

Do Paraguayans ask using Guarani intonation? Yes/no questions in Spanish-Guarani bilinguals

This paper examines and discusses both intonation and syntactic innovations in Paraguayan Spanish, a variety presumably influenced by Guarani. This indigenous language—given official recognition in 1992—has been in intensive contact with Spanish since the beginning of colonization and the founding of Asunción in the early 16th century. Today, half of the Paraguayan population is Guarani-Spanish bilingual (Klee & Lynch 2009: 153), with most speakers using Spanish in formal settings and preferring Guarani or *Jopará*, the mixture of the two languages, in informal contexts (e.g. Meliá 1992). It is therefore not surprising that studies on Paraguayan Spanish and social bilingualism consistently report Guarani influence in lexicon, morphosyntax and segmental phonology (see e.g. Alonso 1941/1951; Malmberg 1947; de Granda 1982; Estigarribia 2017; Gabriel, Pešková & Ewald 2020). Nevertheless, contemporary research on the intonation of Paraguayan Spanish and Guarani is still lacking (but see Gregores & Suárez 1967 and Clopper & Tonhauser 2013 for Guarani).

Yes/no questions are of special interest here from a cross-linguistic perspective: whereas Spanish employs interrogative intonation, Guarani makes use of question particles (*piko*, *pa*). Regarding Spanish, Prieto and Roseano (2010) reveal roughly 20 different nuclear configurations of yes/no questions in ten different European and American Spanish varieties. These include different rising, falling and mixed patterns, depending on the variety and/or the type of yes/no question (neutral or biased). In contrast to Spanish, it is believed that “Guarani questions have the same intonation as declaratives”, i.e. a falling pattern (Estigarribia 2017: 52) and that intonation is redundant because of the presence of particles. However, we will see that the picture is more complex since Guarani displays both falling and rising edge tones too. The study has two aims: first, to find out whether there are any syntactic and intonation innovations present in Paraguayan Spanish yes/no questions, as compared with other Spanish varieties, and second, to examine whether Guarani-dominant bilinguals, Spanish-dominant bilinguals and Spanish monolinguals present any differences. The presence of any “Guarani” patterns would shed important light on how languages in contact converge or diverge.

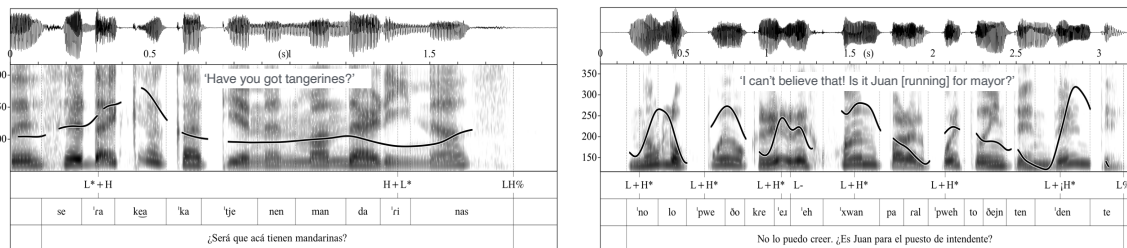
The data analyzed in the study were elicited within the scope of a larger production experiment carried out in 2014 in Asunción and its surroundings. The participants were two Spanish monolinguals, eight Guarani-dominant bilinguals and 11 Spanish-dominant bilinguals, who each produced 16 neutral as well as biased yes-no questions (by applying a *Discourse Completion Task*, just one part of the experiment; see Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Prieto & Roseano 2010).

Results showed that in terms of intonational properties, as formalized within the Autosegmental-Metrical model of intonation phonology (Pierrehumbert 1980), there were no particular differences between the three groups, with all groups producing predominantly a H+L* LH% pattern in different neutral and biased yes/no questions (Fig. left). Interestingly enough, we can also find the same pattern in Guarani. Additionally, counter-expectational and echo yes/no questions were predominantly realized with a L+;H* L% contour in all the three groups (Fig. right). In very general terms, the findings appear to support the idea that two intonational systems tend to converge (e.g. Thomason 2001) due to a long period of contact, as has been shown in other language contact situations (e.g. Colantoni & Gurlekian 2004; Elordieta & Romera in press).

With respect to syntax, the bilinguals (but not monolinguals) produced, albeit not systematically, the Guarani question particles and other Guarani expressions (e.g. *Nde kape, vamos a tomar pio? Dalena!* ‘Friend, shall we go for a beer? C’mon!’). The use of the particle seems not to play a role on the intonation pattern. Moreover, some speakers in all three groups used in some instances *será que* (lit. ‘will it be that’) at the beginning of the question (e.g.

¿Será que acá tienen mandarinas? ‘Do you have tangerines here?’); this construction can be considered to have become or to be becoming grammaticalized as a question particle.

The nuclear configuration H+L* LH%, prenuclear early peaks L+H* in both monolingual and bilingual groups and the use of Guaraní particles in the bilinguals point towards a cross-linguistic influence due to the intensive contact with Guaraní. The findings also indicate that the two levels of linguistic structure develop differently, with prosody being more sensitive than syntax to change or convergence.



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