used. The falling tone, for instance, expresses stronger negation than the falling- rising tone. Further, an

utterance may express refusal when it is semantically considered; but, when intonation is considered, it may not sound so. So, a speaker using a falling-rising tone to refuse an offer, may show willingness to accept it. Moreover, a speaker may choose to mitigate the denial, rejection, refusal or criticism prosodically. Thus, criticizing others using a falling-rising tone is more mitigated than using a falling or a rising-falling tone.

So a speaker may stress his refusal by using a falling or rising-falling tone. These tones, however, differ in that the former shows that the speaker sounds calm while the latter shows that he sounds excited. Additionally, the data of the study reveal that the falling tones are the most frequent tones. Also, it is found that there is no correlation between a particular negative particle and a particular tone. Equally, intensifiers are not used with falling- rising tones. Moreover, the data of the study reveal that the Arabic declarative sentence, when used with a rising tone, cannot be a question proper but it shows surprise and denial; while in English it can be a question proper. Also, the data reveal that even when they are not the nucleus of the tone group, the negative particles are almost always stressed. Finally, it is found that the scope of negation is determined by the position of the nuclear syllable and by the tone group boundaries.

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ملخص البحث

تتناول هذه الدراسة اشكال ووظائف التنغيم فيما يتعلق بأدوات النفي في اللغة العربية الحديثة. وتعتبر ايضا هذه الدراسة محاولة لبيان فيما اذا كانت ادوات النفي مشددة في العربية ام لا. اضافة الى ذلك فان هذه الدراسة تتناول العلاقة بين النغمات المختلفة وادوات النفي في العربية. وقد توصلت هذه الدراسة الى نتائج منها ان اللغة العربية تميل الى تشديد ادوات النفي، اضافة الى ان درجة النفي تعتمد على النغمة المستخدمة فيمكن للمتكلم ان يقوي او يخفف من نفيه استنادا الى النغمة التي يستخدمها.