

P6: “Towards a prosodic grammar of rhetorical questions”

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Current research topic in P6: At the prosody-syntax and phonetics-phonology interface

In this talk, we present two of our current projects: (i) The first one presents a study at the syntax-prosody interface, while (ii) the second one addresses the interplay between phonetics and phonology.

(i) In a web-based production study, we investigated the interplay between syntactic, lexical and prosodic means in German rhetorical questions (RQs). Participants produced RQs or information-seeking questions (ISQs) based on sentence fragments and were free to choose the syntactic construction and to add words. Results revealed that, syntactically, *wh*-questions were preferred over polar questions. Non-prosodic means may accumulate (e.g., the occurrence of a discourse particle (DiP) in addition to prosodic cues), or prosody alone may mark questions as rhetorical (nuclear accent types and edge tones). Furthermore, RQs without DiPs showed slower speaking rates than those with DiPs, possibly compensating for the lack of the lexical information.

(ii) In this study, we assessed the linguistic status (i.e., phonological vs. phonetic) of a nuclear rising-falling contour that has recently been observed in German RQs (Braun et al., 2019). Specifically, we test whether this rising-falling contour is categorically different from the two rising-falling contours that have been established for German (L+H* and L*+H, Grice, Baumann, & Benzmüller, 2005) and hence a phonological category on its own; or, alternatively, whether it is a case of phonetic gradience. We present combined evidence from a) imitated productions and b) judgements on the (connotative) meaning of rising-falling contours supporting the idea of a phonological category.

Reference List

- Braun, B., Dehé, N., Neitsch, J., Wochner, D., & Zahner, K. (2019). The prosody of rhetorical and information-seeking questions in German. *Language and Speech*, 62, 779-807.
- Grice, M., Baumann, S., & Benzmüller, R. (2005). German intonation in autosegmental-metrical phonology. In J. Sun-Ah (Ed.), *Prosodic typology. The phonology of intonation and phrasing* (pp. 55-83). Oxford: Oxford University Press.