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Phonological Intricacies for EFL Undergraduates in Accentuating Particular Parts of an Utterance

Emad Ali Alawad Ali - Religious and Educational Programme , Comboni College, Khartoum , Sudan - **Email:** u.emadali@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study strives to explore the phonological intricacies experiencing EFL undergraduates in accentuating particular parts of an utterance (prominence feature). The descriptive analytical approach has been adopted as it relevantly fits the nature of the present study. In the conduct of collecting the data needed, a diagnostic production test was developed to collect the quantitative data from fifty students in the third year of the English Language BA whom were randomly selected from Sudan University of Science and Technology and Al-Neelain University during the academic year 2017-2018. Then the data collected have been acoustically and statistically analyzed by using Computer Software Package for Speech Analysis in Phonetics known as PRAAT (Boersma, 2001) together with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The results obtained were tremendously in favour of what had been assumed. On this basis, a number of recommendations have been suggested , the most notable of which is the necessity of creating English environment in EFL classrooms through presenting audio and visual materials in conjunction with English classes in order to offer EFL learners a greater opportunity of more English exposure which in turn contributes to promoting their fluency

Keywords: phonological, intricacies, accentuating, utterance, undergraduates

المستخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف التعقيدات الصوتية التى تواجه الطلاب الجامعيين دارسي اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية فى ابراز اجزاء معينة من الكلام .فى هذه الدراسة قد تم تبني المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لانه يتناسب مع طبيعتها . لاجراء عملية جمع البيانات المطلوبة , استخدم الباحث اختبار تشخيصى لجمع البيانات الكمية من 50 طالبا فى السنة الثالثة من بكالوريوس اللغة الانجليزية وقد تم اختيارهم عشوائيا من جامعتي السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا والنيلين خلال السنة الدراسية 2017– 2018 . من ثم تم تحليل البيانات التى تم جمعها صوتيا واحصائيا باستخدام حزمة برامج الكمبيوتر لتحليل الاصوات المعروفة ب (PRRAT) مع الحزمة الاحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) .وقد جاءت نتائج التحليل المتحصل عليها بشكل كبير لصالح ما افترض سابقا. تاسيسا علي ذللك , جاءت الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات ابرزها: ضرورة خلق بيئة جيده للغة المستهدفة عبر عرض مواد صوتية ومرئية بالتزامن مع حصص اللغة وذلك بغرض منح المتعلمين فرصة اكبر للتعرض للغة مما يسهم فى ترقية طلاقتهم .

الكلمات المفتاحية : صوتي ، تعقيدات ، ابراز , كلام , طلاب المرحلة الجامعية

Introduction

Language can basically be thought of as highly- complicated systems which enable us to express our thoughts, intents and attitudes and to take out meaning from the utterance produced by other people. Thus, So therefore, a correctly produced utterance should involve the successful imposition of segmental and supra-segmental features which actually

"linguistics is the science that serves studying the nature and properties of these systems and its various branches focus on different aspects of the communication process" as reported by Alkhuli, M. (1980).

represent the two main areas of phonetics and phonology.

In point of fact, conveying intended meaning and producing intelligible pronunciation while speaking English is not an easy task for EFL students to accomplish perfectly and that is according to several factors like the second language interference which is referred to by Hayati, (1998) when he reports that *"According to the basic assumption of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, learners of any language tend to transfer the structure of their native language into that of the target language while coming across such differences"*. Also the intricacy of the second language tonal structure and its functions are some instances for the difficulties that EFL students encounter to master English pronunciation.

Speech clarity requires specific features which are called suprasegmentals in phonology, whose function is to allow speakers to convey their real intents besides enabling the listeners to perceive the discourse in an appropriate way. Intonation is a part of suprasegmental phonology that conveys the differences of expressive meaning (e.g., surprise, reservation, questioning and etc...) in spoken contexts especially that *"Intonation can convey linguistic and pragmatic meaning*" as stated by Wennerstrom (1994).

EFL Learners involved into a conversation with varying levels of intonation mastery. Some have excellent performance of uttering and their proper use of English intonation is in a way that allows them to produce intelligible discourse, whereas others are unable to highlight their intents clearly because of their unawareness of proper use of intonation so they end up with creating nonsense and gibberish (unintelligible and meaningless) speech.

According to J.C. Wells (2006), intonation has three key functions –to express speaker's attitude, to structure our messages to one another and to focus attention on specific parts of utterance we produce and this is referred to as (tonicity). Haliday (1960) adds that, *" there are three distinct meaningful sets of choices which would be covered under the heading of intonation in English, and these are labeled in different ways: the distribution of an utterance into tone groups is called tonality, the placing of tonic syllables in a tone group is called tonicity and the choice of the primary or secondary contour is called tone"*.

Since this paper revolves around the complexities of tonicity for EFL students, the main focus should be on the linguistic concept and the communicative functions of this prosodic feature. In every intonation group there is one word that is accentuated or emphasized more strongly than the rest within the utterance. This most-accentuated word is called the prominent word and linguistically the process of accentuating the important words in the oral discourse is called tonicity. In fact, the term tonicity refers to a prosodic feature of a language by means which certain words or syllables within the utterance are highlighted in order to signal a certain conversational message.

According to Tench, P. (1996), *"tonicity is the location of the most prominent word (or, even, syllable) in each intonation unit and causes a significant movement of pitch."* This prosodic feature is phonologically marked by a number of other vocal characteristics like higher volume which is simply mentioned by Yoshia, M. (2014) when she has addressed the prominence by saying that*" the prominent word is pronounced more forcefully than the other words, and it may be louder than the others".* Besides the increased volume above stated, the change in pitch, length and quality are also characteristics that assist in popping out the important words or syllables in the message conveyed.

Tonicity performs different linguistic functions in English discourse, the most important of which are to mark a default placement on the final word of a phrase, to mark contrasting information and to signal new information and old information. In most lexical phrases, when there's nothing special that the speaker needs to emphasis, the last content word in the intonation group receives prominence. In expressing new information, Ali, M. and Birjandi, P., (2005) states that: *"When we say that we need to stress the new information, it is logical to think, 'This is the first time I am saying this sentence, so it is all new information. I had better stress every word'. Well, not quite. In Standard English, we consider that the nouns carry the weight of a sentence, when all else is equal. Although the verb carries important information, it does not receive the primary stress of a first-time noun"* and from his side Katamba, F. (1996) adds that *"...Given information is kept in the background. It is not in focus. But new information is foregrounded. It is in focus."* If it is important for a speaker to show that two words or ideas are different from each other, those words can both receive prominence. This is very similar to emphatic stress. The speaker is emphasizing two words because they contrast with each other.

Although most of the previous work has dealt with tonicity as a subtitle or a part of intonation, the results obtained relating to this vocal feature strongly support the hypothesis of the current study which states that highlighting prominence in conversations and read aloud texts poses an intricacy for EFL students. In a study conducted by Ahmed, A. (2015), the obtained results concerning the placement of tonic syllable indicated that, the level of tonic syllable in the pre-test was (10.2) and in the post -test it was (18.2). In another study carried out by Zain , T. (2011) the, findings showed that, stress proved to be difficult for most of the Sudanese native speakers of colloquial Arabic for several reasons: mother tongue interference, negative transfer of stress typology, ignoring of rule restrictions, over-generalization and ignorance of phonetic phenomena. Helal, S. (2014).in her study found that, the overall performance of the students in stress placement in the pretest was low. The students provided 243 correct transcriptions, i.e. 18.2022% of the total. In the post-test, however, there was a better performance: 622 correct transcriptions, i.e. 46.592% of the total. The average performance of the two tests was 32.3971%.

In the line with the aim of this study which mainly focuses on exploring the Phonological Intricacies for Sudanese Undergraduates in Accentuating Particular Parts of an utterance, the following specific question has been put forward for the purpose of being tested:

1- How far are EFL Students able to accentuate certain words or syllables carrying specific linguistic information in some selected utterance patterns?

2- Methodology

2.1 Methods and Approaches

The methodology developed for this study is both descriptive and analytic in nature and a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in an attempt to obtain accurate results and adequate information from the respondents.

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

After checking its validity and reliability a diagnostic production test was utilized for the purpose of gathering data needed. This instrument containing nine scripted pair test items covering most of the common speech forms and they were purposely designed to test the respondents' ability in accentuating certain information in an utterance.

2.2.1 Reliability of the Diagnostic Test: (Half Split Method)

As shown in table (2.1) below, the means of general reliability for all items of the diagnostic test equals 0.813 , and the p-value is smaller than 0.05 , so all the corrected correlation coefficients are significance at (α) = 0.05. Accordingly, it can be said that the test are reliable.

Table (3.5): Split-Half Coefficient method

Diagnostic Test Two			
Part one Items	**Person-correlation**	**P-Value**	**Spearman-Brown Coefficient**
1	0.652	0.000	0.780
2	0.732	0.000	0.802
3	0.712	0.000	0.833
4	0.621	0.000	0.819
5	0.788	0.000	0.781
6	0.674	0.000	0.853
7	0.723	0.000	0.756
8	0.741	0.000	0.807
9	0.800	0.000	0.890
Mean	**0.715**	**0.000**	**0.813**

2.3 Participants

The total number of participants of this study is (50) BA third-year Sudanese undergraduates majoring in English who voluntarily participated in the study. It should be noted that, those participants were randomly selected from two Sudanese governmental universities which were Sudan University of Science and Technology and Al-Neelain University during the academic year 2017-2018.

3- Data Analysis and Results

It is worthy to mention that, the items of the diagnostic test were specifically designed to test how far EFL Students are able to accentuate certain words or syllables carrying specific linguistic information in some selected utterance patterns. In order to analyze the data gathered, a model answer for each item is presented through PRAAT figure for matching the subjects' responses to it. Then a table is attached to each figure showing the pitch frequency. According to (Roach, 2009), Accentuation is produced by four main factors: (i) loudness (intensity), (ii) length (duration), (iii) pitch (Fundamental Frequency/F0), and (iv) quality. Generally these four factors work together in combination, but experimental work has shown that these factors are not equally important; the strongest effect is produced by pitch frequency and length while the loudness and quality do not have much effect. Accordingly the researcher focuses only on the two features of the strongest effect when analyzing accented syllables concerning the items tested.

Test item (1):

A: Excuse me, where do I get breakfast?

B: In the Panorama Restaurant, sir.

As shown below in figure (3-1) and the table goes along with , it is clear that the stress in line (A) is put on the second syllable of (*ex**cuse***) which accented with a frequency of 217.2 HZ and in duration of 0.345 *ms*. . The word (*me*) is not accented as it does not bear any important linguistic information. In the second PU of the same sentence the onset goes on the interrogative word (*where*) so the tonic syllable must go on the first syllable of the compound word (***break****fast*) which accented with a frequency of 189.8 HZ and in a duration of 0.351 *ms*. With respect to the line (B), the accented syllable must be the first one of the word (***res****taurant*) which uttered with a pitch of 200.8 HZ and in a duration of 0.24 millisecond while the final vocative (*sir*) is unaccented. Statistically it was found that: there were only twenty four by (48%) correct responses versus twenty six by (52%) incorrect ones concerning the tonic syllable (-cuse). As for the target tonic syllable (break-) , the correct responses were only fourteen by (28%) in contrast to thirty six by (72%) incorrect responses and with regard to the last tonic syllable (res-) only eighteen by (36%) of responses were correct in contrast to thirty two by (64%) incorrect responses. Actually, this result is in favour of the study hypothesis.

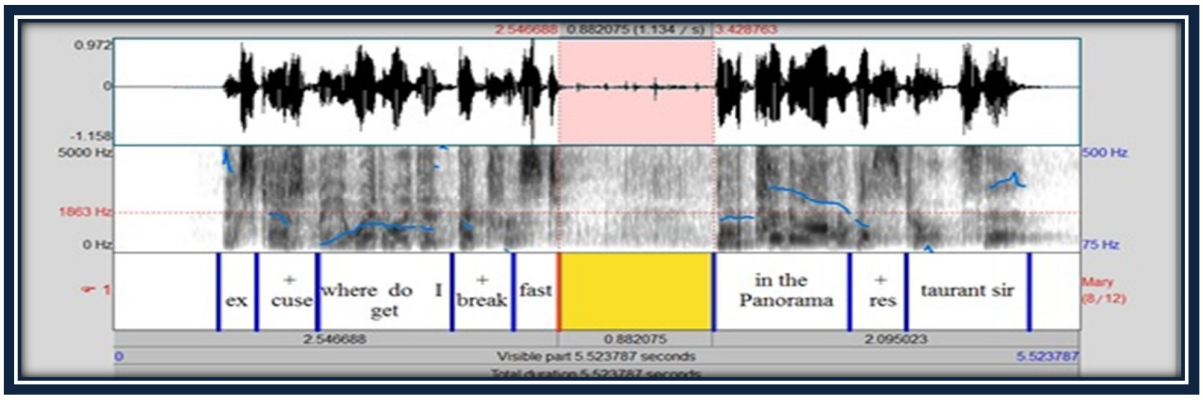

Figure (3.1): A: Excuse me, where do I get breakfast B: In the Panorama Restaurant, sir.

Table (3.1): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (1):

Accented syllables	-cuse	Break-	Res-
Pitch (HZ)	217.2	189.8	200.8
Duration (ms)	0.345	0.351	0.24

Test item (2):

A: Where's that?

B: Twenty-seven floor sir. Use the lift, over there

C: But the lift only goes to the twenty-fourth floor.

With reference to the above three-line conversation, in sentence (A) the onset goes on the interrogative (WH) word and accordingly the stress is placed on the demonstrative (*that*), as for line (B) the last lexical item (*floor*) in (PU1) must take the nucleus since it is the last content word that gives new information in the phrase and not on the final vocative (*sir*) that attached to the preceding (PU) as a part of the tail. Besides that, the word (*there*) in (PU3) must be accented as it also offers new information. With respect to the last line (C) there is contrastive nucleus on (*fourth*) versus (*seven*) in line (B) .However the last content word (*floor*) in (C) is not accented as it conveys old information. Each of the above words was characterized by the following:

- Higher pitch frequency
- Longer duration

Both the below PRAAT figure (3-2) and the following table show the accented words and their pitch frequencies and lengths. In the light of the figure and the table concerned, the participants' different responses were matched and the statistical results were as follows: for the word (*that*) by 56% of responses were perfect versus 44% for the false ones. As for the words (*floor & there*), they were accented correctly by only twenty (40%) and twenty three (46%) respondents consecutively versus thirty (60%) and twenty seven (54%) incorrect accentuation. As for the last word (*fourth*) seventeen by (34%) of the subjects responded to this word in a correct way while the rest by (33/66%) did not.

To sum up, although the first result is positive, we can say that the overall obtained result reflects the weakness of the students in identifying the proper placement of stress on important words so the percentages stated above undoubtedly support the assumption put forth. .

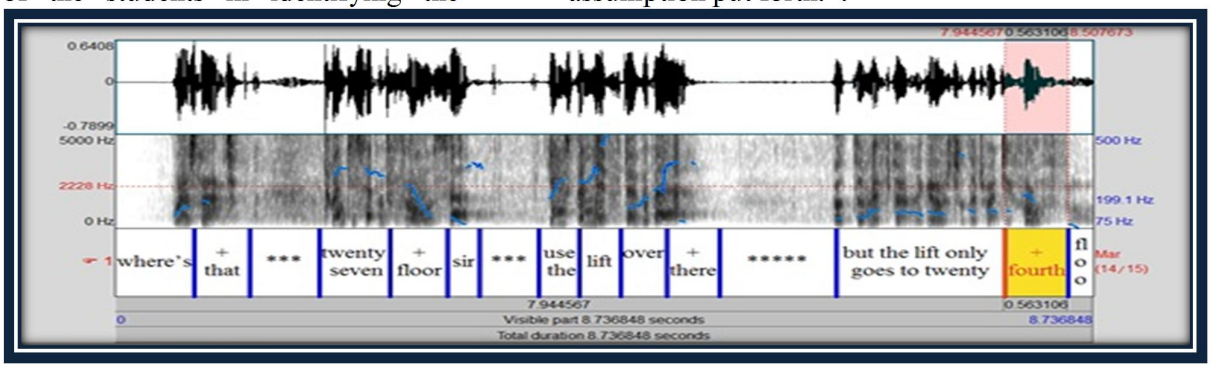

Figure (3.2): A: Where's that? B: Twenty-seven floor sir. Use the lift, over there C: But the lift only goes to the twenty-fourth floor.

Table (3.2): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (2)

Accented syllables	That	Floor	There	Fourth
itch (HZ)	195.7	274	370	221.2
Duration (ms)	0.496	0.513	0.471	0.292

Test item (3):

A: Good morning, Mr. Morson.
B: Come in, sit down.

In sentence (A) the first syllable of the word (*morning*) is the nucleus as it is accented with a higher pitch frequency of (365.6 HZ) and in a longer duration of (0.236 ms.) but the item (*Mr. Morson*) is a final vocative that does not take any prominence. As for line (B) the two phrasal verbs (*come in & sit down*) bear stress on the particles and the phonological rule showing this is that: phrasal verbs are lexically double-stressed in which the primary stress must go on the particles. As can be seen in the above figure and the table attached to, the pitch started falling from the vowels of aforementioned accented syllables with frequencies of (365.6 - 237.7 - 185.9 HZ) and duration of (0.236 - 0.281 - 0.294 ms) for the syllable (mor-) as well as the particles (in & down) respectively. It should be noted that, the participants' responses were matched to these model answers in order to be analyzed statistically and the result show that twenty three respondents by (46%) versus twenty seven by (54%) accented the first syllable of the lexical word (*morning*) correctly. What's more, half of them responded to the particle (*in*) in a proper way in the target item 2. As for the third word, a number of twenty six by (52%) succeeded to place the correct stress on the particle (*down*) while the rest failed and this indicates that, the students were more able to identify appropriately the placement of stress on phrasal verbs.

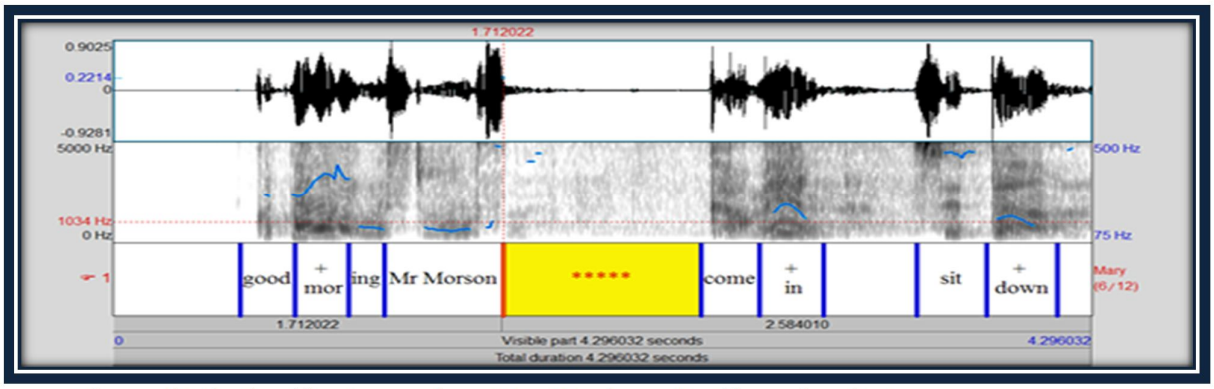

Figure (3.3): A: Good morning, Mr. Morison. B: Come in, sit down.

Table (3.3): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (3)

Accented syllables	Mor-	In	Down
Pitch (HZ)	365.6	237.7	185.9
Duration (ms)	0.236	0.281	0. 294

Test item (4):

A: Why are you looking worried?

B: I've got an exam this afternoon.

In sentence (A) as shown in the below figure (3.4), the first syllable of the word (*worried*) must be accented as it is the last content item in the phrase from which the tone goes downwards. The illustrating table attached to that figure demonstrates the pitch frequency and duration of the above mentioned syllable as: 200.9 HZ and 0.280 milliseconds respectively. In line (B) the stress goes on the second syllable of (*e'xam*) with a pitch frequency of (357.6 HZ) and in a length of (0.343 ms) while the item (*this afternoon*) is not accented though it is the last content word in the phrase. The rule explaining this case is that, adverbs and adverbial phrases of time and place are often not accented if they come at the end of phrase. The statistical results show that the percentages of sample's responses according to the placement of stress on the syllables (*wor-* and *–xam*) respectively only eighteen of the respondents properly placed the stress on (*wor-*) and for the correct responses related to the syllable (*-xam*) there was a slight increase by (42%). Clearly, these obtained results indicate that, the respondents faced a great dilemma in determining the prominent syllables when reading such items loudly

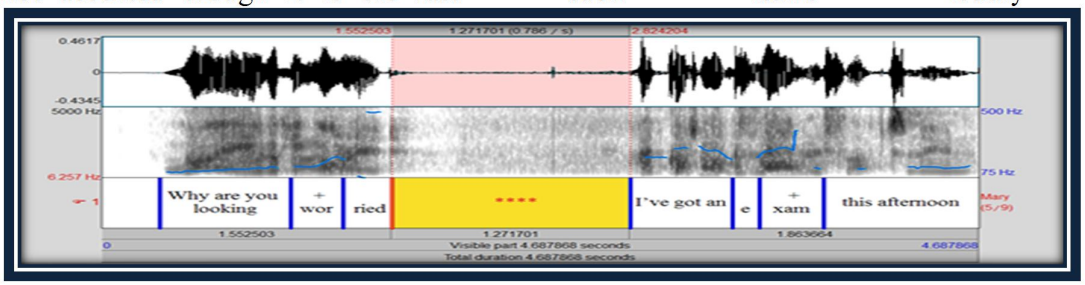

Figure (3.4): A: Why are you looking worried? B: I've got an exam this afternoon.

Table (3.4): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (4)

Accented syllables	Wor-	-xam
Pitch (HZ)	365.6	237.7
Duration (ms)	0.236	0.281

Test item (5):

A: Where's your passport?

B: I haven't got one.

Both the below figure (3.5) and the table attached to show that the main lexical stress in line (A) goes on the first syllable of the compound word (*passport*), in which the pitch started falling down with a frequency of 376.5 HZ and a duration of about 0.360 milliseconds and accordingly the pitch concerning the first syllable is longer than that of the second syllable. In line (B), the accented word is (*got*) and not the last word (*one*) which is used as a pronoun and not as a numeral item. As seen in the above figure the tone in the second phrase started falling from the word (*got*) then stretched to the tail (*one*). With referring to the table (3.5) attached below, we can see the nucleus of the content word (*got*) was pronounced in a frequency of 249.1 HZ and in a length of 0.253 milliseconds (ms) which is relatively longer than others. The statistics indicate that the majority of the respondents (29-58%) succeeded to place the stress on the proper syllable of the word (passport) versus (21-42%) who did not. It is also seen that few of them (16-32%) were able to determine the tonic syllable of the word (*got*) in contrast to (34-68%) who failed.

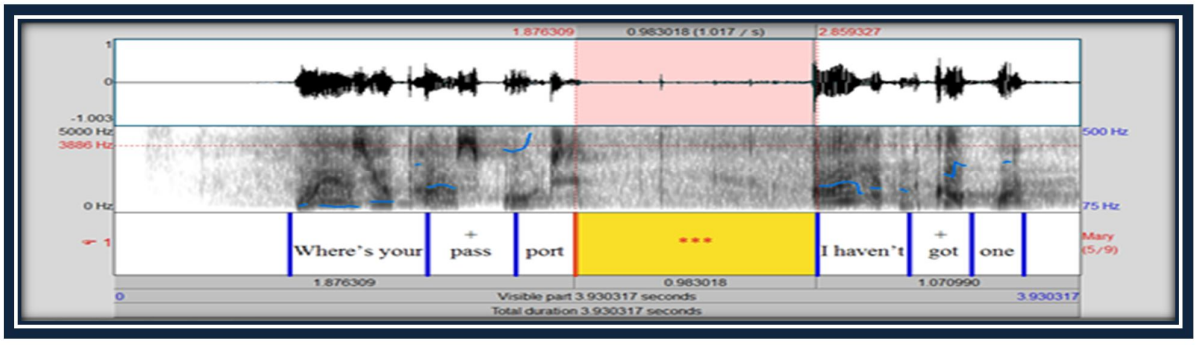

Figure (3.5): A: Where's your passport? B: I haven't got one.

Table (3.5): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (5)

Accented syllables	pass-	Got
Pitch (HZ)	376.5	249.1
Duration (ms)	0.360	0.253

Test item (6):

A: How are you?

B: Fine thanks. How are you?

As shown in figure (3.6) below and the table to which is attached, the (WH) question in line (A) consists of (*how*) followed by two function words which are: (*be*) and (*you*) respectively, as a rule the onset goes on the (WH) word (*how*) while the nucleus goes on the verb to be (*are*) and not on the pronoun (*you*). In line (B) the accented word in the first PU is (*fine*) as it offers linguistic information while in PU2 when the other partner asked in turn the stress shifted to (*you*) as a contrastive focus. From the above figure and the table (4.23) attached to, we can see the pitch frequency and pitch duration for each of the above mentioned accented words. The frequencies and durations of these syllables' nucleuses obviously are the highest and longest in contrast to others. Statistically the results show that, thirty one by (62%) of responses were in favour of the correct answer regarding the accented word (fine). While only (16-32%) of responses related to the accented word (are) and (18-36%) concerning the stressed item (you) were right. Therefore, the obtained results shown prove the inability of students in identifying the tonic syllables specially of the function words.

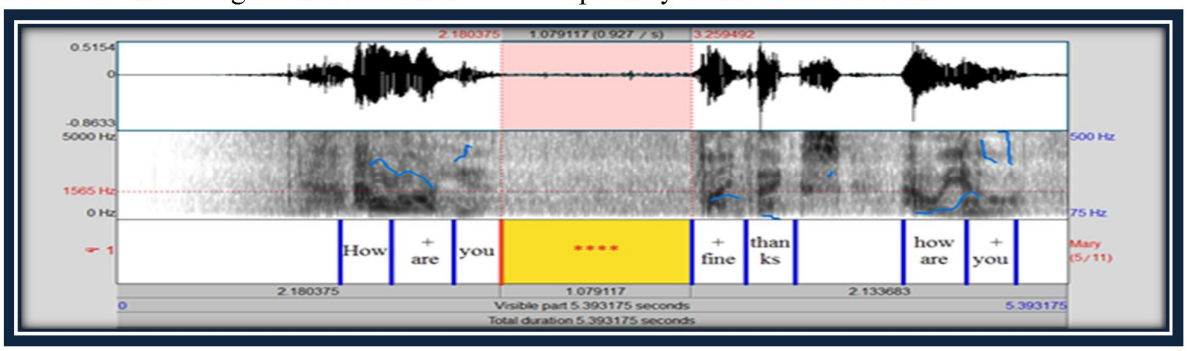

Figure (3.6): A: How are you? B: Fine thanks. How are you?

Table (3.6): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (6)

Accented syllables	Are	Fine	You
Pitch (HZ)	207.2	190.8	206
Duration (MS)	0.289	0.306	0.280

Test item (7):

A: She hasn't done very well, has she?

B: No.

As shown in the below figure (3.7), the tag question, line (A) linguistically must consist of a statement plus tag. We can see that, the last content item (*well)* in the statement is the word that takes the major change in tone (fall-rise pitch) and phonologically the change of tone usually occurs on the tonic syllable and then it may continue over the tail if there is one. For emphasizing the polarity (the quality of being either positive or negative) in the tag, the tone change occurs in the auxiliary (*has*) so it carries the tonic syllable.

Based on illustrating table (3.7) attached to the figure below, it is clear that the two accented words have longer nucleuses in contrast to others around with pitch frequencies of (146.1 - 191.9 HZ) and durations of about (0.245- 0.302 MS) respectively. With respect to line (B), the nucleus goes on the word (No) which pronounced in a pitch frequency of (102 HZ) and duration of (0.257 ms) as seen in the table (3.7). We must draw attention to the fact that, the participants' responses were matched to these model answers in order to be analyzed statistically. the results obtained indicate that, the responses to the words (*well & has*) were erroneous by (38%) and by (40%) respectively. As for the responses to the word (NO) the obtained result was by (54%) which is to some extent regarded as convincing evidence that the participants faced no difficulty in placing the stress on the right item. The obtained results in general prove that, there is still a challenge in producing proper intonation by EFL undergraduates.

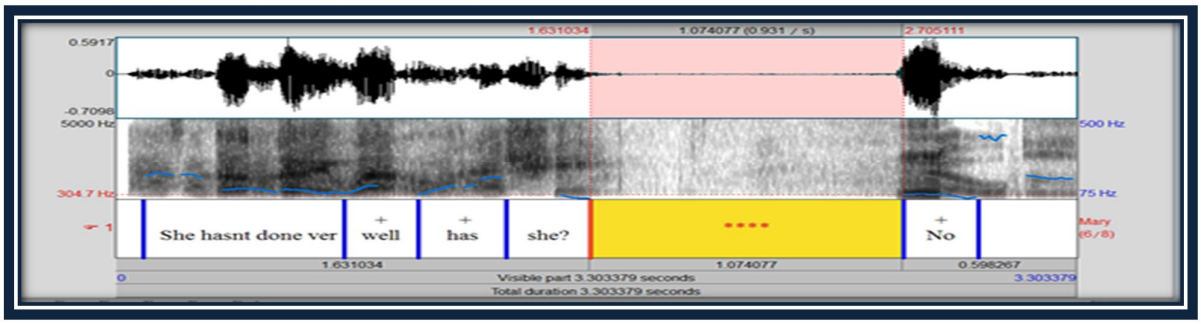

Figure (3.7): A: She hasn't done very well, has she? B: No.

Table (3.7): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (7)

Accented syllables	Well	Has	No
Pitch (HZ)	146.1	191.9	102
Duration (MS)	0.245	0.302	0.257

Test item (8):

A: Have you hurt yourself?

B: Yes I've cut myself.

The below figure (3-8) clearly shows the proper placement of accentuation on the nucleuses of the above two lexical phrases. In the first PU, the word (*hurt*) was accented and we can notice that the phrase tone change occurred at the beginning of the second PU2 while in the second PU the accented item where the pitch started to fall down from was (*cut*). As for the last item in PU2 (*myself*), it is not stressed because when the reflexives are used as the object of the verb or after a preposition they must not be accentuated but instead the stress must be shifted to the items preceding them. In reference to illustrating table attached, the nucleus in each item of the above mentioned is longer, to make it clear, the vowel in the item (hurt) was pronounced in duration of 0.245 milliseconds and with a pitch frequency of 172.8 HZ. With respect to the word (cut), its vowel was pronounced in duration of 0.241 milliseconds and with a pitch frequency of 198.8 HZ which regarded as longer than others. Then for statistical analysis these accented items were used as model answers to match the participants' responses to.

The results obtained indicate that, the majority of students whom were tested to read aloud item (8) erred to place accentuation on the proper nucleuses. The percentages of erroneous responses related to the target tonic syllables (hurt & cut) were by 58% and 62% respectively. This result is certainly consistent with the study assumption.

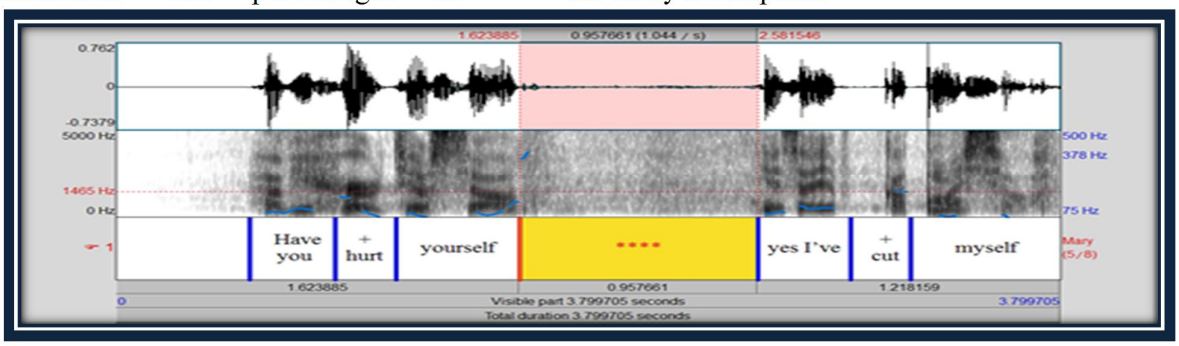

Figure (3.8): A: Have you hurt yourself? B: Yes I've cut myself.

Table (3.8): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (8)*:*

Accented syllables	Hurt	Cut
Pitch (HZ)	172.8	198.8
Duration (ms)	0.245	0.241

Test item (9):

A: We bought it before Christmas
B: Not before Christmas after Christmas.

The below figure (3.9) visibly indicates the words bearing accentuation in test item (9) and accordingly they were used as a model answer to which students' responses were matched. As seen the lexical item (*Christmas*), line (A) has stress on the first syllable as it is the last accented syllable in the phrase where tone change occurs. With respect to IU1 and IU2 , line (B), the stress goes on the second syllable of (*before*) and on first syllable of (*after)* respectively since they are contrastive and the rule explaining this is that: any word can be accented in contrast , even including a function word . With reference to table (3.9) below the tonic syllable in the item (Christmas) was produced with a pitch frequency of (191.8 HZ) and in duration of (0.347 ms) and the nucleuses of the items *before* and *after* were produced with a pitch frequencies (376. & 363 HZ) and durations of (0.276 & 0.232 ms.) respectively which are considered as the highest and longest among others. It should be noted that the participants' responses were matched to these model answers in order to be analyzed statistically as stated as follows: After testing the sample on the referenced item (9) the obtained result indicate that , 64% and 62% of responses relate to the first and the second syllables were inappropriate however, the correct responses to the third item increased perfectly by (76%) , and this is regarded as the highest result among all.

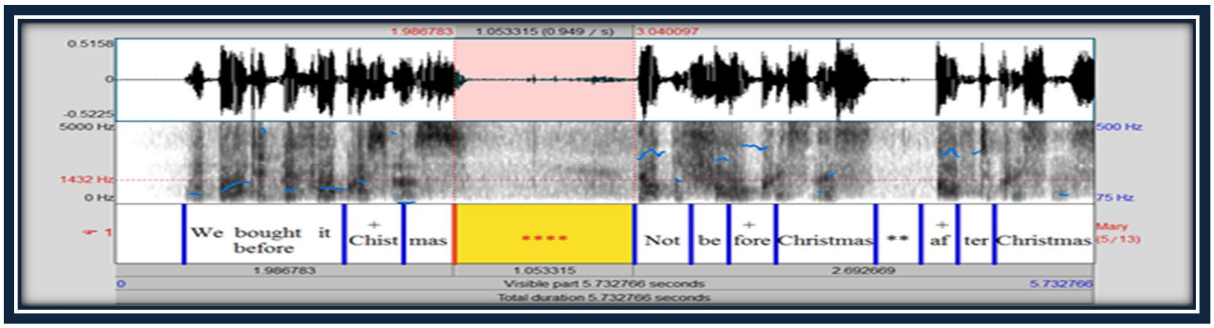

Figure (3.9): A: We bought it before Christmas. B: Not before Christmas, after Christmas.

Table (3.9): Pitch frequency and duration of accented syllables, item (9)

Accented syllables	Christ	-fore	Af-
Pitch (HZ)	191.8	376	363
Duration (MS)	0.347	0.276	0.232

3.1 Verification of the Study Hypothesis:

The study hypothesis seeks to explore the intricacy of highlighting prominence in conversations and read aloud texts for EFL students and in order to assure this assumption, a statistical analysis was done and the outcomes of that analysis were as follows:

Table (3-10): hypothesis testing by using chi-square test

Test Items	Overall Errors		Chi-squire	Mean	Standard deviation	T-Test Value	Sig.
	F	%					
25	0.05	5%	22	18	1.04	13	0.012

From the statistics above, it is obvious that , the calculated value of T – TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in term of the hypothesis No (2) was (13) which is greater than the tabulated value of T – TEST at the degree of freedom (49) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (2.34). This indicates that, the null hypothesis is also rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted showing that there were statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. Also the sig. value (0.003) which is smaller than the significant value (0.05) supports this acceptance in a great degree.

In summary, the statistical results obtained assure that in verbal contexts EFL undergraduates do really face difficulties in highlighting prominent words or syllables that carry important information.

4- Findings and Conclusions

Based on the outcomes of this study, tonicity production is generally proved to be a complexity for EFL undergraduates; and the results obtained from the analysis obviously prove that intricacy. The overall percentage of conformity to the standard pattern with respect to the placement of ‘accentuation' 'tonicity' revealed that (72%) of the responses were not close to the model answers.

In nutshell, the findings of this study report that English intonation in general is a real intricacy for Sudanese EFL undergraduates when speaking or reading aloud and that is due to some phonological differences between their mother tongue and the English.

The findings also imply that the insufficient students' competence in determining the certain nuclei required in verbal contexts refers to applying their L1 suprasegmentals to the learning of the English. Therefore, the traditional methodology of teaching should be replaced by more communicative ones in order to promote the oral production of EFL learners.

In light of the current study outputs, the paper suggests the following recommendations:

1. Intensive and continuous oral and listening assessments should be activated throughout English teaching process because that can help learners to be more mastered and more confident.

2. Since there is lacking contact with natives, it is necessary to create English environment in the classroom through presenting audio and visual materials in conjunction with English classes to offer EFL learners a greater opportunity of more English exposure which in turn can contribute to promoting their fluency.

3. Since acquiring intonation is a long-termed process, encouraging self-learning is recommended together with what mentioned. The best way for students to improve their intonation is simply to become more aware of it. By listening carefully to authentic dialogues and repeating what they listen to, certainly that can help them notice how natives use intonation to express themselves in different contexts and then they can easily produce the same pronunciation. Therefore, listening and imitating method should be activated for helping EFL students overcome the intonation production intricacy.

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