

## Intonational pragmatics of Greek *wh*-questions

Experimental evidence is presented on the pragmatics of two melodies commonly used with Greek *wh*-questions: L\*+H L-!H%, the default, and L\*+H L-L% %, considered less polite (Arvaniti & Baltazani 2005). Two hypotheses were tested: (a) the !H%-ending melody is appropriate *only* for information-seeking questions; the L%-ending melody is appropriate for *both* information- and non-information-seeking *wh*-questions; the non-information-seeking usage, inferred from context and the L%-ending melody, indicates questioner bias for a specific response to their question (cf. Gunlogson, 2003); (b) the !H%-ending melody, being more polite, is more appropriate for female talkers.

In Experiment A, 79 comprehenders heard out six *wh*-questions, e.g. (1), uttered by two male and two female native speakers with a !H or L% melody ( $6 \times 4 \times 2 = 48$  stimuli). They had to choose between a response that provided information (2), and one that agreed with the bias attributed to the questioner (3). As expected, comprehenders selected the *non*-information-providing responses significantly more often after L%-ending than !H%-ending questions, a preference stronger for male than female talkers.

- (1) *Pos tha pao sto Sydagma?* (!H% or L%)  
'How will I go to Syntagma?'
- (2) *Tha paris ti grami 3 kai tha katevis sto Sydagma.*  
'You'll take line 3 and get off at Syntagma.'
- (3) *Exis dikio, den boris na pas. Tha ginete xamos.*  
'You're right, you can't go. There'll be mayhem.'

In Experiment B, 89 comprehenders heard a story followed by one of the questions in Experiment A and used a 1-7 scale to rate the question for (i) politeness and (ii) appropriateness with respect to the story. Stories were crossed with melody (48 melodies  $\times$  2 stories = 96 stimuli), and made appropriate as a response either an information-seeking question (i.e. !H%- or L%-ending) or a non-information-seeking question (i.e. L%-ending); cf. stories (4a) and (4b) respectively as precursors to (1). As hypothesized, !H%-ending questions were judged more polite than L%-ending questions for female talkers only (Wald=22.8,  $p < 0.0001$ ). Contrary to expectations, comprehenders judged !H%-ending questions more appropriate than L%-ending questions in both contexts (Wald=24.1,  $p < 0.0001$ ).

- (4) Stories followed by (1) with !H or L%:
  - a. George, who has not been in Athens before, stops someone on the street to ask for directions.
  - b. All public transport will be on strike tomorrow. Alexis, who must deliver an order at Sydagma, tells her husband.

Overall, the results confirmed L\*+H L-!H% as the default melody. They also showed that the two melodies lead to different pragmatic interpretations of the *wh*-questions. Since these interpretations were available to comprehenders out of context and despite the presence of a fronted *wh*-word that clearly marked the stimuli as *wh*-questions, the results suggest that intonation can overcome conflicting morphosyntactic information. Evidence was also found that intonational pragmatics is influenced by social factors such as gender (the same melody was interpreted differently when uttered by male and female talkers), strongly suggesting that taking into account comprehender expectations about the social use of melodies is crucial for fully understanding intonational pragmatics.

## References

- Arvaniti, A. & M. Baltazani (2005) Intonational analysis and prosodic annotation of Greek spoken corpora. In Sun-Ah Jun (Ed.), *Prosodic Typology: The Phonology of Intonation and Phrasing*, pp. 84-117. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gunlogson, C. (2003) *True to Form: Rising and Falling Declaratives as Questions in English*. New York: Routledge.