

On a special prosodic pattern of polar questions in Romanian

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Most studies on the prosody of Romanian polar questions have claimed that it displays a particular pattern – **the L..H(L) pattern**, with nuclear stress on the verb realized as a low tone and a rising-falling end tone, realized as H* on the last accented syllable, followed by L%, if there is a posttonic syllable (Dascălu 1979, Dascălu-Jinga 2001, Grice et al. 2000, Ladd 2008); this H*(L) configuration is analyzed as secondary association of the HL% tone (Grice et al. 2000, Ladd 2008). This is peculiar because (i) the same pattern is found with early focus – i.e., the focus has L* and the end configuration is H* L% and (ii) nuclear stress is always rightmost in Romanian if there is no pre-final narrow focus. This is why, in fact, it has been claimed that there is no unmarked intonation in Romanian questions, but “some element must receive emphasis” (Dascălu-Jinga 2001). I will argue that the intonation presented as neutral in the aforementioned studies is *not* the neutral intonation of polar questions in Romanian, but represents an instance of *verum* focus. As *verum* focus is marked on the verb, we have an instance of early focus, which explains why the pattern is the same as the one found with early constituent focus. I will show that the neutral intonation of polar questions in Romanian has the nuclear stress in the end, as expected, realized as a low tone followed by a rise (L* H% or L*+H H%) – **the LH pattern**. This pattern had been noticed in the aforementioned studies, but was claimed to be restricted to questions with sentence-final narrow focus (except for Jitcă et al. 2015, who however also treat the L..H(L) pattern as neutral). As final narrow focus is in principle realized in the same way as ‘broad focus’, my claim that neutral polar questions and focus-final polar questions have the same prosodic realization is what we should expect given the general prosodic system of the language.

Despite disagreement on the characterization of the notion ‘*verum*’ (which is divorced from focus in several studies), most of the literature agrees that sentences with *verum* are only felicitous if the propositional radical *p* is context-given (see Büring 2006, Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011, Lohnstein 2012, 2016). Moreover, for *verum* in questions, it is not enough that the proposition *p* has already been mentioned: if it has been asserted, it cannot function as an antecedent. The characterization of *verum* which seems to be the most appropriate for dealing with questions is the one given by Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró (2011): *verum* is only used if ?*p* is present among the questions under discussion (QUD); by using *verum*, the speaker indicates its intention to remove this open issue from the QUD.

I will show that the L..H(L) pattern in Romanian is used if the issue whether *p* has a certain degree of contextual activation. Mention in the immediately preceding dialogue is not necessary, but the issue must have occurred at some point in the previous linguistic exchanges of the speaker and hearer. Thus, in (1), the L..HL pattern is excluded. The sentence *A venit tata?* ‘Has dad come?’ can be used with the L..HL pattern in the beginning of a dialogue, but only if dad’s arrival has occurred as an issue in the communicative exchanges of the conversation participants at some previous time. In order to check these intuitions, I tested experimentally two pairs of polar questions, one in an out-of-the-blue setting ((2a), (3a)) and the other in a context allowing *verum* focus ((2b), (3b)). 13 speakers of standard Romanian (3 men and 10 women, aged between 29 and 69) were asked to read the indications about the context and then to utter the question; in addition to the 4 target sentences, the experiment included 6 fillers; the recordings were analyzed using Praat. The results are given in (4). The two patterns are also sharply different in the first accent, the one on the verb, which is invariably rising – L+H* or L+>H* – in the LH pattern, being prenuclear, and L* in the

L..H(L) pattern, where it is the nucleus (note that auxiliaries are clitic in Romanian, so the only accent of the Aux+V constituents is on V). 88% chose the LH pattern for the a examples and 61% chose the L..H(L) pattern for the b examples. The results for (2) support the view that the LH pattern is unmarked, because in (2b), the environment which allowed for verum, only about half of the informants chose the L..H pattern, whereas none chose this pattern in (2a). As for (3a), I submit that those who chose the L..HL pattern imagined a context similar to the one in (3b).

(1) Ce s-a întâmplat, a venit tata?
 what REFL-has happened has come father-the ‘What happened, has dad come?’

Tested sentences:

(2) a. [Context: you meet by chance some acquaintances on the street]
 Ce faceți? Ați 'fost la cum.pă.ră.'turi?
 what do.2PL have.2pl been at shoppings ‘What’s up? Have you been shopping?’
 b. [Context: somebody was supposed to do shopping; you check whether he fulfilled his commitment]
 Gata? Ați 'fost la cum.pă.ră.'turi?
 ready have.2PL been at shoppings ‘Ready? Have you been shopping?’

(3) a. [Context: you enter a room where somebody has just finished a phone conversation]
 Ce faci? Ai vor.'bit cu co.'pi.ii?
 what do.2SG have.2SG talked with children-the
 ‘What’s up? Have you spoken with the children?’
 b. [Context: somebody had told you a few hours ago that she would try to catch on the phone her children who are abroad]
 E, ai reușit? Ai vor.'bit cu co.'pi.ii?
 hey have.2SG succeeded have.2SG talked with children-the
 ‘Hey, have you succeeded? Have you spoken with the children?’

(4) Results: LH L..H LH L..HL another one:
 (3a): 13 0 (4)a: 10 2 1
 (3b): 7 6 (4)b: 3 10

Figure 1: example of the LH pattern, for (4a)

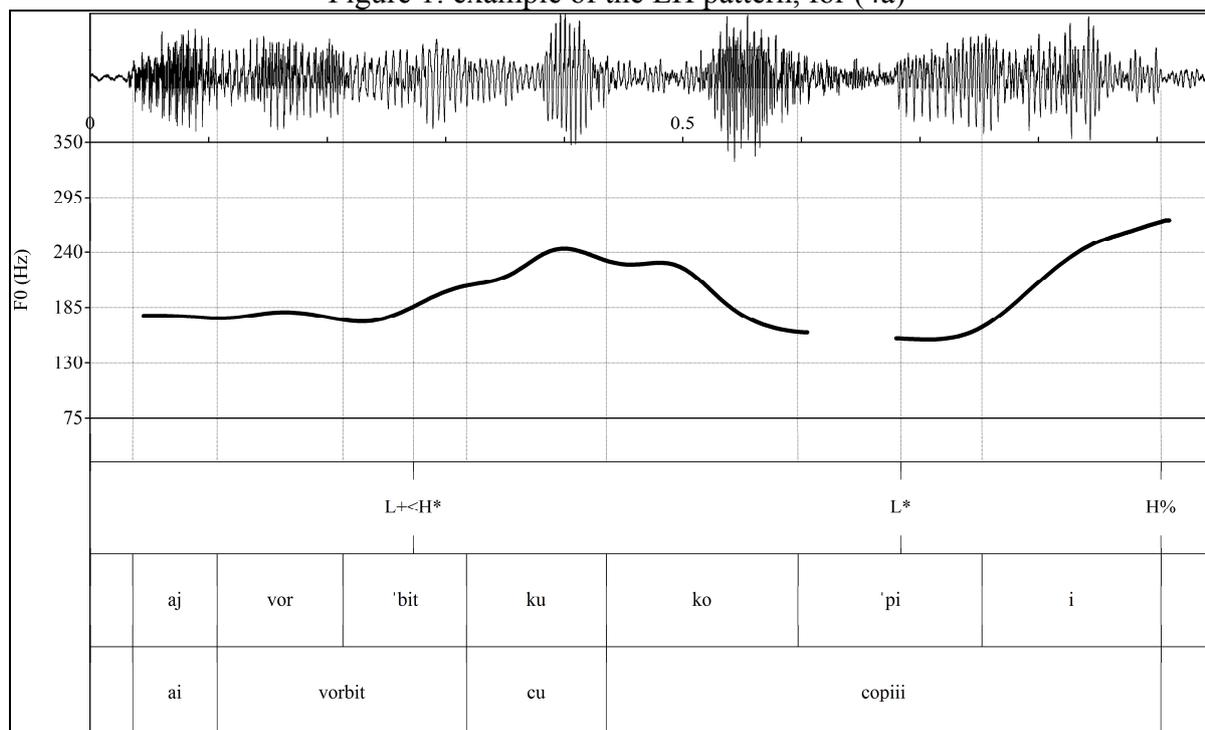
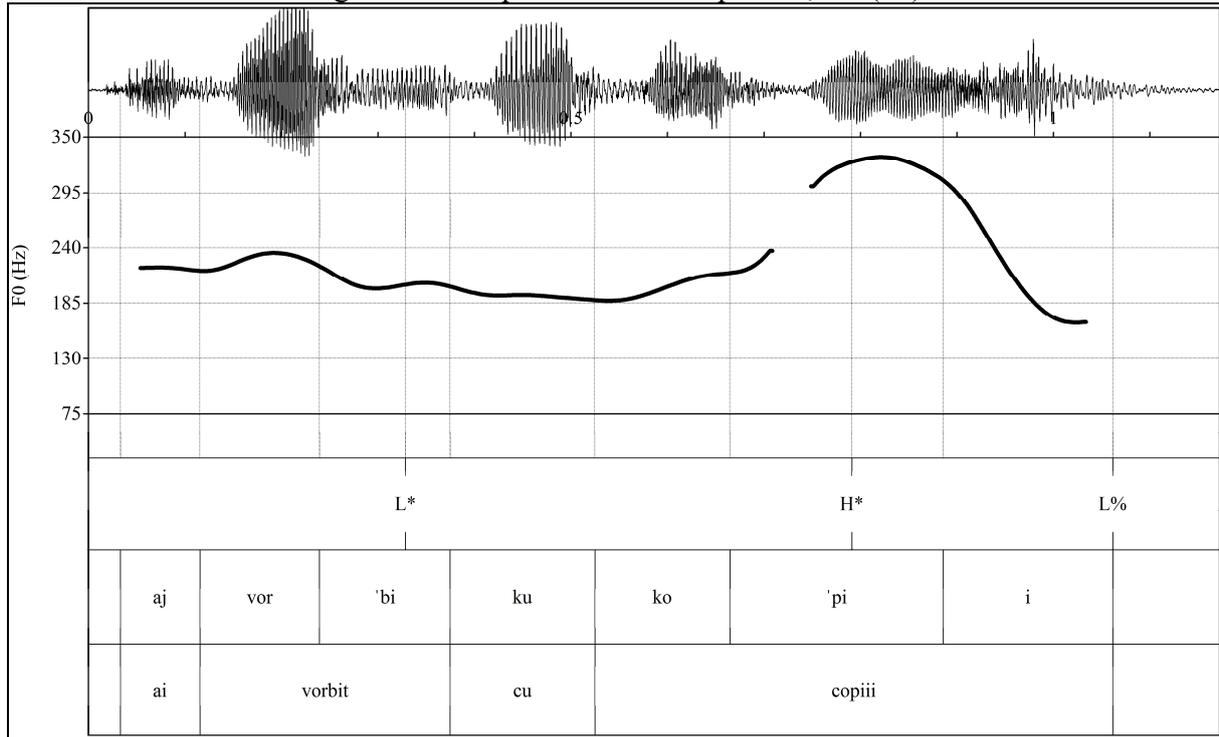


Figure 2: example of the L..HL pattern, for (4b)



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