

# Role of Intonation in Second Language Learning

G. Ravisankar  
PILC

## Introduction

Language and human beings cannot be disentangled. They together shape the human personality. Language is a set of codes or signs or symbols more or less systematized and recognized and agreed upon by the speakers and listeners. These codes are dynamic being potential with meaning/reference. Each word or utterance realized for its meaning/reference thoroughly because one gets the cue from the dictionary or thesaurus. However, sometime they cannot be understood for explicit meaning reference. Such expressions demand past events, experiences of the interlocutors etc. The range of reference of such kind of expressions is defined by the experience of the individuals concerned. It means dictionaries and thesaurus may not be helpful beyond a limit. There are social factors, context of situation needed to derive the meaning explicitly. We know any expression will have intrinsic meaning as well as extrinsic meaning. A learner of a language has to learn the possible extrinsic meaning besides the intrinsic meaning for clear and situation. The communication might run into bad weather when ambiguity enters the scene. It keeps the listeners cue less as to the understanding of the intended meaning. Almost all the languages exhibit such a complicated situation. Sharma and Tuteja (1994) gives the following examples for ambiguity:

‘She’s has got a wonderful bust’ with ‘bust’ having two meanings: i) breast ii) sculptured representation of the upper part of the human figure (head, neck, shoulder, breast). The intended meaning is the latter on which is not clear unless the speaker hurriedly adds the phrase ‘... the one of Socrates in the hall’. Let us turn to a Tamil example. A father telling his son who is about to go for writing examination.

‘inekki eksamaa, paattu eluth’ (You have examination today/ write carefully) where the word ‘paattu’ means ‘be careful’ or ‘be attentive’, but it may also mean ‘copy’ in the examination by looking others papers which is the apposite of the earlier one. The point to be noted is that both the meanings are equally possible and this is the effect of two different intonation imposed on the expression. The ambiguity can be removed by giving the appropriate intonation pattern relevant to get the required meaning. Similarly, The Tamil word ‘Vand:n’ “came he”, if given different intonation will give various meanings. Longer utterances too can be shown as having many meaning under the influence of intonation. (see IP-1).

Thus intonation which is an aspect of speech by being systemic in its structure and function helps members of a speech community to communicate decisively and unambiguously. Hence, in learning a language, especially a second language or a foreign language greater attention should be given to intonation system of that language.

## 2. 0 Intonation and L2 Learning

Intonation is a basic resource in a language, which can efficiently used to avoid any slips in the communication. Especially in the case of L2 learners of intonation will be a boon for quick mastering of the spoken language as it is the aspect of speech present always when one speaks.

It can be said precisely that L2 Learners have the task of learning not only the fundamental meaning of words/sentences they possess under normal circumstances, but also the additional or the intended or even the idiomatic meanings as it will help them to effectively communicate in that language. Intonation will be an effective tool for them to attain mastery in this endeavour. Hence this paper focuses on certain criteria or strategies to be considered by the L2 learners in their attempt to seek help from intonation. The guidelines given here are an of the communicative learning which has spoken form as its domain. This is a kind of discourse notion which has been nurtured for quite sometime in the realm of language teaching/learning. The through learning of various intonation patterns also benefits L2 learners to speak as demanded by the culture or the L2 and indirectly minimises the influence of the mother tongue of the learners while learning L2.

### 3.0 Intonational Features

Intonation is described basically in terms of pitch movement. There are other factors of pitch that is 'pitch levels' and 'pitch range' associated with a pitch movement. Each pitch pattern is added up with rhythmic pattern (formed by the coordination of loudness, tempo, pause and accent), The other noteworthy feature is the duration which coexists with all the said features of intonation. All together form intonation pattern which ends with a characteristic terminal pitch movement observable in the final syllable and called 'terminal contour'. The learners should have the knowledge of all these intonational features. The role of intonation in language learning is very much related to the communicative competence, as these features are active and dynamic in speech. It helps any learners who have reached a particular level of efficiency in L2. He can further his knowledge with the help of intonation in acquiring better competence in L2.

### 4.0 The basic materials for learning

The basic materials are the various grammatical structures in Tamil, comprising of declarative sentences, interrogatives, and imperatives. They should be treated as expressing fundamental meaning i.e. as colourless being unmarked for any additional senses. The pitch pattern of each of them be learnt. for example, the declarative sentence will have always the "falling" intonation pattern in Tamil. The learners look for that part of the pitch pattern where the significant pitch movement occurs. The syllable which carries this significant pitch or tone is called nuclear syllable only to be contrasted from the non-nuclear syllable, which precede and / or follow the nuclear syllable. The nuclear syllable is part of the nuclear word, which is specific for each kind of grammatical structure. Likewise, the interrogatives which are classified in Tamil as i) intonation type ii) -a: type iii) e-type iv) tag type and imperatives can be classified for the nuclear word and syllable and the respective intonation pattern can be identified. ( See IP-2)

As far the interrogatives the intonation type question is created from declarative structure by changing the intonation pattern of it. So the contrastive

pattern can be utilised for learning the intonation type question. This type question is more prevalent in colloquial speech. There are sentences in Tamil accented for emphasis or

contrastive meanings. These are nothing but the declaratives with particular word accented for meaning focus. They too have specific intonation patterns.

The question particles -a- for -a- type question and c- for e-type question bear the actual tone: movement which determines the intonation pattern of *the* respective sentences. Similar is the case with the imperatives in which the word that carries the notion of command (read as verbs) carry the tone and indicates the intonation pattern characteristics of the imperatives. Learners thus identify and memorise the relevant patterns in their colourless stage.

Once the learners are comfortable with using the basic grammatical structures with their appropriate intonation patterns, they may go to the next step of learning the same structures with selected emotions/attitudes intoned in them. The changes are associated with appropriate alterations of the respective intonation. The list of emotions / attitudes are exhaustive. However, those kinds of them, which are quite frequent, useful and relevant for the immediate communicative purpose, can be learnt initially. They can be listed as follows: Surprise, happiness, fear, anger, pity, hesitation and request.

#### 5.0 Prerequisites to learn IPs

By the time the L2 learner of Tamil reach the level of handling intonation for furthering their learning, they

- i) should be able to identify and read the various grammatical structures.
- ii) should have learnt the various intonational features
- iii) should be able to identify the nuclear word and the nuclear syllable with respect to each grammatical structure.

#### 6.0 Strategies for Learning through Intonation

The following are the few strategies for learning Tamil as L2.

- i) Pattern reading
- ii) Pattern Imitation, comprehension and production
- iii) Pattern repetition
- iv) Pattern matching

Each one has been explained briefly below.

- i) 'Pattern reading' strategy comprises of sentences printed and marked for pitch levels, movement and also for the pitch range, loudness, tempo features. Based on the knowledge of notations, the learners practice reading the; sentences of various kinds. (See Ravisankar 1992). This strategy will be a precursor to the other strategies discussed below.

- ii) Under 'pattern imitation, comprehension and production' strategy, the learner listens to the oral demonstration by the tutor carefully and attempts to imitate the patterns, followed by comprehension each of them mentally and then produce one at a time on his own. This strategy is a kind of mental training and is assumed to be quite effective.
- iii) 'Pattern repetition' refers to oral repetition of patterns several times pattern is repeated again and again until it becomes part of his language faculty. The repetition leads to memorizing the patterns and ultimately remain permanently in the language faculty in the brain.
- iv) 'Pattern matching' involves using acoustic instruments like 'Pitch meter', Visi-pitch, CSLs which have split screen facility. The trainer will feed a pattern on one half of the screen and the learner tries to produce similar/identical pattern by uttering it in such a way to match the pattern already recorded on the other half of the screen. This will enable the learner to physiologically equip himself to produce the appropriate pattern as naturally as possible.

## 7. Conclusion

Learners of L2 certainly have some assumptions, preferences, and wishes about acquiring proficiency in L2. The degree of learning might be governed by the need, purpose, requirement and the like. Some of the learners would stop at certain level of learning which they would feel suffice for their purpose. Some would like to reach a reasonable level of competence and some would love to attain complete competence in L2. There may be tailor-made syllabus curriculum or methods available to them. However, introspection would make them to realize that learning; a language, as L2 should be tough and complete to the level precise and perfect competence in it. To such learners of L2 intonation will come handy and will be a crucial and effective tool in their learning process. Therefore the learners of L2 should inevitably avail this system of intonation inherent in languages in order to perfect their efficiency and proficiency in learning and using of the language of their choice.

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