

Intonation and pragmatic markers as encoders of commitment and agreement epistemic operations: the case of Catalan and Friulian

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For years linguists have noted that intonation patterns encode similar meanings as sentence-final discourse particles (or SFPs) across languages (e.g., Yau 1980, Wakefield 2010; see Enfield et al 2012). A question that arises is what is the division of labor between the two and whether we find a compensatory distribution between the two kinds of systems across languages. Typologically, languages with lexical tone systems (and thus with very restricted sets of intonation patterns) tend to have richly developed SFP systems. For example, many pragmatic meanings (e.g., polar questions, obviousness, etc.) that are expressed in the form of SFPs in Cantonese are expressed through intonation in languages such as English (e.g., Kwok 1984). Mandarin Chinese also uses a wide set of modal particles such as the modal particle *me* for assertion of the obvious and disagreement (Wakefield 2010). Interestingly, the pitch shape of SFPs in tone languages tends to be strongly influenced by local intonational patterns rather than determined purely by lexical tone (Kwok 1984, Wu 2009)). Apart from these cross-linguistic tendencies, to our knowledge, there has been no previous systematic and quantitative comparison of how two typologically different languages express epistemic meanings through pragmatic particles and intonation and how the two systems are constrained.

In this research, we will focus on two languages within the Romance group (Catalan and Friulian) which have been reported to use intonation and pragmatic markers to different extents to mark epistemic meanings (e.g., Roseano et al. 2015, Prieto et al. 2015). A total of fifteen native speakers of Northern and fifteen native speakers of Central Catalan participated in a Discourse Completion Task designed to elicit statements with several degrees of speaker commitment and speaker agreement. A total of 90 utterances were obtained for each of the two languages (15 speakers x 2 languages x 3 contexts ‘broad focus/ uncertainty/obviousness’).

The results showed that Catalan and Friulian display an asymmetry in the marking of epistemically-biased statements: while Catalan uses a greater variety of stance-marking intonation contours, Friulian uses a more varied set of stance modal particles and a more restricted set of intonation contours. However, both languages make use epistemic markers together with intonation and place restrictions on how the two are paired, indicating that the relationship between the two systems can be quite complex. Overall, we claim that intonation contours, like pragmatic particles in other languages, can function as epistemic operators that strongly interact with commitment spaces set out by discourse participants in normal conversation. All in all, intonation constitutes an important part of grammar that encodes multidimensional pragmatic meanings and should be studied in combination with morphosyntactic and pragmatic discourse marking. We will show how dynamic semantic models enable us to integrate the study of intonational meaning with other parts of the grammar into a unified approach (e.g., Krifka in press).

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