A very simple but frequent and unsatisfactory classification divides utterances into those that rise in melody (questions) and those that fall (statements). Yet we know that not all questions have a rising melody, and the situation in all languages is much more complex. This is true even if we concede several types of questions, namely polar (yes-no), question-word (wh-) and alternative questions, as each type is associated with a variety of both contours (forms) and meanings (functions). The meaning is not only what the words literally ‘mean’, but what the whole utterance implies or expresses.

The aim of this talk is to compare and examine in detail the melodic forms of question-word and polar questions as opposed to statements in a small corpus of acted read speech, hand in hand with a functional interpretation of associated affective and conative meanings. Several categories of contours will be established for each type of utterance, differing in typicality (frequency). Examples of affective or other functions suggested for specific contours will be discussed.

BIO

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