

## The intonation of Yes/No Questions in Buenos Aires Spanish

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In Spanish each phrase, depending on its use, corresponds to one of a variety of intonation patterns. A phrase like “Mariano viene mañana” can be affirmative, interrogative or exclamative depending the intonation pattern that the speaker uses. It is the melody of the intonation that distinguishes these phrases.

Recent studies (Prieto et al. 1996, 1998; Sosa 1999, Face 1999) have sought to capture the intonational structure of declaratives using the autosegmental-metrical model of intonation proposed by Pierrehumbert (1980). However, only a few studies have sought to capture the intonational structure of interrogatives. Of interest for the purposes of the present study is the intonation pattern of yes/no questions. This type of question (e.g. ¿María viene mañana?) has typically been characterized by a rising terminal intonation pattern (Navarro Tomas 1944; Quilis 1993; Alcoba and Murillo 1998). This is in contrast to pronominal questions, which are characterized by a falling terminal intonation pattern.

While many scholars have reported a rising terminal intonation in yes/no questions in Spanish, these findings are limited almost exclusively to Castilian Spanish. Sosa (1999) reports, however, that yes/no questions in Venezuelan Spanish present a falling terminal intonation pattern, similar to that generally associated with declaratives and pronominal questions. Sosa’s (1999) findings point out the necessity of experimental studies in other dialects of Spanish in order to determine the variety of intonational patterns which Spanish speakers have at their disposal.

In response to the need for experimental studies of intonation patterns in various Spanish dialects, the present study examines the intonation of yes/no questions in the Spanish of Buenos Aires using principles and experimental methods derived primarily from Pierrehumbert (1980) and Beckman and Pierrehumbert (1986). The present study demonstrates that Buenos Aires Spanish employs both intonational patterns mentioned above for yes/no questions: 1) a rising terminal intonation pattern, as has been found in Castilian Spanish, and 2) a falling terminal intonation pattern, as found by Sosa (1999) for Venezuelan yes/no questions. In addition, the present study shows that the terminal intonation pattern is not the only way to intonationally differentiate the yes/no question from a declarative in Spanish. It is shown that phrase accents have a fundamental part in marking this distinction as well. By considering the intonation patterns of yes/no questions in Buenos Aires Spanish, the present study contributes to our understanding of dialectal differences in Spanish intonation. In addition, the finding of two distinct terminal intonation patterns in Buenos Aires yes/no questions has theoretical implications that will be considered in relationship to the experimental results.

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