

Category (b); Accent & tone, Question prosody

You take the High Rise and I take the Low Rise – On the fate of two question intonations in Dutch dialects

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The intonation system of Dutch includes a contrast between the High Rise, or $H^* H\%$, and the Low Rise, $L^* H H\%$. The Low Rise is a rise from low pitch in the accented syllable to high pitch at the phrase end, and the High Rise is identical except that it starts at mid pitch in the accented syllable. The subtlety of the contrast has allowed it to go unnoticed until the mid 1990s. The contrast between them was demonstrated by Gussenhoven & Rietveld (2000), but little is known about their pragmatics or their frequency of use. As interrogatives, they function in the intonation system by the side of $H^* L H\%$ and $L^* H\%$. Haan (2001) found the relative frequencies of these four contours in a reading task with questions to be 66% ($H^* L H\%$), 20% ($H^* H\%$), 9% ($L^* H\%$) and 5% ($L^* H H\%$). In this contribution, I aim to do two things. First, I will report on the frequencies of use in regional non-tonal varieties of Dutch, and second I will report on their use as a lexical contrast in a variety of tonal Dutch.

An investigation with 108 speakers of six varieties spoken in locations that lie in an arc along the North Sea coast, Peters, Hanssen & Gussenhoven (ms) established that the contrast occurs in all of them. However, they found that there is a gradual cline from south-west to north-east whereby the use of $H^* H\%$ declines, that of $L^* H H\%$ increases and that of $H^* L H\%$ shows a peak in the central zone. (The use of $L^* H\%$ is less than 5% in all locations.) This is the first report, as far as we are aware, of a geographical cline in the use of intonation contours. It is remarkable to the extent that the existence of the two contours is below the awareness of native speakers.

Second, in at least one dialect, the contrast was reinterpreted as a lexical contrast. The dialect at issue, Venlo, lies at the periphery of the Dutch-German tonal area, and unlike more centrally located dialects, has retained much of the general character of the Dutch intonation system. However, the number of intonation contrasts has been reduced by more than half. The lexical contrast is ‘hidden’ in these four intonation contours. This is done partly by making phonetic differences which would go unnoticed in standard Dutch phonologically contrastive, as in the case of the early and late declarative falls, which serve as the forms for Accent 1 and Accent 2, respectively. In part this is done by using phonetically similar contours, like the High Rise and the Low Rise, in a lexically contrastive function. In Venlo Dutch, Low Rise is the interrogative form for Accent 1 and the High Rise that for Accent 2. The overall result is that the phonetics of Venlo sentence prosody sounds entirely like a regular non-tonal variety of the language