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Learner Awareness of the "Music" of Spoken English—Focus on Intonation—And Its Impact on Communicative Competence. Is Intonation Teachable and Learnable?

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Abstract

This research examines the significance of intonation in spoken English. It is seen that existence of correct intonation goes quite unnoticed by the Native Speakers (NS) of English, as an unconscious mechanism, whereas its absence, or minimal use thereof, hinders communication by speakers using English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The study, based on 110 EFL university students in China, demonstrated that majority of the students did not feel confident while tackling this dimension of oral discourse because of the ambiguity about how to deal with a feature many learners were not even aware of. Grammar and lexis are made accessible to learners through various devices, but the methodology used for transmission of intonation and related prosodic features is very abstract and intangible. The research, based on observations and oral discourses, which were video and audio-recorded, was then transcribed for qualitative content analysis (Kvale, 2007: p. 105). The results demonstrated a stimulation of curiosity among the participants. They expressed an ardent desire to overcome their speech shortcomings, acquire the nuances to become intelligible/natural speakers, and increase their understanding of spoken English for accurate verbal communication, thereby supporting the case study that intonation is teachable and learnable.

Keywords

Intonation Awareness, Intelligibility, Verbal Communication, Class Tasks, Speech Rhythm

1. Introduction

This research paper investigates the relevance of one of the most important prosodic features used in verbal communication, namely, intonation, and investigates the significance of intonation in enhancing communicative competence for processing information during a discourse in English (Celce-Murcia, 2007: p. 46). This aspect of speech, namely intonation, is relatively hard to teach, as claimed by researchers (Jenkins, 2000). The main challenge to be contended with is the interference of L1 (First Language), the learners' mother tongue. According to Major's (2001) model and Lecumberri et al. (2010), L1 effects are "inversely proportional to the level of phonological competence"; in other words, L1 has a major influence during primary development of language acquisition, which over time is surpassed by the significant features of the target language (Lecumberri, Cooke, & Cutler, 2010: p. 881). This research accords with relevant theory.

Intonation originates in the vocal folds due to vibrations felt therein. It also denotes pitch, overall rhythm, and volume of the words spoken. "Intonation refers to a combination of acoustic parameters, including duration, intensity, and pitch used to communicate discourse meaning" Levis, John (2012). For instance, when the tone of voice rises at the end of a syntactical unit, it indicates that a question has been asked. Whereas, when the tone of voice falls at the end of a syntactical unit, it indicates the end of a statement. Such differences in tones act as an indicator to the listener about what is being said, and what is the true meaning that the speaker is trying to convey. It is an indication of what the speaker expects in response from the listener. "Intonation contributes to linguistic meaning in a variety of domains, such as marking juncture between spoken phrases, highlighting, or backgrounding particular words or syllables, marking the ends of intonational phrases with movement, and using extremes of pitch range to carry discourse or contrastive meaning" Levis, John (2012). Based on Pierrehumbert (1980), each parameter of intonation (pitch accent, tones) is known to contribute intangible meanings to the general utterance. These meanings add to a logical interpretation of the words spoken.

However, many EFL speakers fail to understand the significance of intonation and find it hard to master the intonation patterns used by the Native Speakers of English, and hence, lead to deficiency in understanding others and, at the same time, have a noticeable lack of intelligibility in their own responses. According to De Bot, Kees, & Mailfert, (1982), "most language learners without a linguistic background have no idea what is meant by intonation." Consequently, it becomes necessary that learners should be provided with relevant information about intonation and its importance. As stated further by De Bot, Kees & Mailfert, (1982) "If the students themselves do not recognize the importance of intonation work, we cannot expect their improvement to be outstanding." Therefore, this research, based on 110 EFL students participating in this study, focuses on the importance of intonation and aims at contri-

buting to the already existing pedagogical goal of intelligibility, as proposed by Jenkins (2000).

2. Literature and Context

Production of language accompanied with intonation, as a feature of oral discourse, will occur only after sufficient exposure and practice to this aspect of spoken English. The primary focus of this research is on the perception of intonational features. Intonation has been defined as "the melody of speech and is to be analyzed in terms of variations in pitch" (Roach, 2001: p. 33). He claimed that speakers of English could use intonation to express various types of utterances such as questions and statements. English learners, predominantly the EFL learners of English, have often been intrigued by intonation as an important element of spoken English, resulting in a lively debate about the importance of this aspect of English and its acquisition, as reported by Murphy (2013). This debate started with the recognition of the fact that intonation, stress, and rhythm do play an important role in speaking, and more importantly, understanding the Native Speakers of English. Here, rhythm and other features related to it, such as the length of the vowels and accenting, have been found to chiefly contribute to the intelligibility of speech of the non-native speakers (NNS), or lack thereof, as stated by Adams (1979); Anderson-Hsieh, Johnson, & Koehler, (1992). Hence, the authors emphasise that it is safe to subscribe to the belief and decisively conclude that the significance and necessity of these aspects of spoken English is irrefutable.

According to Firth (1990); and Seidlhofer (2001), English as a lingua franca (ELF) is quite quickly becoming an expanding field of academic investigation. It has been seen that more and more English interactions are taking place among non-native speakers around the world. Therefore, it becomes very essential to be correct about this finer aspect of spoken English, namely intonation, to leave no scope for misinterpretation and miscommunication. Since intonation is a challenge for ESL/EFL speakers, (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995: 14), its study, awareness, and application are of paramount importance for the L2 (Second Language) and EFL speakers, (Celce-Murcia, 2007: p. 46). The authors of this research are of the opinion that if English is spoken between a native speaker and a non-native speaker, and if there were to be a few errors of intonation, there could still be a chance that the native speaker could put two and two together and understand the words in context. However, if two non-native speakers were in conversation with each other or addressing a gathering of EFL speakers of English, there could be a chance that the communication could be flawed and misinterpreted, depending on the comprehensibility and command of each other's English, or that of the listeners. The knowledge and learning of prosodic features of English, intonation in particular, help the EFL speakers, not just to understand each other, but also makes them more receptive to other mediums which are transmitted in English.

"Students who are taught about English prosodic patterns, often report improved understanding of speech that they hear on TV, in movies, and in face-to-face conversations …"—Judy Gilbert, (2008). Therefore, the authors of this research believe, and have observed during the research, that when students learn to "use" tones, they can "hear" them better as well, thereby enhancing their own speech perception, intelligibility, and comprehensibility among other aspects of spoken English.

The goal of the study was to bring to the fore, with irrefutable, asserting evidence, that intonation holds tremendous significance in English conversation and its intelligibility, thus leading to its effectiveness. Studies have proved that "improved perception of intonation leads to improved production" De Bot, Kees & Mailfert, Kate (1982). Additionally, the research was done to make it clear that it is unquestionably necessary to introduce this vital aspect in an ESL/EFL classroom, in a systematically spiralled manner. It is essential to know that the learning of intonation cannot be done just as a one-time overview. During the study, the students had to be educated about the nuances of intonation, and how it could be identified in the context of spoken English. Although intonation is hard to teach (Jenkins, 2000), students had to be instructed to pay close attention to "how" something was said rather than "what" was said during a discourse, to accurately understand the underlying meaning of a word, a phrase, or a sentence. Another methodology applied to achieving the goal of the study was to instruct students to examine the importance of listening to the tones used by a speaker without paying close attention to the meaning of the words being spoken. This was done to help develop the perception of the students to become aware of the "music" of English. The dynamics of the "music" of English, namely, prosody—intonation, pitch, stress, and rhythm—were closely examined during the research. The students were guided to observe the pitch (pitch step up/pitch step down) that moves within the tone-units, comprising tones that are at a Level, Fall, Low-rise, High-rise, Fall-rise, or Rise-fall, which added different meanings to the words or sentences spoken. During the period of the research, the participants, subjects/students of four classes at the university, became aware of the impact that intonation had on the process of enabling the listener to comprehend a major part of the meaning the speaker was trying to convey.

Rationale behind teaching intonation to the ESL/EFL learners is based on principles garnered from theory as well as real life events and academic practices and has revealed the need to incorporate this aspect in the spoken English classes. According to McNerney & Mendelsohn, (1993), the primary, though not exclusive, focus when teaching pronunciation in the classrooms, should be on suprasegmental features, i.e. intonation, stress, and rhythm. This highly studied opinion stems from the conviction that a good knowledge of the use of the suprasegmental structures plays a more important role than mastery of segmental features in contributing to intelligibility of spoken English. To reiterate, the authors of this research have ascertained that segmental features are vitally impor-

tant, but they emphasize that suprasegmental structures are equally important as well. The authors concur with Derwing & Rossiter, (2003: p. 14), "We do not advocate eliminating segment-based instruction altogether, but if the goal of pronunciation, teaching, is to help students become more understandable, then this study suggests that it should include a stronger emphasis on prosody".

All the same, it is not that suprasegmental or prosodic features of English contribute only to enhancing intelligibility, but they also directly contribute towards skilfully using the English language. Segmental features give meaning to words, whereas suprasegmental features give meaning to whole utterances, and greatly help in the correctness and understandability of the words spoken. There is an increasing amount of research suggesting the significance of prosody in communication (Schafer, Speer, Warren, & White, 2000). The importance of intonation in word construction and language production,using prosody,is being understood by speakers. This leads to the validation of the revelation that prosody plays an important role in comprehending language. The research findings by Schafer et al. (2000), reinforce the premise that prosody does contribute to comprehensibility in a discourse. Intonation, stress, rhythm, thought groups, linking, and blending, are extremely significant speaking skills that give an oral discourse meaning and relevance. Whereas, lack of its use leads to miscommunication, resulting in a "disconnect" between the listener and the speaker. The mastery of prosody helps to captivate the audience and becomes an essential element in the making of an effective speaker of English. This ability to emphasize what is key or important in spoken discourse, is crucial to intelligibility, especially in international contexts (Jenkins, 2000).

3. Participants, Methodology and Results

The participants involved in this study, all 110 of them, were EFL university level students. The students had joined the class offered to them to study pronunciation and other co-related aspects of spoken English to better understand and be understood by speakers of the English language worldwide. They were receptive learners and very soon appreciated the many idiosyncrasies of the prosodic features of spoken English. They took the awareness of this feature of English in a positive spirit, which is what led to them learning a lot in the classroom, during this research.

The various activities offered to students as part of the study enabled students to appreciate the importance and prevalence of intonation in English conversation, which contributed to intelligibility of words articulated during a discourse. During the research it was noted that "ESL/EFL students… benefit from phonological awareness activities for clear speaking, listening comprehension and reading development" (Linda Grant ESL Globe, 6 (2), 2009). The subjects were all ardent learners and very interested to learn the nuances of spoken English. Quite understandably, they considered the new knowledge as one more crucial step bringing them closer to becoming natural speakers of English.

Intonation awareness through verbal exchanges was some of the tasks designed by the authors to match the learning outcomes of the students. The focus of the learning plan for the research was to develop and enhance the ability of the students to have a comfortable and intelligible conversation on various topics, with the sole aim to convey their message precisely, using the prosodic features which are important for comprehending language (Schafer et al., 2000). Students need to pay attention to the tone, rhythm, and conversational style of spoken English. Along with "what" a person is saying they need to pay close attention on "how" the person is saying something. Through such practice, the students become aware of all that they have learned and how effective the knowledge and awareness of intonation of English truly is, to regulate the smooth flow of conversation, which significantly enhances the communicative competence for processing information during a discourse in English (Celce-Murcia, 2007: 46).

3.1. Task Designed for Raising Awareness of Intonation and the Results

Sensitivity and awareness of the recurrent use of intonation in English is of vital significance. The changes of pitch change the meaning of a sentence or a phrase. In the words of Wichmann: "It is well known that intonation can convey many nuances of meaning: it has the power to reinforce, mitigate or even undermine the words spoken" (Wichmann, 2005: p. 229).

One needs to have a logical perspective on the interactional significance of the phonetic and prosodic features of English. Hence, intonation and stress on words can change the entire meaning of a phrase or sentence. This aspect was demonstrated to the students of this case through an example, which made the students conscious of intonation and its significance. The authors used one sentence, "I have a red car", using five different tones, as follows: The sentence, "I have a red car", at first sight, appears to have just one meaning, that I have a red car. However, if the stress is on the first word, then the sentence means, it is "I" who has a red car and not my dad. Then if the stress is on "have", it is a confirmation that I truly do have a red car. Then if the stress is on "a", it means, that I do not have more than one car. Then if the stress is on "red", it means that my car is red and not blue, or any other colour. Finally, if the stress is on "car", it means, that I have a car and not a motorcycle.

The result of such easy to understand examples made the learners acutely conscious of the finer distinctions of spoken English. They understood the significance and the existence of intonation, rhyme, and rhythm in spoken English. They became more curious of this feature of oral English, and this curiosity became the springboard of their learning journey.

3.2. Task Designed for Recognising Tones and Fillers and the Results

During the study, the students became aware of how to avoid the conversation

from becoming dull, boring, and jerky. They understood the importance of the use of "fillers" or common vocalizations, such as "hmm", "oh", "yeah", "really", "aww", and so on, which communicated to an interlocutor that they were listening and following what was being verbalized by them. Learners need to understand the importance of the non-linguistic aspect of spoken English. It was Coulthard, (1977: p. 6) who stated that any spoken text can be broadly organized into four levels: phonology, grammar, discourse, and non-linguistic. It is this non-linguistic aspect, signals, and prompts, used in language that learners need to be familiarized with.

Now, the important thing to note here is that such fillers and "umming" occur only in spoken English and their tones are rarely unequivocally taught (Schiffrin, 1988). Therefore, it becomes important to teach this in the English classes. During this study, the students practiced the use of these conversation cues through activities, which they thoroughly enjoyed in the class. Following are some tasks and outcomes noted in the course of this research.

Tasks Using Conversation Cues through Tones and Fillers

1) *Example 1*: Absence of Important Conversation Fillers -

S1: I went to the market yesterday and saw something exciting. (Excited tone)

S2: What was it? (Monotone)

S1: It was a red dress I had been looking for since a long, long time. (Monotone)

S2: OK. (Monotone)

The end of the conversation.

The result of this dialogue showed that when S2 did not match the level of excitement in the tone used by S1, S1 was discouraged to continue the conversation further. S1 even reduced the tone used earlier and matched that of S2 and the conversation ended very quickly.

2) *Example 2*: Presence of Important Conversation Fillers.

S1: I went to the market yesterday and saw something exciting. (Excited tone)

S2: Oooooo!!! Really!!! What was it? (Super excited tone)

S1: It was a red dress I had been looking for since a long, long time. (Super excited tone)

S2: Wow!!! OOOKKK!! Tell me more. (Super excited tone)

And the conversation goes on …

The result of this dialogue showed that when S2 equally matched the level of excitement in the tone used by S1, S1 was encouraged to continue the conversation with greater enthusiasm. S1 even increased the tone used earlier and matched that of S2 and the conversation continued, on and on.

The pragmatic application of tones through realistic tasks and practices, convinced the students of the power of the prosodic features of English and how it directly affected them not just to transmit words, but also to enhance relationships.

3.3. Tasks for Understanding Questions and Emotions and the Results

Associating intonation with grammar and vocabulary was the next step towards teaching intonation to the learners in the research. After students learn to become aware of, and sensitive to, the prevalence of intonation in spoken English, then comes the next stage, which is, linking intonation with grammar and vocabulary. Here, the authors reiterate that intonation cannot exist in isolation. For instance, intonation and stress are extensively used when asking W/H questions, yes/no questions, tag questions, reading lists, saying words aloud, or making statements, among other usages while speaking English. All these and other grammatical constructions and words need to be practiced through tasks in class, with focus being on intonation. This can be done by using role plays in the classrooms. Students can make dialogues, comprising questions, lists, words, and so on. These tasks lead towards students learning intonation through speaking and listening to each other over the length of a discourse. Students become conscious of the rising tone used in the "yes/no" questions and the rising-falling tone used in the "W/H" questions. They become aware of the standard and non-standard questions and the tones used therein.

During the study, it was found that students had difficulty in identifying intonation in the absence of grammar that they had learned in their English classes. When asked, "Going to the library?" with the sentence ending in a high tone, indicating a question, it confused the students whether it really was a question or a statement, due to the absence of the question forming words, "are you", at the beginning of the sentence to indicate that a question had been asked by the speaker, as they had learned in the English grammar class. This kind of tone and rhythm in speech is often used by native speakers and it is this aspect that truly obscures meaning to the non-native speakers, resulting in embarrassment and conversation gaps, or consequently running away from the scene to avoid the native speakers altogether when they are seen approaching!

Tasks Using Tones for Questions and Emotions and the Results

1) *Example 1*: Students Were Made Aware of the Tones Used to Ask Questions.

Where do you live? (Rise-fall) (Asking for information in detail)

Where? (Rise) (Seeking clarification)

How is your mother? (Rise-fall) (Asking for information in detail)

Are you going to the library? (Rise) (Asking a short answer question)

Can you sing? (Rise) (Asking a short answer question)

Going to class? (Rise) (Asking a short answer question)

Coming? (Rise) (Asking a short answer question)

The result of this exercise made the students quickly understand the rising, falling, rise-fall, and other tones used in questions used during everyday conversations. They understood that a question asked by a speaker does not necessarily

follow the grammatical structures learned in the EFL classrooms. The use of tones was very important and needed to be understood correctly in order to have an effective conversation.

2) *Example 2*: Students Were Made Aware of the Tones Used to Express Emotions.

The students participating in the research were encouraged to practice expressing words or phrases with different emotions. For instance, saying a word like, "Wonderful" in a flat tone, conveying disinterest. Then saying the same word expressing enthusiasm, boredom, surprise, among other emotions. The rest of the students were asked to identify the emotion behind the expressions.

The result of this task was that the students had a great learning experience and they enjoyed the feeling of empowerment of understanding intonation not just in theory, but through practice in the classroom.

Many more such pragmatic illustrations made the subjects in the study aware of their own shortcomings and their need to deeply understand the particularities of intonation to become proficient users of the English language. According to De Bot, Kees, & Mailfert, (1982), "If intonation is involved in the structuring of information, then perceiving intonation cues becomes critical for hearing what is important in a verbal message."

4. Data Collection and Analysis

Intonation Awareness Data and Comprehensibility Data were collected from the 110 EFL university students selected for this study. The methodology used to measure data on intonation was extracted through video recordings, oral reading of unseen passages, class activities/tasks and spontaneous speech delivered without prolonged preparation. The participants of this research made immense contribution to the research through their candidness and willingness to communicate their perceptions and experiences of the communication process. They greatly helped to make a connection between the use of intonation in the Mandarin language and understanding the purpose of the tones used in oral English. For example, Lai (2008: pp. 45-46), documented in his study that Mandarin speakers shortened unstressed vowels that appeared in the second syllables, while native English speakers shortened unstressed vowels appearing in any of the nouns and verbs. The subjects in this study, brought their background knowledge and whatever they knew about the effects of tones when speaking English to aid the research through a number of audio and video recordings, which elicited great details to delve into the deepest recesses of their awareness of the finer aspects of spoken English.

Data collected for this research through the voice recordings, primarily focused on students' awareness and usage of intonation in spoken English. The comprehensibility and intelligibility of the subjects was gathered through the presence/absence of accented phrases, pitch, volume, and tones used naturally during the data collection for the research. Results showed that native speakers

gave equal importance to grammatical accuracy as well as to intonation (Wennerstrom, 1994: p. 415). On the other hand, ESL speakers had a different focus from that of the native speakers (Baker, 2010). They gave more importance to the use of a large variety of lexical resources, or were reticent to attempt intonation, or used higher or lower pitch, higher or lower volume, or just sounded quite unnatural.

The data collected showed that out of the 110 subjects of this research, 79 students were largely unaware of the existence of intonation and its effects on spoken English, as they demonstrated little or no effort to integrate this feature of spoken English into their speeches. Whereas, 31 students showed a marginal sense of its existence, but were reluctant to use it for fear of getting it wrong, or some even used intonation quite amateurishly because they did not know the nuances of this important feature of spoken English. This led to most of the students being misunderstood by others or completely lacked comprehensibility. Some of the subjects even tried using body language to help the audience understand their language use but were still not successful. Research by Derwing, Munro, (2015) found that incorrect intonation results in misunderstandings and misinterpretations which lead to listeners finding it hard to comprehend utterances (Figure 1).

The data collected through various audio recordings were used to measure the comprehensibility of the subjects' spoken English. The results showed that on the Comprehensibility Scale of 0 - 10, 75 students' spoken English comprehensibility ranged below 5, and 35 students' spoken English comprehensibility ranged above 5 (Figure 2).
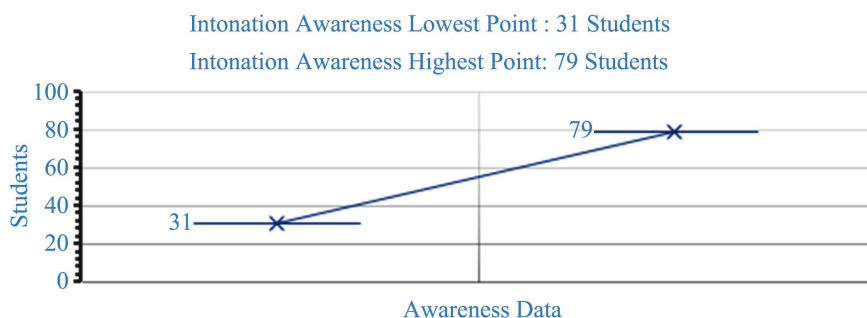

Figure 1. Result of the video recordings used for intonation awareness data.
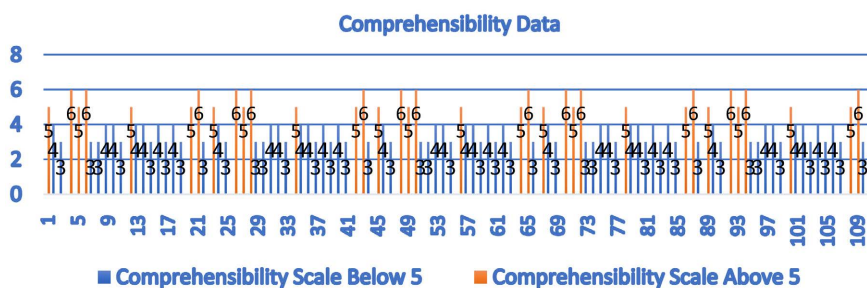

Figure 2. Result of the audio recordings used for comprehensibility data.

These data were then analysed using rubrics, to measure parameters other than intonation, namely, pitch, volume, rate of speech, clarity of voice, and modulation of the voice, to gauge the degree of communicative competence of the speakers. The measurement of suprasegmental features is quite a challenge and little research has been done beyond the sentence level, or for measuring spontaneous or free speech by non-native speakers (Pickering, 2004; Hirschberg et al., 2007; Trouvain & Gut, 2007; Chun, 2002; Nagy, 2015). Suprasegmental features are very complex, primarily because different languages have diverse use or application or meaning of the use of intonation. Once again, L1 interference plays a significant role (Major's 2001 model; Lecumberri et al., 2010).

5. Discussion

Researchers believe that both segmental and suprasegmental features of English are important and any ineptitude in either features of English could affect communication. For example, at the segmental level, if a learner does not understand the difference between the pronunciation of the phoneme /q/ and instead uses the phoneme /s/, in trying to convey "he is thinking", but says "he is sinking", it can affect communication and may result in misunderstanding. Alternatively, if a learner does not understand the suprasegmental features and uses incorrect stress on words, for example, take the word "conduct" used as a noun and a verb. Once again, this would affect communication and lead to misunderstanding. Kim (2003) supports this view that segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation is both important. This further supports the authors' claims of the importance of the suprasegmental aspect of spoken English.

The existence of intonation is quintessential in various languages. The fact that intonation exists in spoken languages, and that one needs to understand the various tones of intonation especially of the target language, English, can hardly be overemphasised; in the classrooms at the university, during the research, its application was found to enable students to appreciate this vital aspect of the spoken language, and according to the systematic feedback collected from them, it assisted them in understanding concepts better. The authors discovered in this research, the Chinese students understood this concept very quickly, as the Chinese language itself is rich with tones (Cantonese has 9 tones, Mandarin has 4, and the local Chou Shan dialect has 8 tones).

The results of the research showed that, at first, the participating students were unaware of their own intonation in spoken English and gave it minimal importance. However, during the research, when they were exposed to the knowledge imparted in the classes, they became receptive and learned the importance of tones used in spoken English. They formed a learning bridge between their Mother Tongues, Mandarin, and English. They nodded in perfect agreement when they were informed of the importance of intonation, as they knew for a fact how the four tones used in Mandarin could change the meaning of words. Let us take an example of the word, "Ma" used in Mandarin. If one uses the first tone of Mandarin the word "Ma" means Mother. The second tone

changes the meaning of the word "Ma" to Linen. The third tone changes the meaning of "Ma" to a Horse, and the fourth tone makes the word "Ma" to Scold someone. Hence, fortunately the importance of intonation has never been lost in the classes comprising EFL speakers of English in this part of Asia as well.

Finally, then came the connection between intonation and attitude or state of mind, which can be communicated through the appropriate use of tone during speech. Through practice came the realization, which made the students understand that one's attitude, frame of mind, thoughts, and feelings, all got conveyed through the use of intonation while speaking with another, or while addressing an audience as an orator. As a speaker, one's state of mind, be it happy, sad, disturbed, distracted, or bored, is picked up by the audience, the emotions are transmitted to them through one's verbalization. Once the subjects of this research understood the basic concept, the authors then collected the data for analysis and were able to prove that intonation can be taught and studied in the EFL/ESL classroom.

6. Conclusion

The relevance of the prosodic features of English, going hand in hand with the phonetic structures, is sure to contribute to the existing pronunciation teaching goal of international intelligibility, as proposed, for example, by Jenkins (2000) and Derwing & Rossiter (2003). During this study, the subjects became more aware of this vital aspect of spoken English immediately after the first few classes, as they began to understand the concept. Research in this vast field has shown, first, how intonation in speech has made speakers more aware of the use of rhyme and rhythm in the L1 speakers'/Native Speakers' interactions; second, how this awareness could be transferred to application in the EFL learning classroom; third, how this could change the future teaching decisions and syllabi, knowing that language learners would greatly benefit from learning this aspect of spoken English, thereby making intonation teachable and learnable.

This important element of pronunciation can be rationally integrated into many types of ESL/EFL classes, particularly classes where speaking is central. The maxim about spoken English, that "how" something is said is equally, if not more, important than "what" is said, is very true. According to De Bot, Kees & Mailfert, (1982), "Teachers should attempt to show their students that intonation plays an essential role in communication." Granted, vocabulary, grammar, connotations, cohesion, and coherence are all useful for effective communication; but, at the same time, pronunciation is a vital factor contributing to comprehensibility and intelligibility, thereby making the study of prosodic features an essential element of spoken English (Schafer et al., 2000). The conclusions drawn from this research support the view that intonation, an important suprasegmental feature, contributes immensely to speech enhancement. The research subjects became aware of the nuances of oral English and appreciated learning this very valuable knowledge.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

An important caveat here that deserves mention is that while practicing intonation in the classes, one needs to be careful of being very selective about the choice of the speaking tasks, as the tasks should be engaging and interesting, or else there could be misleading results. In order to get authentic results, as teachers, one does not necessarily need to make students "aware" of exactly which aspect of intonation they would be getting examined on. One needs to keep the activities very casual because if students become self-conscious, they could just clam up and not speak at all. Students must not feel pressured or uncomfortable due to the teacher's expectations from them, to get the best results.

All the same, further to the acquisition of the rhythmic use of language, future research could be conducted on how successfully the participants, be it undergraduate students, post graduate students, or even further on, corporate executives, and business entrepreneurs, who are in the process of learning English as a second language, could consciously employ intonation, speech rhyme, and rhythm into their oratory skills to make their spoken English more effective and engaging.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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