Icelandic question intonation

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Background:

  Previous literature mostly based on introspective data
  The default boundary tone for all sentence types (declaratives, polar questions, wh-questions) is L%.
  Nuclear pitch accent types distinguish between sentence types.
  Declaratives: L+H* nuclear pitch accent; L+H L% nuclear contour
  Polar questions: L+H nuclear pitch accent; L+H L% nuclear contour
  Wh-questions: the typical contour starts high, followed by a H* nuclear pitch accent; H* L% nuclear tune

Hypotheses (question intonation):

1. Both polar and wh-questions are typically produced with an intonation contour falling to L%.
2. The two question types differ in nuclear pitch accent type. Specifically, polar questions are typically realized with a late rise (L*+H), while wh-questions are typically realized with a monotonal H* pitch accent.
3. The typical contour associated with wh-questions starts high.

Production experiment:

• Materials:
  • targets: 21 wh-interrogatives and 21 polar interrogatives, with contexts;
  • 34 fillers (mostly exclamatives), 3 practice items; also tested in the same experiment: same number of wh- and polar questions intended as rhetorical questions (Dehé & Braun to appear)
• Procedure:
  • two experimental lists; each list contained both polar and wh-questions (and both illocution types; illocution type manipulated within-subjects)
  • visual display of the context, read carefully by participants, target on button press (self-paced); production as naturally as possible in given context
• Participants: 17 native speakers of Icelandic (age: 22-32, average = 26.9; 6 male, 11 female)
• Data treatment: 317 items analyzed: 155 polar, 162 wh; annotation following previous intonational analyses of Icelandic in the AM framework (e.g., Dehé 2010, 2018); done by first author, 15% annotated by second author, agreement 84.4%, kappa 0.81 (Cohen 1960)

Results and discussion:

H1. Boundary tones: The default in both polar and wh-questions is L%.

H2. Polar and wh-questions differ in nuclear pitch accent types:
  • Polar questions: mostly bitonal (rising);
  • mostly late rise, but more early rises in polar questions than hypothesized
  • Wh-questions: mostly monotonal high, followed by early rise

H3. The typical contour associated with wh-questions starts high (H* or %H).

Example contours:

- polar (vp28, female): Who reads novels?
- wh (speaker vp11, female): Who eats mold cheese?