

Intonation Patterns of Voice-Overs in Nigerian Broadcasts

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Abstract

The constant drive for communication and the need to convey information verbally has made voice-overs emerge as a veritable tool in marketing today. Voice-over is an audio/visual production technique employed in multimedia content to verbally accentuate the message being passed across. Considering the importance of pitch modulation in verbal communication, this study embarks on a phonological description of intonation in voice-overs in Nigerian broadcasts using fifty (50) voice-over extracts purposively sampled from the Nigerian media, adverts and other presentations. The data is analysed qualitatively and acoustically using concepts from Discourse Intonation theory and Praat software respectively. The study reveals that professional Nigerian voice actors consciously align their intonation with patterns established for different pragmatic functions. This suggests a high level of compliance with the theoretical constructs of Discourse Intonation. The study also reveals the preponderance of the proclaiming tone in the voice-overs, underscoring the intent to highlight new or important information and also emphasize novelty. The study provides empirical data for the Nigerian English corpus having focused on an area associated with technological advancement in the world today, a fertile ground for research on the intonation of Nigerian English.

Keywords: intonation, voice-over, proclaiming tone, referring tone, praat.

Introduction

Voice-over artistry, as a vocal technique, has significantly grown in prominence across the global media landscape. Over the years, voice-over (VO hereafter) artists have played the role of unseen narrators as they successfully guide audiences through stories; providing voice for commercials, documentaries and others, while evoking emotions through versatility in voice talents. Though it dates back to the early 19th century with notable works done by Reginald Fessenden, VO was made popular by the prowess of 'Mel Blanc,' the American voice actor and radio

personality whose voice-over career in radio (and later animations) helped boost the prestige of VO artistry (Sum 2021). In Nigeria today, VOs are central to advertising, public announcements, and broadcasting, often serving as the primary channel for disseminating persuasive and emotive content, with skilled voice actors breathing life into words as they turn scripts into compelling memorable experiences for their audiences.

One major skill common to all successful VO artists is their ability to manipulate the pitch of their voices for linguistic effect: the ability to make productive use of their intonation. Considering consistent reports from empirical studies on the non-compliance of Nigerian English intonation with established patterns across native English domains; and also recognizing that despite the growing importance of VO artistry, little phonological research has explored the intonation features of VOs in the broadcast media in Nigeria, these authors investigate how intonation - specifically pitch movement - functions within VO productions in Nigerian broadcasts. This is with a view to establishing if there are patterns unique to the Nigerian setting, particularly in relation to the Discourse Intonation framework.

Literature Review

Voice Over and Media Speech

While there is not any extensive body of literature specifically dedicated to the phonological study of VOs, some academic works and research papers touch upon the subject within the broader fields of language study and applied linguistics. An off-screen vocal narration often used in audiovisual media to convey emotions, information, and instructions, VO is a production method where a voice is typically used for narrating stories or conveying information. Just as the narrator's voice in documentaries is capable of providing both contextual and emotional connection to the subject matter; commercial VOs can employ intonation to promote their sales through the use of friendly voice, energetic voice, etc. as the intonation and style employed can greatly influence how the content is perceived by the audience.

A VO is often recorded separately from the visuals, thereby serving as an additional layer to the existing narrative. Typically performed by voice actors reading from a script, VOs find application in television, film, theatre, radio, and various other forms of presentation. They can thus be described as the re-enactment of real-

life situations in an audio recording scenario. According to Matamala (2019), VOs can be deployed to mediate both fictional and non-fictional content. Non-fictional genres include documentaries, interviews and commercials, whilst fictional genres encompass films, TV and animation series, to mention a few examples.

Keenan (2024) also classifies types of VOs as commercials, narration, animation, elearning, audiobooks and podcast. Commercials are crafted to swiftly and efficiently capture the viewer's attention. In these instances, VOs are concise and vibrant, delivered by a voice actor who injects energy and emotion into the script to engage and inform the audience. Narration serves as a prevalent form of VO in documentaries, corporate videos, explainer videos, and various other types of online content. Inanimate characters are also animated into life through VOs, prompting actors to craft unique and distinctive voices that suit the character's persona. In addition, audiobook VOs breathe life into an author's work through their performance; hence, skilled narrators adeptly weave tales, altering their voice to embody diverse characters and emotions, captivating listeners for extended periods. Podcasters, on the other hand, perform various roles as hosts, interviewers, narrators, or commentators; discussing news, entertainment, and personal anecdotes. Therefore, the tone of their VOs is conversational yet engaging, seamlessly blending information with entertainment to captivate listeners.

Khoii and Naser (2021) revealed that VOs can also be a useful resource while teaching and they encouraged the use of VO slides as a self-study instructional package as against the use of mute slides. Teaching with VOs is a good alternative and its merits are great; as embedding VOs in online learning tasks, particularly in settings when teaching in the class is not possible, makes learning more interesting. Professional voice actors often have experience in voice acting, possessing a range of voice qualities, perfect pronunciation and enunciation; and also employing proper pacing and natural articulateness (Keenan 2024). VO can, therefore, be described as the invisible backbone of many industries as it is capable of shaping how audiences perceive stories and brands, by bridging the gap between visuals and emotions.

In the Nigerian media industry, VO is a dynamic and culturally-significant development which requires more academic attention. It reflects not only linguistic diversity but also the creative and adaptive

spirit of Nigerian broadcasters and content creators. In recent times, it is increasingly employed in advertisements, documentaries, political campaigns, and educational programming. Acknowledging this trend, Sowoolu (2023) avers that the rise of digital media has expanded opportunities for Nigerian voice-over artistes to participate in global and local media production. He, however, observes that these opportunities are constrained by structural, technological, and professional challenges that must be addressed for the industry to fully thrive. Identified challenges include limited professional training, unstable power supply and inadequate recording infrastructure and technology. Considering the expanding demographics of VO artistry and its role in the media industry in Nigeria, the investigation of its interaction with regular voice features such as intonation is considered necessary in this study.

Intonation and Phonology

Intonation is the use of the rises and falls in the pitch of the voice to add meaning, emphasis and emotions to language, and to generally enrich communication. It is a means for conveying information in speech that is independent of the words and their sounds (Nolan 2014). As an aspect of suprasegmental phonology, it is concerned with how pitch is modulated over an utterance, also helping to characterise the utterance with different semantic and pragmatic functions. Wells (2006:1) views intonation as "the melody of speech," distinguishing it from stress and rhythm. Crystal (1969) defines it as the variation of pitch in spoken language, which can signal sentence type, speaker attitude, and discourse function. According to Anyagwa and Adedeji (2019),

... intonation is the distinctive use of patterns of pitch or melody to convey linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic meanings in communication. ... statements are characterized by a falling intonation, while questions have a rising intonation contour. Para-linguistically, the F0 contour conveys information about speakers' emotions and attitudes. Other paralinguistic or non-linguistic information that can be conveyed through intonation include the age and gender of the speaker.

Wells (2006:11-12) categorises the various functions of intonation into six, namely: attitudinal, grammatical, focusing, discourse, psychological

and indexical. Structurally, intonation is associated with the largest phonological unit – the tone unit or intonation phrase. Katamba (1989) analyses the structure of the English Tone unit as follows:

Tone Unit = (Pre Head) + (Head) + Nucleus or Tonic + (Tail)

where the brackets indicate optionality; hence the Tonic Syllable or Nucleus is said to be the only obligatory component of a tone unit, and the point of pitch change. Wells (2006:17) explains:

...the tonic syllable will tend to occur on the last lexical word in the tone unit, but may be placed earlier in the tone unit if there is a word there with greater importance to what is being said.

The prominence perceived in the Tonic Syllable of a tone unit is often as a result of the distinctive use of pitch in the form of a kinetic tone. Halliday (1963) proposes five tunes: Falling for statement; High rising for seeking information or challenging a statement; Low rising for question; Rising-falling for assertion and, Falling-rising for submission. Grammatically-speaking, however, different sentence types are associated with particular intonation patterns. Thus, while statements/declaratives, WH-questions, imperatives and exclamatory structures are associated with falling tunes; polar questions, friendly greetings and polite requests favour the rising tunes (Cruttenden 1997: 87-89).

On intonation in Nigerian English, Jowitt (1991) notes the preponderance of the falling tone in statements, commands and wh-questions; and the use of the rising tone for yes/no questions and tag questions. He also observes the infrequent use of complex tones. In a later publication, Jowitt (2000) adds that lexical words are intonationally marked of by “a core pattern of high pitch followed by a down drift”. He further adds gender as a basis for variation in Nigerian English intonation, concluding that some of the observed frequently-occurring patterns in NE differ in important respects from native-speaker systems, though lacking stability. Towing his pattern, Nnamdi (2019) investigates the ‘Effects of socio-indices on intonational patterns in English discourses’ exploring the interface between intonation and certain sociolinguistic variables. Writing on ‘Intonation Patterns in the

Broadcasts of Selected Nigerian Television Newscasters,' Melefa (2021) found that the patterns of intonation of Nigerian television newscasters are markedly different from the standard British English, which serves as the normative standard for Nigerian English.

Interestingly, the Discourse Intonation framework adopted in this paper has been explored in the analysis of intonation within the Nigerian variety of English. Odeyemi (2015), for instance, investigates 'Context and Discourse Intonation in English-medium product advertisement in Nigeria's Broadcast Media.' The study reveals that advertisers in Nigeria use proclaiming (falling) tones to attract attention. It also reveals that structural words are often stressed to provide contextual prominence. Thus, the study confirms that the context of use easily influences the choice of intonation. These observations form a basis for our analysis of intonation in voice overs in Nigerian broadcasts.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Discourse Intonation theory as developed by David Brazil (1997), which aligns well with the pragmatics of voice-overs. Brazil posits that intonation is governed by discourse structure and speaker intention, which influence the meaning of particular words or groups of words. Thus, in Discourse Intonation (DI hereafter), he reflects his interest in the way participants in a conversation use intonation to control the interactive structure of the conversation rather than how intonation marks sentence types or expresses attitudes. DI, thus, treats pitch movements not as grammatical indicators but as communicative tools. The theory provides a reliable tool for analysing and interpreting intonation choices made by speakers in naturally-occurring speech because it recognizes significant intonation choices as being made within four systems: prominence, tone, key and termination. This study focuses on the concept of tone.

DI categorises four of the tone choices into two major groups: proclaiming and referring tones. The proclaiming tones, which introduce new information, include the fall and rise-fall while the referring tones, which indicate shared knowledge, include rise and fall-rise. The speaker, therefore, has the duty to decide about what information to proclaim and what to refer to, considering his/her moment-by-moment assessment of the discourse. In between these are the continuing tones, which suggest that the speaker has more to say. These intonation choices align with communicative intentions in marketing and narrative delivery, making

the framework suitable for analysing persuasive VOs in Nigerian broadcasts.

Analytically, the formal components of DI are headed by the tone unit, which consists of a single and complete pitch pattern that houses proclitic, tonic and enclitic segments. The tonic segment has a scope that starts from the onset which is the first prominent syllable and ends on the tonic which is the last prominent syllable. Prominent and tonic syllables are usually capitalized. With a view to consenting intonation to context, as suggested by Brazil (1997), grammatical and attitudinal roles of intonation in discourse constructions are explored in our analysis in this study in line with the tone which is the pitch movement within the tone-unit.

Methodology

In line with the aim of providing a phonological description of intonation in voice-overs in Nigerian broadcasts, a total of 50 (fifty) voice-over extracts, involving 80 (eighty) tone units, were purposively selected from Nigerian radio, TV and online commercials, online video content, public service announcements, narrations, documentaries and interactive voice responses (IVR). The criteria for selection included clear articulation and varied intonation patterns. Focus was on the different statements, Wh-questions, exclamations, polar questions, imperatives, friendly greetings, and polite requests in the data gathered.

The data was subjected to both qualitative auditory analysis and quantitative acoustic analysis. First, the utterances were converted to WAV file format through an audio converter; then, selected portions were analyzed using Praat software (version 5.4.12) and concepts from the constructs of Discourse Intonation (Brazil 1997; Chun 2002). Key pitch parameters such as pitch range, peak frequency, and tone unit segmentation were analysed. Each extract was also transcribed orthographically and annotated for tone choices based on Discourse Intonation categories. For depth and clarity, the analysis was limited to the tokens of proclaiming and referring tones in the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Intonation and Sentence Types

The data analysis shows that Nigerian voice-over artists systematically modulate pitch to reflect sentence function. The intentionality in

conveying the intended meaning was reflected in the consistency of the following patterns across the data extracts analysed:

(a) Declaratives predominantly ended with a falling (proclaiming) tone as in:

Proudly, she strides into her 6th decade.

The deadline for abstract submission is April 13th 2024.

Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and natural resources.

This number cannot receive calls at the moment.

If it's not panadol, it can't be the same as panadol (containing two tone units, this and i. have a continuing tone on the first tone unit to show that the utterance continues in the next tone unit).

(b) Interrogatives are grammatically classified into polar and WH-questions. While the former requires a 'yes' or 'no' answer, the latter is guided by the nature of the question word – what, why, where, when or how. These differences also impacted on the tone in the data as polar questions attracted the referring tone while WH-questions involved proclaiming tones as in:

What can go wrong?

What do you know?

Have you heard of the power of one?

Am I in heaven?

Is this how love feels at first sight?

The interaction between grammatical structure and pragmatic function was observed in "What are you reading, my dear?" which, though structurally an interrogative, performed the indirect speech act of a request; with the latter determining the intonation pattern.

(c) Imperatives generally feature mid-level to falling tones (proclaiming) depending on the level of urgency as in:

Abstracts should be submitted to the appnlcu2024conference@gmail.com.

Try *Golden Bites* today.

Grab your copy now.

Join with the link, and thank me later (where the proclaiming tone is on the second tone unit, following a continuing tone on the first)

Determine the urgent ones.

Tell me more.

These patterns also align with Wells (2006) and confirm that the intonational system in VOs from Nigerian broadcast media approximate global English norms. The next section presents our analysis of the use of proclaiming and referring tones in the data.

Use of Proclaiming and Referring Tones

The analysis reveals a dominant use of the proclaiming tones (76% of utterances). This tone choice dominated declarative structures, WH-questions, exclamations and imperatives. Proclaiming tones were observed at the end of product names or slogans, which suggests the intent to highlight new or important information. For instance, in the phrases “Think different!” and “Just do it”, the slogans are pronounced with a marked fall in pitch to emphasize novelty.

On the other hand, referring tones featured only in 24% of the analysed data. They were commonly preferred in polar questions, greetings and polite requests. Observably, these structures did not necessarily present new information but were used to emphasize rhetorical questions implying shared knowledge as in “Is this how love feels at first sight?”; familiar greetings as in “Hello!”, and established politeness terms as in “Please”. This finding is further illustrated in the acoustic analysis presented below using Praat.

Acoustic Analysis

The Praat analysis revealed the location of pitch peaks at the nuclear syllable of focus words in each tone unit, suggesting deliberate emphasis and emotional appeal. Using screenshots of the samples of annotated graphs of intonation as displayed on Praat, we analyse the prevailing tones - proclaiming and referring - in the data.

Intonation Choices on Proclaiming Tones

The proclaiming tone typically involves a falling intonation pattern, signalling the end of a complete thought or providing new information. The primary functions and characteristics of the proclaiming tone include: conveying new information to the listener, signalling completion or the end of a statement, showing assertive statements (assertions) or making confident statements and highlighting important information. Proclaiming tones convey certainty, finality, and authority. Sentences that use the falling or rising-falling intonation fall within this group. Below are the analyses of the proclaiming tones in the data.

Declarative Tone Units

Across the data, statements or declaratives were used to declare or assert information, facts, opinions, or beliefs. They primarily provided information and orthographically ended with a period (.). Proclaiming tones in declaratives enable the speaker to convey certainty and finality about what they are saying. Fig. 1 is the screenshot of a Pratt display of the acoustic analysis of declarative sentence: *Proudly, she strides into her 6th decade* (with two tone units and ending in a proclaiming tone).

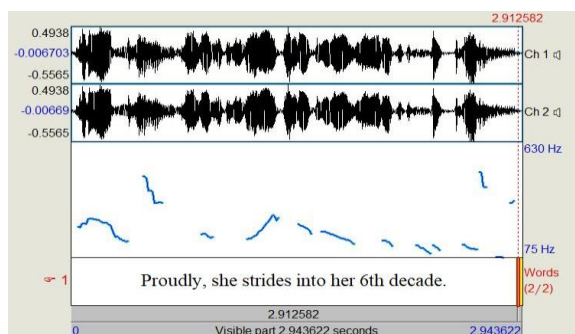


Figure 1: A Declarative sentence using the proclaiming tone

The figure shows two tone units ‘*Proudly*’ and ‘*she strides into her 6th decade*’ in the utterance, visibly demarcated by a pause, denoting reduced energy. The reduced amplitude at the end of the utterance signals a final, conclusive tone, consistent with the proclaiming tone. The first tone unit, “Proudly,” begins with a moderately high pitch, then drops sharply. The pitch rises again on “strides” (the tonic syllable) of the second tone unit, and then descends progressively through “into her 6th decade”. The shift of the tonic syllable from the last content word “decade” to the first “strides” suggests a marked emphasis for artistic purposes, although “decade” retains an intensity peak alongside “strides”.

With a high pitch on the tonic syllable followed by a downward glide towards the end of the utterance, the display aligns with the typical contour of a falling (proclaiming) tone which is characteristic of declaratives. Besides the pitch pattern, the observed fundamental

frequency range – a peak F0 of ~240–250 Hz and a drop to an end F0 of ~75 Hz - is acoustically consistent with a declarative sentence, not a question or continuation. From the viewpoint of duration, the slight lengthening observed in “strides” supplies the prominence characteristic of tonic syllables; inducing the compressing of the final syllables (“decade”) in both pitch and duration, thus enhancing the sense of closure and shift of emphasis. With the amplitude tapering off at the end, the waveform reinforces a final intonational boundary.

This utterance, therefore, confirms the use of the proclaiming tone in declaratives in VOs having aligned with the norms of falling pitch contours (Brazil 1997), clear finality, a drop in pitch range, and a correlation between duration and prominence on the one hand, and intensity and closure, on the other.

Exclamatory Tone Units:

An exclamatory sentence is a type of sentence that expresses a strong emotion or excitement. It typically ends with an exclamation mark (!). Exclamatory sentences are used to convey a wide range of emotions such as joy, surprise, anger, or excitement. The default tone for exclamations is the proclaiming tone, which underscores certainty and expressive finality. Fig. 2 illustrates the exclamatory structures *Yes! The land is green!*

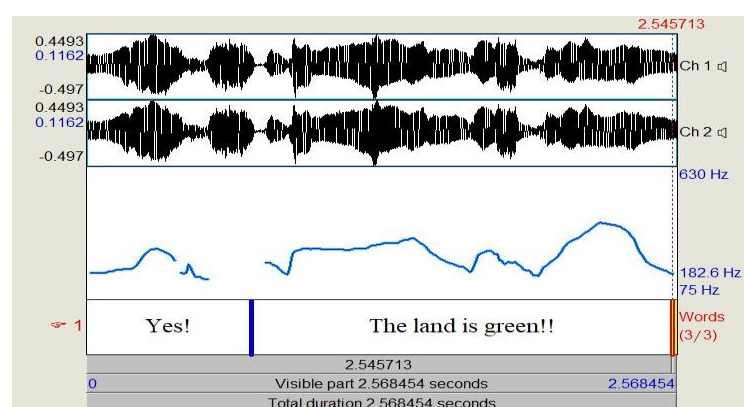


Figure 2: An Exclamation using the proclaiming tone

The figure presents the waveform of twotone units, with notable amplitude spikes at the exclamatory segments “Yes!” and “green!!” We can then categorically claim that displayed here are two emphatic expressions “Yes” and “The land is green”. The increase in intensity towards the end of the utterance suggests strong emotional emphasis which is typical of exclamations. The first tone unit “Yes!” begins with a mid-pitch (~150 Hz) and rises slightly. Subsequently, it drops sharply to a low pitch (~100 Hz or below), completing a falling pitch contour. This fall signifies affirmation which is characteristic of the proclaiming tone. The second, equally exclamatory, tone unit “The land is green!!” begins at a low-mid pitch, climbs slightly on “land” and “is,” and peaks at “green.” The tonic syllable, “green” shows a high pitch peak (~250 Hz) followed by a notable fall (~100 Hz). The Lengthening of the vowel in “green”, /i:/, also visible in the waveform and pitch contour, adds to its prosodic prominence. This final fall after the pitch peak on “green” confirms the use of a proclaiming tone at the end of the utterance. Thus, the wide pitch excursion in both “yes” and “green” reflects a strongly expressive proclaiming tone which is also orthographically reinforced by the punctuation mark (!!).

The observed intonation pattern reflects a strong declarative stance with emotional involvement and this is typical of exclamations that assert or affirm with conviction. From the waveform, we note the use of falling pitch at both tone unit boundaries, a high-low fall on both tonic syllables with extended duration and intensity, strong prosodic emphasis, and a clear closure, signaling a complete and confident statement. All of these are characteristic of the proclaiming tone on the one hand and the exclamatory sentence structure, on the other. This suggests that exclamatory structures in Nigerian VOs align with the tone structures described in DI.

Imperative Tone Units:

Imperative structures characteristically issue commands, directives or instructions. They typically do not include the subject of the sentence, thereby starting with the verbal element. In cases where utterances are used to perform indirect speech acts, they may overtly adopt another sentence structure while performing a different pragmatic function. For instance, a question can be used to express a request (e.g. Can you pass the salt, please?). Consequently, Figure 3 presents our sample imperative

utterance which, though declarative in structure, performs an imperative function.

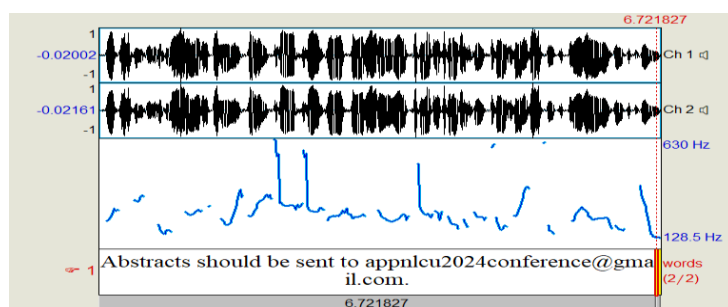


Figure 3: An Imperative Sentence

The waveform shows an utterance whose energetic articulation supports the commanding and declarative nature of its imperative function. The pitch (F0) movement has an initial rise on “Abstracts should be,” indicating slight prominence for engagement or topic setting. On the mid-section (“sent to appnlcu2024conference”), we observe a modulated but overall level pitch, with localized peaks on content words like “sent” and “conference,” reflecting emphasis. This is followed by a clear downward movement (falling tone) towards the end (“gmail.com”), typical of a proclaiming tone.

The fall to the lower pitch range at the end of the utterance is an acoustic marker of a proclaiming tone, signaling finality and authority. It can also be said to indicate assertion and closure. The observed proclaiming tone is characteristic of many imperatives in English, especially those issuing instructions or directives. Thus, the acoustic characteristics of the utterance, “*Abstracts should be sent to appnlcu2024conference@gmail.com*” are consistent with an imperative meant to assert authority and signal completeness of instruction. By implication, the tone pattern of imperatives in VOs in Nigerian broadcasts also aligns with DI specifications.

Intonation Choices on Referring Tones

Rise and fall-rise patterns signal referring tones and these introduce already known or shared or given information. These tones help the listener understand that the speaker is providing additional context,

elaboration, or background rather than making a primary assertion or asking a question. Referring tones are crucial for maintaining coherence and clarity in communication. Below are sample structures which employed the referring tone in the analysed data.

Polar questions

A polar question, also known as a yes-no question, is a type of question that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." These questions typically begin with an auxiliary verb such as "is," "are," "do," "does," "have," "has," "will" and "can". Figure 4 illustrates the polar question structure of *Have you heard of the power of one?*

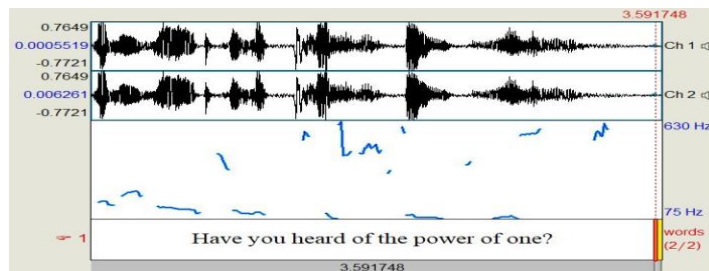


Figure 4: Polar Question

The waveform shows the utterance “*Have you heard of the power of one?*” whose pitch starts moderately low (75 Hz) and rises steadily towards the end, peaking on the word “one” (630 Hz) which is also the tonic syllable. This final pitch rise is a key acoustic feature of polar questions in English. Worthy of note is its moderate and measured rise which is suggestive of a referring tone - where the speaker assumes shared knowledge or gently prompts recall. In addition, the absence of abrupt pitch jumps or excessive pitch span suggests a less emphatic tone, also aligning with the referring tone type.

The referring tone is typically used to ask for confirmation of shared knowledge, to refer to something already mentioned or assumed to be known, or to suggest continuity or lead into further explanation. However, in this case, the speaker’s tone suggests an expectation of awareness or mild prompting, not strong interrogation. It can also be interpreted as alluding to a shared or previously introduced idea, gently

seeking affirmation or acknowledgment, all conveyed in a referring tone. Thus, again, the data suggests compliance in Nigerian VOs.

Polite Request

A polite request is a way of asking for something or asking someone to do something in a manner that is courteous and respectful. Polite requests often make use of referring tones. The utterance used to illustrate the use of referring tone in polite requests here performs what we can categorise as an indirect speech act. It is structurally a WH-question but pragmatically a request. WH-interrogatives favour proclaiming tones; however, to confirm Brazil's (1997) position on consenting intonation to context, the interrogative structure yields to the referring tone of polite requests as shown in Fig. 5.

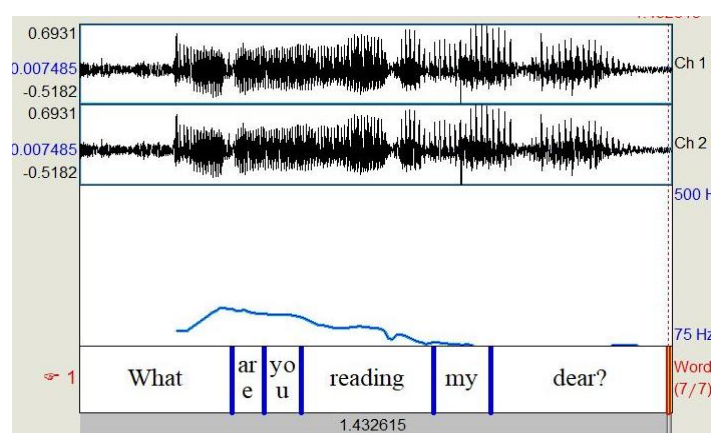


Figure 5: A Polite request using the referring tone

The waveform presents the polite request intonation structure of two adjacent tone units “What are you reading” and “my dear”. The proclaiming pattern covers the first tone unit which is traditionally a WH-interrogative structure, with the energy on “reading” and “dear,” suggesting prosodic prominence. The tonic syllable of the ultimate tone unit “dear” is consistent with a non-final or rising tone.

The pitch track shows that the question word “What” starts relatively low (~120 Hz) and rises sharply on “are you,” remaining fairly level on “reading” (~150–170 Hz) - (proclaiming tone). This pattern

continues on “my” but gives way to a noticeable rise at the end, i.e. on “dear,” (~230–250 Hz) marked by a sharp upturn in F0. This distinct rising pitch on “dear,” coupled with a slight lengthening, constitutes a classic hallmark of polite requests, characteristically affective and engaging rather than informational.

This utterance supports the pragmatic function of intonation, using the prosodic emphasis on the rightmost tonic syllable, the pitch and duration cues to convert the proclaiming tone of a WH-interrogative structure to a referring tone of polite requests. Thus, while WH-questions typically end in a falling tone when neutrally delivered, this particular interrogative uses a rising terminal, possibly due to the affectionate address (“my dear”) or to invite a response gently or persuasively. This aligns with pragmatic factors influencing intonation.

Friendly Greetings

Intonation for greetings in English typically involves a rising or falling pitch depending on the context and the type of greeting. Intonation can convey friendliness, enthusiasm, surprise, formality, or other emotions. Friendly/Informal Greetings employ the referring tone to convey warmth and friendliness. Fig. 5 below illustrates this pattern.

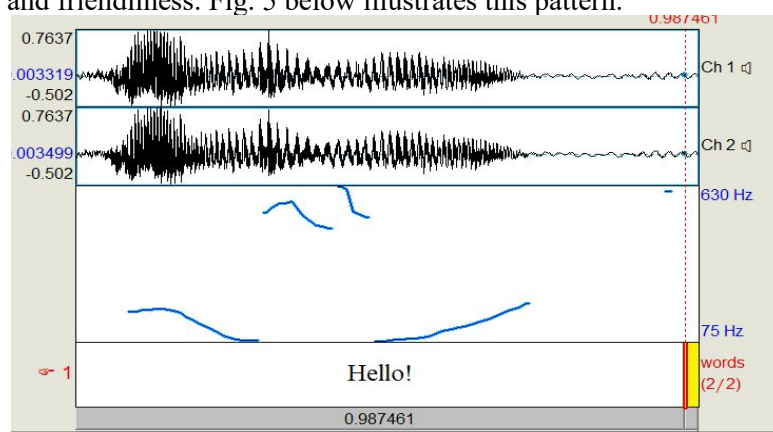


Fig. 5 Friendly Greeting

“Hello” is a greeting word often produced with varying patterns based on the social context. In the above waveform, however, we observe a strong initial burst, especially on the stressed syllable “Hel-”, followed

by a trailing, lower-energy segment on “-lo!”. The pitch of the former starts at a mid-high level and rises toward the latter. The observed rising intonation is a key characteristic of a referring tone, which is typical of polite greetings. In relation to duration, the utterance is made in approximately 0.98 seconds, indicating a moderately-paced delivery. The combined effect of the timing and referring tone align this polite greeting with the theoretical constructs of DI.

Discussion of Findings

The analyses in this study reveal that the intonation contours in Nigerian VOs closely mirror those of British and American English. This reinforces the idea that Nigerian English, particularly in broadcast contexts, exhibits systematic intonational behaviour reflective of communicative intent. Considering that proponents of DI based their assertions on practical discourse without prejudice to the disparity between native and non-native accents; this finding contrasts with Jowitt’s (2000) view that certain intonation patterns in Nigerian English usage differ in important respects from native-speaker systems, though lacking stability. However, this discord may be ignored on the ground that whereas DI relates tone choices to the real-time context of spontaneous speeches, VO renditions are rehearsed over time for accuracy.

Another inferential interpretation can be found in the personality and qualities of professional voice artists. Keenan(2024) rightly observed that professional voice actors often have experience in voice acting, possessing a range of voice qualities, perfect pronunciation and enunciation; and also employing proper pacing and natural articulateness. Considering this background, which was also confirmed in the analysed data, it can be inferred that VOs are designed to reflect the professionalism of the voice actors, adhering to target pronunciation standards. In the internet age where most of the analysed VOs are from online contents, the desire for international intelligibility in the global community can be a motivation for compliance. This study thus expands the work of Udofot (2004) by showing that intonation is not just present but functionally and contextually significant in media settings.

Our acoustic analysis also revealed that intonation in VOs in Nigerian broadcasts predominantly aligns with the theoretical construct of Discourse Intonation with regard to Declaratives, Interrogatives, Imperatives, Exclamatory Sentences, and Polite Requests. It also

revealed that both referring tones and proclaiming tones are employed in VOs in Nigerian broadcast. However, the high prevalence of proclaiming tones also suggests a strategic emphasis on product novelty and command.

The grammatical function of intonation (Wells 2006) was well documented as, across the analysed data, it enabled the listeners to identify clause boundaries, pauses, end of sentences, etc. and the prominence each exhibits. Though directives/imperatives were used sparingly in the data and mostly as indirect speech acts, it was noted that their voice quality and volume consistently signalled politeness in order to appeal to the listeners. The study thus confirmed the interface between sentence structure and pragmatic function, with the latter predominantly determining intonation pattern. Also confirmed was Wells' (2006) observation on the possibility of relocating the tonic syllable to an earlier syllable, in marked cases. Quantitatively, this study found that the declarative structure was the most common type of sentence used in VOs as they are used to establish facts, opinions or beliefs that the VO artist intends to communicate.

Conclusion

This study examined the phonological properties of intonation in Nigerian VO productions and its potential for contributing to the clarity, meaning, and emotional tone of speech. The findings reveal the structured use of pitch for communicative effect. It was further revealed that, just as obtains in real-life situations, intonation in VOs is used to distinguish the different types of sentences - statements, questions, commands and exclamation - one from another. Using the Discourse Intonation framework, it was shown that Nigerian VO artists employ intonation patterns purposefully to guide listener interpretation and engagement.

The study contributes to the growing body of empirical research on Nigerian English and media phonology by portraying Nigerian VO broadcasts as adhering to the norms of intonation usage. It thus enriches the Nigerian English corpus, and opens further research opportunities in intonation studies, particularly in emergent media like podcasting, social media ads, and virtual assistant voices. Against the backdrop of codification and standardisation, it also provides a description of the intonation of educated Nigerian English from the angle of voice-overs in broadcasts.

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