Difficulties of Learning Intonation in Tonality, Tonicity, and Tones among Iraqi EFL Students

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Abstract
Learning intonation is one of the most important aspects of language learning. At the same time, learning the intonation is one of the most difficult parts of language learning and teaching. Therefore, this study investigated the difficulties of learning intonation, i.e. tonality, tonicity, and tones, among Iraqi undergraduate EFL students in Thi-Qar University. The study employed an embedded research design to collect data from diary notes, interviews, and focus group discussions. The sample of the study consisted of 40 third-year undergraduate students from the English Department of Faculty of Education, Thi-Qar University. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. The findings showed that there were two types of problems in learning intonation, namely, external and internal issues. The external difficulties were a) condition difficulties included lack of communication, low proficiency of the partner, lack of learning materials, lack of practice, lack of understanding of the intonation, and old learning instruments, b) Arabic language influence, including intonation differences between Arabic and English languages, as well as the influence of mother tongue, c) learning condition, including lack of training, lack of interaction, and poor training. On the other hand, internal difficulties were a) personal issues including shyness, lack of confidence, and soft voice, b) confusing use of intonation, stressed syllabus, and lack of attention in long conversations. Recommendations and suggestions for future research are presented at the end of the article.
Keywords; learning intonation, learning difficulties, tonality, tonicity, tone, EFL students.

1. Introduction

Grammar plays a prominent role during the communication process; however, some second language teachers and researchers (e.g. Fery & Stoel, 2006; Halliday, 2015) contend that mastering the intonation has a more significant role. This is because having incorrect intonation patterns, both in perception or production; obscure the communication with native and non-native speakers (NN) of the target language (Mennen, 2015). In this regard, Wichmann (2014) asserted that listening to phrases requires obvious phonological signs of the main components in the sentence structure..Besides intonation function as an attitudinal marker (i.e. to reveal the emotion of speakers like surprise, happiness, and anger; Jeidani, 2013), it acts as a discourse, information, pragmatic, grammatical marker, as well as conversation manager.

As asserted by a large number of effectively construed studies and research, the production and perception of intonation are related to high degrees of success and accomplishment in the triumphant acquisition of the English language (Graham & Post 2018). During studying important aspects of

teaching English as a second language, it was identified that the students were in inevitable need of understanding the interpretation of intonation. Effective learning of intonation requires a good teaching pattern (Wichmann, 2014). Thus, to learn English as a foreign language, it is important for the learners to receive in-depth instruction on the perception and production of the intonation (i.e. the rise and fall of the pitch). These processes are considered important, as intonation is imperative in the comprehension of what is being said. As identified, intonation is significantly related to understanding and comprehending the meaning of speech and utterances (Ar-Riyahi, 2015). Teaching intonation to EFL learners helps them increase their abilities to understand native language speakers and communicate effectively.

Some researchers emphasize that intonation training is difficult (Taylor,1993; Roach 2009; Hamza, 2017; Hamad & Muhammad, 2018). They argue that only some core intonation items could be given to EFL learners of English. On the other hand, Portmanna and Leemann, (2018) assert that intonation can be instructed by employing intonation training courses supported with certain language-learning strategies (LLS). The question now is to what extent does learning English intonation help the successful communication of Iraqi EFL learners whose mother tongue is Arabic. There is debate on this question. Most of the scholars who cited research and gathered data (Imam, 2000; Al-Azzawi, 2007; Rashid, 2019; Al Jubouri 2013; Betti & Ulaiwi, 2018), asserted that Iraqi EFL learners use inappropriate intonation when speaking with English native speakers since they are not aware of the functioning of the intonation system.

Some studies (e.g. Al-Jubouri, 2013; Al-Safi, 2017; Rashid, 2019) were examined the prosodic features such as intonation and found that the main stress is usually placed in the stem of an English word. However, Arabic speakers place the same amount of stress on all words of a sentence, regardless of whether they are functional (auxiliaries, articles, prepositions, pronouns, wh-words, and conjunctions) or content words (adjectives, verbs, and nouns). Thus, misunderstanding may happen when they do not realize the intended meaning of an utterance produced with a particular intonation pattern (Al-Riyahi, 2006). It seems that Iraqi learners are not aware of the functions of prosodic features on conveying meaning and their role in producing clear utterances. This could be due to the lack of attention to learners‟ perception and awareness of the English intonation system and its functions, which are addressed in this study. It is believed that interactive teaching of the intonation system would enhance Iraqi learners‟ awareness of the intonation.

This study presents a theoretical and practical investigation on „intonation‟ that is a significant aspect of speech. There are inadequate studies on learning English intonation, particularly the improvement of the English intonation of Iraqi EFL learners using certain language strategies. Nikolić (2018) asserted that intonation could be taught to EFL learners. The findings of this study can be used for teaching and designing textbooks in Iraq. Furthermore, this study provides practical suggestions for improving Iraqi curriculum design in order to assist learners to interact in the target language (English) and developing instructional materials that effectively facilitate the process. Finally, the introduced framework could be utilized for other studies such as comparing the intonation perception in English and Arabic, and studies related to other prosodic features used by Iraqi EFL learners. The present study describes and explores the factors that affect Iraqi EFL learners' perception and production of intonation. The research interest was formulated in the following question: What difficulties do Iraqi EFL students face in learning intonation systems in terms of tonality, tonicity, and tones?

2. Literature Review

Second language acquisition (SLA) theories elaborate on how people learn a second language. Research in SLA is thoroughly associated with various disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, neuroscience, and education. Accordingly, most SLA theories are rooted in one of the above-mentioned disciplines. Although it is accepted that each relevant theory sheds light on one part of the language learning process, no comprehensive theory of second-language acquisition has been universally acknowledged by researchers (Cook, 2008). It is difficult to accurately assign a date to the emergence of SLA as an interdisciplinary field (Gass, Selinker, & Larry, 2008); however, two distinguishing works were influential in developing the modern study of SLA. On one hand, Corder (1967) rejected the behaviorist perspective in SLA, proposing that learners employ their intrinsic internal linguistic processes. On the other hand, Selinker (1972) maintained that second-language learners possess their own individual linguistic systems which are different from those defined for the L1 and L2 (VanPatten, Benati, & Alessandro, 2010). In brief, during the 1970s, SLA research commonly focused on examining the concepts of Corder and Selinker, while rejecting behaviorist theories of language acquisition. Indeed, the research trend in that era had been led by naturalistic studies of people learning English as a second language (VanPatten, Benati, & Alessandro, 2010).

In linguistics, prosody is the rhythm, stress, and intonation of speech (Pell, 2005). Prosody presents numerous features of an utterance, including the emotional state of the speaker, the form of the utterance, emphasis, contrast, and focus, or other elements of language that may not be encoded by grammar or by choice of vocabulary (Pell, 2005). As mentioned earlier, 40 SLA models have emerged, but only a few dealt with the L2 acquisition of phonology-related processes. A minority of these models has been applied in research and findings on suprasegmental aspects. For example, the speech-learning model (SLM), (Flege, 1995) postulates a directionality of difficulty for the second language learner, highlighting that the similarity can be regarded mostly as a problem rather than a difference. To acquire a sound of the target language, the learners need to primarily recognize the sound as adequately different from the ones appearing in their own first language. Being unable to reach such recognition, the substitution of a sound from the L1 would occur (Gut, 2003).

3. Past Studies

English-language learning is considered animportant issue in most Arabic-speaking countries, and a large number of people start taking English classes at elementary school, and more recently before preschool. Private schools and many universities often offer bilingual or English-medium programs. When teaching English to Arabic speakers, teachers have to face a wide range of challenges, including pronunciation of sounds, consonant clusters, and intonation patterns. Although pronunciation errors do not cause major communication issues, intonation patternscan sometimes lead to misunderstandings. According to Al Bazi (2012), there are remarkable differences between Arabic and English intonation systems that may make it difficult for an Arabic speaker to comprehend the intonation of English native speakers. The most frequent mistake of Arab EFL learners is improper use of falling and rising pitches in wh- and tag questions (Odisho, 2003).

Another important area of difficulty for Arab learners of English is communication. Arab learners find it difficult to communicate freely in the target language. This may be due to the inappropriate methods and environment of foreign language teaching and learning. The fact is noticeable in Iraq as the formal language of communication is Arabic. In Iraq, the only way to learn English intonation is

through formal education in inside classrooms run by native Arab teachers. Domestically, there is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language since it is not possible to meet many English native speakers. Therefore, the promotion of intonation knowledge is accomplished through intonation training using methods that help L2 learners to convey their intended meanings. Such learning gradually helps learners to easily comprehend the second language and produce effective speech.

Although teachers have concerns about suprasegmentals in their teaching, learners still lack proper intonation and suprasegmental aspects when dealing with authentic communication situations. In fact, improper methods of teaching sound structures disrupt the rhythm, and therefore, the clarity of the speech.In Iraq, teachers focus more on the perception of English vowel and consonant system, and little attention is paid to pitch and intonation aspects of speech. Furthermore, there is little interaction between students in classrooms, and teachers mainly focus on controlled drills. In all drills, learners have little or no choice in what is said, so drills are in the form of highly controlled practices. There is one correct answer and the focus is on „getting it right‟, i.e., accuracy. Drills are usually conducted chorally (i.e., the whole class repeats) and then individually. There is also the possibility of groups or pairs of students doing language drills together. Therefore, there is no interaction between students in the classrooms to practice more for English intonation and suprasegmental aspects.

4. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method design, more precisely "an embedded design" since its purpose was to gather qualitative and quantitative data sequentially or simultaneously. In accordance with this type of mixed-method design, the qualitative data was given priority over the quantitative paradigm. The justification for gathering the second type of data, i.e., the quantitative data, was to support the primary data that was collected qualitatively. The embedded design was used because the use of one tool may provide only "a limited view of the complexity of human behavior" (Cohen,

Manion, & Morrison, 2000). An intonation-training course was conducted in the English Department of the Faculty of Education, Thi-Qar University. The corpus of this study included 40 third-year undergraduate students from the English Department of the Faculty of Education, Thi-Qar University. Students were selected using the purposive sampling method and participated in both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Generally, Purposive sampling is a technique in which the researcher relies on his or her judgment to select members of the population to participate in the study. The use of this kind of sampling was due to the fact that the selected participants also acted as the primary data sources. To align and meet the requirements of the study, certain criteria were needed to select participants. Hence, students were selected based on the features that made them eligible to meet the objectives of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Following the method used by Dornyei (2007), the sample of the study was similar to the target population in terms of significant features such as education, age, and background. Data triangulation in this study was adopted using four different data collection methods to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. In the present study, following the qualitative data collection method, the researcher used diary reports, field notes, interviews, and group discussions. After the raw data were accepted, the researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis to achieve plausible assumptions.

5. Findings and Results

This section presents the student"s difficulties in using intonation. These issues were mostly mentioned in diary reports, interviews, and group discussions, or observed by the trainer in the filed notes. The data focused on students" difficulties in learning different parts of the intonation system in English, namely, tonality, tonicity, and tones. The students" diary reports were confirmed and validated by a secondary source of data collection (field notes, interviews, and group discussions).

The researcher classified the difficulties into two groups of "external" and "internal" difficulties. The external difficulties included condition difficulties and transfer of the Arabic language. On the other hand, "internal" difficulties included personal problems and the use of intonation.

5.1. External Difficulties

The first group, external difficulties, are caused by external factors (not by students).

5.1.1 Condition Difficulties

The obtained results demonstrated that students faced a number of difficulties when dealing with intonation systems, including tonality, tonicity, and tones. Condition difficulties were related to the situations that the students faced before and during the intonation-training course. The data of this difficulty are illustrated in the following charts.
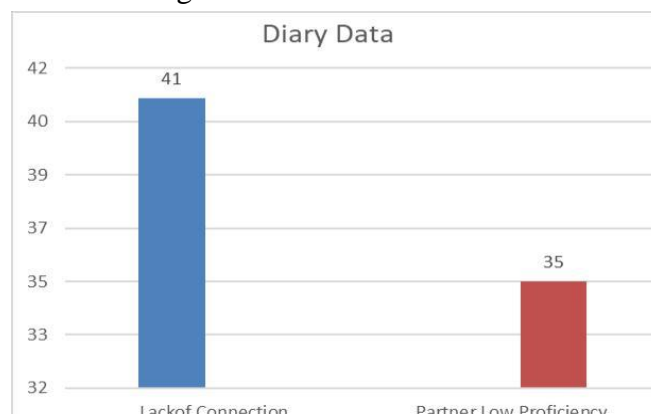
Figure 1. Findings of diaries regarding condition difficulties
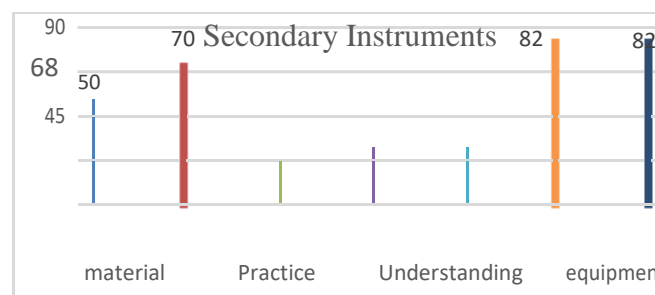
**Figure 2 Findings of other instruments regarding condition difficulties**

According to the results presented in Figures 1 and 2, several types of difficulties were found in the dataset. The first group of these difficulties can be classified as "lack of access to computers and the internet, breakdown headphones." Most of students reported these difficulties in their diary reports. Moreover, some of the students stated in the discussion groups that they do not have appropriate

materials for learning intonation. Having appropriate learning materials is very important and positively affects the learning process of intonation. Thus, students need to be provided with adequate learning materials to improve their intonation learning. In this regard, Campfield & Murphy (2017) assert that having appropriate learning materials enhance language acquisition, especially the learning of prosodic elements such as intonation. However, as mentioned, students were not given adequate intonation learning materials during the course.

In most Iraqi universities, the lack of educational instruments such as sound labs, recorders, and computers has negatively affected the learners" mastery of intonation. This result is in line with the findings of Chun (2002) who assert that the lack of access to the internet and other technological tools is a major obstacle for both teachers and students in the learning process. Chun (2002) adds that the materials presented to the students depicted an insurmountable challenge in developing native intonation patterns. These types of difficulties that arose during the experiment were not under the control of the students participating in the study, therefore, they can be considered as minor or major based on the living situations of the students. There is no doubt that these difficulties are common in countries where English is a foreign or second language. The difficulty of communicating with native speakers and the limited use of technology to teach a foreign language (only available at universities and educational institutions) make it difficult to learn the language in these countries.

5.1.2 Influence of Arabic Transfer

Students" mother tongue (in this case Arabic) affects the process of learning intonation as students tend to use the mother tongue intonation system in speaking English. The phenomenon, in which a learner applies his/her native language (L1) patterns for the target language (L2), is called transfer.
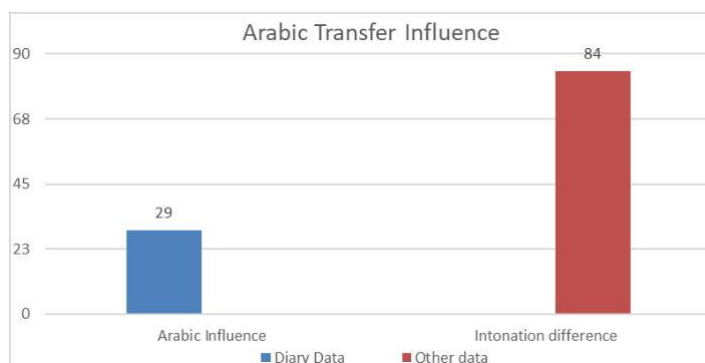
Figure 3 Arabic transfer

Although the students studied the English intonation system, they still could not break their habit of transferring Arabic intonation when speaking in English. At the end of the training, the students were asked to prepare their diary reports. Five students reported that it was difficult for them to produce correct intonation when speaking in English. For example, on the question "You have left the door open, haven't you?" they noted that the trainer instructed them to make a correct intonation for the tag questions. Even though the trainer had taught them that using a falling intonation means the speaker expects agreement, the students continued to use the rising intonation, noting that this was due to the "transfer" of the Arabic intonation system for English tag questions. One of the students gave another example of the use of Arabic intonation in English in sentences including names. For

example regarding the sentence "Harry and Jane agreed to have a child", the teacher had trained them to use falling intonation when the stress is on the first name; however, students used rising intonation following the Arabic intonation system. One of the students (student number 5 in training day 9, S5TD9) mentioned this problem in an interview:

"I always used rising intonation for any type of English statement since I thought that questions must use rising intonation as in my own language". (Sarah)

She also noted the interference of her first language intonation system when speaking in English, adding that the training helped her identify and use the correct intonation for any statements in English. One of the students wrote in her diary reports regarding the influence of Arabic intonation in learning the correct intonation of the English language:

In Arabic, we usually use rising intonation for questions and I also used the same intonation in English but after the teacher said that in the question form of sentences, the falling and rising of intonation is different based on the types of questions in English, I tried more to identify the type of question first and use it correctly but it was hard for me because of the influence of my mother tongue language which is Arabic is strong and affects my intonation while learning and practicing the intonation of English language. (Maha, TD9)

Moreover, a 20% effect of Arabic on the difficulty of learning the English intonation system was observed in students" field notes. The two most difficult sentences for a large number of students to pronounce correctly were "Can you tell me the address?" and "Have you read the paper?" They were trained to use rising intonation for "yes/ no" questions; however, the students adopted Arabic intonation and used stress on the second syllable and falling intonation at the end. It is common to use initial rising intonation and falling in "Yes/No" questions in Arabic.

Can you tell me the address? له يمكن أن تخبرني عه العناون ؟

This problem is due to language transfer and is not only seen in the grammar but also in the intonation aspect. These results indicated that students should receive more training on the English intonation system and they should be provided with native intonation learning materials. The students should become more familiar with the native English using instructional materials provided by native speakers, whether watching English movies or listening to CDs. The aforementioned findings were aligned with studies by Wells (2006) and Doan (2005) who found that the influence and transfer of the mother tongue on the process of learning intonation is a common phenomenon in foreign language learning. The findings of this study were also in accordance with a study conducted by Anh (2013) in Vietnam. Anh concluded that Vietnamese students were greatly influenced by their mother tongue when learning the intonation system of English.

5.1.3 Learning Conditions

Difficulties of learning situations were observed in different aspects such as proper training and teaching methods as well as the interaction inside the classroom. The findings are presented in the following chart.
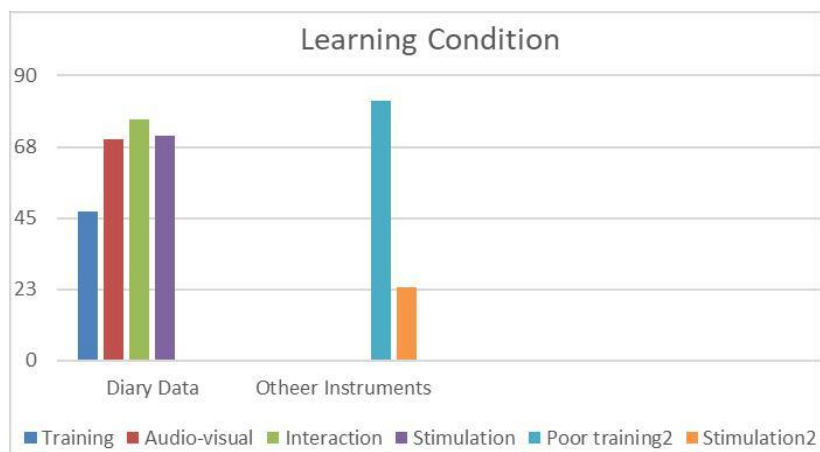
Figure 4 Findings of Learning Condition difficulty

According to diary reports (Figure 4), some of the students found the learning situation as a barrier in learning intonation system, while others (6.35%) reported the lack of suitable and appropriate training methods in the classroom. As Figure 4 indicates, the same issues were mentioned in the interviews. Others said that they did not get enough training on intonation before. They stated the teachers" vague instructions for finding the correct intonation in English sentences. Regarding the intonation-training course, the students mentioned that the teacher did not provide clear instruction in the initial stage of the training course and the students were not able to answer the questions during practices. They also expressed their confusion about the objectives of each exercise in the initial training stages. The students were limited to examples mentioned by the teacher in the classroom and expressed their need for more examples. However, the field notes showed the agreement of most students about solving this problem in the next training sessions. Even though the teacherprovided the audio-visual materials relevant to the objectives of the training session (*Merlin* series), some students reported that the learning intonation system should be in audio-visual form.

The researcher overcome this difficulty during the experiment by adopting specific procedures. According to the field notes, the materials (handouts) and CDs (audio-visual) used by the trainer were very helpful for the training course. References and materials were clear to show the rising and falling intonation in different types of statements in English. Moreover, the problem was solved later by using the British series „*Merlin'* during the experiment. It is advised that learning intonation be done using audio-visual tools as students need to listen to native speakers. For this reason, is recommended that technology be integrated into English language learning, especially intonation, as it helps the students enhance their learning process and simplifies the teaching process.

Given the learning situation, the lack of an interactive atmosphere was a serious problem for students. A majority of the students reported the scarcity of interactive practices in the classroom. They just repeated the sentences considering intonation and most of the exercises were individual. They believed that learning intonation system only occurs when they interact in real situations or in the classroom. Since there are very few opportunities for Iraqi learners to interact with English in a real situation, the classroom is the best place for them to practice the English intonation system. This is another difficulty faced by Iraqi participants in the intonation training sessions. As noted in the students" diary and field notes, the majority of the students were aware of the influences of an interactive environment on improving English intonation knowledge. Regarding the results, teachers

are recommended to use new teaching methods focusing on the importance of the environment role in enhancing the students learning process.

In addition, field notes showed that students were experiencing bullying while giving feedback to the teacher. The second-day field notes (FN2) showed that the influence of class stimulation on intonation learning was small. According to the diaries, the class was not stimulating enough and the students were reluctant to respond to the teacher using a precise intonation system. This issue needs to be addressed as the success of the learning process depends on proper training and technological instruments that ease the learning process and create an interactive environment in the classroom. Without proper training, students will not be able to acquire sufficient knowledge of intonation; therefore, the teachers and trainers should be professionally qualified and have enough experience in teaching the prosodic aspect of native English. Moreover, the data gathered from the interviews revealed the lack of sufficient intonation training. However, in the discussion after the experiment, the students mentioned that they could overcome this difficulty after sufficient training.

5.2 Internal Difficulties

5.2.1 Personal Difficulties

The data collected using the main and secondary instruments showed some personal difficulties faced by the experimental group learners. The findings of these difficulties are presented in the following section.
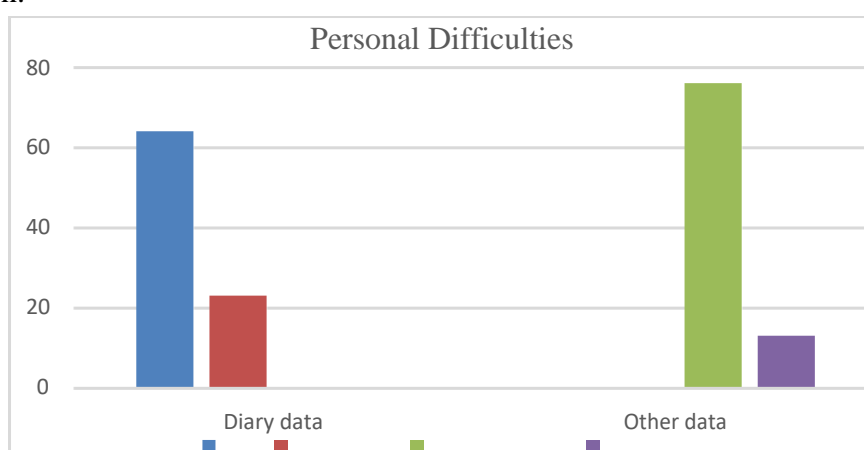
Figure 5 Findings of personal difficulties

The difficulties mentioned by the students were: 1) the lack of interest and confidence 2) shyness and 3) soft voice. These were the obstacles that students faced in using a clear, native English intonation. Shyness was the most common barrier among Iraqi learners of English. The issue is rooted in their self-confidence and fear of being ridiculed by their peers, which inhibits them from taking chances to express themselves when speaking English. This was reported in the diaries as well as the interviews conducted before the training course. Many students stated that they found it very difficult to express themselves loudly and clearly in front of their classmates. Shyness was the most pervasive difficulty that occurred when speaking English.

As represented in Figures 4 and 5, the second category was "the role of the teacher." During the interviews, it was found that the teachers‟ dominant role greatly impacted the students‟ ability to express themselves freely. Moreover, some students reported feeling embarrassed and hesitant when speaking in English or when expressing their attitudes by using intonation. This result revealed one

of the major problems in the Iraqi context, namely, the dominant role of the teacher, which prevents students from participating in the class unless they are engaged by their teacher. Teaching the English language in Iraq still follows the grammar-translation method (GTM), in which the teacher plays a central role in teaching the intonation or other aspects of the English language. The new teaching method, communication language teaching (CLT), is not yet utilized in Iraq. However, the Ministry of Education is making efforts to apply new teaching methods and strategies in which the learner plays a key role in the learning process. These methods provide learners with the chance to speakand practice the English language more freely and improve their intonation as well as the other aspects of the English language. As Ar-riyahi (2015) claimed, this problem leads to a lack of self-confidence among students and a feeling of embarrassment to express themselves in English.

Overcoming this difficulty was not hard as students mentioned that the motivational interactive training program of the intonation system made them more active and less shy. One of the students reported being shy and not motivated enough to use correct English intonation, adding that engaging in interactive activities made her more motivated to use the correct English intonation.

I am a shy person and it was not comfortable for me to repeat the same intonation when the teacher asked me to repeat the sentence in front of other students. But when we started to practice for interaction exercise, I saw how easily other students used falling and rising intonation and most importantly, they do not laugh at each other. So, it motivated me to practice like them. (Suha, TD6) This example indicated that interactive training removes the psychological barriers and helps students to express themselves more easily and comfortably. During the training course, this problem disappeared gradually as reported by S3TR10, ST8TR10, and S13TD11. The students changed to be more confident and less shy when speaking English in the classes.

Another difficulty as observed in FNs 1, 2, and 3, was the soft voice or the low-pitched voice of students. Although some students reported shyness as the reason for their soft voice, only a few had this physical attribute. The students claimed that they used a soft voice to hide their nervousness in front of other participants. This suggests that students need more exposure and practice in the English language in order to improve their self-confidence, become extroverted, improve their speaking skills, and participate more in the classroom. As the students mentioned in the group discussions, these personal difficulties disappeared during the training. However, as stated by Oxford (1990), these small personal problems and other factors such as preferred learning style and motivation contribute to the success of the whole learning process.

5.2.2 Difficulties in Intonation Usage
The students reported that it was difficult for them to use English intonation patterns in real-life situations. Further, they reported having difficulty recognizing tones boundaries. They added that they were not sure which tone to use. Figure 6 depicts more details about this issue.
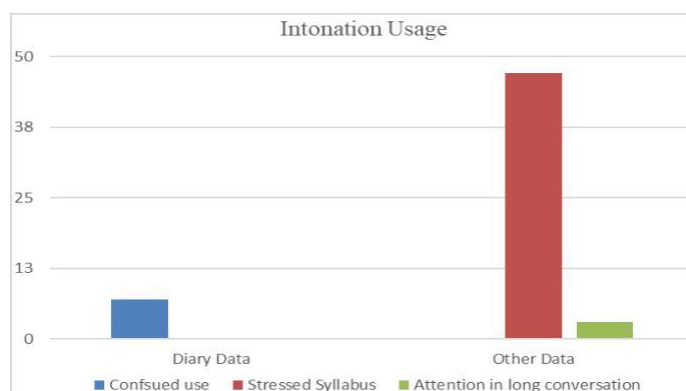
Figure 6 Findings of Intonation Usage

As Figures 6 and 7 show, 41% of the students reported problems using intonation, for example, when to use what tone. In the interviews, some students said they had difficulty recognizing the tonic syllable and tone patterns. These issues were also mentioned in field notes 4, 5, and 7. All these problems were solved at the end of the intonation training course according to field notes 10 and 11 as well as the researcher‟s observations. Other students reported in their diaries that it was difficult for them to sustain their attention to intonation during long English conversations. This is due to the students‟ low command of the English language. In other words, their focus on grammar, vocabulary, and translation leads them to lose their focus on intonation.

The results indicated that the students should get more training and exposure to the intonation system. The students‟ difficulties in this section are mainly rooted in the fact that the English language syllabus in Iraq does not provide any intonation practice and is too general. Further, the syllabus does not provide any audio tools in English classrooms. Consequently, students feel confused when practicing intonation. This result was aligned with another study in a different context where English was a foreign language (Al-Safi, 2017). Al-Safi stated that the EFL learners in Iraq lack self-confidence and feel confused when practicing intonation. Furthermore, some diaries reported that students faced difficulty communicating with low-skilled classmates. As reported by most students, this difficulty was later solved in the process of the course by encouraging them to practice more, raise their competence in speaking, and correct each other‟s mistakes. This led some of the students to prefer to change their partners in pairs, as that could help them learn the intonation better. Moreover, sometimes practicing for a long time caused partners to feel bored while some students reported that they did not have enough time to practice the intonation with their group pairs. In the interviews, some students reported having difficulty finding a native English speaker to practice the correct intonation. This made it difficult for them to understand and use the intonation correctly. As reported by most students, this problem was solved at the end of the intonation course by using English CDs and movies such as „*Merlin'*, or more listening exercises (Wells, 2006). Based on the interviews, 5.29% of the students believed that the teachers‟ ignorance of the intonation negatively influenced the level of students‟ intonation proficiency. Based on the field notes and interviews, the participants did not have enough knowledge of the intonation system. However, as mentioned by students during the group discussions, this difficulty was overcome as the students received adequate training and were provided with authentic intonation learning materials. The aforementioned results indicated that they understand the need for intonation education and believe in the necessity of input, i.e., the intonation knowledge, which indirectly indicated their support for the input hypothesis (Krashen, 2017).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

   This study investigated the difficulties of learning intonation (tonality, tonicity, and tones) among Iraqi undergraduate EFL students at Thi-Qar University. The embedded research design was used to collect data from diary notes, interviews, and focus group discussions of 40 undergraduate students from the English Department of the Faculty of Education, Thi-Qar University. The findings showed two types of difficulties, namely, external and internal. The external difficulties included condition difficulties, the influence of the Arabic language, and learning conditions. On the other hand, internal difficulties included personal issues and confusing use of intonation. The study recommends English language teachers pay attention to the teaching of intonation. English language teachers are encouraged to use different teaching styles; therefore, a variety of strategies, in teaching intonation inside the classroom, including pair-work, group-work, and imitation. Learners can listen to native speakers and imitate them in producing intonation. In the future, the influence of gender on the intonation proficiency of Iraqi students or the effect of intonation training on another level or type of learners, such as secondary or postgraduate students and teachers, can be examined.

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