
Diagnosing speaker attitudes in English Rising Declaratives

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What does rising intonation encode when it occurs with English declarative clauses? The contrast between examples (1) and (2) suggests that the rise signals an uncertainty about the truth of the proposition (p), which results in a request for confirmation of whether it is true that it is raining (Gunlogson 2001).

(1) Speaker A enters a windowless office, all wet, and says: ‘It’s raining[−]’

(2) Speaker A enters a windowless office, all wet. Speaker B says: ‘It’s raining’

Uncertainty about p isn’t the only function of RDs, however (e.g., Goodhue 2021). In addition to this inquisitive use, there is an incredulous use, which is employed if the speaker thinks that it is not true that it is raining. There is also a speculative use where truth does not seem to be at issue. Another use of the rise, particularly in narrative contexts, signals continuation. In this talk, I survey existing diagnostics for the use conditions of RDs using data elicited in a Map Task Study. In a departure from previous analyses, I introduce diagnostics that don’t exclusively focus on (evidence for) the truth of p . Instead, some of these novel diagnostics focus on the relevance of the speaker’s contribution. The reliability of the proposed diagnostics is then tested in an online naturalness rating study with 40 native speakers of North American English judging examples of my own Map Task Study. I compare the results of applying these diagnostics with an analysis of RDs in a previous Map Task study (Ritchart & Arvaniti 2014) which uses turn-taking properties and indirect requests as diagnostics to identify different uses of rising intonation. This comparison demonstrates that a combination of six diagnostics (subjective predicates, evaluating adverbs, indirect evidentials, hedging, calls, and addresses) suffice to discriminate the four different uses mentioned above. These findings suggest that it is indeed possible to systematically discriminate different uses of rising intonation without relying on ambiguous turn-taking or contextual cues. This in turn may get us closer to resolving the question of whether different uses have unique prosodic profiles. The Map Task data elicited here suggest that English RDs that negotiate the truth of p have a steeper rise than those that negotiate the relevance of an utterance to the course of the conversation. Variation of speaker attitudes in RDs can then be characterised by un/certainty about truth or relevance.

References: • Goodhue, D. (2021). A unified account of inquisitive and assertive rising declaratives. *Proceedings of the LSA* 6(1), 951–965. • Gunlogson 2001. *True to form: Rising and falling declaratives as questions in English*. Ph.D. dissertation, UC Santa Cruz. • Ritchart A. & A. Arvaniti (2014). The form and use of uptake in Southern Californian English. *Proceedings of Speech Prosody*. Vol. 7. Dublin, Ireland: Trinity College Dublin.