



Problems of Perception and Production of Intonation among A1 Learners of FFL in Iran*

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WHAT is becoming more and more of a concern for the actors of the language teaching / learning process, i.e. teachers and learners, is better oral communication skills. In order not to limit it to its linguistic components, we have highlighted its extralinguistic aspects such as prosody or intonation in particular. In the Iranian context, we note that this prosodic trait is not taken into consideration in educational programs. This is because we think that the message passes well, without any problem, by producing a speech well-structured at the morphosyntactic level. Thus, the primordial role of intonation is neglected. What concerns us in this study is to first discover the perceptual deficiencies of learners who are new to FLE in Iran, as a result of a listening activity. Secondly, we recommend to compare the production times of learners and natives. Finally, we seek to establish a descriptive inventory of informants' problems in the perception and production of interrogative and affirmative statements. Our choice of the two basic modalities of French is explained by the difficulty of the intonation, for the foreign speakers, in its two perceptive and productive point of view, and in its expressive function. The purpose of this research is to emphasize intonation, the element that is learned early and easily in the mother tongue and affects strangers because of the melodicity it gives to speech. The research methodology is based on both quantitative and qualitative analyzes. Based on audio data

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from 12 A1 level learners at the Farhang Sina Institute in Tehran, we took an advantageous use of the digital possibilities to perform the analyses. Thus, Praat software, designed for phonetic processing, and SPSS statistical software, were used. The first helped us to make phonological annotations of the intonation, in the authentic productions and that of the learners. The durations of the productions were also obtained from this software. As for the numerical results, they were provided by SPSS software. Our analyses are based on the ToBI system for French that Delais-Roussarie and her co-authors defined in 2015 and it is called F_ToBI. As a result, the annotations and justifications at their origin have not been subject to subjectivity that would have removed them from authenticity.

Through the literature of research, we have focused on the oral aspect of language, the prosody in perception and production and the habits and learning styles of Iranian learners. Spread among adult learners, without insisting on nationality, we meet a shared desire for access to the written word. This is because it is thought that writing facilitates oral comprehension as it plunges the reader into deciphering and recognizing its components, hence the difficulty in establishing meaning. By contrast, orally, whose priority has been attested for a long time especially with the communicative approach, the prosodic elements, constituting the context of the message, will come to the aid of the auditors in order to remove the cognitive load in the treatment of sound information. However, even if the prosody does not always draw attention, it is because of ignorance of the pronunciation. In the verbo-tonal method of phonetic integration, pronunciation has priority over other elements to learn. According to the principles of this method, perception must be followed by production, first in the oral and then in the written form. Otherwise, an inverted approach will not be as beneficial to the teacher or the learner. What deserves to be taken into account by priority is the education of the ears in the good auditory perception in a foreign language and thus reduce the effect of the phonological screen, caused by the mother tongue. However, we have seen the influence of this one on perception and production in French.

In the data collection, we asked informants to listen to and repeat six statements that we had chosen from the book "Essential Phonetics of French A1 / A2" (Kamoun and Ripaud, 2016). What we tried to verify in the corpus was the perception and production of interrogative and affirmative modalities. That is, the analyses are located at the final tonal boundaries, where the modality is defined. The intonational models for interrogations and affirmations are of the following order: L*H% for the partial interrogation, H*H% for the total interrogation and L*L% for the affirmation. A fourth model, being erroneous, was also found among the public without distinguishing the modality: H*L%.

The learners had rather perceptual-productive problems with the partial interrogations where the modality is specified by a morphological mark. Among these problems, we observed the transformation of the interrogative modality into the affirmative (with a high rate), the confusion of the intonation patterns for the partial and total interrogation, and the production of the exclamatory intonation (H*L%) declared by Delais-Roussarie et al. (2015), unconsciously produced by learners. This shows their lack of proficiency in the management of the voice where the prosodic features are. The transfer of the mother tongue has always been present in the production of interrogative statements. As for the affirmations, they were perceived and produced with fewer problems. Where there were hearing problems, the modality was transformed into interrogation, partial or total. In a small number of cases, the good intonation has been noted but with the expression of a doubt in the pronunciation. This gave us the good intonation pattern without respecting the intonation expected because of hesitation. As far as the durations are concerned, they have in most cases been prolonged. By this, we conclude that as a result of perceptual difficulties, the learners could not correctly produce the correct intonation, including accentuation. In addition, the syntactical difficulty may affect the duration to be produced, resulting in a slower rate and a longer duration. Production skills in mother tongue are also to be considered.

Keywords— intonation, perception, oral production, Iranian learners, FLE.