Chapter 5   Conclusion

5.0. Introduction

The conclusions presented here are based on the analysis presented in Chapter 4. The research questions of this study were: firstly: what are the sentence-final intonation patterns in Cantonese Interrogatives?; secondly, what is the relationship between type of interrogatives and particular sentence-final intonation patterns?; and lastly, what are the possible variables that affect the sentence-final intonation patterns?

5.1. What Sentence-final Intonation Patterns are found in Spoken Cantonese?

The study found six types of sentence-final intonation patterns. Three of which occurred frequently, namely: Rising, Falling and Level Final Intonations, which accounted 94.42% of patterns found in the data. The other three intonation patterns found in the data were: Invisible, Center Rise-Fall and Fall-Rise and "Unidentified" final intonations. Five out of six types are confirmed and one type remains in the Unidentified category because only one example was found, and this pattern of sentence-final intonation could not be established.

5.2. The Relationship between Cantonese Interrogatives and Sentence-final Intonation Patterns.

Based on the findings, there is no evidence to suggest that there is a one-to-one relation between a Cantonese interrogative and a sentence-final intonation pattern. However, the findings show a tendency that more Rising Final Intonations were used when making Cantonese Yes/No, Rhetorical, Elliptical and Tag Interrogatives, than in Wh- and A-not-A Interrogatives where Falling Final Intonations tend to be used more frequently,

Disjunctive Interrogatives have an equal number of Rising and Falling Final Intonation (refer Table 5.1). Yes/No and Wh-Interrogatives are the two most commonly used interrogatives among the seven types of interrogatives. As the second most used interrogative, the findings suggest that, Wh-Interrogatives marked the highest average pitch, this can be due to the use of High-level SFPs, for example "ne1", but further study is needed to confirm this. While A-not-A Interrogatives marked the lowest average pitch among the interrogatives.

Table 5.1
Sentence-final Intonation Patterns and Average Highest/Lowest F0

Interrogative Types	Sentence-final intonation pattern contour (%)		Average pitch (hertz)	
	Rising	Falling	Highest	Lowest
1. Yes/No	50.70 (36)*	36.62 (26)	236.78	139.68
2. Wh-	28.79 (19)	43.94 (29)*	275.86*	143.36
3. Rhetorical	58.33 (21)*	16.67 (6)	235.10	138.83
4. A-not-A	17.39 (4)	56.52 (13)*	224.97	117.40*
5. Elliptical	83.33 (10)*	16.67 (2)	237.64	148.94
6. Tag	44.00 (11)*	12.00 (3)	192.16	202.20
7. Disjunctive	33.33 (1)	33.33 (1)	182.13	138.71

The choice of a sentence-final intonation in an interrogative is affected by many pragmatic factors. Pierrehumbert (1983:87) states that, "the choice among different melodic elements appears to be controlled by the attitudes of the speaker and the relation of his phrase to others in the discourse." The same interrogative can be shifted from one type of final intonation to another according to the intention or emotions of the speaker. The intention of the speaker will affect not only the type of final intonation being used but also the type of interrogative that is to be chosen. If the intention of the speaker is to ask for a decisive answer, "Positive" or "Negative", then most of the time, a Yes/No Interrogative will be used, but if an explanation or description is asked for by the speaker a Wh-Interrogative will then be chosen. Since types of interrogatives have everything to do with

the illocutionary force of the speaker, and it happens that the illocutionary force has a real close relation with the intonation, it is reasonable to say that there is a tight correspondence between the syntactic form and sentence-final intonation pattern.

5.3. Variables that Affect Sentence-final Intonation Patterns.

Five possible variables were suggest by the findings, and were categorized into two main factors that dealing with the language and the speakers.

5.3.1. Language

Mai (1998:237) presented the concept of Zero intonation in Cantonese, which means that when a utterance is in the Zero sentence-final intonation, the sentence-final intonation will then be determined by the sentence-final syllable tone. According to the findings, when an utterance is in Zero intonation as Mai (1998) suggested, the lexical tone of the syllables, mostly SFPs play a key role to influence the sentence-final intonation patterns. The choice of High-level and Low-falling toned SFPs such as "ne1" and "aa4" by the speakers have created the Wh-Interrogatives with Rising Final Intonation and Yes/No Interrogatives with Falling Final Intonation. Based on the findings of this study, the results support the conventional opinion of sentence-final intonation tends to be used more frequently with Wh-Interrogatives and the opposite happens to Yes/No Interrogatives.

Vowel Reduction refers to the phonological process of an unstressed vowel reduced to a shwa. An example from the data is, "m-e-i a-a", as / i / is reduced. The combination becomes "m-e-a-a", the audio file presents a breathy voice in the articulation of "m-e-a-a", which may not be detected in a pitch graph, so that a peculiar Invisible Final Intonation is found. The process of Consonant Deletion also plays a role in affecting the

sentence-final intonation patterns. Based on the data, the deletion of Unreleased Stop "t" (/ t ˥ /) in "saat aa" make four "a"s join together as a consequence. When it is pronounced, the "a-a-a-a" segment of the syllable showed an Invisible Final Intonation.

Tone Sandhi is thought to be able to affect the sentence-final pitch pattern. In the data, however, there was no case of tone sandhi found. Thus, no conclusions as to the effect of Cantonese tone sandhi on the sentence-final pitch pattern could be drawn based on this study. Nontheless, this study chose another means to examine the effect of the Cantonese tone sandhi phenomenon on sentence-final pitch pattern. This was focusing on two High-level tones /55/ occuring consecutively. The findings indicate that there was evidence of sentence-final pitch pattern changes. The reason can be due to easing articulation difficulties.

Right Dislocation syntax in Cantonese is evident and can affect the sentence-final intonation pattern. But the Cantonese Right Dislocation syntax is a phenomenon that due to the customary use of the language by changing the word order to affect the sentence-final intonation patterns.

5.3.2. The Speaker

Intonation in speech is mostly associated with the intention and emotions of the speaker. It is the wish of the speaker, that intonation has an ultimate influence on the lexical tone. The sentence-final intonation patterns which are determined by the speaker are done so in a fully conscious manner. Emphatically, it is the speaker's wishes or its manners of articulation (like breathing) to determine whether the sentence-final intonation rises or falls or something else. The emotions and intentions of the speakers will also affect the final intonation used. For example, a common way of greeting, the Phatic Interrogative, a Falling Final Intonation associated with a Yes/No Interrogative shows this effect.

5.3.3. Suggestion for Futher Research

Of all the factors mentioned above, the use of SFPs to influence the sentence-final intonation pattern was the most frequently evidenced (chiefly seen in Yes/No and Wh-Interrogatives). The situation raises the question as to whether it is just a coincidence that the High-level tone SFP is chosen and attached to a Yes/No Interrogative (the opposite to Wh-Interrogatives) or whether, in order to comply with the convention that a Yes/No Interrogative is supposed to end with a final rise, the High-level tone SFP is intentionally chosen? More research need to be carried out before a conclusion can be reached.

5.4. Conclusion

The differences in world cultures, values and differences are such that trying to identify universally the meanings of different intonation patterns is far too problematic an undertaking. A language is not simply a set of rules or codes for making utterances: it also involves a lot of human psychological factors and paralinguistics. Based on observation, native language users can use their language by following their intuition; for example, the lexical tone for "father" (爸爸) in Cantonese is "baa1 baa1" High-level /55/. A native Cantonese speaker seems to be able to adjust tone changes from two juxtaposed High-level Tones (/55/) to other tone levels, automatically or naturally. In casual speech "father" can also be pronounced as either "baa6 baa1" or "baa6 baa2" or "baa6 baa6"; consequently, the tone changes for "baa1" on the left are (1 and 6) while "baa1" on the right are (1, 2 and 6). It should be stressed, however, that the level of tone changes is neither set nor taught in schools, but the changes which speakers make remain understandable and acceptable to other native language users.

Intonation of an utterance is a part of its deep structure of meanings. Understanding it fully is a much more complicated process because it does not just depend upon a good literal command of the language in terms of knowing the meanings of words and phrases. However, there is also the need for a pragmatic understanding of the context in which those words or phrases are made and which may, therefore, give a deeper meaning beyond the purely literal. Although it has been asserted that some intonations themselves represent certain connotative meanings, it must also be noted that it is different from one culture to another culture. They have never been set in stone. There are certainly similarities of connotative meanings in intonations that we can find from other languages in the world, but these will have to wait for future studies.