Yes-no questions and echo questions intonation in Majorcan and Minorcan Catalan

Marta Payà (UB) & Maria del Mar Vanrell (UAB)
paya@lincat.ub.es · MariaDelMar.Vanrell@campus.uab.es

Introduction

- Interrogative sentences in Catalan have a great functional and dialectal complexity.
- Up to now, the research done in this field is minimal, and specially centered in Central Catalan. In 2001 the first works on dialectal comparison are found (Pristolo 2001, Carrera et al. 2001, Fernandez et al. 2003). Pristolo & Pristolo (2003), in their phonetic or semantic nure - function, communicative intention, context - are not kept in mind (or only partially).
- Among interrogative sentences, Grice and Savino (2003) distinguish between questions that ask for new information and the ones that ask for given information. We assume this perspective because we consider that it helps us to explain an important part of the variety that is produced inside the same dialectal variety.
- We try to describe the intonation of interrogatives basing on the typology described by Payà et al. (2002): on the one hand, partial interrogatives and yes-no questions; on the other hand, four special types of interrogatives: retorical ones, indirect, tag questions and echo questions. In this paper we analyse yes-no questions, tag questions and echo questions.

Goals

- To describe the intonation patterns of yes-no questions and echo questions -QUERY and CHECK in HCRC Map Task- in Catalan, in order to find whether the two types of interrogatives present significant differences.
- To compare these interrogative utterances in Majorcan and Minorcan Catalan in order to verify if this type of questions present the same differences with the same distribution in both varieties.

Methodology

- Each of the two participants had a map which the other participant couldn't see.
- One of the two maps (Instruction Giver's map) had a route that the other participant had to reproduce asking for it (Instruction Follower's map).
- Landmarks names were selected so that they had voiced segments and penuentimate or antepenultimate stress.
- The two participants didn't have exactly the same landmarks. There were some discrepancies in the location of the landmarks, the landmarks colour, the landmarks names...
- This elicitation method allows: a) to get a wide range of questions in controlled and, at the same time, natural conditions; b) a good interaction among the particpants; c) to display dialectal features due to the spontaneous speech.

Participants

- Ten female participants for each variety (Minorcan and Majorcan), aged from 20 to 30 with High School degree or Bachelor's degree.

RESULTS IN MAJORCAN

1. QUERY questions: H + L* H-L% (the leading tone H is upstepped)
2. CHECK questions:
   a) Tag questions: H + L* (the certainty degree decreases using a descendent tail).
   b) Echo questions: H + L*/ L-H* [+ certainty] (no neutral attitudes are conveyed , i.e., surprises, using leading tone H is upstepped in H-H%).

RESULTS IN MINORCAN

1. QUERY questions: H = L* H-H%
2. CHECK questions:
   a) Tag questions: H + L* (and boundary tones from L-L% to H-H%)
   b) Echo questions: H + L*/ L-H* [+ neutrality] (no neutral attitudes are conveyed , i.e., surprises, using leading tone H is upstepped in H-H%).

Conclusions

- Majorcan and Minorcan coincide with pitch accent (H+L*) but have different strategies (boundary tones,  
unsstepped features) to convey different kinds of information.
- Semantic and pragmatic Information is very important in order to analyse every interrogative sentence. We have specially considered: whether the question is about new or given information; in tag questions, the certainty degree on the answer; in echo questions, the (+ or – neutral) attitude of the speaker.
- Sentence order is also very important to distinguish between QUERY and CHECK questions: i.e. Tens una barberia? (QUERY "Do you have a barber’s") - Tu tens s’acadèmia? (CHECK "Do you have the academy?").
- Cross-dialectal comparisons are necessary in order to describe a language. In Catalan there is still a long road to travel through in this field.