

Phonetics Colloquium at UdS

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online

(please write an e-mail to trouvain@lst.uni-saarland.de to get the access code for zoom)

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Question Intonation in Bilingual Speakers of Bulgarian and Judeo-Spanish

This study examines the intonation of yes/no questions (YNQs), wh-questions (WHQs), and alternative questions (AQs) in 18 bilingual speakers of Bulgarian Judeo-Spanish (BJS) and Bulgarian (BG), compared with 18 monolingual BG speakers. BJS is a critically endangered heritage language spoken by fewer than 30 elderly individuals. Semi-spontaneous questions were elicited in a Discourse Completion Task and analyzed using a ToBI-like annotation of nuclear pitch accents and edge tones. The data show that bilingual speakers vary their question intonation depending on whether they speak BJS or BG. In BJS, YNQs typically end high, WHQs end low, and AQs end high on the first component and low on the second. Bilingual BG largely resembles monolingual BG, though subtle divergences reflect heritage influence. Overall, our findings highlight the lasting impact of long-term language contact on prosody and show that bilingual speakers maintain distinct intonational patterns, even in a nearly extinct heritage language.