

The encoding of epistemic operations in Romance: intonation and pragmatic markers

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For years linguists have noted that intonation patterns encode similar meanings as sentence-final discourse particles across languages (e.g., Yau 1980, Wakefield 2010). A question that arises is what is the division of labor between the two and whether we find a compensatory distribution between the two kinds of systems. In this talk, I will focus on the encoding of epistemic operations in several Romance languages, and specifically in the comparison of two languages within the Romance group (Catalan and Friulian) which have been reported to use intonation and discourse particles to different extents to mark epistemic meanings (e.g., Roseano et al. 2015, Prieto et al. 2015, Prieto & Roseano 2015). A total of 15 speakers per language were asked to participate in a Discourse Completion Task designed to elicit statements with several types of speaker commitment and involvement properties. The results show that Catalan and Friulian display an asymmetry in the marking of epistemically-biased statements: while Catalan uses a greater variety of stance-marking intonation contours, Friulian uses a more varied set of stance modal particles and a more restricted set of intonation contours. However, Catalan also uses epistemic adverbs together with intonation and both languages place restrictions on how discourse particles and intonation are paired, indicating that the relationship between the two systems can be quite complex. Overall, I will claim that dynamic semantic models enable us to integrate the study of intonational meaning with other parts of the grammar into a unified approach.