

Antti Iivonen

IS THERE INTERROGATIVE INTONATION IN FINNISH?

University of Helsinki

Problem and background

Partly contradictory results concerning the possible interrogative intonation in Finnish have been presented earlier:

1. (Kallioinen 1968:) Intonation which (in formally unmarked utterances) indicates question is not distinctive, but only expressive, i.e. expressive nucleus (rising pitch, increasing stress, increasing duration) indicates surprise, final rise indicates kind appeal.
2. (Mirvonen 1970:) General and particular questions (and imperatives, too), which also are marked formally as questions, are consistently characterized by a high initial pitch (actually F_0 has been measured). It is distinctive and forms part of the communicative system of Finnish (appeal to the listener). The final falling pitch is identical for questions and neutral breath-groups (= statements).

The partly different results described above seem to be explainable on the basis of the differences in the 1) concept of intonation, 2) a priori assumptions concerning the realization and localization of the interrogative prosodic features within the utterance structure, and 3) utterances used.

Material

For further elucidation of the problem following types of material will be treated: 1) isolated neutral simple sentences produced in studio (first read, then unloaded from the memory), 2) radio broadcast utterances, 3) child speech, 4) interview speech gathered in Helsinki for socio-dialectal studies (conducted by Prof. M. Paunonen), 5) Finnish utterances produced by foreigners.

Preliminary results

Instrumental registrations did not reveal any indisputable regularity between a high initial F_0 (or intensity peak) and neutral utterances which are marked as questions by a question word or by a word ending with the suffix /-ko/ or /-kö/ (i.e. material type 1). It rather appears that the high initial F_0 or intensity peaks are connected with speaking effort and rhematic or contrastive stress. The initial F_0 and intensity peak levels seem to have a loose mutual correlation. Listening of more spontaneous utterances seems to indicate that there is a potentially realizable connection between interrogative function and high initial, high over-all, or rising final pitch depending on different connotations and pragmatic purposes.

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