The use of uptalk in Spanish dating shows?

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The use of rising intonation at the end of declarative sentences so that they sound like questions, also known as uptalk (Cameron, 2007), has been assumed to be restricted by age and gender (Gorman, 1993; Davis, 2002). However, findings from other studies (Linneman, 2013; Ritchardt & Arvaniti, 2013) challenge the aforementioned gender-restrictions in that uptalk is also found in the speech of both males and females. Regarding the social context in which uptalk is used; studies like that of Lakoff (1973) have interpreted the use of this practice in the discourse as a sign of submission, insecurity or unwillingness to commit to a statement. However, more recent research (McConnell-Ginet, 1975; Brazil, 1985; Linneman, 2013) has suggested that uptalk is triggered by social and contextual factors, such as, asserting power, holding the floor in a conversation, soften a command, signal confidence or solidarity.

While much research in the fields of linguistics and gender has focused on the study of uptalk in English, little to no research has studied this phenomenon in Spanish. The motivation behind this poster is to address the aforementioned gap in the research and is guided by the following questions: (i) Is uptalk present in Spanish? (ii) If so, is uptalk a gendered phenomenon in Spanish? and (iii) what are the social and contextual factors that trigger the use of uptalk in Spanish? The present study investigates the production of uptalk in peninsular Spanish. The data was collected from four episodes, which amount to four hours of recordings of the Spanish dating reality show Mujeres y Hombres y Víceversa. The informal language used by the participants of this reality show was considered suitable for the study of uptalk, a phenomenon present mostly in spontaneous speech. From a total of 1101 declarative utterances produced by 12 adult contestants, six males and six females, those that showed a high raising terminal as well as those that did not were perceptually identified, coded and analyzed using a quantitative content analysis.

Results demonstrated that, like in English, uptalk was present in Spanish in the speech of both females and males. Female participants, however, used uptalk three times more frequently (18.57%) than male participants did (6.12%). This pattern was also consistent when examining individual differences. Results showed variation regarding the social and contextual factors that triggered the use of uptalk. Both gendersexhibited a high use of uptalk for purposes of holding the floor while telling a narrative (males=70.37%; females=34.62%). Femalesalso used uptalk to express camaraderie (16.35%) and soften a commands (21.15%), with a higher frequency (18.52%) than males (11.11%). Interestingly, uptalk was also profusely used when female contestants were acting submissively in front of males during romantic encounters. While female contestants often displayed submission through the use of uptalk (27.88%), males did not (0%). I argue that while these results support the findings of Lakoff (1973) for English, the reasons behind this specific use of uptalk might be more complex and are possibly masking exertion of female power and dominance.
References


