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An Intonational Investigation Of Kuwaiti Questions

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Abstract

The present study invesigates the intonational patterns of three types of Kuwaiti questions extracted from free conversations conducted by fifteen (15) adult native speakers of this dialect . The results of this study show that Kuwaiti Yes/No questions , declarative questions, as well as WH-questions can be signalled by using simple tone groups that may be terminated with eleven (11) tones ranging from simple to complex , expressing different attitudes .

An Intonational Investigation Of Kuwaiti Questions

1 . Introduction

This work displays an attempt to examine and analyse the intonational patterns of three types of Kuwaiti questions , namely: Yes /No questions , declarative questions , and WH- questions .

Actually , previous studies dealing with the intonation of Gulf Arabic dialects are not quite many . In (1966) , Badawi carried out a study treating the intonation of Colloquial Riyadhi Arabic . His findings show that the speakers of this dialect make use of thirteen (13) tones , ten of which are called final and the other three tones are termed medial . He alleges that the use of each of these tones is conditioned by the context of conversation and the type of the grammatical structure that is utilized . Thus, he believes that the occurrence of these tones may take place within any one of the following contours : "interrupted" , "complete" , or "incomplete" , which reflect speech characteristics .

Ahmed (1987) conducted a study tackling the intonation of Zubairi Arabic . He (ibid:98) states that the internal structure of the tone group consists of one obligatory element (the nucleus) and three optional elements (the tail , head and prehead). He identified three (3) simple tones, two (2) complex ones and four (4) types of compound tones. Ahmed (ibid :203) mantains that "attitudinal as well as grammatical factors are present in varying degrees in each utterance and are both taken

as part of the total meaning which the intonation patterns convey in collaboration with the grammatical categories ."

In (1994) , Gatta analysed the intonation of Kuwaiti Arabic ststements . She came out with the conclusion that Kuwaiti speakers employ three (3) simple falling tones to terminate simple tone groups , whereas with compound tone groups they may use seven (7) compound –tone patterns to signal various attitudes .

II . Experimental procedure

II . I.Subjects

Fifteen (15) adult native Kuwaiti speakers, ten (10) females and five (5) males, ranging in age from eighteen (18) to twenty four (24) years old, participated in the recordings of the material of this study . None of these subjects reported any hearing or speaking impairment .

II.2. Material & Method

The material of the present work is a set of free conversations dealing with miscellaneous topics chosen by the subjects themselves who were totally ignorant of the aim behind the recording process .

In order to ensure a good quality of recordings , the experiment took place in the sound proof language laboratory of the English Department at the College of Education /Basrah University .

III. The Intonational Analysis of Kuwaiti Questions

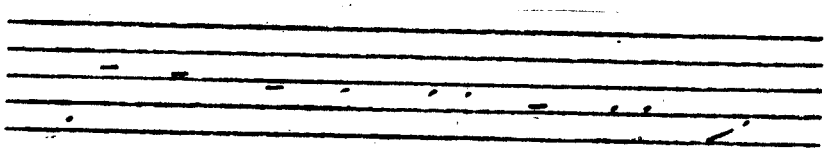
While studying the intonational patterns of the aforementioned types of Kuwaiti questions, one type of tone groups was identified at the end of which one nuclear tone tends to occur , namely : simple tone groups .

Starting with Yes/No questions , one can notice that this type pf Kuwaiti questions may have simple tone groups terminated with seven (7) different nuclear tones .[1]

A speaker seeking information and/or confirmation can use simple tone groups ending with a low rising (LR)tone , or a mid rising (MR) one, preceded by a low prehead and /or a descending head , as shown in the following examples :[2]

1.A.// tagdi-riin _tguuliin lina min humil Salab //

- can you tell us who are AlSalab ?



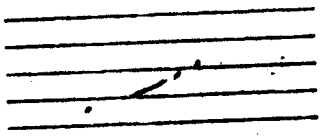
[1]See tables (1,2,and3) in Appendix I).

[2]The notation system used in transcribing the examples of this study is the (2L).

B.// ?ilsalab 9awaa ? il min9azla bruuHha //
- al-Salab are isolated families .

2.A.// kint 9iDuu fii naadil saalmijja //
- I was a member in Al-Salmyya club .

B.// ?is saalmijja //
- Al- Salmyya ?

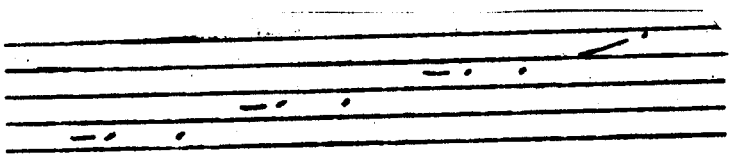


The first tone group , in the above examples , is started with an unstressed syllable having a very low pitch level , viz . the low prehead . Following this unstressed syllable is a series of stressed syllables in a smooth pattern; this pattern is termed the descending head . Terminating this tone group is a low rising tone that begins its movement from pitch level (no.1) and rises towards pitch level (no.2).[3] The rising movement of the preceding nuclear syllable is then continued by the tail . In fact , the tail of any tone group almost always takes on the same movement of the immediately preceding nucleus .

In the second example , the low prehead commences the pitch movement followed by a mid rising nuclear syllable which starts its movement from about pitch level (no.2) and ascends towards pitch level (no.3) ; the tail , then , proceed in completing this pitch movement.

Using a simple tone group that can be initiated with an ascending head and terminated with a high rising (HR) tone , a speaker can signal his bewilderment and surprise as shown below :

A.// _?inta maa –xaabir Tibaaji9 riiidzak //
you don't know your friend's manners ?



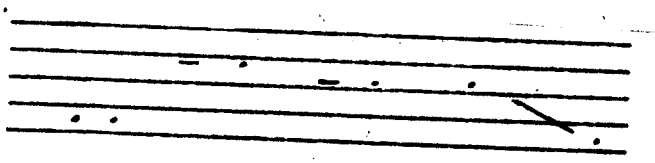
[3]See the diagramatic scale of pitch levels in Appendix B .

B.// bas huu maa ʧaan ʧiʤii//
-But he was not like that .

The above tone group is started with a set of stressed syllables . The latter are followed by unstressed syllables , both of which rise upwards in a smooth way making up what is called the ascending head . Ending this tone group is a high rising tone , which begins its movement on the nuclear syllable from pitch level (no.4) and moves upwards ; thereafter the tail completes this movement.

A Yes/No question tone group may end with a falling tone rather than a rising one .Actually , this is the case with most of Yes/No questions when a high degree of certainty is being reflected . The coming example exhibits a tone group that is initiated with a low prehead , and ended with a mid falling (MF) tone followed by a tail :

A.// ja9nii ¯kaanat - hoo ʃaat bàrii?a //
-That is to say , they were innocent quarrels ?

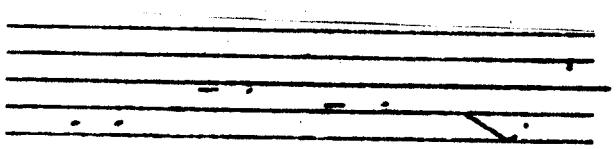


B.// haaʤii Kaanat Tabii9at Ii9bil jahaal //
-This was the nature of children's games.

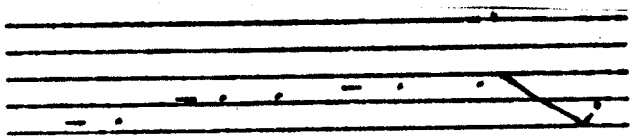
The nuclear syllable , in the preceding example , follows a low prehead and a descending head . The mid falling tone , which is carried by this nuclear syllable ,commences its movement from a point that lies within the region limited by pitch levels (no.2 and no.4) , and terminates at the low pitch level (no.1) .A tail , then , follows .

Seeking positive confirmation is an attitude that can be reflected by utilizing a tone group ending with a low falling –rising (LF-R) tone , or a mid a mid falling –rising (MF-R) one. Such tone groups can be started with a low prehead and/or a descending head , or only with an ascending head. The following two examples illustrate these situations :

1.A.// ja9nii ¯kaanail – waanajt mulkik //
-In other words , the pick-up was yours?



B.// ? imbala// – Yes.
2.A.// haaSil manTiGa ?asaasan kaanat SHara//
This region originally was a desert .
B.//_taqSid-? inha maa ¯kaanat maskuuna //
You mean , it was not inhabited ?

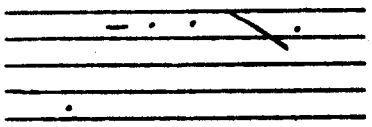


The above first example shows that the complex tone is composed of two elements , and this is the case with all complex tones . The first element of this complex tone initiates its movement from pitch level (no.2) and ends at pitch level (no.1) . Thereafter , the second element begins its rising movement from the same end point of the first element and moves upwards till it terminates at a point lower than the start point of the first element .

The first element of the complex tone , in the second example , commences its falling movement from about pitch level (no.3) and ends at the bottom of the pitch range . Then , the second element starts its rising movement and terminates at a point lower than the start point of the falling element.

When the speaker wishes to reflect an attitude that asks for an explanation or expects some more information to come , he may use a high falling –rising (HF-R) tone in a tone group that is initiated with a low prehead which is followed by a high head , as shown below :

A.// minhal jidiidaw minhal 9itiiga//
Some are new , and some are old
B.// maDaarisil nigra //
AL – Nigra schools?

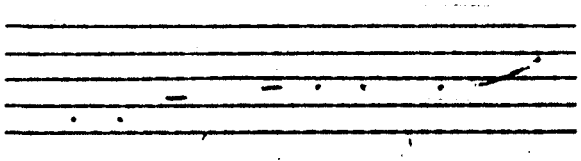


The above tone group is initiated with a low prehead followed by a high head , that is usually uttered with a high pitch . A high falling –rising

tone , ends the tone group . The first element of this tone starts falling from a point located between pitch levels (no.5 and no.4) and moves downwards till it terminates slightly below pitch level (no.4). Afterwards, the second element commences its rising movement from the same end point of the first element and rises upwards to a point which is lower than the start point of the falling element . Then , a tail continues the preceding pitch movement.

The tone groups of Kuwaiti declarative questions can be terminated with four (4) nuclear tones . An anxious speaker searching for information may start such tone groups with a low prehead followed by a descending head . A mid rising (MR) tone , then , can end this type of tone groups , as shown in the following examples :

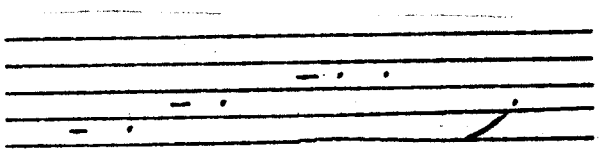
A.// ?iʃti _Galt-?ajjaamil diraasa //
-You worked during your study ?



B.// ?iʃtiGalt 9aamil bjawmijja θalaaθ danaaniir //
-I was employed as a worker with a daily wage of 3 dinars .

A low rising (LR) tone may end a tone group which can be initiated with an ascending head when the speaker is after a definite answer , or when he tries to be persuasive as in the following instance :

A .//laiʃ sammoha Sajhadil 9awaazim //
- Why did they call it Sayhadil Awazim ?
B.// _ jamkin-li?an jaskin hal fgara //
- perhaps , because it is inhabited by the poor people ?

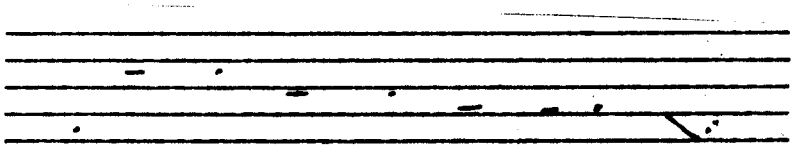


If the speaker expects his listener to agree with him and confirms his opinion , he either uses a low falling –rising (LF-R) tone or a mid falling – rising (MF-R)tone . Such tones can be utilized to terminate tone groups

which are started with either a low prehead and/or a descending head , or with an ascending head, these two situations are exemplified below :

I.A.// Hitta maaj-Siir ṭam-jiiz _ bajnil Talaba //

- So that students should not be distinguished ?

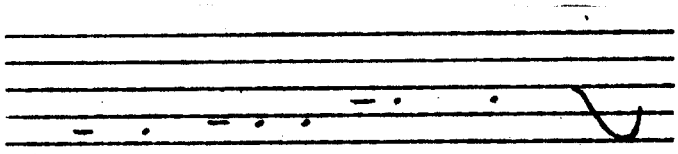


B.// muu bas tʃii //

- Not only that .

2.A.// _ Kintit – 9arifnii wiHna filk wajt//

- You used to know me while we were still in Kuwait ?



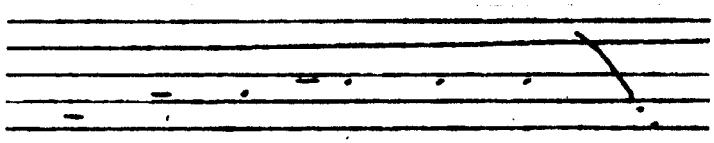
B.// sima9na fiitʃhnaak //

- We heard about you there .

Various attitudes can be signalled by using seven (7) tones that may terminate WH-questions tone groups. To express his interest in his listener's answer , a speaker may use a polite and friendly tone group that can be intiated by an ascending or a descending head . Usually , this type of tone groups is terminated with either a high low falling (HLF) tone or a low falling one , as shown below :

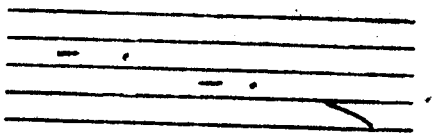
I.A.// _ min-kaan ma 9aakum fil farwaanijja//

- Who were with you in Al-Farwanyya ?



B.// kaan ma99aanna zaajid wislajmaan //
- There were Zayid and Sulayman .

2.A.// ʃamil-saa9al hiin //
- What is the time now ?

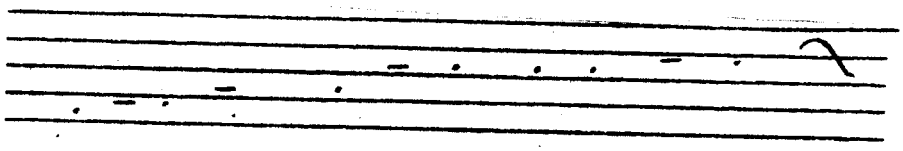


B.// 9aʃru rib9//
- It is ten fifteen .

In the above first example , the tone commences its movement on the nuclear syllable from a point above level (no.4) and terminates at pitch level (no.1) . On the other hand , the nuclear tone in the second example starts its falling movement from above or slightly below pitch level(no.2) and ends at the bottom of the pitch range .

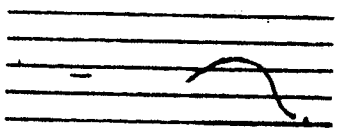
In order to indicate a serious reproach , or to reflect an angry attitude that is expressed in a polite manner , the speaker may use a high rising – falling (MR-F) tone or a mid rising – falling, (MR-F) tone, respectively . Such tone groups can be started with a low prehead followed by a descending head , or a mid head , as shown below :

I.A.// li_mutaʒ-ʒal maat farrig bajnil qaaf wil Gajn //
- Till when you won't be able to differentiate /q/ from /G/?



B.// jaxuuj Haawalt bas maa fii faajda //
- I tried , but in vain .

2.A.// 2ʃfiitʃ saakta //
- Why are you keeping silent ?



B.// ?anTirkumit si?Iuunii //

- I'm waiting for you to ask me .

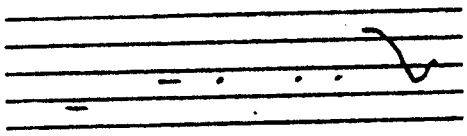
The above two tone groups display the use of two complex rising – falling tones . In the first tone group , the first element of the complex tone (HR-F) starts its movement from a point that is located about pitch level (no .4) and rises till it terminates at a point below pitch level (no.5) . Thereafter , the second element begins its falling movement from the end point of the first element and ends at a point near pitch level (no.3).

In the second tone group , the first element of the complex tone (MR-F) initiates its rising movement from about pitch level (no.2) and ascends until it terminates near pitch level (no.4) .After that the second element begins its movement from the end point of the rising element and ends at the bottom line .

A very interested and serious attitude can be expressed by using a WH- question tone group that is commenced with an ascending head , and ended with a high falling –rising (HF-R)tone , as shown in the following example:

A.//_wajn-kintum taskinuum //

- Where were you living ?



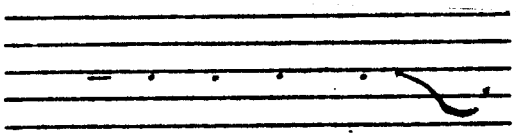
B.// ?aana min sakanat manTaGa faGiira ?isimha Sajhadil 9awaazim//

- I was one of the inhabitants of a poor region called Sayhadil Awazim .

A mid falling – rising (MF-R) tone may terminate tone groups that can be initiated with a mid head to denote an angry and almost impolite attitude , as illustrated below :

A.//2wajnak fii jaa 9abdalla//

- Where have you been Abd-Allah?



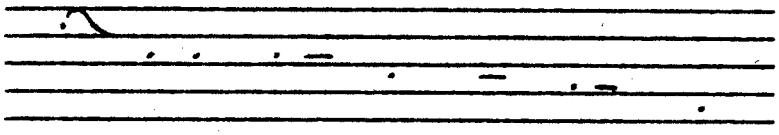
B.// kint ?atarajjag //

- I was having breakfast .

Expecting a satisfactory answer , a speaker may begin his tone group with a high prehead followed by a descending head , and then followed by a low falling-rising (LF-R) tone . The following example displays a case :

A.// zajn fahad -laj. sam moohal liSlajbijja //

- Well Fahad , Why did they call it AL-Šlaybiyya?



B.// sammooha tsiʃii li?an jakoir fiihal maaj lislajbii//

- They call it so , because it contains plenty of bitter water .

It is worth mentioning that in the above tone group the first unstressed syllable is termed the high prehead , since it is usually produced with a high pitch ; higher than that of a low prehead .

IV.Conclusions

In this study , the researcher attempted an investigation of the most common intonational patterns that are used with three types of Kwaiti questions reflecting different attitudes . Seven tones were identified as being characteristic of Yes/No tone groups . Four of these tones are simple (i.e.:LR, MR,HR,,and MF) ; whereas the other three tones are complex (i.e. :LF-R,MF-R, and HF-R) . With declarative questions , it was possible to distinguish four tones , two of which are simple (i.e.:MR)and the other ones are complex (i.e. :LF-R, and MF-R). As for WH-questions tone groups , the researcher was able to recognize seven tones ;two of them are simple (i.e.:HLF,and LF), and the rest are complex tones (i.e.:HR-F,MR-F,HF-R,MF-R,and LF-R).

These tones are by no means the only existing ones in Kuwaiti Arabic that can be utilized by native speakers with the aforementioned types of questions , but rather they are the most common ones taking into account the contextual factors that necessitate the use of a particular tone rather than another in signalling a certain attitude .

Appendices :

Appendix A :

The Arabic segmental symbols used in this study : [4]

1. The Vowels :

Symbol	Description
I	A short half-close front with lip spreading vowel.
ii	A long close front with lip spreading vowel.
a	A short half-open front unrounded vowel .
aa	A long open front unrounded vowel .
u	A short half-close back rounded vowel .
uu	A long close back rounded vowel .
oo	A long half-close to half –open back rounded vowel .

2 . The Consonants :

Symbol	Description
f	A voiceless labio –dental fricative .
ɵ	A voiceless interdental fricative .
ð	A voiced interdental fricative.
s	A voiceless denti-alveolar fricative.
S	A voiceless denti-alveolar emphatic fricative.
z	A voiced denti-alveolar fricative .
ʃ	A voiceless palato-alveolar fricative.
x	A voiceless velar fricative.
G	A voiced velar fricative.
H	A voiceless pharyngeal fricative.
9	A voiced pharyngeal fricative.
h	A glottal fricative.
b	A voiced bilabial plosive.
t	A voiceless denti-alveolar plosive.
T	A voiceless denti-alveolar velarized plosive.
d	A voiced denti-alveolar plosive.
D	A voiced denti-alveolar velarized plosive .
k	A voiceless velar plosive.
g	A voiced velar plosive.
q	A voiceless uvular plosive.

[4] After Ghalib (1977).

Symbol	Description
ʔ	A glottal plosive.
dʒ	A voiced palato – alveolar affricate.
tʃ	A voiceless palato – alveolar affricate.
m	A voiced bilabial nasal.
n	A voiced denti-alveolar nasal .
l	A voiced alveolar lateral.
r	A voiced alveolar flap.
w	A voiced labio- alveolar approximant.
j	A voiced palatal approximant

Appendix B:

A diagramatic scale showing the five pitch levels identified in normal non-emphatic speech :

5 ———— High
4 ———— Upper-Mid
3 ———— Mid
2 ———— Lower-Mid
1 ———— Low

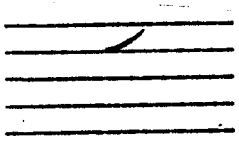
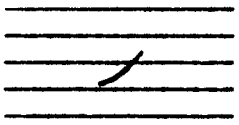
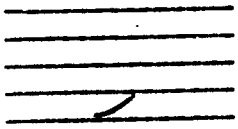
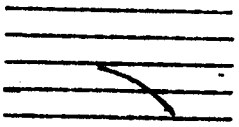
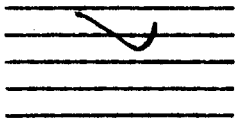
Appendix C:

Pitch notation (The marks are to the syllable//wajn//'where',in each case).

// wajn //	A low prehead (unmarked).
//°wajn //	A high prehead.
//¹wajn//	A high head
//2wajn //	A mid head
//¯wajn-wajn_wajn //	A descending head.
//_wajn-wajn¯wajn//	An ascending head
//^wajn //	The High Low Fall (HLF) .
//\wajn //	The Mid Fall (MF).
// ↓wajn //	The Low Fall(LF).
//↗wajn //	The High Rise (HR).
//↷wajn //	The Mid Rise (MR).
// ↗wajn //	The Low Rise (LR).
//↘wajn //	The High Fall -Rise (HF-R) .
//↘wajn //	The Mid Fall -Rise (MF-r).
//↘wajn //	The Low Fall-Rise (LF-R) .
//^wajn //	The High Rise –Fall(HR-f) .
//^wajn //	The Mid Rise –Fall(MR-f) .

Appendix D:

Table (1) shows the tonal shapes and the attitudinal implications of seven tones (simple & complex) that may end Kuwaiti –Yes/No question tone groups . The tonal shapes are of monosyllabic words

Nuclear Tone	Tonal Shape	Attitudinal Implications
HR		Bewilderment and surprise.
MR		Seeking information and/or confirmation.
LR		Seeking information and/or confirmation.
MF		Reflecting a high degree of certainity .
HF-R		Seeking explanation or expecting more information to come .

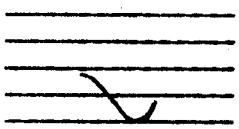
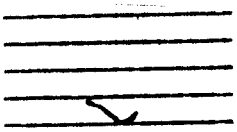
MF-R		Expecting positive confirmation .
LF-R		Expecting positive confirmation .

Table (2) shows the tonal shapes and the attitudinal implications of four tones (simple and complex)which may make up Kuwaiti declarative –question tone groups . The tonal shapes are of monosyllabic words :

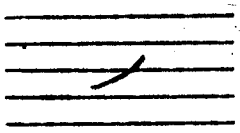
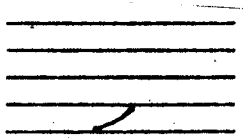
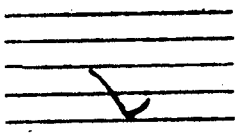
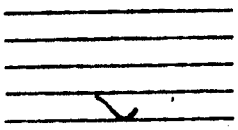
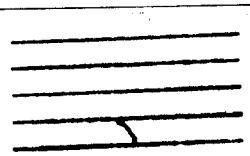
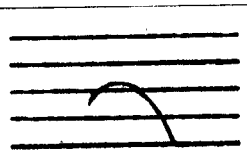
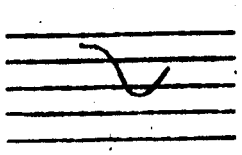
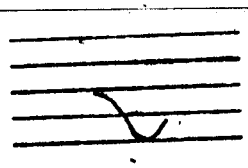
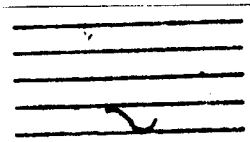
Nuclear Tone	Tonal Shape	Attitudinal Implications
MR		Anxiously expecting information
LR		Seeking a definite answer , or trying to be persuasive .
MF-R		Expecting agreement and confirmation
LF-R		Expecting agreement and confirmation

Table (3) shows the tonal shapes and the attitudinal implications of seven tones (simple and complex) which may terminate Kuwaiti WH-question tone groups . The tonal shapes are of monosyllabic words :

Nuclear Tone	Tonal Shape	Attitudinal Implications .
HLF		Polite and friendly.
LF		Polite and friendly.
HR-F		Seriously reproaching, or angry.
MR-F		Seriously reproaching, or angry.
HF-R		Serious and interested .
MF-R		Angry and almost impolite.
LF-R		Expecting a satisfactory answer .