

44. Intonation in Tone Languages: Insights from Esan

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Abstract

The prosodic feature of pitch, which is the main exponent of intonation, is also used for establishing contrasts in tone languages. Pitch used distinctively in words is called 'tone', while in longer stretches it is called 'intonation'. This does not in any way suggest that tone and intonation are mutually exclusive. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the interaction in Esan between tone and intonation in conveying meaning; in particular, to see how intonation can be superimposed on tones to form intonational patterns that convey different kinds of linguistic information. To do this, we examine the intonational patterns in statements, contrasting them with the intonational changes observed in emphatic statements and questions.

1.0 Introduction

It is widely but incorrectly believed that intonation is not normally associated with tone languages. To discuss this, our data are taken from the Ekpoma dialect of the Esan language, spoken mainly in Esan West Local Government Area (LGA), Edo State, Nigeria. Different dialects are spoken in four other LGAs, Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-East and Iguẹben. Esan is a North-Central Edoid language of the New Benue-Congo family (Bendor-Samuel 1989), previously classified under the Benue-Kwa grouping (Elugbe 1986) and Kwa of the Niger-Congo grouping (Greenberg 1963).

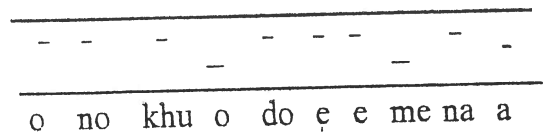
Intonation is a feature usually of phrases and sentences, while tone is a feature of the lexicon involving the pitch patterns of words. Intonation has been variously defined in the literature. Cruttenden (1986:9) describes it as 'the occurrence of recurring pitch patterns, each of which is used with a set of relatively consistent meanings, either on single words or on groups of words of varying length'. Hyman (1975:227-228) compares intonation with tone in terms of the two related notions of downdrift and downstep. He describes downdrift as an automatic lowering process, which in tone languages is common among those with two contrastive tones, high and low. It is a property of intonation, involving a sequential process whereby high tones after low tones become progressively, less high throughout an intonational unit. (Crystal 1997:126). This contrasts with downstep, a non-automatic lowering process 'which applies to the second of two high tone syllables' such that 'a downstepped high tone would be slightly lower than the preceding high tones but not so low as to be equivalent to a low tone' (Crystal 1997:126). Downstep is phonemic, since it is phonologically contrastive.

Intonation is here understood as a prosodic/suprasegmental feature which can be super-imposed on the tones in a word, phrase, clause or sentence in tone languages, just as it can be super-imposed on stressed/unstressed syllables in stress-timed languages and, presumably, in pitch-accent languages.

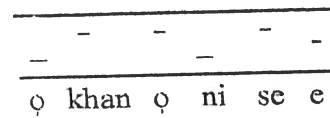
Intonation serves various purposes, including marking grammatical boundaries such as phrases and clauses, signalling sentence types such as statements and questions, and conveying all kinds of speaker's attitudes such as the expression of joy, surprise, exasperation, irony, etc. Esan has two contrastive tones, high and low, and these form rising and falling tones. See Ejele (1982, 2002a, 2003a).

Intonation in Tone Languages

- d) ọní ókhùò dé óé émèná'á
 the woman bought leg cow
 'The woman did buy a leg of cow'

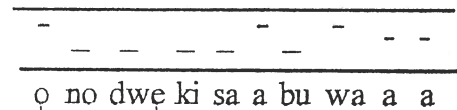


- e) ọ khán ọní 'ísé'é
 He hammered the nail
 'He did hammer the nail'

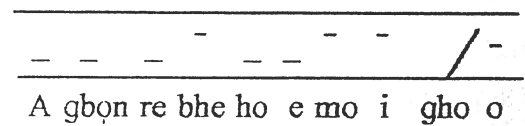


Interestingly, the lowered high tones are higher than the raised low tone. It does appear that this tone (lowered high or raised low) is associated with the realisation of emphatic statements. In the case of statements ending on a falling or rising pitch, these can be used emphatically by lengthening the last segment and its tone. However the tone on the lengthened segment is raised in the case of the falling tone (resulting in HL⁺L sequence) while that on the rising tone results in LH⁺H tonal sequence - as in 6a and 6b compared with 3a and 3b respectively.

- 6a) ọní ọdùèkí sàá bọ ùwá'àà
 the trader atlast build house
 'The trader is at last building a house'



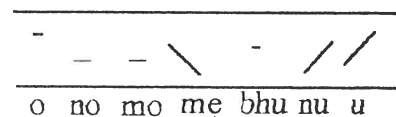
- b) Àgbọ̀n rẹ̀bhé hò èmọ́ íghǒ'ó
 people all love/like matter money
 'Everybody loves money'



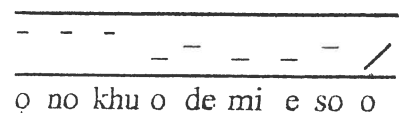
(NB ùwàà is written as úwààà to show clearly the intonational change).

On the whole, the examples show that statement-final low tones, statement-final high tones, statement-final falling and statement-final rising tones when used for emphasis, are realised as raised low tone, as in the final low and falling tones or as lowered high as in the case final high and rising tones. In both cases involving the raised low or the lowered high, the resulting sound associated with the lowered high is higher than that of the raised low. A related phenomenon to emphatic statements is statements that convey intensity, exasperation surprise (pleasant or disappointing) or admiration. It is possible to use all the sentences so far given above but we will restrict our examples to just a few, as in 7a, 2a, 3a used in 7a, b and c respectively.

- 7a) ọní òmò mẹ bhúnǔ ǔ
 'The soup is very very tasty!'

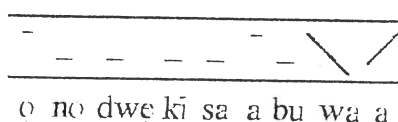


- b) ọní ókhùò dé émi èsóó'
 'The woman bought some weird/unusual things'



c) ɔnĩ òdùèkĩ sàà bò ùwā ǎ́

'The trader is at last building a house'



o no dwe kī sa a bu wa a

7a can be used to describe an extremely delicious soup; 7b for a woman who bought unusual/weird things and 7c can be said of a trader whom people did not expect would be able to build a house and by building a house, has put his enemies to shame, as he now has a house of his own. The intonation pattern for this type of statements end not just on a raised pitch but on a contour, typically LH. In fact the H after the LH is actually an extra high tone, which we have represented as ǎ́ with the LH ǎ́ in the form ǎ́ on the last vowel segment.

2.3 Intonation in questions

Although Esan has a morpheme **baa** for marking questions (Ejele 1995), our focus here is on the use of the suprasegmental feature of tone alone. Words, phrases and sentences can be questioned by introducing the LH tones as Q marker which combine with the last tone of the string to form contour tones, necessitating vowel lengthening (Ejele 2003b, 2002d). Thus sentences can be questioned simply by raising the sentence-final tone through the introduction of the LH Q marker.

Examples:

Words	Questions	Intonational Patterns	
8a) ékpà 'vomit'	i. ékpàǎ ii. ékpǎ́ 'vomit?'	i) e kpa a	ii) e kpa
b) ègbèdé 'needle'	i. ègbèdèǎ ii. ègbèdǎ́ 'needle?'	i) e gbe de e	ii) e gbe de
c) úwā 'house'	i. úwāǎ ii. úwǎ́ 'house?'	i) u wa a	ii) u wa
d) íghǒ 'money'	i. íghǒó ii. íghǒ́ 'money?'	i) i gho o	ii) i gho

Examples 8a-d show that two forms of tonal marking of questions result when the LH tones interact with the last tone of the word, as expressed in (i) and (ii) under questions. (i) involves contours while (ii) involves the extra high tone, which is represented orthographically by double acute on the particular vowel. What is clear from these examples is that whether the word ends on a low, high, falling or rising tone (as in 8a-d respectively), the question ends on a high or extra high pitch.

Similar observations can be made with respect to phrases and sentences, as in 11a-d and 12a-d respectively. It is pertinent to explain how questioning mainly by tonal features takes place. We shall illustrate with the words ékpà 'vomit', ègbèdé 'needle',

íghǒ 'money' and úwâ 'house'. Question 1 involves contours and Question 2 involves the extra high tone. We treat Question 1 first.

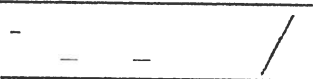
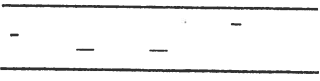
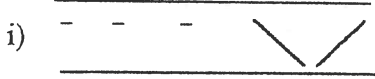
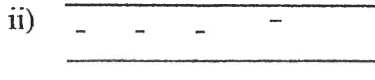
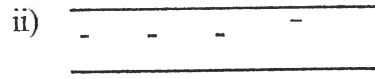
	Word	Word + Q	Vowel lengthening	Tonal merging	Question 1 Gloss
9a)					
b)				—	
c)					
d)				—	

In Question 1 type involving contours, the final tone of the word to be questioned combines with the LH of the Q-marker. Segmentally, the word-final vowel lengthens to house the Q-marker, as in 9a-d. At this point, if the presence of the LH Q-marker results in a sequence of L tones, then tonal merging takes place, satisfying OCP conditions, as in 9a and c. However, if the resulting sequence is LH LH (typical of word-final rising tone) then the first L of the LH Q-marker becomes floating. This explains why the remaining H of the Q-marker cannot merge with the word-final LH, as in 9d. The alternative form in Question 2 can be similarly explained, as in 10a-d.

	Word	Word + Q	Tone merging	Loss of low tone(s)	Question 2	Gloss
10a)						
b)			—			
c)						
d)			—			

In Question 2 type involving the extra high tone, vowel lengthening does not take place but tone merging takes place in 10a and c, just as in 9a and c. However the L tone of the LH Q-marker becomes floating. Its presence is manifested by the failure of the H tone to merge with the final H of the word, thus violating OCP. The questioning is adjudged grammatical and acceptable by native speakers, in spite of this violation. This is because the two H tones are associated with a single vowel and form the extra high tone, showing that the extra high tone is distinct from the simple high tone. In fact in 10d, the two L tones float, one L from the LH of the word final tone and the other from the LH of the Q-marker. For details on the source of the extra high tone, see Ejele 2002d.

Similar observations can be made with respect to phrases and sentences as in 11a-d and 12a-d respectively.

Phrases	Questions	Intonational Patterns
11a) <i>é-lá-mén é-wè</i> 'bush meat'	i. <i>é-lá-mén é-wè-ě</i> ii. <i>é-lá-mén é-wě</i> 'bush meat?'	i)  <i>é la mèn wẹ ẹ</i> ii)  <i>é la mèn wẹ</i>
b) <i>ón-ń ò-kp-í-á</i> 'the man'	i. <i>ón-ń ò-kp-í-á-á</i> ii. <i>ón-ń ò-kp-í-á</i> 'the man?'	i)  <i>ọ no kpia</i> ii)  <i>ọ no kpi a</i>
c) <i>ó-dá-ló ú-wá</i> 'front(of the) house'	i. <i>ó-dá-ló ú-wá-á</i> ii. <i>ó-dá-ló ú-wá</i> 'front(of the) house?'	i)  <i>o da lu wa a</i> ii)  <i>o da lu wa</i>
d) <i>é-mó í-gh-ò</i> 'money matter'	i. <i>é-mó í-gh-ò-ó</i> ii. <i>é-món í-gh-ó</i> 'money matter?'	i)  <i>e mọn i gho o</i> ii)  <i>e mọn i gho</i>

As with phrases, sentences can be questioned simply by raising the sentence-final tone (through the introduction of LH Q marker) while maintaining the statement form segmentally, in such a way that only the suprasegmental features reflect this, as in:

What
quest
end o

3.0
F

1. I
2. I

3. I
4. I

Intonation in Tone Languages

Sentences	Questions	Intonational Patterns
12a) óńĩ òmò mè bhúnù 'The soup tastes delicious'	i. óńĩ òmò mè bhúnùù ii. óńĩ òmò mè bhúnù 'The soup tastes delicious?'	i) - - - / o no mo me bhu nu u ii) - - - - o no mo me bhu nu
b) óńí ókhùdè dé émĩ èsò 'The woman bought some things'	i. óńí ókhùdè dé émĩ èsò ii. óńí ókhùdè dé émĩ èsò 'The woman bought some things?'	i) - - - - - / ii) o no khu o de mi e so o - - - - - o no khu o de mi e so
c) óńĩ òkpíá bó úwâ 'The man (has) built a house'	i. óńĩ òkpíá bó úwâ ii. óńĩ òkpíá bó úwâ 'The man (has) built a house?'	i) - - - - / o no kpi a bu wa a ii) - - - - o no kpi a bu wa
d) Ófùré mò íqhǒ 'Ofure has money'	i. Ófùré mò íqhǒó ii. Ófùré mò íqhǒ 'Ofure has money?'	i) - - - - / O fu re mo i qho o ii) - - - - O fu re mo i qho

What stands out in the examples of words, phrases and sentences is the fact that questioning imposes a particular intonational pattern on the utterance. Thus, it must end on a high or extra-high pitch.

3.0 Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. Downdrift as a lowering process is attested in Esan.
2. Downdrift is common in Esan. It involves an automatic sequential lowering of high tones after low tones in an intonational unit.
3. In having downdrift, Esan behaves like Edo (Bini), its closest relative.
4. In having low-tone raising in final position, Esan is like its further relatives Isoko and Urhobo. However it is used differently, being used to mark statements in Isoko and Urhobo, but marks emphasis in Esan.

5. In having high tone lowering in final position. Esan is distinct from Edo (Bini) and Isoko and Urhobo, which do not exhibit this phenomenon (Amayo 1976, Elugbe 1977, Donwa-Ifode 1984).
6. The lowered high tone and the raised low tone are used for emphasis. Auditorily, the lowered high tone is higher than the raised low tone.
7. Questions impose a particular intonational pattern. Hence they must end on a high or extra high pitch.

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