

**Intonational patterns of Refusals
among Egyptian Actors and Actresses:
Intonational Tendencies among
Different Refusal Strategies**

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Abstract:

English has been considered the universal language for communication, even between cultures that do not speak English as a native language. But in order to communicate effectively with other speakers of the language, and to avoid any potential misunderstanding, speakers of any language should be aware of the intonational patterns and their pragmatic implicatures. Intonation helps the speakers express their emotions and attitudes, draw the attention of the hearers to certain parts of the utterance, indicate the grammatical structure of utterances, and it also can turn a statement into a question without having to change the syntactic structure of the utterance. Intonation is seen as the music of speech, and a simple change in that music will reflect a certain meaning in the mind of the hearers. Hence, it is believed that for speakers of English, or any other language, to communicate effectively and avoid any potential misunderstanding, they should be aware of the language's intonational patterns and their implicatures in different contexts.

Key Words:

Intonation, intonational patterns, sentence structure, communication, misunderstanding.

الأنماط التنغيمية للرفض بين الممثلين والممثلات المصريين: الأنماط التنغيمية بين استراتيجيات الرفض المختلفة وأثرها في تغير الدلالة في اللغة الإنجليزية

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ملخص:

تستخدم اللغة الإنجليزية في الوقت الحاضر في التواصل بين الشعوب، حتى تلك التي لا تستخدمها في حياتها اليومية. ولتجنب الفهم الخاطئ عند التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية أو أي لغة أخرى على العموم- يجب أن يكون المتحدث على علم بأنماط التنغيم لهذه اللغة ودلالاتها في المعنى. فالتنغيم يساعد المتحدث على إبراز مشاعره ومواقفه، وعلى جذب انتباه المستمعين لأجزاء معينة من الكلام، وتوضيح التركيب اللغوي والنحوي للجملة، وأيضاً يمكنه تحويل الجملة الخبرية إلى استفهامية والعكس دون الحاجه إلى تغيير أي جزء من أجزاء الجملة، وذلك عن طريق التنغيم.

ويمكن تعريف التنغيم على أنه موسيقى الكلام، وأن أي تغيير في هذه الموسيقى سينعكس على المعنى الذي يصل إلى المستمعين. لذلك فإنه يجب على متحدثي اللغة أن يكونوا على معرفة بأنماط التنغيم ودلالاتها في المواقف المختلفة ليتجنبوا أن يفهمه المستمعون بشكل خاطئ وليتواصلوا مع الآخرين بطريقة صحيحة ومثمرة.

ويحاول هذا البحث أن يعرف بأنماط التنغيم المختلفة في اللغة الإنجليزية، وتغير الدلالة تبعاً لنمط التنغيم . من خلال عينة للبحث .

الكلمات المفتاحية :

التنغيم ، الدلالة ، أنماط التنغيم ، تركيب الجملة، التواصل ، الفهم الخاطئ.

1. Introduction:

It goes without saying that learning a new language is difficult and might cause some problems for the learners. Learners have to understand new grammar rules, new syntactic structures, new cultural differences, and, sometimes, new alphabetical systems. However, one problem that is often overlooked is the phonological aspects of the new language. These phonological aspects might be different from those of the learner's native language, which leads to some misunderstanding.

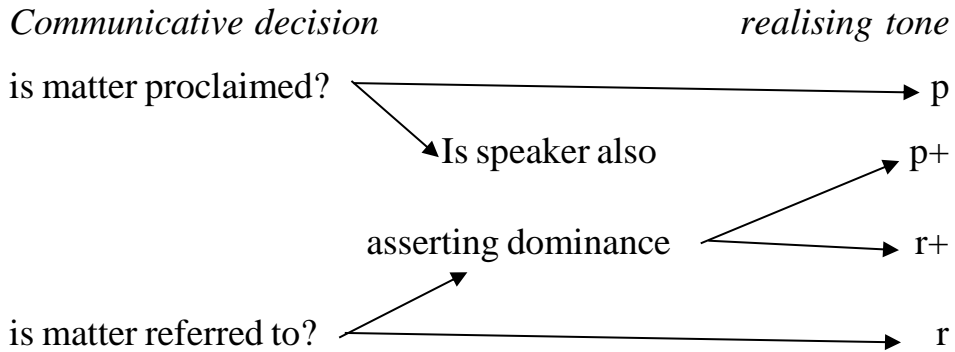
In this Research we will analyze Egyptian actors and actresses refusals to find the most frequently used intonational patterns for each of the refusal strategies. Refusal strategies, as well as intonational patterns, differ in the level of threat they impose on the hearer's face. Thus, a speaker should be careful to choose intonational patterns that are suitable for the context.

2. Theoretical Framework:

It has been argued by Peter Roach (1992) that intonation has four functions that can be used to change the meaning of an utterance. The four functions of intonation are the grammatical function, the accentual function, the attitudinal function and the discourse function. Roach also argued that the use of one intonational pattern in a certain situation can imply a meaning that is different from other patterns. In this research we will use Brazil and Coulthard's (1980) discourse function that is more suitable for the purpose of the present research.

David Brazil (1980) illustrated that there are five main tones; falling, falling-rising, rising, rising-falling and level tone. Out of these five tones the rising tone and the rising falling tone are more dominant than the other three tones, and their use should be to assert dominance over the addressee. More power one speaker has over the other, the more freedom he has in his choice. Brazil (1980) argues that the same thing applies to social distance since the closer they are to each other, the more freedom they both have in their choice. Brazil (1980) provides the following Figure:

Figure 1: Brazil's classification of tones



(Brazil, 1980, p.56)

Brazil (1980) gives examples distinguishing the two most significant tones in his model; the falling-rising, which he called the *referring* tone and gave it the symbol *r*, and the falling, *proclaiming* tone, which he gave the symbol *p*.

//*r* he'll be TWENTy//*p* in AUgust//

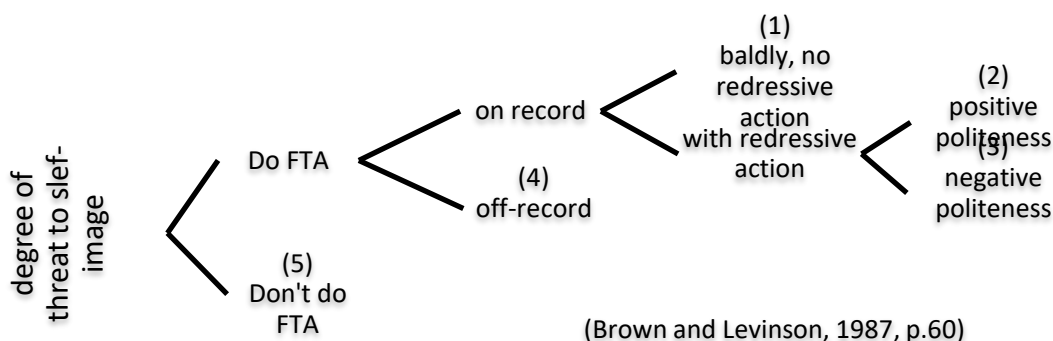
//*p* he'll be TWENTy//*r* in AUgust// (Brazil, 1980, p. 16)

These are the same utterances, with a change in tone selection for each tone unit. In the first example we can assume that the hearer already knows that the person they are talking about will be twenty, but he doesn't know in which month. On the contrary, in the second example, the hearer is told how old that

person will be on his next birthday, which the hearer already knows will be in August.

Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1980) indicated that the speech act of refusal is one of the acts that impose a high threat to the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that the threat that a certain speech act has over the face of the addressee can confine the speaker to how he/she would utter that speech act. Brown and Levinson also introduced their classification of politeness strategies according to the threat of the speech act at hand. Their classification consists of five main classes ranging from doing the face threatening act as ‘baldly’ as possible to avoiding the face threatening act completely.

Figure2: Brown and Levinson’s classification of politeness strategies



Their classification consists of five main classes ranging from doing the face threatening act as ‘baldly’ as possible to avoiding the face threatening act completely. They also described the other classes, as they argued that positive politeness is when “the potential face threat of an act is minimized by the assurance that in general S [speaker] wants at least some of H’s [hearer’s] wants” (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 70). Negative politeness, on the other hand, assures that the speaker understands the independency of the hearers and that he/she is not willing to impose on their freedom of choice.

Refusals are one of the less commonly studied speech acts, but they are sometimes a big issue for some of the learners as they might sound impolite or rude because of the choice of the wrong strategy or tone. In this research we will only focus on the tone choice, leaving aside the use of strategy. We will use Beebe et al.’s classification of the refusal strategies for the organization of the data. Here are the refusal strategies as presented by Beebe (1990):

I. Direct strategies:

1. Performative verbs – e.g. ‘*I decline*’
2. Flat ‘No’ – e.g. ‘*No.*’

3. Negative ability - e.g. *'I can't.'* *'I don't think I can make it.'*

II. Indirect strategies:

1. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor:

- a. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester – e.g. *'I won't be any fun tonight'* to refuse an invitation.
- b. Guilt trip – e.g. waitress to customers who want to sit a while: *'I can't make a living off people who just order coffee.'*
- c. Criticize the request/requester (statement of negative feeling or opinion; insult/attack) – e.g. *'Who do you think you are?/That's a terrible idea!'*
- d. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request
- e. Let interlocutor off the hook – e.g. *'Don't worry about it./That's okay./You don't have to.'*

2. Regret – e.g. *'I'm very sorry.'*

3. Wish - e.g. *'I wish I can do it...'*

4. Excuse/Explanation – e.g. *'I want to leave now.'*

5. Alternatives – e.g. *‘I will find somebody to help you carrying your things.’*
6. Future acceptance – e.g. *‘I can help you tomorrow after final exam.’*
7. Principle – e.g. *‘I don’t like lazy students who like easy notes taking.’*
8. Philosophy – e.g. *‘Excuse is worse than sin.’*
9. Self-defense – e.g. *‘You should have attended class.’*¹
10. Acceptance that functions as a refusal
 - Unspecific or indefinite reply
 - Lack of enthusiasm
11. Avoidance
 - a. Nonverbal
 - i. Silence
 - ii. Hesitation
 - iii. Doing nothing
 - iv. Physical departure
 - b. Verbal
 - i. Topic switch
 - ii. Joke

¹Raja Rozina, Raja Suleiman. (2011). Refusal Strategies In English By Malay University Students. *Journal of Language Studies*, 11(3), 74-75.

- iii. Repetition of part of request – e.g.
‘Monday?’
- iv. Postponement – e.g. *‘I’ll think about it.’*

Hedge – e.g. *‘Gee, I don’t know. / I’m not sure.’*

Adjuncts to Refusals

1. Positive opinion or agreement – e.g. *‘That’s a good idea’*
2. Empathy – e.g. *‘I realize you are in a difficult situation.’*
3. Pause fillers – e.g. *uhh/well/oh/uhm’*
4. Gratitude/appreciation

3. Data collection:

The subjects of the research are twelve Egyptian actors and actresses taking part in Hollywood movies. The data are collected from twelve Hollywood movies in which those actors are present. Here, we will list the movies and the actors taking part in them:

- 1- Omar Sharif: Lawrence of Arabia, Doctor Zhivago and Che!

- 2- Amr Waked: Lucy and Salmon fishing in the Yemen.
- 3- KhaledNabawy: The Citizen.
- 4- SayedBadreya: ‘T’ for Terrorist and American East.
- 5- Sammy Sheik: Darfur, American East.
- 6- Mido Hamada: The Situation.
- 7- Chewikar: Cairo.
- 8- Ahmed Mazhar: Cairo.
- 9- FatinHamama: Cairo.
- 10- Kamal Alshinawy: Cairo.
- 11- Abdel KhalekSaleh: Cairo.
- 12- Salah Nazmi: Cairo.

4. Data analysis and findings:

The data collected were analyzed using the PRAAT software to find the main intonational patterns that were present in every utterance. The next table shows the tones associated with all the different strategies of direct refusals. The results are represented in numbers followed by the percentage compared to utterances with the same refusal strategy. At the end of the table there is the total number of tone units that had specific

tones as the main tone movement, to find the frequency of the occurrence of a specific tone movement, among other movements, with direct refusal.

Table 1: tone movements of direct refusals.

Semantic formula		<i>R</i>	<i>R+</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P+</i>	<i>O</i>
Direct refusal	Performative verbs.			2 100%		
	Flat refusal	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	9 56%	3 19%	
	Negative ability/ willingness	1 25%		2 50%		1 25%
	Total (22)	3 13.6%	2 9%	13 59%	3 13.6%	1 4.5%

As we can see in the previous table, there is a tendency towards the use of the less dominant falling and falling-rising tones with direct refusals. We had only two utterances in the first strategy, but both of them were produced in a falling tone to lessen the effect of the direct refusal. Flat refusals showed a tendency towards the use of the falling tone with 56%, followed by the falling-rising tone with 12.5%. Negative ability/willingness also showed that the speakers preferred the less dominant /P/ and /R/ as well as the distant, uninvolved level tone. The more dominant rising and rising-falling tones were seen with flat refusals, which might indicate that the speakers

are being rude or impolite.

The next table, on the other hand shows indirect refusal strategies and their intonational tendencies:

Semantic formula		<i>R</i>	<i>R+</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P+</i>	<i>O</i>
Indirect refusal	Attempt to dissuade		8 38.1%	3 14.3%	10 47.6%	
	regret		2 40%	2 40%		1 20%
	Explanation/ excuse		5 27.8%	8 44.5%	1 5.5%	4 22.2%
	Alternative	1 9.1%	4 36.3%	5 45.5%	1 9.1%	
	Principle	1 33.3%		1 33.3%	1 33.3%	
	Self-defence		2 50%	1 25%	1 25%	
	Avoidance	2 20%	7 70%		1 10%	
	Total (76)	4 5.3%	28 36.8%	24 31.6%	15 19.7%	5 6.6%

Table 2: tone movements of indirect refusals.

We can see in the previous table how different the statistics are between direct and indirect refusal strategies. Direct refusal strategies tend to have more falling tones. However, indirect refusal seems to have more rising tones. The use of the more dominant rising and rising-falling tones is obvious in the attempt to dissuade. This might imply that the speaker is practicing his authority over the addressee. Regret shows even results as two utterances were in rising tone, two

utterances in falling tone and just one in level tone. The strategy of explanation showed a tendency towards the use of the falling tone with 44.5% of the utterances in this strategy using the falling tone compared to 27.8% in rising tone and 5.5% in rising-falling tone. The refusal strategy of avoidance, however, showed 70% of its utterances using the rising tone, which might indicate that the subjects preferred to sound dominant using this strategy. Overall, indirect refusals had 36.8% of its utterances using the rising tone, while 31.6% used the falling tone. The rising falling and the falling rising were less commonly seen with 19.7% and 5.3%, respectively.

Beebe et al. (1990) introduced another type of refusal that was considered to be an adjunct to refusal. We will also introduce the tone units accompanying this refusal strategy in the data collected:

Table 3: tone movements of adjuncts to refusal.

Semantic formula		<i>R</i>	<i>R+</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>P+</i>	<i>O</i>
Adjuncts to refusal	Appreciation			2 100%		
	Gratitude			2 100%		

The occurrence of this strategy was not frequent in the data collected; however, all four examples of it show a falling tone as the main tone.

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