

Is there a prosodic accommodation in the final falling contours of Pola Siero's absolute interrogatives?

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ONOMÁZEIN | Special Issue XI – Current Approaches to Romanian and Spanish Intonation: 140-150
DOI: 10.7764/onomazein.ne11.02
ISSN: 0718-5758



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Received: March 2019
Accepted: December 2019

**Special
Issue**
– XI –

Current
Approaches
to Romanian
and Spanish
Intonation

2022

Abstract¹

This paper investigates the final Pola de Siero's contours in absolute interrogatives. We carried out 24 surveys of situations using the methodology of *Interactive Atlas of Spanish Intonation*, with examples of various intonation contours, which are employed to encode different semantic nuances. The 24 subjects of our corpus were selected taking into account three social variables (*age, education and sex*)². We aim to address one question in this study: is there a correlation between social factors and the final contours of Pola de Siero in absolute interrogatives? We found that 21 informants in our survey show a tendency towards the final falling contours in absolute interrogatives, a salient feature of northern Spanish, which contrasts with the final rises in Standard Peninsular Spanish (three informants). As a consequence of this, we could say that this prosodic feature is a relevant one in our corpus and that it seems there is not an Asturian prosodic accommodation in absolute interrogatives; this pattern is not acquired by Spanish speakers who have family in Burgos or Valladolid.

Keywords: information structure; nuclear constituent; psycholinguistic IS model.

1 This investigation was possible due to the grant "Severo Ochoa" (BP 14-069), FICYT (*Fundación para el Fomento en Asturias de la Investigación Científica Aplicada y la Tecnología*) and it is part of my PhD. I would like to thank to Alina-Viorela Prelipcean and Jonathan Ure for the corrections.

2 Cf. Bleorțu, 2014 and 2015a.

1. Previous studies

Since 1986, when Canellada published a study on Asturian intonation, there were many works published on this theme. We should, of course, mention the investigations carried out by the group *AMPER-Astur*, coordinated by Muñiz Cachón. As regards the subject of our investigation (sociolinguistics), two are of interest to us.

The first of these is a paper from 2017, in which a researcher from the University of Oviedo focuses on the vowel duration of Mieres, in controlled contexts, within the framework of *AMPER (El Atlas Multimedia de Prosodia del Espacio Románico)*. Muñiz's investigation being composed of a collection of sentences uttered in Asturian and Spanish by both men and women; in this investigation the importance of the duration in the discrimination of sentential modalities is confirmed.

Secondly, a work that is currently under review (*Prosody: a Feature of Languages or a Feature of Speakers? Asturian and Castilian in the center of Asturias*), where this linguist, of the University of Oviedo, reaches the conclusion that the speakers are not aware of the differences between Asturian and Castilian prosody and, consequently, schooling in Spanish seems not to influence the Asturian prosody, as preserved in Asturias.

Additionally, outside the *Amper-Astur* framework, another study which must be pointed out is the one made by Troncoso-Ruiz and Elordieta (2017), where the intonation of the Andalusian population settled in Asturias is investigated; it is concluded that the presence of the falling contours in the absolute questions in all informants is due to the process of linguistic accommodation, which seems to play a very important role in all speakers who come into contact with the Asturian prosody.

Apart from these works, there are others that refer to the particular intonation of the Asturian (Canellada, 1986; García Arias, 1985; Andrés, 2008); still further, there are more which focus on other prosodic aspects such as the study of Asturian vowels (Canellada, 1989; Viejo, 2014, forthcoming).

Finally, we must mention a work carried out by Bleorțu (2015b) and a methodology proposal for the sociolinguistic study of the intonation of Bleorțu and Cuevas Alonso (2017). In the first work, the Romanian researcher of the University Zurich concludes that there are no sociolinguistic differences in terms of the results obtained from the autosegmental-metrical model and the survey of situations used by Pilar Prieto (2001); while, in the second work, a methodology similar to that applied by Bleorțu in her 2015 work is proposed. All these works helped to strengthen the ideas of the present investigation.

2. The Pola Siero's linguistic situation

Pola de Siero is a northern Spanish community where people use two languages: the Asturian and the Spanish languages. There is a social diglossic bilingualism³ because Asturian is the «low» language which speakers use with family and friends, while Spanish language is employed in administration, education, formal communication, etc.

In a linguistic situation such as this, every speaker is subject to a linguistic accommodation process when he/she communicates with other people. In other words, in a linguistic situation as Pola de Siero, each person accommodates his/her speech according to the person with whom he/she communicates. It is true that some individuals accommodate their form of speech more than others. It is extremely likely that we all make this linguistic accommodation when communicating with others. In most cases, this is due to the fact that we want to be part of a social group and, as a consequence, we try to build a «new» linguistic identity when doing so.

For these reasons it is important, when we study a community such as Pola de Siero, to take into account not only the morphosyntactic and lexical variation, but also the prosodic one. This latter is supposed to reflect more the origin ('stemming'⁴) of our informants than the other two, which demonstrate the discursive purpose ('heading')⁵ of the participants.

As a consequence, we decided to dedicate this investigation to a prosodic aspect: the contours of the absolute interrogatives in Pola de Siero. So, if we take into account the idea of existence of the northern dialectal continuum (Penny, 2000⁶; Zamora Salamanca, 2009; Bleorțu and Cuevas, 2016), we can predict the existence of two prosodic patterns: (1) firstly, the final rises of Standard Spanish absolute interrogatives; and (2) secondly, the final falling contours of Asturian language.

3 For more information see Andrés, 1998, 2002; Barnes, 2013; Bleorțu, 2021.

4 The concepts of 'stemming' and 'heading' appear in Kabatek (2017).

5 Kabatek (2000) in a study on contemporary Galician shows that there exists a prosodic continuum with a strong correlation to the L1 (Spanish or Galician) and some correlation with the communicative situation.

6 Regarding this theme, Penny affirms: "There are no dialectal boundaries to be observed as one progressively examines the linguistic varieties that occupy the third of the Peninsula. [...] All other divisions can only be arbitrary, since they will not coincide with any observable linguistic reality. In particular, terms like *Galician*, *Leonese*, *Castilian*, etc., when used to distinguish one segment of the continuum from the rest, are motivated entirely by politico-historical considerations, such as where administrative boundaries and other frontiers now fall or once fell. They are at best a necessary convenience (since we often need to refer to portions of what is an amorphous reality), but at worst there are a dangerous fiction (since they suggest linguistic boundaries where none exist)" (Penny, 2000: 80).

3. Methodology

3.1. Survey of situations

Our corpus was obtained between January and December of 2014. It consists of recordings of a survey of situations, which contains examples of a wide and varried range of utterances (almost 70 contours). This survey is that which was employed by Prieto (2001) and is an inductive method in which the researcher presents to the participants several situations (for example, the subject has to imagine that she/he comes home and does not see her/his mother. She/he has to shout out for her). Then she asks the subjects to respond accordingly.

The phrases of the corpus were organized as follows:

- *yes/-no* questions,
- *wh*-questions,
- echo questions,
- imperatives,
- vocatives.

The interviews were recorded at a sample rate of 44, 100 Hertz (Hz); for this we employed the software Audacity, a microphone and a PC.

3.2. Participants

For this study, we used 24 speakers who grew up in Pola de Siero, which formed a balanced sample: they were equally represented in terms of gender, age and education. The participants were grouped as shown in table 1:

TABLE 1

Participants grouping

	TEENAGERS 18-37		MIDDLE-AGED 38-57		ADULTS > 58	
4 to 10 years of education	2 W	2 M	2 W	2 M	2 W	2 M
More than 13 years of education	2 W	2 M	2 W	2 M	2 W	2 M

3.3. ToBi System (Tones and Break System)

For describing prosodic phenomena from our corpus we use Sp_ToBi (Tones and Break Indices), a system of tone labeling in Spanish, based on the autosegmental-metrical model devel-

oped by Pierrehumbert (1980)⁷. The annotations of our corpus include four levels of analysis and four tiers: (i) first of all, *an orthographic level*, where we write the phrases of our corpus; (ii) secondly, *a phonetic tier*, with the phonetic transcription of the previous words; (iii) thirdly, *a tonal level*, where we take into account the pitch accents, phrase accents and boundary tones; and, finally, (iv) *a break index*, where we indicate the junction between the words (for example, 0: no word boundary; 4: full intonational boundary, etc.).

As far as the analysis of our corpus, the sentences of the survey were analyzed with Praat. For the annotation of our corpus is concerned, we have used the proposal of Estebas Vilaplana and Prieto (2008); hence, we have considered the following tonal accents: (1) *monotonal accents* (L*; H*), (2) *bitonal accents* (L+H*; L+>H*; L*+H; H+L) and (3) *final boundary tones* (L%; H%; M%; HH%; LH%; HL%; LHL%).

4. The absolute interrogatives

In the studies carried out, the final contour of absolute interrogatives is different in Standard Spanish compared to Asturian: it can be described as a valley followed by a high rising boundary tone, if we take into consideration the data from the Interactive Atlas of Spanish Intonation and AMPER (Atlas Multimedia del Espacio Románico)⁸. On the other hand, the Asturian interrogative shows a high tone followed by a falling contour as in Galicia, Cantabria, etc. The presence of one or another pattern has been related to several factors, such as the urban/rural area, age, etc.

5. Results

The Asturian model was evident in 21 subjects, whereas the Castilian pattern was only evident in three subjects. The following figures illustrate some examples of the final contours of the absolute interrogatives in Pola de Siero:

Therefore, in our corpus, we find the Spanish contour and the Asturian contour. It seems that there are individual differences between the 24 participants of our study.

The cause of the existence of these two patterns in Pola de Siero had to be not only investigated in the surveys of the three subjects, but also in a series of social variables: thus, it seems that there is no correlation between gender, age, educational attainment and the

7 Cf. Estebas Vilaplana and Prieto (2008).

8 See, for example, Díaz Gómez et al., 2006; Muñiz Cachón et al., 2006; Fernández Rei et al., 2005a and 2005b; Elejabeitia et al., 2007, 2008; Bleorțu y Cuevas, 2016, etc.

FIGURE 1

The Asturian falling contour in absolute interrogatives (*Perdón, ¿se puede?* 'Sorry, can I?')

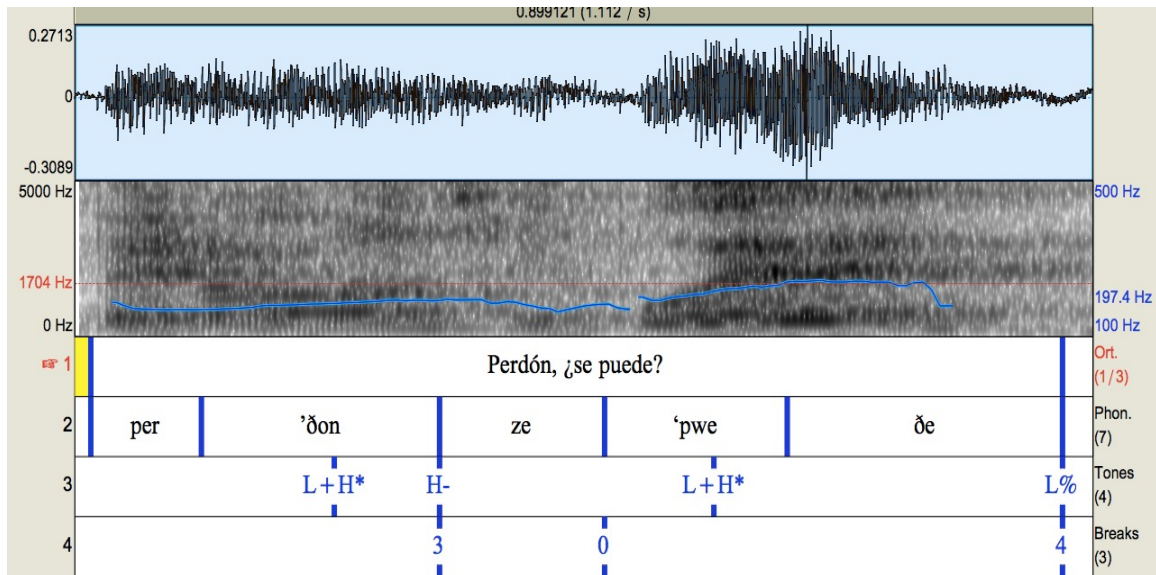


FIGURE 2

The Asturian falling contour in absolute interrogatives (*¿Oye, a María la viste?* 'Did you see María?')

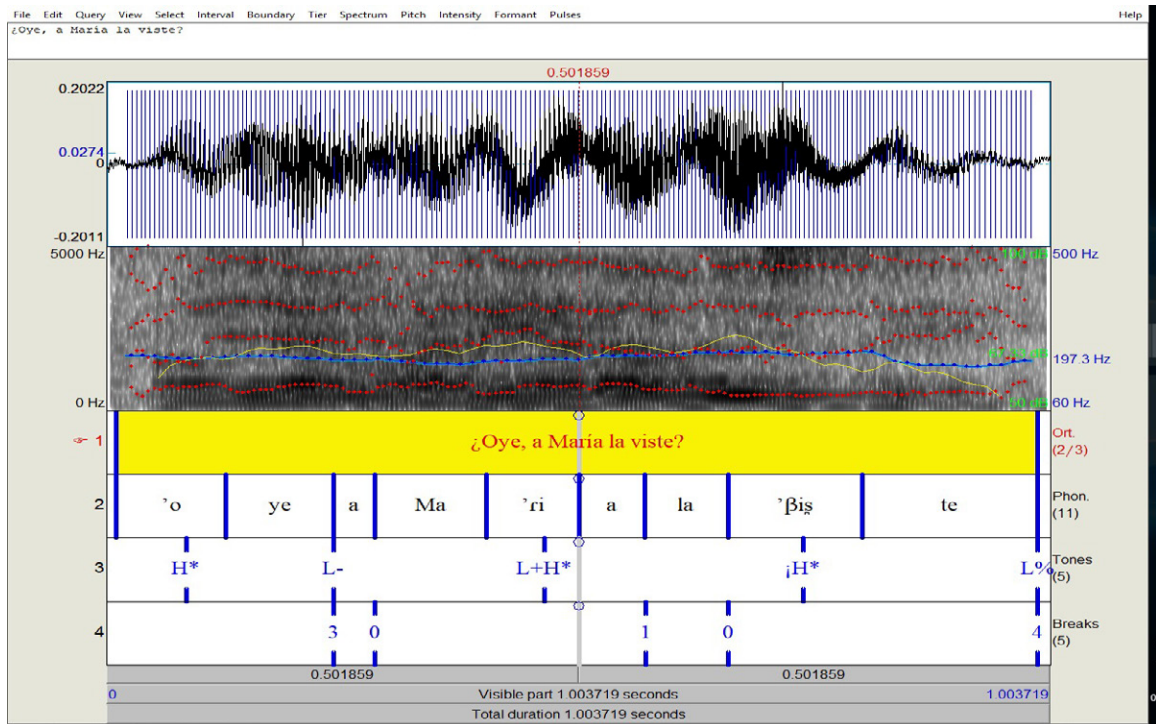


FIGURE 3

The Asturian falling contour in absolute interrogatives (*¿Tienes mermelada?* ‘Do you have jam?’)

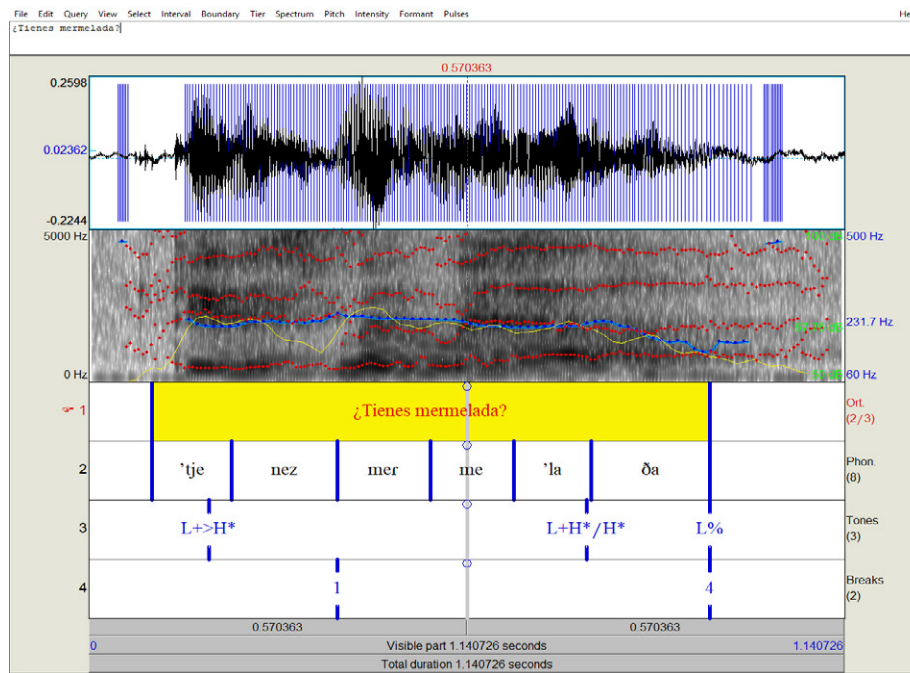


FIGURE 4

The Spanish rising contour in absolute interrogatives (*¿Se puede?* ‘Can I?’)

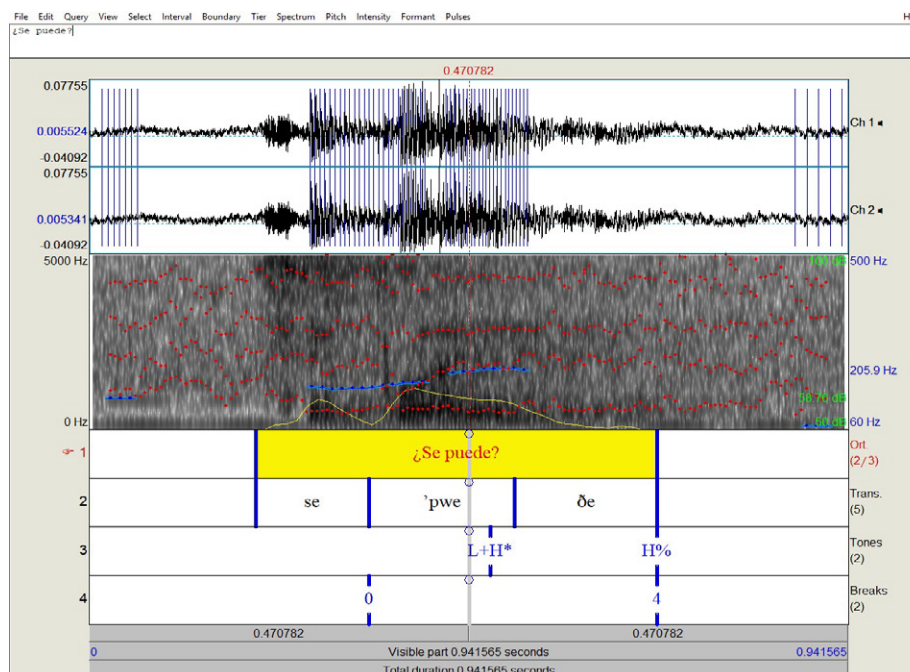
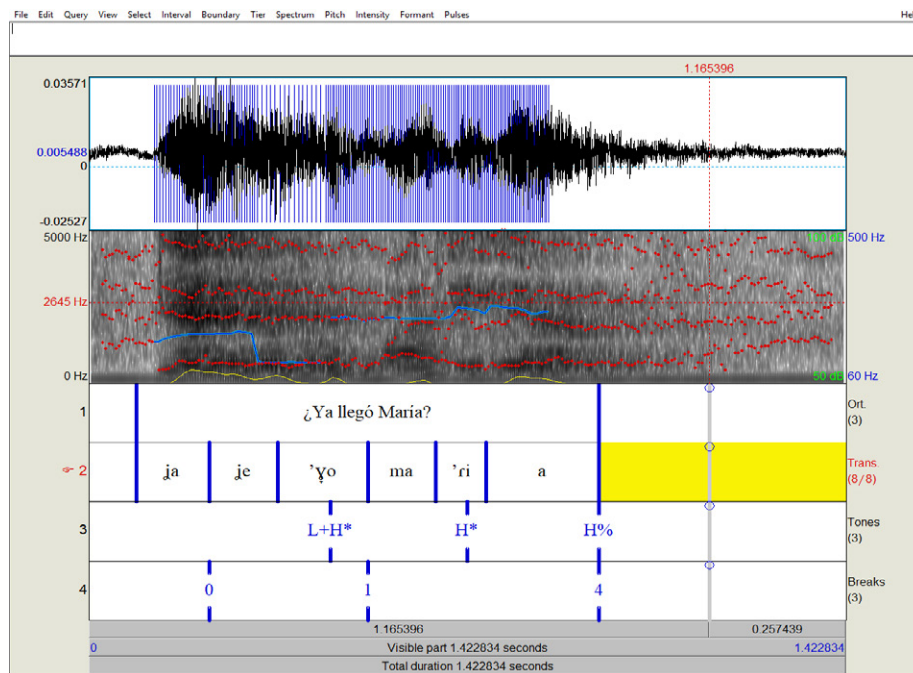


FIGURE 5

The Spanish rising contour in absolute interrogatives (¿Ya llegó María? 'Has María arrived?')



existence of the Spanish model. The social variable that affects these contours realizations is the birthplace of the family of the interviewees: these are speakers who have relatives in Valladolid and Burgos.

6. Conclusions

The results of our study show that not all speakers accommodate their intonation to the Asturian one, employing the falling contour in the absolute interrogatives. Three of the subjects produce the high rising boundary tone of the Spanish language.

It is interesting to note that the only social factor that affects the production of the two prosodic patterns is the origin of the subjects. The Asturian language is, therefore, not the language of these people's personal linguistic biography. Moreover, it seems that prosody is as accessible as morphology and lexicon, as we can see in our PhD dissertation (Bleorțu, 2021).

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