

Prosodic Means to Turn a Positive Interrogative into a Negative Assertive Force

Bettina Braun (University of Konstanz)

Abstract:

Rhetorical questions have the surface form of an interrogative but function to make a point—often with opposite polarity to what was apparently asked (e.g., *Wer studiert denn Algebra?* ‘Who studies algebra?’ – intended answer: nobody). In this talk, I present production and perception evidence demonstrating the role of prosody in distinguishing rhetorical from information-seeking questions, with a focus on positive questions that convey a negative assertion.

Prosody, Morphosyntax and Meaning in German and English Negative Polar Questions

Anja Arnhold (University of Alberta)

Abstract:

This talk presents joint work with Bettina Braun and Maribel Romero on how speakers convey their bias toward a positive or negative answer in negative polar questions. In parallel production experiments on German and Canadian English, we examined whether speakers asked negative polar questions to confirm their own bias (e.g., *Aren't you a vegetarian?* when they believe the answer is yes) or to confront an implication to the contrary.

Speakers chose between two morphosyntactic structures: high negation questions (e.g., *Aren't you a vegetarian? / Bist du nicht ein Vegetarier?*) and low negation questions (e.g., *Are you not a vegetarian? / Bist du kein Vegetarier?*). We analyzed both the syntactic form selected and the prosodic realization.

Results showed a different division of labor between prosody and syntax across languages. In English, prosody played a key role in indicating whose bias was being checked, particularly through boundary tones and accentuation of the auxiliary. In German, morphosyntactic choice strongly reflected bias: high negation for speaker bias, low negation for addressee implication. Each structure had a characteristic prosodic pattern. Notably, *kein(e)* in low negation questions was typically accented with a rising tone, while *nicht* in high negation questions was usually unaccented—suggesting that the prosodic prominence of negation results from the interaction of multiple factors.

Prosody of Negation in Drenjongke (Bhutia), a Tibeto-Burman Language

Seunghun J. Lee (International Christian University & University of Venda)

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Abstract:

This talk examines the prosodic realization of negative expressions in Drenjongke, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Sikkim, India. Drenjongke has at least five negative allomorphs, varying with tense and aspect (Yliniemi 2019: 386–391). Following Prieto et al. (2020), our focus is on prosodic cues associated with denial and rejection.

Drenjongke is a verb-final language in which negative allomorphs appear pre- or post-verbally. The preverbal allomorph *[man]* and postverbal *[ma]* both induce a pitch rise on the following verb. Interestingly, the future negative *[mi]* does not trigger pitch raising. In rejection contexts, a pitch plateau is observed.

We conclude by offering a typological overview of negation morphology and its prosodic correlates across Tibeto-Burman languages.