

# THE INTONATION PATTERN OF INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE LEARNING OF MAHĀRAH AL-KALĀM AMONG ARABIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDENTS

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Ideally, students as future educators of the Arabic language are required to possess competent language skills. However, it was discovered that the students were still lacking knowledge and skills in speaking with accurate intonation. Therefore, the researchers aimed to analyze the application of the intonation pattern to the students. This research examined the intonation pattern of interrogative sentences of Arabic Education students and its acceptance by native speakers as well as its implications on the learning of *mahārah al-kalām*.

**Methodology:** Data sources in this research consisted of primary data and secondary data. Documentation, interview, and observation methods were used for data collection. The data was processed digitally with the Praat version 6.1.01 program.

**Main Findings:** The results were that students could apply the intonation pattern of Arabic interrogative sentences and were accepted by native speakers with varied acceptance values.

**Implications/Applications:** The implications of the learning *mahārah al-kalām* demonstrated that students and lecturers could apply the principles and fulfil the components of Arabic in general.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** Inaccuracy in concluding by listeners of messages delivered by speakers can occur due to misperceptions caused by the use of unsuitable intonation patterns. The inaccuracy in applying this intonation pattern also occurs in the speech of Arabic education students. However, currently, there is no research that further inquiries the results obtained in the realm of foreign language education, particularly on speaking skills. This study has investigated the application of the interrogative sentence intonation patterns spoken by students and their implications for learning speaking skills.

**Keywords:** Arabic Intonation, Interrogative Sentences, Learning Mahārah al-kalām, Foreign Language, Speaking Skills.

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills do involve not only linguistic elements but also non-linguistic elements. The linguistic elements in question are the accuracy of speech; appropriate placement of pressure, tone, joints and duration; word choice; and the accuracy of the conversation target. Meanwhile, the non-linguistic elements include the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic atmosphere which surrounds the speaking activities<sup>1</sup>. Appropriate intonation also becomes a determining factor for understanding a speech message, and it can also be a special attraction in speaking. Please note that the correct pronunciation of intonation is very important as is the importance of pronouncing letter sounds in the right way. The use of proper intonation is a necessity in speaking; it always follows and surrounds a person's speaking activities (Nurbayan, 2008; Al-khresheh, Khaerurrozikin, & Zaid, 2020).

Intonation can deliver syntactic and semantic signals. At a pragmatic level, Pike (1964) explained that differences in pitch configurations in speech can imply a change in the relationship of the speaker or sentence to his environment (Pike, 1964; Ammon, 2004; Cook, 1991; Fairclough, 1989). Inaccuracies in the use of intonation patterns in certain communication contexts and their interpretation can lead to failure of delivery and meaning of messages. Therefore, knowledge, mastery, and sensitivity to intonation are a necessity for native speakers.

In some conditions, intonation in Arabic can function as a differentiator between sentences and question sentences, as well as intonation can function for other targets, such as indications of approval, rejection, surprise, and amazement (Nasution, 2009; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Heath, 2005; Husseinali, 2006; Nababan, M. et. al. 2012). If the intonation is not understood, the spoken language will lose its idioms and pronunciation characteristics (Basyar, 1980; Abdullah, N. H., Laily Ramli, N. H., & Rafek, 2017; Svoboda & Zagar-Sostaric, 2019). With foreign language learning, the knowledge of intonation is very crucial. Every language should be spoken close to the characteristics of its native speakers.

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<sup>1</sup>Speaking skills are not simple skills that can be mastered in a short time. In other words, according to Brown, speaking skills are complex skills related to micro-skills, one of which is producing pressure patterns, words that are under pressure, rhythmic structures and intonation (Syahid, 2015).

Strengthening good speech is considered the most difficult part of language elements, especially in learning foreign languages. The most difficult sound for students is the sound of a foreign language that is not the same as their mother tongue. The way of speaking in the mother tongue and its related habits create great difficulties for students who are not accustomed to speaking the language being studied. The problem gets more complicated when foreign language learners depend heavily on their mother tongue (Al-khresheh, 2010, 2011). Thinking that first and second language structures are similar will lead to producing interlingual errors that affect their language learning process. (Al-khresheh, 2015, 2016a, 2016b)

Inaccuracy in concluding by listeners of messages delivered by speakers can occur due to misperceptions caused by the use of unsuitable intonation patterns. The inaccuracy in applying this intonation pattern also occurs in the speech of Arabic education students (Rosyidi, 2016; Wagner & Nesselhauf, 2006; Wekke & Hamid, 2013).

Three main parameters that must be considered in learning the pronunciation of a foreign language are the type of phonetic elements and their formation process, the characteristics in the target language that must be used as guidelines, and the similarity of the students' pronunciation with that specified guidelines. To meet these objectives, foreign language learners are expected to not only master the segmental elements but also master the suprasegmental elements, such as intonation (Umam, 1980). The extent to which learners can master the pronunciation of the language intonation can be used as a reflection for improvements in teaching the language, which in this case is Arabic, including how to determine the standard intonation patterns to be taught.

### Research Gap and Research Problem

From the explanation above, it can be understood that the object of this study is the speech/utterance of Arabic language interrogative sentences by students of the Department of Arabic Language semester III 2016/2017. The focus of the problems discussed in this research is the application of the interrogative sentence intonation patterns spoken by students and their implications for learning speaking skills. The objectives to be achieved in this research are to find the patterns of Arabic interrogative sentence intonation spoken by students of Arabic Education at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and explain the implications of the results of research on the application of the interrogative sentence intonation pattern to the learning of *mahārah al-kalām*.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Similar studies that discuss language sounds and their relation to learning speaking skills are

First, Phonology and Morphology in Arabic Egyptian Dialect. The library research conducted by Mufrodi (2015) analyzed the phonological and morphological variations in Egyptian *āmiyah* that could facilitate pronunciation so that communication became effective and efficient. In Arabic Egyptian Dialect, there are phonological and morphological variations in the form of sound changes, the addition of sounds, sound absorption, metathesis, and acronyms. Intonation functions to distinguish declarative, interrogative, and positive and negative sentences (Mufrodi, 2015).

Second, *Al-Nabr wa al-Tanghīm fī al-Lughah al-Arabiya (Dirāsah Wasfiyah Waẓīfiyah)*, research by Abdul Hakim (1998). This research was a literature study that examined the pressure and intonation of Arabic by revealing the patterns and locations of stresses and intonations in spoken language and discussing both functionally in Arabic speaking (Abdul Hakim, 1998).

Third, the Contrast of Declarative Interrogative Intonation of Sundanese Language, research by Irawan (2011). The research with an experimental phonetic approach examined the prototype of intonation of Sundanese declarative and interrogative sentences by native speakers, the acoustic contrast threshold of both, and that variations in the intonation pattern of the two types of sentences are accepted as proper speech (Irawan, 2011).

Fourth, Analysis of Perception Test of Indonesian Language Imperative Sentence Intonation by Japanese Speakers, research by Afriani (2015). This qualitative research analyzed the intonation of Indonesian imperative sentences by Japanese speakers. This study found the characteristics of the Indonesian imperative sentence by Japanese speakers which tend to declinate on the final pitch line and go up (inclination) on the predicate (Afriani, 2015; Fahrurrozi, 2014).

Fifth, the Mastery of Malay Students on the Sound Emphasis Pronouncing Arabic Words from the Intensity Aspect, research by Ramli, Mezah, and Thai (2016). This research was a field study using a quantitative approach and aimed to see the level of mastery of students to sound emphasis in terms of intensity through three patterns, namely فعل (CV + CV + CV), يستعمل (CVC + CVC + CVC), يفعل (CVC + CV + CVC) (Ramli, Mezah, & Thai, 2016).

The literature review above confirms that this research conducted by the researchers has a significant difference from previous studies. The researchers have observed that there is no research that further inquiries the results obtained in the realm of foreign language education, particularly on speaking skills. The weaknesses and strengths of these studies are the starting point for this research, but it can be concluded that this research has never been done before.



## RESEARCH METHOD

### Types of Research

This research belongs to the category of qualitative research since it is presented in a verbal form and uses descriptive statistical analysis<sup>2</sup>. The numbers shown in this research are only as of the supporting data, not the main data.

### Data Sources

Data sources in this research consisted of primary data and secondary data:

Primary data in this research was the interrogative speech of students majoring in Arabic Education semester III of the 2016/2017 academic year UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta who took *al-istimā'wa al-kalām* course and the field data obtained from student interviews and lecturers of related subjects, classroom observations, and lecture documents.

Secondary data was a variety of written sources or literature related to the object of research, previous studies, as well as other supporting documents and data.

### Data Collection Method

The researchers collected the data as follows:

- Observation: researchers conducted non-participant observation, i.e. the researchers only observed without being directly involved in the learning process. The data obtained from this observation method was the real conditions that occurred in the field, which was the learning process of *al-istimā'wa al-kalām* course.
- Documentation: data or information related to the research object, consisted of the background and experience of the participants (supporting lecturers and students) as well as the information on the course, e.g. the learning materials, curriculum documents, and pictures of lecture activities.
- Interview: the researchers interviewed the supporting lecturers and students.

### Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed in the following stages:

- Data reduction: The researcher analyzed the data and sorted out the main points that were under the focus of the study, i.e. data concerning the learning of speaking skills and interrogative Arabic-language sentences by students. This stage was also conducted to select the best voice data that demonstrated better clarity compared to the others and were suitable to be used as a data corpus. The speech recording results were processed digitally with the Praat version 6.1.01 program<sup>3</sup>.
- Presenting Data: Researchers presented data in the form of narrative text descriptions about learning Arabic speaking skills and analyzing patterns of interrogative Arabic sentence intonation and perception of intonation by respondents.
- Conclusion and Verification: Researchers drew conclusions based on research data findings and verified research data.

## DISCUSSION

Speech data taken and analyzed were the interrogative sentences contained in language-speaking activities in class, in the *taqdim al-qisṣah* with the title story Umar bin Khatab. The sentence was: ما جاء بك في هذه الساعة؟ (What made you come this time?).

The target sentence was a sentence with an interrogative particle that used question word (*Asma' istifham*). The 'ما' what' question word in this target sentence represented interrogative sentences with other forms such as من 'who', متى 'when', كيف 'how', كم 'how many'.

Respondents in this study consisted of 25 students and 15 native speakers of Arabic: male and female, aged between 21 to 58 years old, are living or had lived in Egypt or Libya, with educational background equivalent to bachelor to doctoral degrees. Respondents from native speakers communicated with the researchers and filled out an online questionnaire through the WhatsApp application.

The perception test was conducted on the 25 interrogative sentences of the 25 students. This perception test aimed to determine the value of acceptance of interrogative sentence intonation. Based on the perception test being played, the response to the interrogative speech data was given by 15 active speakers of Arabic in the perception test is as follows:

<sup>2</sup>Not using inferential statistics.

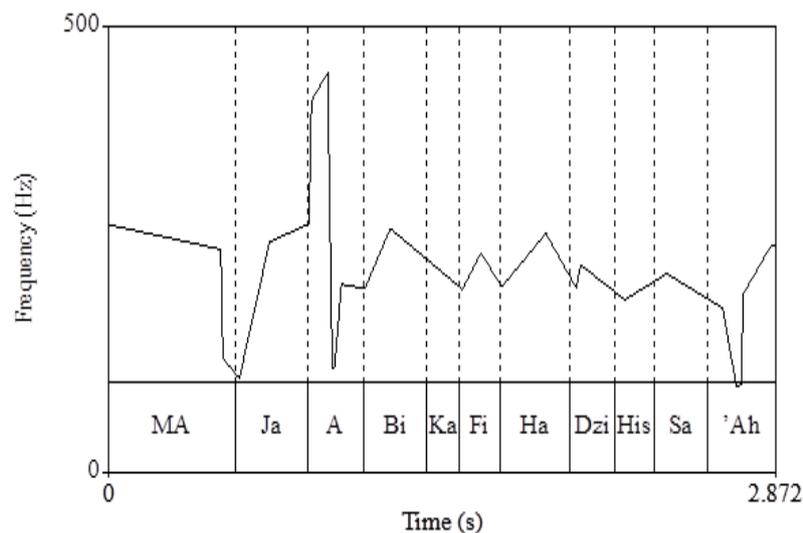
<sup>3</sup>Praat in Dutch means 'sound'. Praat is an application created by Paul Boersma and David Weenink from the Institute of Phonetic Science, University of Amsterdam. Through this application, analysing the utterances can be run by looking at the spectrograph. See [www.praat.org](http://www.praat.org)

**Table 1:** Response to the Acceptance of Interrogative Sentences

Stimulus	Acceptance Response		Value of acceptance					Score
	No	Yes	1 (Very bad)	2 (Bad)	3 (Fair)	4 (Good)	5 (Very good)	
1		V	2	12	15	8	-	37
2		V	3	8	12	16	-	39
3		V	3	6	18	12	-	39
4		V	-	4	12	16	25	57
5		V	3	6	12	20	-	41
6		V	2	8	9	24	-	43
7		V	-	10	9	16	15	50
8		V	4	2	12	24	-	42
9		V	-	2	6	28	25	61
10		V	-	-	12	16	35	63
11		V	2	6	12	24	-	44
12		V	1	6	6	32	-	48
13		V	-	6	6	40	-	52
14		V	1	4	9	32	5	51
15		V	1	2	9	32	10	54
16		V	-	2	9	20	30	61
17		V	1	4	6	32	10	53
18		V	5	4	12	16	-	37
19		V	-	8	15	20	5	48
20		V	4	6	6	24	-	40
21		V	-	2	15	20	15	54
22		V	-	4	24	12	10	50
23		V	-	10	12	20	5	47
24		V	5	6	9	16	-	36
25		V	1	6	9	8	30	54

From Table 1 above, it can be seen that the interrogative intonation of Arabic Education students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga 2016/2017 can still be accepted by respondents with varied acceptability values.

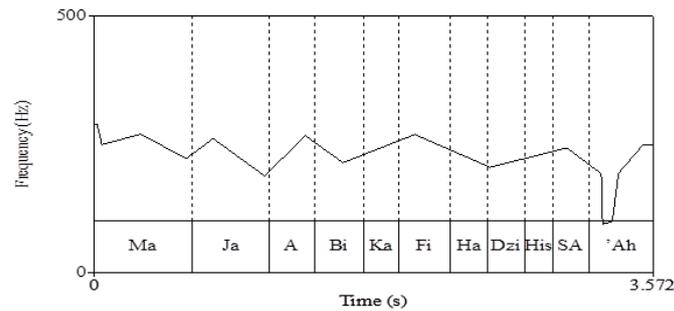
In this study, three target speeches were selected. They were used as the basis for giving the tone contour and making a sentence that had been stylized. The three speeches were sorted based on the highest score of 63, 61, and 61 achieved by the stimulus with codes 10, 9, and 16. The intonation contour of the selected speech can be seen as follows:



**Figure 1:** Intonation Contour of the Best Interrogative Sentence by Stimulus 10

**Source:** Developed by authors

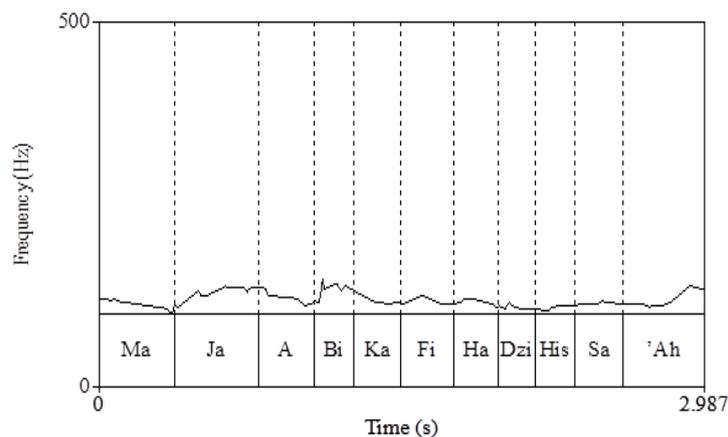
Based on the interrogative sentence intonation contour in Figure 1, the following characteristics of the contour was retrieved: there is a downward flowing tone on the question word, up-down-up on the predicate, up-down on the object, and the final up-down-up tone at the adverb.



**Figure 2:** Intonation Contour of the Best Interrogative Sentence by Stimulus 9

**Source:** Developed by authors

Based on the interrogative sentence intonation contour in Figure 2, the following characteristics of the contour was retrieved: there is a down-up-down tone on the question word, up-down-up on the predicate, up-down on the object, and the final up-down-up tone at the adverb.



**Fig 3:** Intonation Contour of the Best Interrogative Sentence by Stimulus 16

**Source:** Developed by authors

Based on the interrogative sentence intonation contour in Figure 3, the following characteristics of the contour was retrieved: there is a downward flowing tone on the question word, up-down on the predicate, up-down on the object, and the final up-down-up tone at the adverb.

**Table 2:** Ideal Intonation Contour Pattern

Figure	Question word	Predicate	Object	Adverb
1	Down	Up-down-up	Up-down	Up-down-up
2	Down-up-down	Up-down-up	Up-down	Up-down-up
3	Down	Up-down	Up-down	Up-down-up

### Implications of the Interrogative Sentence Intonation Pattern of Arabic Education Students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta for *Mahārah Al-Kalām* Learning

Based on the results of the acceptance of the interrogative sentence intonation of Arabic Education students by Arabic native speakers, it is found that several intonations are still considered bad even very much by native speakers (Abdul Hakim, 1998). Thus, the acceptance data indicates that the students' ability to apply interrogative sentence intonation patterns is said to be less than ideal (Ramli et al., 2016). This level of acceptance can be considered as one of the benchmarks for the success of learning *mahārah al-kalām*.

These results are inseparable from many factors surrounding the learning of *mahārah al-kalām*, including:

1. Students with various abilities ranging from low to advanced and their varied educational background before studying in the Arabic Education department also influence the subsequent development of their Arabic language skills.
2. Speaking skill learning material that has not provided a specific portion to introduce students to the theory of sentence intonation accuracy.

3. The speaking skill exercise has not led the students to practice the right interrogative sentence intonation patterns in Arabic.
4. Lecturers and students have not yet realized the urgency of using sentence intonation correctly. Lecturers have not been able to actualize themselves appropriately to students as facilitators of Arabic phonetic learning.

The implication is that the level of acceptance of the intonation speech emphasizes the description and study of Arabic learning starting from the tone system (phonology). Hence, the intended language is taught by devoting to precision exercises intensively.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the problems and analysis in the discussion of the results of this study, the researchers concluded as follows; First, the Arabic Education students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta semester III 2016/2017 apply the pattern of interrogative Arabic intonation sentences that are accepted by native Arabic speakers with varied acceptance values. The highest acceptance value can be used as an ideal intonation pattern that is applied to the Arabic interrogative sentence mode. Second, the implication of applying the pattern of interrogative sentence intonation to the learning of *mahārah al-kalām* is that students and lecturers as parties involved in this learning, can apply the principles and fulfil the components of learning Arabic in general.

## LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This research has some limitations which must not be ignored. This research belongs to the category of qualitative research since it is presented in a verbal form and uses descriptive statistical analysis and no inferential statistical tool is used for analyzing the data. Since data was presented and analyzed as well as conclusions did drawn based on researchers' understand thus, we cannot rule out the possibility of human error. In the future, researchers are encouraged to use stringent discourse analysis tools to analyze the data and infer conclusions. This will make the study contributions more credible. Since this is the first study investigating Arabic intonation for foreigners, thus multiple studies with different samples having diverse demographic characteristics must be conducted in the future to get a deeper understanding of the research domain and enhance the credibility of current findings.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed to this study effectively. Tulus Musthofa formulated the first draft of this study and carried out observations for data collection. Samirotul Azizah worked on data collection through interviews, documents, reports and questionnaires. Whereas, both authors worked on the data analysis.

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