



Paragraph Intonation Patterns among Persian Speakers' English Interlanguage: The Diversity of Paratones in Focus

Ahmad R. Beigi Rizi

University of Isfahan, Iran

&

Abas Eslami Rasekh

University of Isfahan, Iran

Abstract: The way sentences are pronounced, express much more than just the information that are lexically encoded in the words. Studies of how prosody can signal the structure of spoken language are often motivated by practical applications, such as speech synthesis (Wichmann, 2014). This study investigates the intonation patterns in the Persian speakers' English Interlanguage and the possible differences in the intonation patterns, and whether this Interlanguage does or does not respond to the printed form of the text. It further examines whether the terms "paragraph" and "paratones" should be assumed as synonymous in Persian speakers' English Interlanguage. The results indicate that the intonation patterns among the Persian speakers' English Interlanguage are remarkably different from each other. The results further show that the readers usually do not respond to the printed form of the text in Persian English Interlanguage. The study concludes that the terms "paragraphs" and "paratones" are not synonymous in Persian speakers' English Interlanguage. Key words: Discourse intonation, paragraph intonation, pitch reset, topics, paratones.

1. Introduction

Research in discourse intonation and the teaching of English intonation and pronunciation has made evident the importance of suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm and intonation) in the production and comprehension of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Botinis *et al.*, 2001). It has also been discovered that students who are instructed on suprasegmental features can improve their learning of

intonation to a spontaneous production more effectively than those who receive instruction with only segmental contents (i.e. vowels and consonants) (Moyer, 1999). However, the teaching of English suprasegmentals is not a priority in most EFL programs in Iran or in language materials for instruction; there is rather, more emphasis on segmental aspects of the language.

According to Damar (2014), among suprasegmental features, intonation and stress are the crucial elements for language acquisition and learning. Intonation is defined as the variation of pitch when speaking - the “music” of a language and the important element of a good accent (p.228). Therefore, if the “colour” or “tone of voice” plays such a significant role in the comprehension and production of everyday oral communication, one can imagine the importance of intonation in special cases such as reading stories for children, stories broadcast by radio and TV and reading stories and texts in the classroom. Unfortunately, while significant research has been realized for many years on intonation in conversational and reading style, researchers have been really “frugal” in discussing the intonation of foreign language teachers. The ways in which expressions or sentences are pronounced, express much more than just the information that are lexically encoded in the words. Speech perception may add or shape other functions of the literal meaning of expressions. The interpretation of sentences may be influenced by intonational patterns. These patterns can interact with different layers of meaning. The current study signifies an assumption that all texts, including spoken or read

texts, have some kind of internal structure.

2. Review of the Literature

According to Wichmann (2002:24), if a sentence is read, it has a typical pitch pattern which starts high and ends low. This high pitch is known as a pitch ‘rest’, since it is thought to rest declination - the typical tendency of pitch to fall in the course of an utterance. According to Wichmann, most texts read aloud do not usually consist of single sentences or even lists of sentences. Sentences are normally grouped together in a meaningful way to create larger units. Speakers are able to signal by means of intonation the organization of units of discourse around a single topic. Observing this, Yule (1980) proposed the existence of the “paratone” - a prosodic unit which spans a topic or sub-topic in speech, roughly equivalent to a paragraph in writing. The way in which speakers use intonation to group sentences in a paragraph-like way is often referred to as “paragraph intonation” (p. 24).

Lehiste (1975) shows that the most common prosodic correlate of a new topic or “conceptual paragraph” is an extra high pitch reset. According to Tench (1990), pitch sequences usually begin with high key and, thus, tend to conflate with sequence chains (p. 277). Some researchers believe that high initial pitch signals the

beginning of a new paragraph intonation while low pitch, at least partly, signals the closure of the paragraph intonation. Brown *et al.* (1980) argue that the delimiting criteria for paragraph intonations are pause followed by an initial high pitch reset, though they also recognize that speakers signal the completion of an existing paragraph intonation by “dropping low in their pitch range” (pp. 25, 26). Lehiste (1975) examined whether such features also served as perceptual cues to discourse structure. She indicated that speakers started a sentence on a higher pitch at the beginning of a paragraph than if the same sentence occurred elsewhere in the paragraph or was spoken in isolation, and that this was used as a cue by listeners to identify the start of a new topic. Many researchers such as Brazil *et al.* (1980), Brown *et al.* (1980) and Yule (1980) made similar notes regarding the prosodic marking of beginning (pitch ‘rest’). “A new start is marked phonetically...by the speaker when speaking high in his pitch range and speaking loudly” (Brown *et al.*1980:26). We can get a sense of the nature of topic reset by comparing the pitch contours of a topic initial sentence and topic-medial sentence (Wichmann, 2002:24). The occurrence of paragraph intonation is by now well-documented (see Cruttenden

1997; Ford and Thompson 1996). Many researchers have shown that readers start a new paragraph by using among other things, an especially high pitch at the beginning of the first sentence. More recently this phenomenon has been referred to as “topic reset”, and in many studies the terms “topic” and “paragraph” are used interchangeably as if they were synonymous (Wichmann 2002:25)

According to Oliveira (2003), variation in fundamental frequency is generally considered to be a common device in discourse segmentation. On the one hand, new topics are usually initiated with a relatively expanded pitch range and concluded with a compressed one. Lehiste (1975, 1979, 1982), had also found that high fundamental frequency is often associated with the beginning of discourse units. Utterances that are located at the beginning of such units are perceived with statistically significant accuracy as paragraph-initial sentences. According to Nakajima & Allen (1992), there is a tendency for fundamental frequency to decrease in the course of the paragraphs. They observed that if there is no sudden topic change among the utterances, fundamental frequency tends, to be the same; so, an indication of topic change or discourse segmentation, which is a high fundamental frequency of

the first intonation unit in a paragraph, is the melodic discontinuity that occurs between two neighboring intonation units (Hirschberg, Nakatani & Grosz 1995; Swerts 1997). In a study by Hirschberg & Pierrehumbert (1986), in order to signal a hierarchical segmentation of discourse, systematic variation in pitch range was considered useful to be focused. They showed that an increase in pitch range indicates discourse boundaries, a reduction in the amount of final lowering at a potential boundary can indicate that no such boundary in fact can exist, so larger increases in pitch range mark major boundaries, whereas smaller increases indicate sub-segment boundaries.

“Topics” reflect linguistic units or paragraphs. In this respect, Wichmann (2002) opines that “paragraphs may reflect linguistic units but are essentially typographical units.” They are motivated in part by considerations which are aesthetic rather than linguistic: “short paragraphs provide convenient resting places during reading and aesthetically pleasing contrasts between print and white space” (Quirk et al.1985:1624). There is nonetheless an assumption that, to some extent at least, a paragraph will constitute a coherent textual unit of some kind:

“...a paragraph enables a writer to show that a

particular set of sentences should be considered as more closely related to each other, and that those grouped in one paragraph are to be seen as a whole in relation to those that are grouped in the paragraphs preceding and following (Quirk et al.1985, p.1624). Finally, there is an assumption that “no grammatical units extend beyond their limits” (Quirk et al.1985, p.1624).

Wichmann (2002) also shows to what extent therefore these grammatical, textual and aesthetic considerations may be satisfied at the same time. Firstly, it is usual that a printed paragraph is conterminous with a grammatical sentence. Secondly, the paragraph is usually motivated by some kind of semantic discontinuity, often signaled by adverbial phrases of time, place (e.g. “the next morning ...” “In another part of the town ...”) or by the introduction of a new character. In experiments (e.g. Stark 1988) designed to find out what motivates paragraphing, such surface cues play an important role. Stark found out that the cues that constitute paragraphs are the need to significantly break the coherence of time, space, characters, events and the world (Chafe, 1979:180). All these strands of discourse operate concurrently and overlapping; and a paragraph may be motivated by

a break in one, several or all of these strands. Paragraph breaks are not necessarily “correlative,” that is, even if one begins with a shift in the temporal coherence, it may not necessarily end for the same reason. The length of a paragraph is dictated mainly by aesthetic considerations. This means that a suitable coherence break will be chosen or ignored depending on how close it is to the previous paragraph break. Brown and Yule (1983) in their analysis of discourse, insist that a topic structure is not inherent in any text, but a construct of the speaker or the writer. “...it is speakers and writers who have topics, not texts” (p.68), but we do not always have independent access to speakers’ and writers’ intentions (p.30).

3. Empirical Aspects of Paragraph Intonation

According to Damar (2014), teaching suprasegmental features is one of the priorities of the language teaching curriculum (p.231). In order to teach suprasegmental features to students, language teachers need to be familiar with prosodic means for structuring paragraph intonation; in this respect Jasinskaja, Mayer & Schlangen (2004:158), believe that the two most important prosodic means for structuring paragraph intonation, are pitch range and pause duration. The pitch range is a property of an intonational

phrase and defines a subdivision of the total range of fundamental frequency variation of a given speaker.

The pitch range can vary in width (e.g. expanded, normal, compressed) and in position relative to the total range (e.g. high, mid, low). It is the reference frame for local tonal events like pitch accents and boundary tones. A high tone is realized higher in a phrase with expanded pitch range compared to a high tone in a phrase with compressed pitch range. Compressed pitch range signals the end of a paragraph or the closing of a (sub-) topic. (Jasinskaja, Mayer & Schlangen 2004:158).

Other studies have also shown that width and position of the pitch range correlate significantly with the depth of embedding of discourse units (Ayers, 1994, den Ouden et al., 2002; Mayer, 1999, Mohler & Mayer, 2001). On the other hand von Heusinger (1999) observes that phrase boundaries are marked by pauses, boundary tones and duration patterns. Pitch range controls the limits in which the contours are realized. One may increase one's pitch range for many reasons – for example, to project one's voice or to highlight the information in a particular phrase (p. 15).

Other results are reported for the duration of silent pauses. For

instance, Cole (2014:14) reports that

“Many of the studies just cited also report longer pauses at the end of a discourse unit than at the end of prosodic phrases that are medial in the discourse unit. Additional durational effects are observed in speech rate changes in the vicinity of a discourse boundary.”

Pauses are longer before units introducing new discourse topics (Jasinskaja, Mayer & Schlangen, 2004: 158). In a research on both native (L1) and L2 speech, silent pauses are an important feature to describe, characterize, and compare speech from different speakers performing in different speaker tasks (De Jong & Bosker 2013:17). Pauses may occur after a new topic has been established, in most cases a “transition phase” rather than a clear boundary. There are also clause boundaries marked differently in spontaneous speech – speakers often pause after, not before, a conjunction (Wichmann, 2014: 5).

Studies of how prosody can signal the structure of spoken language as opposed to written narrative are often motivated by practical applications, such as speech synthesis Wichmann (2014). According to Jasinskaja, Mayer & Schlangen (2004) the two most important prosodic means for structuring paragraph intonation, which are reported in numerous

studies, are pitch range and pause duration (p.158). Wichmann (2002) states that speakers have the ability to signal the organization of units of discourse around a topic by means of intonation. She defines this as “topic reset.” That is, readers start a new paragraph by using a high pitch at the beginning of the first sentence. Observing this, it can be true that the intonation patterns in the advanced Persian – speakers’ English Interlanguage are different and the readers treat paragraphs and topics differently.

Based on this hypothesis a teacher may consider the diversity of Paragraph Intonation Patterns (PIP) in reading short stories among the English Interlanguage (L2) of the Persian speakers (L1) and instruct a point concerning learning the English language and accordingly, teach the learners about the existence of such diversities when the learners are reading a text.

he goal of this study is to show evidence of the existence/nonexistence of similarities among Persian – speakers’ English Interlanguage (L2) paratones and also show some evidence that they treat paragraphs and topics differently.

3.1 Research questions

As highlighted above, Wichmann (2002) observes that speakers are able to signal the organization of units of discourse around a topic

by means of intonation. She defines this as topic reset; that is, readers start a new paragraph by using a high pitch at the beginning of the first sentence. Based on this proposition, we try to answer the following questions:

- (i) Are the intonation patterns in the Persian speakers' English interlanguage (L2) different from each other?
- (ii) Should we assume the terms paragraph and paratones as synonymous in Persian – speakers' English Interlanguage (L2)?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

A group of ten (10) advanced EFL speakers studying at the Department of Foreign Languages of Isfahan University were selected for the study. Their age ranged between 28 and 35. All the participants are males and have an advanced knowledge of English because they are all teaching advanced English. The participants were chosen because their voices were technically simple to analyze (Boersma & Weenink 2014) and the pitch range setting is the most important setting for pitch analysis in PRAAT version: (5.3.85, 2014). The standard range is from 75 to 500 Hertz, which means that the pitch analysis method will only find values between 75 and 500 Hz. The range that was set here is

shown to the right of the analysis window. According to the PRAAT manual help, for a male voice, it is better to set the floor to 75 Hz, and the ceiling to 300 Hz; for a female voice, the range must be set to 100-500 Hz instead and for creaky voice must set it much lower than 75 Hz. The floor of the pitch range is a technical requirement for the pitch analysis. If it is set too low, very fast F0 changes will be missed, and if it is set too high, very low F0 values will be missed. Therefore the frequency of females and children's speeches is not easy to analyze.

4.2. Materials

The material employed to collect the data consists of one passage. A Short Story extracted from Wichmann (2000, p. 31) (See Appendix A).

4.3. Data Collection

First the participants were trained for the whole data collection procedures then the participants were recorded while reading the short story in Appendix A. Before the recording, the participants were asked to read the text in Appendix A and when they were ready they were asked to read again and they were recorded.

4.4. Data Analysis

The participants were recorded in a quiet place with sound recorder software called the phonetics software PRAAT version: (5.3.85, 2014) installed on a laptop. This

software has a sound recorder and player which supports long audio file types in different formats and provides real time voice recording features; it can also save the recorded sounds as waveform (.wav) files (Format: PCM 22.050 kHz, 16 Bit, Mono) - the format for analyzing the sound with the phonetics software PRAAT version: (5.3.85, 2014) (Retrieved from: <http://www.praat.org> or <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>, which was installed on a personal computer).

4.4.1 Acoustic Analysis

The acoustic factor for data analysis is the fundamental frequency. Variation in fundamental frequency is generally considered to be a common device in discourse segmentation. In PRAAT, frequency is the number of vibration cycles per second. Although one can sometimes see the abbreviation *cps*, PRAAT always uses Hz (short for *Hertz*), which means the same. This article examines the systematic variation in pitch range to signal a hierarchical segmentation of discourse in the data. PRAAT is an advanced and flexible computer program with which speech may be analyzed, synthesized, and manipulated in order to derive many features' analysis such as waveform, duration, pitch, formant, intensity and spectral analysis, and create high-quality pictures for phonetics

research. To analyze the data, the recorded sounds were brought to the Praat Objects window with Open long sound file... from the Read menu. Then the Long Sound object can be viewed in a Long Sound Editor by choosing Long Sound: View. A Sound Editor window appears on the screen. The top half shows the waveform and the bottom half of this window contains a pitch contour, drawn as a blue line or as a sequence of blue dots. If the pitch contour cannot be seen, Show pitch can be chosen from the Pitch menu and then Zoom in from the view menu can be clicked on several times to zoom in the pitch contour.

4.4.2 Data Selection Criteria in the Short Story

When listening carefully to somebody reading a passage, one of the most striking aspects is the fact that there are many irregularities with respect to the fluency of the speech: the speaker is alternately speeding up and slowing down his/her speech production, using pauses and using variations in speech tempo. For the larger part, this will be the result of planning the discourse: the time necessary to adequately formulate what has to be told. Other than by adaptations for speaking styles and situational circumstances (number of listeners, reverberation, etc.), the speaker may create the possibility to plan the discourse and to

reorganize this discourse planning, if necessary, by means of a specific pausing strategy. On the one hand, the variation in fundamental frequency is generally considered to be a common device in discourse segmentation. On the other hand, new topics are usually initiated with a relatively expanded pitch range and concluded with a compressed one. Lehiste (1975, 1979, 1982), for example, found that high fundamental frequency is often associated with the beginning of discourse units. "Utterances that are located at the beginning of such units are perceived with statistically significant accuracy as paragraph-initial sentences." (Oliveira, 2003:1)

By the way, some studies have demonstrated that there is a tendency for fundamental frequency to decrease in the course of the paragraphs. Nakajima & Allen (1992) observed that if there is no abrupt topic shifting between utterances, fundamental frequency tends to be the same (see also Bruce 1982; Ladd 1988; Menn & Boyce 1982; Sluijter & Terken 1993; Thorsen 1985; Hirschberg & Pierrehumbert 1986; Silverman 1987). Therefore, what seems to be an indication of topic change or discourse segmentation, rather than simply a high fundamental frequency of the first intonation unit in a paragraph, is the melodic

discontinuity that occurs between two neighboring intonation units (Grosz & Hirschberg 1992; Hirschberg & Grosz 1992; Hirschberg, Nakatani & Grosz 1995; Swerts 1997; Hakoda & Sato 1980).

In this analysis, Wichmann's (2000) way of plotting the sentence onsets of the sentences was followed. The recorded data of the ten male participants were analyzed. The F0 of the first stressed syllable in each sentence was distinguished with PRAAT. In this way, the frequencies of the syllable peak of the accented syllables in all sentences were distinguished one by one and plotted on graphs (Appendix B).

4.4.3 Scoring Procedures

The graphs show the sentence beginnings in the English text, which are plotted in groups corresponding to printed paragraphs where the top part shows the sentence beginnings grouped according to orthographic paragraphs and the lower part re-grouped to indicate the spoken paragraphs. The numbers in the middle show the number of the printed paragraphs and the numbers at the bottom of the graph show the number of the sentences.

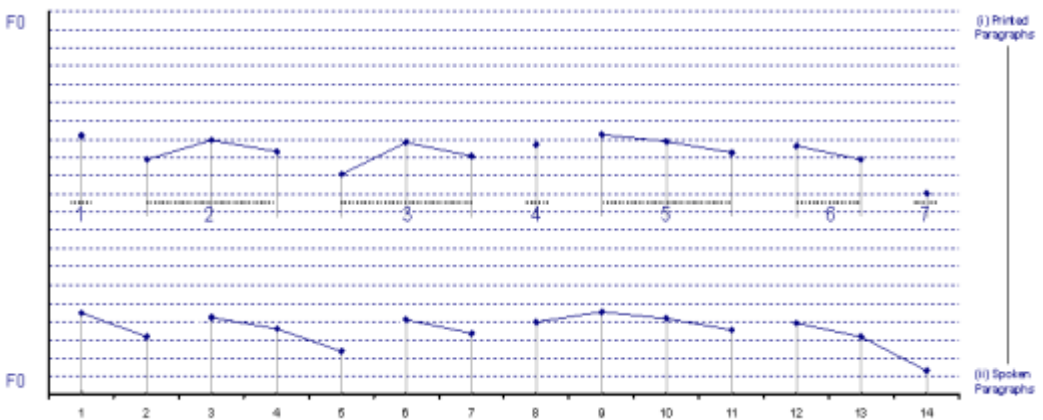
5. Results

After the acoustic analysis, the obtained fundamental frequencies were observed on the graphs (Appendix B). The graphs show

the sentence beginnings of the participants in the text, showing the intonation patterns in the Persian speakers' English interlanguage, which are plotted in groups corresponding to six printed paragraphs. The top part in each graph shows the sentence beginnings grouped according to orthographic paragraphs and the

lower part was re-grouped to indicate the spoken paragraphs. The numbers under the bold dotted lines in the middle of each graph show the number of the printed paragraphs and the numbers at the bottom of the graph show the number of the sentence.

Figure 1:



Notes: sentence beginnings in the text. (i) grouped according to orthographic paragraphs; (ii) re-grouped to indicate spoken paragraphs.

As the graphs (Appendix B) show, the readers do occasionally begin a sentence with an extra high pitch; and according to Wichmann (2000), these are the points where the listeners perceive a topic shift, but they are not consistent with printed paragraphs. Wichmann had also assumed each high onset as the

beginning of a “speech paragraph”.

The graphs in Appendix B also show that the readers frequently do not respond to the printed form of the text, and it seems they treat the paragraphs and the paratones differently. To prove this with the participants' Persian speakers' English Interlanguage see table 1. This table shows the number of the participant, the number of the printed paragraphs in the text, the number of the paratones, the number of the paratones each

participant has responded to and participant:
the printed paragraphs for each

Table 1: No. of paratones responded to the printed paragraphs

Participants	No. of printed paragraphs	No. of paratones	No. of paratones responded to the printed paragraphs
1	7	5	1
2	7	4	0
3	7	5	0
4	7	4	0
5	7	6	1
6	7	5	0
7	7	5	1
8	7	6	1
9	7	5	1
10	7	5	1

In table, 1 only 12% of the paratones responded to the printed paragraphs. It means 88% of paratones didn't respond to the printed paragraphs. The same result can be proved by table 2, which shows the number of the printed paragraphs on the first row, the number of the sentences on the second row among which the underlined ones in the gray dotted squares show the sentences at the beginning of each printed paragraph. The numbers on the third row show the number of times the sentence onsets have

been greater than or equal to 230 Hz among the participants, for example, sentence 1 which is the first sentence of paragraph No. 1 has been greater than or equal to 230 Hz for all the participants (10 times). This is obvious because it is the first sentence that all the participants started the text with. But it was not the same for the first sentences of paragraphs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. If the participants' paratones had responded to the printed paragraphs, all the numbers in the high group would have been 10.

Table 2: The number of times the sentence onset has been greater than or equal to 230 Hz among the participants in English Interlanguage

Paragraphs	1	2		3			4	5			6		7	
Sentences	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	3	4	<u>5</u>	6	7	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	10	11	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>
Sum of High	10	1	1	2	8	0	1	8	4	1	5	4	2	3

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results obtained from the study indicate that the intonation patterns among the Persian – speakers’ English Interlanguage (L2) are remarkably different from each other. A careful observation of the participants’ charts of Appendix B shows that the readers usually do not respond to the printed form of the text in English Interlanguage. So we can be sure that the terms paragraph and paratones are not synonymous in Persian – speakers’ English Interlanguage.

This study shows a diversity of produced paratones among the Persian – speakers’ English Interlanguage. One implication is that while the participants were reading the text aloud they probably focused on (or were concerned with) their comprehension of the text, the accuracy and fluency of their sound production, the speed of their production, their voice quality, the transfer of their sound to the recording device and their own abilities while being recorded. Whatever the important

reasons were, it is common knowledge that different participants have different paratones while reading the same text. This diversity seems to be an interesting phenomenon for different research areas connected to paragraph intonations and paratones. The EFL teachers can use this knowledge not to enforce their learners to create paratones similar to native speakers’ or their classroom audio files. They can also help learners develop their own paratones’ qualities based on their own accuracy and fluency of their sound production, the speed of their production, their voice quality, the transfer of their sound to the recording device and their own abilities while reading a text aloud or saying their own words or opinions. One way to accomplish such goal is to ask learners to listen to their own recorded voice considering the fact that there is a diversity of produced paratones among different learners.

By plotting the obtained fundamental frequencies and showing them on the graphs, it

was observed that none of the participants had corresponding paratones and none had responded to the printed form of the text in English Interlanguage. The reaction to the printed paragraphs by the participants' paratones is the next diversity among the participants. This can help curriculum designers to create more standards for composing educational paragraphs because after the composition of the paragraphs they might be read differently in different situations. This knowledge can also help EFL language teachers to focus on the diversity of paratones created by different learners in reading a text aloud and do not expect the learners to correspond to their paratones with the printed paragraphs.

This study has also some implications for the EFL mentors or teacher trainers. They can use the results of this study when teaching or giving advice to other EFL teachers at work to create classroom guidelines for teaching the students for reading a text aloud. This study has shown two kinds of diversities. One is the diversity of produced paratones by different participants while reading the same material and the second is the diversity of correspondence of paratones to the printed paragraphs among the participants. This range of diversities shows that although the teachers naturally believe that

the classroom written materials are the same, the participants have shown that the materials are not the same for them at the level of paratones. The diversity of the paratones and the diversity of the correspondence of paragraphs and paratones have reached an exciting stage in their development. As the researchers increase our connection with other branches of second language acquisition science, we continue to push the field forward, uncovering new insights and helping both researchers and practitioners reach a better understanding of the dynamic, socially situated, and cognitive processes of acquiring a second language through such diversities of paratones and their correspondence to the written paragraphs.

For further research, it is recommended that EFL mentors study the performance of the EFL teachers when teaching different aspects of the paratones and their guidelines to the learners by considering the fact that although the teachers naturally believe that the classroom written materials are the same, the materials are not the same for them at the level of paratones. It is also suggested that the curriculum designers study the effects of paratones of their audio materials on the language learners inside and outside of the classroom and focus on the written paragraphs of their

curriculum materials when the students or the EFL teachers are going to read them aloud.

In this study we can see that there are two layers of language: one is on the “printed paragraphs” and the other is the “paratones” of the readers. The expected direction was to ask the readers to read the text and create their paratones (paragraphs to paratones). Perhaps it is time to consider the different aspects of the diversity of paratones to paragraphs and evaluate the effects on the EFL curriculum designers, teachers and learners. However, one problem with the present study is its population of the participants.

They were only ten. A large population would indicate more precise results. The same problem exists for the number of sentences, paragraphs and the words in the text. There were only fourteen sentences, seven paragraphs and 225 words in this text. Moreover, sound-recording does not result in high quality computerized files in order to be analyzed by computer software. One can suppose a completely high quality computerized recording studio in which there is no environmental and distracting noise and advanced recording tools to help the researchers, record high quality voice files.

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About the Authors:

Ahmad R. Beigi is a Ph.D candidate in Second Language Acquisition at the University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran. His research interests include SLA, Discourse Analysis and EFL teacher education. E-mail: arbeigi@gmail.com

Dr. Abbas Eslami-Rasekh is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Esfahan University, Iran. He has taught graduate and undergraduate level courses in English as a second language for the last 10 years. His research interests include issues related to the education of EFL and EAP students; EAP needs assessment, discourse analysis, and translation. E-mail: abbasseslamirasekh@yahoo.com