

The use of uptalk in Spanish dating shows?

Daniel Vergara-González (*University of Illinois at Chicago*)

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 Viceversa*. 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 genders exhibited a high use of *uptalk* for purposes of holding the floor while telling a narrative (males=70.37%; females=34.62%). Females also used *uptalk* to express camaraderie (16.35%) and soften a command (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

- Brazil, D. (Ed.). (1985). *The communicative value of intonation in English*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, Deborah. 2007. *The myth of Mars and Venus: Do men and women really speak different languages?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, H. (2002). The Canuck uptalk epidemic. *Globe and Mail*.
- Gorman, J. (1993). Like, Uptalk?. *New York Times*, 15.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in society*, 2(01), 45-79.
- Linneman, T. J. (2013). Gender in Jeopardy! Intonation Variation on a Television Game Show. *Gender & Society*, 27(1), 82-105.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (1975). Our father tongue: Essays in linguistic politics.
- Ritchart, A., & Arvaniti, A. (2013). The use of high rise terminals in Southern Californian English. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 134(5), 4198-4198.