

Social Factors Influencing Intonation before the Spanish Discourse Marker *y*

Various scholars have defined discourse markers (DMs) and described their textual functions in both English (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1988, 1999; Schourup, 1999) and Spanish (Ballesteros, 1993; Zorraquino, 1998; Mujica, 2005). However, studies on Spanish DMs in social contexts are less common: Cortes Rodríguez (1991), Torres (1997, 2002), and Cepeda (1999). The present study identifies the Phrase Terminal Intonation Before *y* (PTIBY) used by Puerto Rican (PR) bilinguals living in Hampton Roads, VA, and examines factors influencing the choice of PTIBY. Interview data totaling more than 66 hr were gathered from 48 PR informants during 2002 - 2004. Informant ages varied from 21 to 81. All were born in Puerto Rico, and 45 came to the United States in their teens or later. PTIBY for 12,770 occurrences of *y* was classified by ear and using Praat. Crosstab analysis was used to examine the influence of style (Labov, 2001), sex, education (two categories), age (two categories), length of residence in the US (two categories), and the language used at home (two categories), on PTIBY. This is the first study to examine PTIBY used by PR bilinguals in the USA.

Gili Gaya (1961) claimed that so called 'muletillas' (fillers), including *y* are used by uneducated people. However, in the current study, the ratio of *y* to total words uttered by educated and uneducated informants was 3.31% vs 2.98%. Education has nothing to do with the frequency of use of *y*. Instead, informants used *y* more frequently in casual style than in careful style (t-test, $p < 0.01$). Cepeda (1999) studied twelve DMs in relation to sex, age and social strata, but not style.

Ballesteros (1993) claimed without presenting supporting data, that semifalling intonation generally occurs before *y*. However, in the present study, intonation was found to be variable: falling 6,943 (54.4%), rising 2,218 (17.4%), or level 3,467 (27.1%).

Highly educated men and women, and women of low education, used more falling intonation in casual style ($p < 0.01$). Men with less education did not change PTIBY significantly according to style.

Young and old women used more falling intonation in casual style ($p < 0.01$). Old men used more falling intonation in careful style ($p < 0.01$). Young men showed no difference.

Informants who speak Spanish at home changed PTIBY more readily ($p < 0.01$) than those speaking English. English speakers may have lost competence in choosing intonation regardless of style.

Men with short U.S. residence (≤ 5 years) did not change PTIBY. However, women used more falling intonation in casual style ($p < 0.01$) regardless of the length of U.S. residence. Men of long residence (> 5 years) used slightly more falling intonation in careful style.

Loglinear analysis identified the best model for PTIBY as containing sex, age, education, language and style ($P=1$). Future studies will analyze the relationships of prosodic features of *y* with grammatical construction, logical connection, and information structure, etc.

References

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