

THE INTONATION OF QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH
AND GERMAN: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

BY 45

ADELHEID SIMON BYRNES

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Approved by

William A. Coates

Major Professor

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of problem and purpose of study

The ever increasing popularity of the audio-lingual approach to foreign language teaching brought with it the need for detailed analyses of the structure of both the native language and the language to be acquired by the student. Over the years contrastive analyses, centering around phonology, morphology, and syntax, and pairing English with the most commonly taught foreign languages were prepared, and have aided in the construction of effective teaching materials.

Though contrastive analysis has thus reduced considerably some of the difficulties of language learning, there seems to be one aspect of language structure, intonation, that has not received the attention one would expect, considering its eminent role in language. Typically, intonation is briefly treated under the heading of phonology along with such features as rhythm and stress, and the investigation is generally limited to the enumeration of a few basic contours. Its role in language, however, is comparable to that of the sum of all segmental features which to date have been the prime object of linguistic investigation. Indeed, it is only through the combination of both systems, segmental and suprasegmental, that any utterance in language can be realized. Hockett takes note of this apparent neglect of intonation in linguistic studies, by stating:

"Until recently, intonation was more or less tacitly ignored by most linguistic scholars on the assumption that

it did not vary significantly from language to language, or that anything so "natural" hardly warranted serious consideration. It is perhaps true that certain features of speech melody are to be found in all languages (e.g., rise of pitch and volume under the stimulus of pain or anger), but such universal features, if they exist, are not part of intonation as we now use that term. Recent research suggests that every language has a system of basic speech melodies which is as unique to the language as is its set of vowel and consonant phonemes."¹

Perhaps it is the large number of programs in foreign language teaching at various institutions that has brought about a significant increase, during the last few years, in studies dealing with the nature and function of intonation. For it is in teaching a foreign language, where the aim is the most efficient acquisition by the student of native or near-native speech habits, that one becomes most directly aware of the importance of intonation and acquires first-hand insights into the differences and difficulties that are connected with it.

The purpose of this paper is to gather information from both English and German studies available to me at the time of writing, dealing with only one area within the overall systems of English and German intonation, that of the intonation of questions. In its restricted frame it attempts to make a contribution to more efficient teaching of German to speakers of English by noting the intonation contours employed for questions in the two languages and investigating identical, similar, or obviously different features as they are found. No attempts

¹Charles F. Hockett, A Course in Modern Linguistics. (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 34.

will be made to present practical aids for use by the teacher of German to help in effectively establishing correct habits of intonation in the student. Such aids would be pattern drills, concentrating on intonational features, much as the pattern drills used at present focus on structural features. However, the findings of this paper, whether revealing agreements or differences in intonation, should help in the preparation of such drills.

Placing the paper in perspective with regard to overall linguistic investigation, it will try to present facts, to verify, modify, or disprove the tacit assumption of agreement between the intonations of different languages, taking as an example the intonation of questions in English and German.

Procedure

The organization of the report will be as follows:

Part I, General Considerations, in its first chapter deals with overall characteristics of intonation such as its function and its relationship to the segmental structure of language. Some common features of emphatic as contrasted with unemphatic speech are discussed and a choice made for the notational system employed in the examples. Chapter 2 delimits the area of "question" and gives its major subdivisions as they are used to investigate intonation.

Part II, Analysis of Question Intonation in English and German, presents the intonation contours, used with different struc-

tures, resulting in different question types. In each case, the intonation of the English questions is taken as a point of departure and the contours used in German are given by comparison. This seems to be the most natural procedure since the more numerous analyses of English intonation are available to me; at the same time, this arrangement serves the purpose of this study that its results might be used in the teaching of German to native speakers of English.

The contrastive analysis will be between the intonation of questions in General American English and standard Hochdeutsch. The former is the basis of numerous investigations and is also the English I have learned to use through my husband, a native of Kansas. Standard Hochdeutsch, which is the object of most German studies, with most Germans shows a certain amount of regional colouring; my own speech reflects some of the characteristics of Silesia where my parents are from, and the area of northern Bavaria where I grew up.

In most instances the various books or articles dealing with intonation that were available to me are the sources for statements on usage of particular intonation contours. Where the corresponding findings are not available in the studies for both languages, I attempt to give supplemental information from my own speech. Also, because of the difference in notational systems, an attempt is made to check the intonation with native Germans, presently associated with Kansas State University.

The study is concluded by a summary statement of the more important findings.

PART I
GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER I

OVERALL CHARACTERISTICS OF INTONATION

The term "intonation" refers to the continuous systemic fluctuations in the pitch of the voice during an utterance. The assumption that alterations of pitch are not haphazard but standardized to a considerable extent is the theoretical basis for the attempt to find a limited number of pitch patterns which can account for the majority of utterances.

Since intonation is most intimately related to stress, a treatment of intonation typically combines the alterations of both pitch and stress, particularly the occurrence of primary stress. The most important connection, however, is the segmental structure which it accompanies to form an utterance. Engler and Haden establish the inseparable relationship between intonation contour and structure for conveying certain meanings, and discuss ten statuses to exemplify this connection.¹ This paper takes the Engler - Haden article as a basis and specifically concentrates on those statuses which pertain to questions.

As in most treatments of intonation, a base form of intonation is assumed which ideally accompanies a segmental structure that is the base form of the clause type it represents. The base form of intonation is not to be equated with the most

¹Leo Engler, and Ernest F. Haden, "Status of Utterance," Acta Linguistica Hafniensia, Vol. IX, No. 1 (Copenhagen, 1965), pp. 25 - 36.

frequently occurring form; rather it is the form with the minimum of special meanings, so that any variation from the base implies contrast of one degree or other.² The base form could therefore be considered the unmarked form of that question type while the variants are the marked forms. While this approach is often expressed by a division in the resultant meaning only, such as intellectual vs. emotional function of intonation (Schubiger), or emphatic vs. unemphatic speech (Armstrong - Ward), it is also reflected in the context³ and in the structure of the utterance itself. Oskar Zacher elaborates on both aspects in his discussion of weak and strong sentence position.⁴

The problem whether intonation is to be considered as completely arbitrary, as physiologically determined to a certain extent,⁵ or as "embedded in a matrix of instinctive reactions"⁶ need not be treated here in this context. It may influence one's judgment regarding the phonemic status of intonation⁷ but does not affect a description such as this.

²Hans-Walter Wodarz "Über vergleichende satzmelodische Untersuchungen," Phonetika V (1960), 87.

³Engler, and Haden, op. cit., 27.

⁴Oskar Zacher, "Zur Intonation syntaktischer Grundmodelle," Zeitschrift für Phonetik (1963), pp. 277 - 291.

⁵František Daneš, "Sentence Intonation from a Functional Point of View," Word XVI (1960-1961), 35.

⁶Dwight L. Bolinger, "Intonation and Analysis," Word V (1949), 249.

⁷Leonard Bloomfield, Language, (New York: Holt, 1933), pp. 114 - 115.

As for the overall function of intonation, this paper is based on the exhaustive study of intonation function by Daneš.⁸ The role of question intonation, then, is not only to perform structural functions, such as the delimitation and integration of utterances in the stream of speech⁹ and the tying together of "thème" and "propos"¹⁰ but to add the modal functions of first identifying the intent of an utterance, here the questioning, and, where desired by the speaker, the secondary modal function of conveying the speaker's attitudes and feelings about his utterance as well as his hearer.

If one follows the very similar division by Romportl and Wodarz, who establish three functional levels, question intonation would not be marked on level 1, "abschliessend - weiterweisend", but would be marked on level 2, "Entscheidungsfrage - Nichtfrage", and on level 3, "gefühlsgefärbter - emotional neutraler Ausspruch".¹¹

In order to avoid repetition in the treatment of base contours and accentuated contours, be these unemphatic or empha-

⁸Daneš, op. cit., pp. 34 - 54.

⁹Otto von Essen, Grundzüge der hochdeutschen Satzintonation, (Ratingen/Düsseldorf: A. Henn, 1964), Rhetorische Bindung, pp. 53, Rhetorische Auflösung, pp. 56.

¹⁰Daneš, op. cit., 45. Frequently the terms topic and comment are used here as well as psychological subject and psychological predicate.

¹¹Wodarz, op. cit., 81.

tic, in the investigation as such, the most important characteristics of emotional speech will be briefly listed here.¹² These characteristics are seen as playing a vital role in any emphatic question. Any one or a combination of these may be used even when the segmental structure remains unaltered. The possibility of increasing emphasis through non-intonational features will be discussed later.

Armstrong and Ward differentiate between two kinds of emphasis which they define "as an all-round special increase of effort on the part of the speaker."¹³ Emphasis may express

1. Some added meaning or intensity.
2. Some extra prominence which the speaker attaches to particular words or sentences.

It may be accomplished in the following manner:¹⁴

1. By simply increasing the stress on the normally stressed syllables, the intonation remaining the same as for unemphatic utterances.
2. a) By widening the range of intonation for the whole sentence (in addition to increasing the stress).

¹²Compare Kenneth L. Pike, The Intonation of American English (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1945), Chapter 3, "General Characteristics of Intonation".
Maria Schubiger, The Role of Intonation in Spoken English (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1935).

¹³Lillias E. Armstrong, and Ida C. Ward, Handbook of English Intonation (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1926), p. 43.

¹⁴This discussion follows Armstrong - Ward, op. cit., pp. 44.

- b) By widening the range of intonation from the intensified word to the end of the sentence, the rest of the sentence being pronounced with normal stress and intonation.
3. By lowering and narrowing the whole range of intonation (in addition to increasing the stress). The pitch of the final syllables is sometimes so low that whisper takes the place of voice.
 4. By shift of intonation turn. Normally, it is on the last stressed syllable of an utterance that the direction of the pitch changes most noticeably, be this to a rise or to a fall. In emotional language, however, there seems to be almost no limit to the shifting of this intonation turn. Even words that in normal utterances are unstressed may in the proper context become the nucleus of a contour.
 5. By addition of primary stress on normally unstressed words, such as pronouns or auxiliaries.
 6. By adding a separate fall of the voice on each stressed syllable.

Engler and Haden distinguish between divided and undivided prominence.¹⁵ A syllable is said to have undivided prominence if both pitch peak and primary stress are united on it. Normally this is the last syllable in an utterance which has word stress, but a shift of both features to another syl-

¹⁵Engler, and Haden, op. cit., pp. 27 - 28.

lable may also be involved. Divided prominence results if primary stress and pitch peak are not on the same syllable.

Intonation may even deviate so far from the base contour as to approximate a contour that is distinctive for another clause type.

The type of contrastive variation mentioned above must be kept separate from the non-distinctive variation which is a result mainly of varying degrees of expansion for a clause type or different lexical choice for a given structure. The latter is thus essentially connected with the innate stress of words, resulting in slightly different pitches.¹⁶

The notational system is essentially that of Trager and Smith in their Outline. This choice was made despite criticism regarding its adequateness¹⁷ since most American studies seem to agree with their four stress, four pitch and three terminal juncture model. (Pike uses inverse numbering system for pitch levels). The German material available showed little uniformity; the majority of the studies indicated intonation by a sequence of lines and dots above the print, the dots marking pitch for unstressed, lines for stressed syllables. Some were influenced by the American pitch level system of indicating intonation,

¹⁶ Compare George L. Trager, and Henry Lee Smith, An Outline of English Structure (Seventh Printing, Studies in Linguistics: Occasional Papers, 3; Washington, D. C. 1957). Treatment of allophones of pitch phonemes, pp. 45.

¹⁷ Dwight L. Bolinger, "Intonation: Levels versus Configurations," Word VII (December 1951), pp. 199 - 210.

others used uninterrupted lines through the printed text to indicate height of the pitch of the voice.

A comparison of intonation contours described with different methods naturally presents difficulties; the details available through one system, such as English discrete pitch levels, may not be represented in the other; thus the height of the voice in most German studies is only indicated in relation to those syllables in its immediate environment. Essentially a transposing of systems is involved. In those cases where evidence was lacking or seemed to conflict a choice, based on the writer's speech and that of native Germans presently residing in Kansas had to be made. All these steps naturally admit the possibility of error. Yet, to some extent, this procedure seems hardly avoidable at this point in contrastive analysis of intonation.

CHAPTER II

THE SENTENCE TYPE QUESTION AND ITS MAIN DIVISIONS

In this chapter the reference of the term "question" is to be investigated. It is necessary to establish just what area of speech is to be covered by the term to find the boundaries for the study. At the same time, this will make possible a division into the most important subgroups.

As frequent as the references to questions are, only in very few cases is a definition attempted. Fuchs, in his search for a central characteristic common to all questions, arrives at the following: "Die Frage ist der Ausdruck eines Verlangens nach Aufklärung."¹ And he adds: "Alle Sätze nämlich, die nicht unmittelbar in dem echten Verlangen nach Aufklärung ausgesprochen werden, sind nicht als Fragesätze im eigentlichen Sinne, sondern höchstens als eine Abart derselben zu bezeichnen." From this standpoint he excludes the so-called "rhetorical question" since it is answered by the speaker or writer himself and is simply an attention-getting device. Likewise, questions, with the syntactic structure of a statement, questions directed to the speaker himself, as well as teacher questions are excluded. Nonetheless, he treats at length "fragende Aufforderungssätze", i.e. "Can we see it", and "Aufforderungssätze in

¹Eugen Fuchs, Zur Intonation des englischen Fragesatzes (Bonn: H. Ludwig, 1935), p. 4.

Frageform", i.e. "Certainly, will you please enter your name here". Obviously, a great deal of subjectivity is involved when such terms as "echtes Verlangen" are made the basis for classification.

The only other longer treatment available to me is that of E. Hermann in "Probleme der Frage". He says: "Worin besteht nun die Leistung der Frage? . . . Die Frage ist die sprachliche Formulierung des Suchens nach dem fehlenden Stück in den Gedanken über einen Sachverhalt (Darstellung), eine Überzeugung (Kundgabe), ein Begehren (Appell)."² He emphasizes that question and answer are inseparable and that a sentence to which no answer is expected, even if it is in question form, is no question. Thus he excludes rhetorical questions, such questions as "Willst du das gleich sein lassen!", that are only appeals, and emotional expressions such as "Ist das herrlich!" which have the syntactic structure of a question. However, he adds: "Allerdings ist die Grenze zwischen solchen Darstellungen, Appellen, Kundgaben und Fragen fließend, daher ist es oft im einzelnen Fall schwer zu entscheiden, mit welcher Sprachfunktion man es zu tun hat."³

The structural characteristics of questions are usually not treated separately but are implied in the standard division of the area "question" into information questions, that is,

²Hermann, op. cit., p. 128.

³Ibid., p. 129.

questions with an interrogative morpheme, and yes/no questions, that is, questions with a sentence initial predicate. Questions with entirely different structure are thus not accounted for.

All this points to the impossibility of defining question strictly by structure, intonation, or situation. Rather, all three aspects must be considered as suggested by the treatment of English utterances as a whole by Engler and Haden who propose the term "status" for the construct whose two constituents are the intonation contour and the syntactic arrangement. Structural signals for questions are inversion of subject and verb and the use of interrogatives. The intonation contour which signals questions is the one ending in a final rise. Thus, ideally, a question would be identified on three counts, i.e. inversion of subject and verb, rising terminal contour and an appropriate context. Clearly, the contextual identification is only secondary, since, in itself, without the typical question intonation, it cannot signal a question. Intonation is the primary signal, since it may even override structural signals.

Instead of examining the Engler - Haden statuses which pertain to question, each in their numerical order, this paper takes as a point of departure for division the various structural constituents. These represent the main divisions for which traditional terminology in the area of questions is maintained as a mnemonic device as well as for quick reference. Subgroups under these headings are distinguished by the various intonation contours that are available with this structure. Terms express-

ing the meaning differences resulting from different intonation contours or different context which were frequently used to designate main types of questions will be given where appropriate.

The main divisions are:

Chapter I: Questions with Interrogative Morpheme

Chapter II: Questions with Sentence Initial Predicate

Chapter III: Alternative Questions

Chapter IV: Tag Questions

Chapter V: Statement Structure with Question Intonation

The following table is intended to illustrate how each of these question types is marked, in its base form, either by structure, intonation, or context.

	Interrogative	Inversion	Intonation	Context
I	+	± *	-	-
II	-	+	+	-
III	-	+	+(1st part)	-
IV	-	+	+	+
V	-	-	+	+

*Inversion with interrogative non-subject morpheme, no inversion with interrogative subject morpheme.

PART II

ANALYSIS OF QUESTION INTONATION IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN

CHAPTER I

QUESTIONS WITH INTERROGATIVE MORPHEME

I. INTERROGATIVE NONSUBJECT MORPHEME

A. Structure

1. English

One of the non-subject, non-predicate tagmemes of the independent declarative clause type, be it obligatory or optional, such as direct or indirect objects, adverbials of time, place, or manner, was transformed into one of the interrogatives "what, whom, how, how much, when, where", and moved to sentence initial position. For those clauses containing a finite form of "be" or an auxiliary, inversion with the subject takes place. Otherwise the person-tense-marker "do" is introduced immediately following the interrogative and preceding the subject. The clause may be either negative or affirmative.¹

Why can't we go swimming?

What is her name?

Where did they go?

How do you open it?

¹Engler, and Haden, op. cit., use the term "polarity" for the affirmative and negative versions of an utterance, 26.

What should we tell them?

What did she cut it with?

2. German

German substitutes the interrogative morphemes "wer, wem, was, wann, wo, wie, wieviel" for the same tagmemes mentioned above for English. While the preposition of an English prepositional phrase for whose nominal the interrogative was substituted does not change its place, German expresses nominals referring to inanimates with the morpheme {wo-} and combines it with the respective preposition, resulting in compounds such as "worin, worauf, womit, wofür", which are then moved to sentence initial position. Simple inversion of subject and finite verb takes place regardless of the type of verb involved so that the ordering is: Interrogative Morpheme + Verb + Subject in every case.

Wie geht es dir?

Womit kann ich dienen?

Wann kommt der Zug an?

Wem gehört dieser Mantel?

Was gibt es Neues?

This question type is usually referred to as "information question or question-word question", German "Ergänzungsfrage oder Wortfrage".

B. Intonation

1. /231 3/

- a) The basic contour, that is, the contour independent of linguistic context, is /231↓/ for both English and German. (Compare Engler - Haden Status IV). However, this seems to be true primarily for northern Germany while in the South the contour /323↑/ seems to be preferred with the former intonation being considered a rather harsh form. Otto von Essen uses the expression "Höflichkeitsmelodie" for this particular contour:

"Andererseits können aber Aufforderungen und Ergänzungsfragen durch den steigenden Melodieverlauf die Note des Freundlichen und Verbindlichen annehmen: . . . Diese "Höflichkeitsmelodie" wird gern - und in zunehmendem Masse - im öffentlichen Verkehr angewandt, um den aus früherer Zeit noch nachwirkenden "Beamtenton" zu überwinden. Aufforderungen und Befehle mit interrogativer Intonation klingen freundlich, konziliant, zuvorkommend."²

/²When can we go ³swimming¹↓/

/²What is her ³name¹↓/

/²Where did they ³go¹↓/

Northern German:

/²Wie ³geht es dir¹↓/

/²Womit kann ich ³dienen¹↓/

/²Wann kommt der ³Zug an¹↓/

Southern German:

/³Wie ²geht es dir³↑/

²von Essen, op. cit., p. 59.

/³Womit kann ich ²díenen^{3↑}/

/³Wann kommt der ²Zúg an^{3↑}/

b) accented base contour

(1) with unemphatic stress

Accentuation of the base contour may be either divided or undivided prominence as discussed above; this holds true in both languages. These contours can be interpreted as variations of the base contour, eliminating the necessity for establishing separate contours. Accentuation with unemphatic and with emphatic stress depends on and requires context.

/²What is ³hér name^{1↓}/

/²What is hér ³name^{1↓}/

/²What ³is her name^{1↓}/

/²What is ³her name^{1↓}/

Northern German:

/²Wie ³schréibt man dieses Wort^{1↓}/

/²Wie schréibt ³man dieses Wort^{1↓}/

/²Wie schreibt man ³díeses Wort^{1↓}/

/²Wie schreibt ³man ²díeses Wort^{1↓}/

Southern German:

/³Wie ²schréibt man dieses ³Wort^{3↑}/

/³Wie ²schréibt ³man dieses Wort^{3↑}/

/³Wie schreibt man ²díeses Wort³↑/

/³Wie schreibt ²man díeses Wort³↑/

The second accentuated form given for Northern German /231↓/ approximates the Southern German /323↑/ because of the primary stress on pitch level 2, that is, the feature of divided prominence. However, the two still differ in the final pitch level, /1/ vs. /3/, and the falling vs. the rising terminal so that they cannot be considered as variations of each other.

If the interrogative morpheme is to receive special prominence the fall occurs on it, resulting in a glide on that syllable of the interrogative which carries the word stress.

/^{3~2}Whom did she see¹↓/

/^{3~2}Wie ist das passiert¹↓/

Hermann characterizes the intonation for German information questions in the following manner:

"Auch in der deutschen Wortfrage gilt die Höhe als allgemeines Kennzeichen . . . , nur in ganz anderer Weise als in der Satzfrage. Im Gegensatz zu dieser spielt in der Wortfrage das Ansteigen der Melodie eine weit geringere Rolle. Dagegen tritt die dort nur vereinzelt absinkende Tonkurve in den Vordergrund . . . Die aufsteigende

Linie ist viel seltener als in der Satzfrage, kann aber in allen Abarten auftreten."³

Most other investigators simply equate the intonation of the German information question with that of the independent declarative clause whose characteristic is the terminal fall.

If a slight rise in the overall descent of the voice is used at the end, it may give the question the effect of cordial interest.

Compare:

/²How do you ³feel¹↓/

/²How do you ³feel²↑/

/²Wie geht es ³Ihnen¹↓/

/²Wie geht es ³Ihnen²↑/

Abe notes: "This rise would sound, depending upon the situation in which it is used, either pleading, wheedling, or even importunate."⁴

/⁴ ³When are we going to ²eat³ /

/⁴ ³Wie lange dauert es ²noch³ /

could easily be a child's whining question.

(2) with emphatic stress

³Hermann, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴Isamu Abe, "Intonational Patterns of English and Japanese," Word, XI (1955), 396.

The question receives a note of urgency or displeasure when emphatic stress ("") is substituted for normal or shifted primary stress.

/²Why did they ⁴leave¹↓/

In most cases pitch /3/ will change to /4/.

/²When is this going to be ⁴over with¹↓/

/²Warum hast du nicht ⁴vörher gefragt¹↓/

Additional factors, in many cases, corroborate the emphatic stress with its concurrent feature of higher pitch, particularly in German. Since word order frequently performs a syntactic function in English and therefore is relatively fixed intonation alone is often the bearer of finer emotional and intellectual shades of meaning. German, however, maintaining more inflections to indicate the syntactic relationship among sentence elements can move these more freely, though by no means with unrestricted liberty. In the case of the interrogative non-subject question, for example, which is spoken with /231↓/ both languages restrict the occurrence of the interrogative word to sentence initial position, thus eliminating for German change in the order of occurrence of sentence elements as a signal for

emphasis. In this situation, as well as when rearrangement is permissible, German generally varies the segmental component somewhat, frequently with adverbs, the most common one for questions being "denn".

/²Was ⁴hat ³er schon wieder¹↓/

would then be:

/²Was ⁴hat ³er denn schon wieder¹↓/

It is difficult to determine the exact semantic value of this type of adverb aside from the general one of emphasis since it easily absorbs the overall meaning of an utterance and the two can no longer be separated objectively. This difference between English and German in the area of emphatic questions will emerge as being rather consistent and will be taken up again with other question types. Maria Schubiger points out another variation for a German emphatic question.⁵ When emphasized, the pronouns for the person being talked about, singular or plural, are substituted for by the demonstratives. This emphatic use of "die" and "der" can signify a variety of emotional shades, such as contempt, condescension, but also admiration.

⁵Schubiger, op. cit., p. 31.

/²Was wollte denn ⁴die¹↓/

/²Warum sprichst du mit ⁴dem¹↓/

2. /233↑/

a) Echo Question = Nachfrage

The intonation /233↑/ applied to a preceding information question signals an echo question (Status VI).

From the standpoint of structure, an echo question, in unemphatic use, is a verbatim repetition of the previous question, except for any necessary pronoun changes from second to first person and vice versa. An echo question, whether it has the structure of an information question or a yes/no question, can express four different reactions.

- (1) The speaker has understood the utterance, but merely wants to confirm his impression. This is the basic use of the contour.

A: /²Where will you ³wait for me¹↓/

B: /²Where will I ³wait for you³↑/

A: /²Wann hast du das ³gékáuft¹↓/

B: /²Wann hab' ich das ³gékáuft³↑/

- (2) The speaker has understood most of the utterance but is not certain about one word. This word will receive undivided prominence in his question.

A: /²How much did the dress ³cost^{1↓}/

B: /²How much did the ³dress cost^{3↑}/

A: /²Wann wart ihr zu ³Häuse^{1↓}/

B: /²Wann waren ³wir zu Hause^{3↑}/

If the question word is the item not understood completely the echo question frequently repeats only it, often with emphatic stress and pitch /4/, omitting all other elements.

A: /²How much did the dress ³cost^{1↓}/

B: /³How ⁴much^{4↑}/

A: /²Wann wart ihr zu ³Häuse^{1↓}/

B: /⁴Wann^{4↑}/

- (3) The speaker has heard the original question, but, to gain time in the formulation of an answer, he repeats the question directed to him. It differs from the usage under (1) in being spoken more slowly, usually on a somewhat lower pitch relative to the speaker's voice range, but maintaining the utterance-final rise.

A: /²Where are my ³glässes^{1↓}/

B: /²Where are your glässes^{2↑}/

A: /²Wo ist meine ³Brille^{1↓}/

B: /²Wo ist deine Brille^{2↑}/

(4) The speaker has understood the question but wants to indicate surprise, shock, or indignation about the fact that it was asked at all.

A: /²Where's my ³Daddy^{1↓}/

B: /²Where's your ⁴Daddy^{4↑}/

A: /²Was ³máchst du da^{1↓}/

B: /²Was ⁴mách' ich da^{4↑}/

b) Questions asking for repetition

The speaker has failed to hear or understand or has forgotten the previous question and asks for repetition. Most frequently the interrogative receives undivided prominence. This type of question in itself is not different from an echo question. Only when one takes the context into consideration can the two be distinguished. An echo question echoes a previous question with the restrictions given above, while a question asking for repetition typically arises from the failure to hear a previous statement.

/³What did you say^{3↑}/

/³Where's he going^{3↑}/

/³How many should I buy^{3↑}/

/³Wo ist der Briefkasten^{3↑}/

/³Wann werden wir erwartet^{3↑}/

/³Warum soll ich mich beeilen^{3↑}/

In English, less frequently perhaps in German as well, another form of the question asking for repetition exists, this being quite emphatic. For convenience it will be discussed here although it does not have the same structural description as the other questions discussed under this heading. Rather, the structure is that of the independent declarative clause except that the item in question is expressed by an interrogative word which most often stands in final position. (Status VIII).

/²You saw ³what^{3↑}/

/²They travelled ⁴where^{4↑}/

/²We can go ⁴when^{4↑}/

/²Du suchst ⁴wen^{4↑}/

/²Du kommst ⁴wann nach Hause^{4↑}/

c) Questions expressing a threat

When most of the prenuclear syllables are spoken at an almost monotone pitch and only the final stressed syllable receives a sharp rise from /3/ to /4/ the question may express a threat.

/³What did you do then^{4↑}/

/³Where were you at that time^{4↑}/

/³Was hast du gemacht^{4↑}/

/³Wie kommst du zu dem Bild^{4↑}/⁶

⁶von Essen, op. cit., p. 60.

II. INTERROGATIVE SUBJECT MORPHEME

A. Structure

The interrogative subject morphemes "what, who" or German "was, wer" take the place of the subject in an independent declarative clause which again may be negative or affirmative. No inversion takes place.

Who is coming?

What's making that awful noise?

Who told you to go?

Wer spricht so laut?

Wer kennt dieses Bild?

Was raschelt da?

B. Intonation

1. /231↓/

The basic contour both for English and German is again /231↓/ (Status I). The contour /323↑/ once more seems to be preferred in southern Germany.

/²Who is ³coming¹↓/

/²What's making that awful ³noise¹↓/

Northern German:

/²Wer ³spricht so laut¹↓/

/²Was ³raschelt da¹↓/

Southern German:

/³Wer ²spricht ³so laut³↑/

/³Was ²raschelt ³da³↑/

Accentuation of the basic contour, both with normal and emphatic stress conforms to the interrogative nonsubject question.

/²Who ³tóld you to go¹↓/
 /²Who told ³yóu to go¹↓/
 /²Who tóld ³you to go¹↓/
 /²Who ³told ²yóu to go¹↓/

Northern German:

/²Wer kennt ³díeses Bild¹↓/
 /²Wer ³kénnt dieses Bild¹↓/
 /²Wer ³kennt ²díeses Bild¹↓/
 /²Wer kénnt ³dieses Bild¹↓/

Southern German:

/³Wer kennt ²díeses ³Bild³↑/
 /³Wer ²kénnt ³dieses Bild³↑/
 /³Wer kennt ²díeses Bild³↑/
 /³Wer ²kénnt dieses ³Bild³↑/

2. /233↑/

a) Echo Question (Status IV)

Change of intonation from /231↓/ to /233↑/ again signals an echo question with the possibility for indicating any of the four reactions discussed above.

A: /²Who is ³cóming¹↓/

B: /²Who is ³cóming³↑/

A: /²Wer ³rúft dich¹↓/

B: /²Wer ³rúft mich³↑/

b) Question asking for repetition

There is no difference from the interrogative non-subject questions. However, the emphatic question with the structure Subject + Predicate + Interrogative is not possible here.

/⁴who" is the man up there⁴↑/

/⁴wer" hat das gesagt⁴↑/

CHAPTER II

QUESTIONS WITH SENTENCE INITIAL PREDICATE

These questions are commonly referred to as yes/no questions, German "Entscheidungs- oder Satzfragen". They can be answered with "yes" or "no".

I. STRUCTURE

A. English

Again, taking the independent declarative clause as a starting point, two simultaneous changes occur in English.

1. Occurrence of an interrogative predicate

This can be a finite form of "be" or any of the auxiliaries. Otherwise the person-tense-marker "do" is introduced.

2. Inversion of the interrogative predicate with the subject tagmeme.

Is it for me?

Can you write her?

Did you notice that man?

Have they given you everything?

B. German

Simple inversion of subject and predicate tagmeme transforms an independent declarative clause into a yes/no question.

Kannst du mir die genaue Zeit angeben?

Wissen Sie schon das Neueste?

Seid ihr bald fertig?

Habt ihr Hunger?

II. INTONATION

A. /233↑/

1. The basic intonation contour for yes/no questions is

/233↑/ (Status III) for English and German.

/²Is it for 3_{me}³↑/

/²Did you notice the 3_{man}³↑/

/²Kannst du mir die genaue 3_{Zeit}³↑/

/²Wissen Sie schon das 3_{Neueste}³↑/

/²Seid ihr 3_{fertig}³↑/

For German Hans-Heinrich Wängler notes:

"Die Entscheidungsfrage hat im Deutschen eine ganz charakteristische Melodieführung: Tonanstieg und Hinaufschleifen der letzten Silbe. Die Tonhöhenlage des Schwerpunktes ist dabei wieder nicht entscheidend, wohl aber wird die sinnwichtigste Silbe zumeist hoch gelegt.

/²Hast du schon zu 3_{Abend}³↑/ . . .

Ohne weiteres ist aber auch dies möglich:

/³Hast du schon zu 2_{Abend}³↑/"¹

¹Hans-Heinrich Wängler, Grundriss einer Phonetik des Deutschen, (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1960), p. 138. Transcription mine.

It is difficult to determine which of the two is to be considered as the basic contour. Moulton notes that /323↑/ is particularly prevalent in southern Germany, as for information questions. While it is possible in English as well it seems to be less commonly used.²

Hermann takes note of the apparent diversity of intonation for both yes/no questions and information questions and characterizes the information question in the following manner:

"Die Fragesätze im Deutschen haben sehr verschiedenartige Melodien geliefert. Satzfragen und Wortfragen gehen häufig, aber keineswegs immer zusammen. . . . Das Charakteristikum der deutschen Satzfrage ist fast durchweg das Ansteigen des Tones . . . Allein die Melodie braucht bei betonter Vorletzten nicht bis zur letzten Silbe anzusteigen, was vielmehr bloss bei betonter Endsilbe die Regel ist; auch muss das Steigen nicht allmählich vor sich zu gehen, der Ton kann auch erst eben verlaufen und zum Schluss ansteigen . . . Hat das letzte Wort den Druck nicht auf der letzten Silbe, so steigt er oft auch nur bis zur Drucksilbe und bleibt dann stehen oder sinkt ab. Daneben gibt es eine andre Kurve, in der nach vorausgegangenem Anstieg . . . oder etwa gleichbleibender Höhenlage . . . in der vorletzten Silbe der Ton sinkt, um danach wieder in die Höhe zu springen: in die frühere Höhe oder höher oder nicht mehr so hoch; . . . Das allgemeine Charakteristikum der deutschen Satzfrage ist somit nicht so sehr das Ansteigen des Tones zur Höhe, als die Höhe überhaupt, wenn auch das Ansteigen die meisten Fälle in irgend einer Form beherrscht."³

²William G. Moulton, The Sounds of English and German (Chicago: 1962), pp. 134 - 136.

³Hermann, op. cit., p. 167.

Hermann compares German and British English intonation by saying: "Im allgemeinen bemerke ich, dass im Englischen Wort- und Satzfragen viel schärfer als z. B. im Deutschen in der Melodie voneinander getrennt sind."⁴

Duden notes of the Entscheidungsfrage: "Je höflich-verbindlicher sie gestellt wird, desto mehr schwingt der Tonbogen aus."⁵ Duden also makes a distinction between the function of glides and separate pitches.

/³Ist er schon ²dá³↑/

/³Ist er ²schon ³dá³↑/

/³Kennst du mich ²nícht³↑/

/³Kennst du ²mich ³nícht³↑/

"Je schroffer der Wille hervortritt, desto mehr löst sich der Tonbogen in Stufen auf, und die Tonlage des ganzen Satzes rückt ein Stück nach oben."

2. Accentuated contour

a) with unemphatic stress

Accentuation of the base contour follows the same principles given in Chapter I.

/²Can you tell us the ³whole story³↑/

⁴Ibid., p. 181.

⁵Duden, Grammatik der deutschen Gegenwartssprache (Mannheim, 1966), paragraph 7240.

/²Can you tell ³us the whole story³↑/

/²Can you ³tell us the whole story³↑/

And an example from von Essen (p. 47):

/³Hast du den ²Böten g³esehen³↑/

/³Hast du den ²Boten g³esehen³↑/

/³Hast ²dú den ³Boten gesehen.³↑/

With such accentuation which frequently results in a longer sequence of postnuclear syllables one may note a difference between English and German. In American English most postnuclear syllables are held rather monotone at /3/ and the definite rise occurs only at the end of the utterance. For German, however, a gradual rise of all these syllables plus a rising terminal seem more characteristic. This would be particularly applicable with the /323↑/ contour which allows for a definite rise between levels /2/ and /3/ spread over a number of syllables.

If the nuclear tone of the English question is shifted to the sentence initial form of the person-tense-marker "do" the speaker inquires about the reality or non-reality of the content of his question.

/³Did he go³↑/

/³Didn't they bring the correct one³↑/

German emphasis on the sentence-initial verb does not seem to be a direct parallel to the English sentence in all cases. Since person and tense are not marked by a separate form as in English but are suffixed to the verb, emphasis on the verb immediately implies contrast with some other semantically appropriate verb.

/³Schréibst du^{3↑}/

may have an implicit contrast "or are you calling on the phone". It is in the alternative questions, to be discussed in Chapter III, that we have similar meaning as in English, specifically with those questions whose second element is "oder nicht".

/³Dó you know^{3↑}/

/³Weisst du es^{1↓2}oder ³nícht^{1↓}/

Only in German compound tenses or in the combination of any auxiliary with another verb, or naturally with "séin" as the main verb is the exact parallel to be found.

/³Díd you see it^{3↑}/

/³Hást du es gesehen^{3↑}/

/³Cán you bring it^{3↑}/

/³Kánnst du es bringen^{3↑}/

/³Ís it true^{3↑}/

/³Íst es wahr^{3↑}/

b) with emphatic stress

An emphatic stress instead of the primary stress indicates surprise, incredulity, shock, or reluctance on the speaker's part to accept something that has been said. In many cases pitch /3/ will change to /4/.

Accentuation through non-intonational features is again frequent in German. "Denn" and usage of the demonstrative instead of the personal pronoun are applicable as in Chapter I.

For a negative question "denn" implies that the speaker considers the affirmative to be true or vice versa or that he now has some doubt about an opinion formed previously, whether hypothetical or actually voiced.

/²Habt ihr denn ³keinen Hunger^{3↑}/

/²Bist du denn ³gröss genug^{3↑}/

More importantly, perhaps, than through insertion of adverbs, accentuation in this question type is achieved by rearrangement of the order of occurrence of sentence elements. Generally, in a yes/no question the syllable that receives the nuclear stress after which the voice rises is the most prominent.

/²Are you going home with ³me^{3↑}/

If "home" is to be emphasized, to contrast it with some other location, English shifts the undivided

prominence to it, which automatically reduces the stress on "with me". In German this same shift of stress and pitch peak to give emphasis to a particular item is likewise possible.

/²Gehst du nach Hause mit ³mir^{3↑}/

/²Gehst du nach ³Hause mit mir^{3↑}/

More frequently, however, the two prepositional phrases will change places, automatically making "Hau-" in "Hause" the last syllable on which the nuclear stress may occur and thus emphasizing it.

/²Gehst du mit mir nach ³Hause^{3↑}/

/²Warst du letzten Montag im Theater^{3↑}/

/²Warst du im Theater letzten ³Montag^{3↑}/

Some elements may even be placed in sentence-initial position, preceding the predicate, thus receiving special emphasis, conveying strongly the meaning of surprise, shock, incredulity.

/²Nach ³Hause geht er^{3↑}/

/³Morgen kommt er nach ³Hause^{3↑}/

Due to the rules of ordering in German sentences this same structure can be interpreted as a statement clause with question intonation. For English, however, it must be interpreted as a statement clause with question intonation since inversion, typical of questions does not occur, i.e. "Tomorrow he'll come home?"

Since the contour already ends in a final rise, a feature used in all echo questions, an echo yes/no question can only be signalled by use of emphatic stress.

A: /²Has ³John come^{3↑}/

B: /²Has ⁴John come^{4↑}/

A: /²Bleibst du bei ³uns^{3↑}/

B: /²Bleib' ich bei ⁴euch^{4↑}/

B. /231↓/

The meaning of /231↓/ with this structure is somewhat difficult to determine. Pike points out: "It is important to notice, however, that these same phrases may utilize a falling contour when it becomes more pertinent to insist on focusing the hearer's attention on some point."⁶

/²Are you ³going^{1↓}/

/²Is it ³there^{1↓}/

/²Does he ³care^{1↓}/

Kingdon assigns to questions with this intonation a certain amount of insistence. "When they are repetitions they are used because the person addressed has either not heard, not understood, or has shown reluctance to answer."⁷ He notes that a suggestion of impatience is

⁶Pike, op. cit., p. 53.

⁷Roger Kingdon, The Groundwork of English Intonation (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), p. 217.

added to the insistence if there is a slight low rise on the initial verb, the form of "do", or the auxiliary.

/¹~²Can't you ³cóme¹↓/

Engler and Haden point out that the majority of the questions with this intonation "are requests for corroboration rather than for information."⁸

The speaker's indication of curiosity is thus considerably reduced.⁹ Uppermost are his own concerns so that the utterance can even show displeasure or protest, or approach a command.

/²Is my ³cár¹ in your way¹↓/

/²Can you ³hélp me ¹with this¹↓/

/²Is it ³nécessary ¹to make all that noise¹↓/

In this connection, those structures whose interrogative predicates are auxiliaries such as "would, should, can, could" can be singled out to contrast the two contours.

/²Would you come ³with me³↑/

is a courteous request.

/²Would you come ³with me¹↓/

is a command which does not expect a verbal response.

Likewise

/²Can we ³sée it³↑/

asks permission.

⁸Engler, and Haden, op. cit., 34 (Status IX).

⁹Dwight L. Bolinger, "The Intonation of Accosting Questions," English Studies, XXIX (1948), 112.

/²Can we ³see it¹↓/

is a rather harsh utterance, indicating that the speaker is about to proceed with or without permission.

For German this contour is equally applicable. Otto von Essen makes the following comment: "Bekanntlich gibt es Aussprüche die ihrer grammatischen Form nach wie Fragen aussehen, es aber dem Sinne und ihrer Funktion nach nicht sind. Sie sind dann Befehle oder Ausrufe. z.B.

/³Bist du dā²bei gewesen¹↓/

Ihre Intonation ist dann natürlich auch die der Aufforderungen und Ausrufe, d.h. die terminale."¹⁰

This type of question is strongly suggestive and is frequently used in interrogations.

/³Bist du dā²bei gewesen¹↓/

/²Haben Sie nicht einen Kompl³izen gehabt¹↓/¹¹

In addition, Essen notes that this contour, though not with as pronounced a terminal fall or even almost a sustained pitch seems popular with negated questions.¹²

/²Haben Sie meine ³Frä²u nicht gesehn²→/

Bierwisch states only: "Die Entscheidungsfrage ohne Frageintonation, . . . ist eine häufige und offenbar

¹⁰ von Essen, op. cit., p. 48. Transcription mine.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹² Ibid., p. 45.

reguläre Möglichkeit der deutschen Sprache, . . ."¹³

The utterance gets harsher the wider the intervals.¹⁴

/²Ist das ⁴währ¹↓/

/²Wollt ihr nicht ⁴anfangen¹↓/

¹³Manfred Bierwisch, "Regeln für die Intonation deutscher Sätze," Studia Grammatica VII, Berlin: 1966, p. 166.

¹⁴Duden, op. cit., paragraph 7249.

CHAPTER III

ALTERNATIVE QUESTIONS

I. STRUCTURE

Structurally, the alternative question in both languages consists of two parts. The first part is a question of the type discussed under II, that is, a yes/no question, with the second part separated from it by the conjunction "or/oder". The speaker is presented with an alternative from which he is asked to select. The second part has no predictable structure; it may be a simple negation of the first part: "or not/oder nicht". Otherwise its choice depends on the element in the first part which receives the emphasis and to which the alternative is given. The conjunction which may separate one or more alternatives from the yes/no question seems to be the most convenient way of identifying this question type.

Logic uses the term "disjunctive proposition" for a predication of this type. Disjunctive statements may be expressed schematically in the forms:

1. A is either B, or C
2. Either A is B, or C is D
3. Either A or B is C.

Any of these may be negated without altering the disjunctive value of the proposition.

Disjunctive questions simply question propositions of the above type, e.g., Is A either B or C? etc.

Pertaining to the meaning of "or" Joseph says:

"It is not always clear in a disjunctive proposition whether the alternatives offered are meant to be mutually exclusive. If A is either B or C, then it cannot be neither; but may it be both? . . . Sometimes from the nature of the case we may know that the alternatives exclude each other . . . Where this is not so, it is perhaps safer to assume that they are intended as mutually exclusive, unless the contrary is stated; . . ."¹

It remains to be investigated whether intonation makes possible this kind of distinction which apparently is not made in grammatical structure.

Bierwisch distinguishes "Ja-Nein-Alternativen" such as

Hast du Hunger, oder nicht?

from "Konstituenten-Alternativen", such as

Arbeitest du noch oder gehen wir ins Kino?

by the following characteristic: the answer to the first subtype may be the sentence adverbials yes or no or these together with a total sentence determined by the nucleus of the question. For the second subtype, however, the sentence adverbials are not part of the answer; rather it consists entirely of the proposition.²

Kommst du mit oder nicht?

Possible answer: Nein; ich habe viel Arbeit.

Spielt er Klavier oder Geige?

Possible answer: Er spielt Geige.

¹H. W. B. Joseph, An Introduction to Logic (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, second revised edition), p. 187.

²Bierwisch, op. cit., p. 168.

English example:

Do you want to come along or stay?

Are they in front or back?

Will you have tea or coffee?

Was she at home or not?

German examples:

Kommst du mit oder bleibst du hier?

Sind sie vorne oder hinten?

Nimmst du Tee oder Kaffee?

War sie zu Hause oder nicht?

II. INTONATION

Two intonation contours are available for questions with this structure. In either case, the first part, having the structure of a yes/no question also has the basic intonation of that question type, that is, /233↑/ for both languages, or the additional possibility of /323↑/ for German.

Contours for the second part

A. /231↓/

/²Do you want to 3c'ome^{3↑2}or 3stáy^{1↓}/

/²Are they in 3frónt^{3↑2}or 3báck^{1↓}/

/²Will you have 3téa^{3↑2}or 3c'offee^{1↓}/

/²Could she be at 3h'ome^{3↑2}or 3nót^{1↓}/

/²Kommst du 3mit^{3↑2}oder bleibst du 3h'ier^{1↓}/

/²Sind sie ³vorne^{3↑2}oder ³hinten^{1↓}/
 /²Nimmst du ³Tee^{3↑2}oder ³Kaffee^{1↓}/
 /²War sie zu ³Hause^{3↑2}oder ³nicht^{1↓}/

With the combination /233↑231↓/ the utterance contains a full list of the choices the hearer is being given and he must choose one of these. The necessity of choice between one or the other would seem to indicate that "or" is used in its mutually exclusive value. In the above examples, both English and German, this exclusiveness is based on two aspects, however, the falling final intonation contour as well as semantics. In an utterance such as

/²Do you like Berlin^{3↑2}or ³Munich^{1↓}/
 /²Haben Sie Berlin^{3↑2}oder ³München gern^{1↓}/

which, from the standpoint of semantics, does not dictate exclusiveness it would still seem that the intent of the speaker, when presenting the question, was that of mutual exclusiveness of the alternatives, even though the answer could very well be: "Oh, I like both cities." The intonation /233↑231↓/ then, at least seems to favor the value of exclusiveness for "or".

Naturally, shifting of the primary stress as in the yes/no question as described above is possible. However, the alternative must always be related to the stressed word and therefore would have to change lexically with the shift of prominence.

/²Do ³you want to come^{3↑2}or ³he^{1↓}/
 /²Kommst ³dú mit^{3↑2}oder ³er^{1↓}/

B. /233↑/

1. /²Do you want 3téa^{3↑2}or 3côffee^{3↑}/
- /²Could she be at 3hóme^{3↑2}or at 3schóol^{3↑}/
- /²Do you like Berlín^{3↑2}or 3Múnich^{3↑}/
- /²Nimmst du 3Tée^{3↑2}oder 3Káffee^{3↑}/
- /²War sie zu 3Háuse^{3↑2}oder in der 3Schúle^{3↑}/
- /²Haben Sie Berlín^{3↑2}oder 3Múnchen gern^{3↑}/

The alternatives given do not constitute a complete list of choices, the hearer may supply one or more in addition. For this reason the negation with "or not/oder nicht" does not seem likely with the rising intonation. Related, though by no means equal, to the meaning of "no complete listing" is that of the alternatives presented not being mutually exclusive, when this is possible from the semantic point of view. Again, the intonation does not prescribe the non-exclusive meaning of "or/oder" but only makes it a likely interpretation.

Roger Kingdon points out another difference between a question with the intonation /233↑231↓/ and a question with the contour /233↑ 233↑/:

"It is interesting to note that invitations given in the form of alternative questions require different negative answers, according to whether their intonation indicates that they do, or do not, constitute a complete list:

A: /²Will you have 3cáke^{3↑2}or 3pástry^{1↓}/

B: Neither, thank you.

A: /²Will you have ³cáke^{3↑²}or ³pástry^{3↑}/

B: No, thank you.³

For German the meaning difference between the two contours seems to be the same as for English sentences: complete vs. incomplete listing of alternatives with the related meanings of mutually exclusive vs. non-exclusive value of the alternatives.

For both contours, the first terminal rise, separating the alternatives or groups of alternatives, is frequently lost in rapid speech.

/²Do you want ³téa²or ³cóffee^{1↓}/

/²Nimmst du ³Tée²oder ³Káffee^{1↓}/

This kind of question could be interpreted as a yes/no question and therefore be answered simply by "yes" or "no". The value of "or" in that case is no longer disjunctive but approaches that of conjunctive "and", with the phrase "tea or coffee" being understood simply as a way of referring to something to drink.

2. Utterances with the rising contour in the second part could in a given context be interpreted as echos of an alternative question and thus have the meanings possible with echo questions as characterized above.

A: /²Will you have ³téa^{3↑²}or ³cóffee^{1↓}/

B: /²Will I have ³téa^{3↑²}or ³cóffee^{3↑}/

³Kingdon, op. cit., p. 214.

A: /²Nimmst du 3¹Tee³↑²oder 3¹Kaffee¹↓/

B: /²Nehm' ich 3¹Tee³↑²oder 3¹Kaffee³↑/

CHAPTER IV

TAG QUESTIONS¹

I. STRUCTURE

A. English

Tags are additions to an utterance already made, consisting essentially of a pronoun, less frequently a noun, as subject, and a finite form of the verb "be" or an auxiliary which takes the place of and refers to the verb or verb phrase of the previous utterance. If the previous verb phrase did not have any of these as constituents, the person-tense-marker "do" replaces the verb in the tag. (Compare with Chapter II yes/no questions). All tags show inversion by having the verb precede the subject, a structure usually signalling question. However, tags may have the meaning of statements and it is by intonational features alone that they will be identified as one or the other. As will be seen below, the first distinction is made by the intonation used with the tag but even there the division is not always clear; rather there is a grey area where an utterance may be interpreted as either question or statement. Because the initial form which is marked for person and tense replaces the principal verb it nearly always carries undivided prominence. Only

¹This chapter follows Kingdon, op. cit., pp. 244.

when the pronoun of the tag and the subject of the previous utterance do not have an identical referent will the pronoun be stressed for contrast.

In most cases, when the utterance is negative, whether by negation of the verb or because of a negative subject (nobody), or negative adverb (never), the tag is positive, and vice versa.²

We'll go swimming, won't we?

You can't read that, can you?

They wrote the letter, didn't they?

You're hungry, aren't you?

I'm not late, am I?

B. German

The German tag question is much less unified structurally than its English counterpart. Its first part, as in English, is essentially an independent declarative clause. The tag, however, instead of repeating or referring to the previous verb phrase, consists of fixed expressions such as "nicht wahr, stimmt es" or only, "ja, nein, so". Duden lists such regional variants for "nicht wahr" as "gell, gelle" for central Germany, "gelt" for southern and southwestern Germany. The clearcut distinction of negative tags following positive statements and positive tags following negative statements seems to be lacking, i.e. "nicht wahr,

²Engler, and Haden, op. cit., 30.

stimmt's", in the writer's speech follow either polarity without any detectable meaning difference.

Du kannst das lesen, nicht wahr?

Du kannst das nicht lesen, nicht wahr?

With "gelt" the writer has an expressed positive form "gelt ja" which follows a positive statement and the negative "gelt nein" following a negative statement. This practice could not be verified with anybody else from her region.

Du kannst das lesen, gelt ja?

Du kannst das nicht lesen, gelt nein?

Other examples:

Wir haben morgen keine Prüfung, nicht wahr?

Das ist alles reine Erfindung, nicht wahr?

Du bist nie pünktlich, stimmt's?

Thus tag questions will present difficulties in the choice of the appropriate lexical item.

II. INTONATION

Instead of the normal division by possible intonation contours, tag questions will be grouped first into those added by the speaker and those added by the hearer; subgroupings of these headings are then distinguished by the different intonations.

A. Tags added by the speaker

1. /(2)33↑/

a) Spoken with this contour, the tag is a true question.

The speaker is not certain of the accuracy of his

statement and he is inquiring from the hearer about its correctness. (Compare Status III.)

/²You can't ³read ²that^{2→3} can you^{3↑}/

/²They wrote the ³letter^{2→3} didn't they^{3↑}/

/²You're ³hungry^{2→3} aren't you^{3↑}/

/²I'm not ³late^{2→3} am I^{3↑}/

Likewise for German:

/²Das ist deine ³Schwester^{2→3} nicht wahr^{3↑}/

/²Wir haben morgen ³keine ²Prüfung^{2→3} nicht wahr^{3↑}/

/²Das ist alles reine Erfindung^{2→3} nicht wahr^{3↑}/

/²Du bist ³nie ²pünktlich^{2→3} stimmt's^{3↑}/

Different shades of meaning, such as that of challenge to the hearer, are not expressed in the tag, rather they result from different pitch and stress combinations in the utterance to which the tag is attached. Thus they are of no immediate concern in this context.

- b) The speaker repeats some one else's statement with necessary pronoun changes and adds to it an affirmative tag after an affirmative statement, a negative tag after a negative statement. The tag usually does not have a very pronounced rise.

A: (I don't want to help.)

B: /²You don't ³want to ²help^{2→2} don't ³you^{3↑}/

Other examples:

/²They did everything they ³could^{2→2} did ³they^{3↑}/

/²The book's on the ³table^{2→3} is ³it^{3↑}/

The utterance expresses disagreement with the previous statement. Kingdon states:

"An interrogative-negative usually suggests a belief that an affirmative statement of the matter in question would be true, and by contrast a simple interrogative rather suggests a negative belief."³

For German, the fixed expression "so", following affirmative and negative utterances alike, seems to fulfill the functions of the English tag.

/²Du willst ³nicht ²helfen^{2→3} so^{3↑}/

/²Sie taten alles Erdenkliche³ so^{2→3} so^{3↑}/

2. /31↓/

- a) With the intonation /31↓/ the same structure no longer questions the hearer but it indicates certainty on the part of the speaker and the assumption that the hearer agrees.⁴ (Status IX.) It is similar, for English, both in structure and intonation, to the insistent yes/no question.

/²You can't ³drive ²yet^{2→3} can you^{1↓}/

/²The house is much too ³small ²for us^{2→3} isn't it^{1↓}/

/²Du hast noch ³keinen ²Führerschein^{2→3} nicht wahr^{1↓}/

/²Das Haus ist viel zu ³klein ²für uns^{2→3} nicht wahr^{1↓}/

³Kingdon, op. cit., p. 252.

⁴Ibid.

- b) The tag is always affirmative, regardless of the previous utterance, and represents something of an afterthought to the utterance that was originally perceived as a fact the hearer would agree to. The tag is introduced by "or"; this makes it similar to the alternative question.

/²You'll ³write^{2→2} or ³will you^{1↓}/

/²Nobody ³called ²me^{2→2} or ³did they^{1↓}/

For German, "oder ja" following the negative and "oder nein" following the positive polarity approximate English usage. While the English tag ends with a terminal fall German has a terminal rise. The tag "oder nein" is quite similar to the alternative question expression "oder nicht", (see Chapter III).

/²Du wirst mir ³schreiben^{2→2} oder ³nein^{3↑}/

/²Du kannst mir ³nicht ²helfen^{2→2} oder ³ja^{3↑}/

- c) The tag may follow either an affirmative or a negative command and has the opposite polarity of the imperative.

/²Open the ³door^{2→3} won't you^{1↓}/

/²Don't let her ³have ²it^{2→3} will you^{1↓}/

This is an urge, almost a command to the hearer. For German, "ja" with a rising intonation conveys the meaning of a question that does not allow a different opinion on the hearer's side and therefore has the value of a command.

/²Mach die ³Tür ²auf^{2→3} ja^{3↑}/

/²Gib es ihr ³nicht² ja^{3↑}/

B. Tags added by the hearer

1. /233↑/

This tag indicates awareness of and some interest in the previous utterance.

A: (My father called last night.)

B: /²Oh ³did he^{3↑}/

A: (He was promoted recently.)

B: /²Was ³he^{3↑}/

With emphatic stress on the nuclear syllable the tag indicates surprise.

For German, the fixed expression is "wirklich" or "ja". It carries the same intonation and has the same function as the English tag.

A: (Er ist vor kurzem befördert worden.)

B: /²Wirklich^{3↑}/ or /²Ja^{3↑}/

2. /231↓/

The hearer indicates that he agrees with what has been said and in a way anticipated it.

A: (I received a letter yesterday.)

B: /²Oh ³did you^{1↓}/

A: (Ich habe gestern einen Brief bekommen.)

B: /³Wirklich^{1↓}/

CHAPTER V

STATEMENT STRUCTURE WITH QUESTION INTONATION

I. STRUCTURE

In both languages the structure is that of the independent declarative clause type.

II. INTONATION

The intonation is the question intonation /233↑/, again with the variant form /323↑/ in German.

Generally, not too much attention is devoted to this status in the literature, leaving one with the assumption that any statement can be transformed into a question when spoken with a final rise in the intonation. Only Bierwisch observes that the sentence adverbials yes and no may not precede a statement when spoken with a /233↑/ contour.

/³Nein²er geht ³nicht³↑/
is not possible.¹

Typical usage of this question is as an echo yes/no question to a previous statement. Like any echo question it requires context and has a rising intonation.

A: (We must depart immediately.)

B: /²We must depart immediately³↑/

¹Bierwisch, op. cit., p. 167.

A: (Ich habe keine Zeit heute.)

B: /²Du hast keine ³Zeit heute³↑/

Of the four meanings discussed for echo question in Chapter I only the following three seem to be possible: desire to confirm an impression, uncertainty about some part of the utterance, indication of surprise or shock. The purpose of gaining time in answering is not applicable here since in fact no answer was being sought from the hearer.

SUMMARY

The foregoing discussion demonstrated that English and German question intonation are identical to a considerable extent. This identity not only applies to the basic contours for the major question types but to a high degree to variations as well, the most important of these being echo questions.

Areas of divergence were not in the inventory of contours, but in their frequency of occurrence with a given question type. Most important here is the usage in German of /323↑/ which is preferable to /231↓/, the normal English contour for information questions as well as for certain yes/no questions. The English student will not have committed an error nor will he have any difficulty in being understood when using /231↓/; but he must be aware of the matter-of-fact, or perhaps even brusque manner this conveys. Likewise the German intonation must not be interpreted as childish or wheedling.

Since German tag questions are not nearly as unified structurally as their English counterparts the English student will first encounter difficulties in the lexical choice for the tag. These will be augmented by some difference in intonation, such as the rising final contour for the tags "ja/nein" where the English question has a falling terminal. However, the basic usage of tags with the expression "nicht wahr" agrees with English in the usage of both rising and falling terminal.

It was not so much the speech melody then, but the segmental structure which it accompanies that diverged, especially

for accentuated contours and for tag questions. Naturally, this divergence is primarily handled in structural analyses. Because of the interrelatedness of intonation and grammatical structure, however, it might be advantageous to discuss such features as the use of certain adverbs, the rearranging of sentence elements, and the fixed expressions for tags in connection with intonation.

For teaching these findings mean that the student should have no difficulty conveying the most important aspect of his utterance since the base forms are virtually identical, even if he cannot perform with equal ease all the accentuations possible. Only the patterns for tag questions must receive special emphasis because of structural as well as intonational divergencies. Correct understanding of a native speaker's utterance and proper production on the student's part will have to be stressed.

Table comparing English and German basic intonation contours for the main question types

	English	German
I. Questions with Interrogative Morpheme	/231↓/	/231↓/ or /323↑/
II. Questions with Sentence Initial Predicate	/233↑/	/233↑/ or /323↑/
III. Alternative Questions	/233↑ 231↓/	/233↑ 231↓/ or /323↑ 231↓/
IV. Tag Questions	/ (2) 33↑ /	/ (2) 33↑ /
V. Statement Structure with Question Intonation	/233↑/	/233↑/ or /323↑/

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THE INTONATION OF QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH
AND GERMAN: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

by

ADELHEID SIMON BYRNES

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ABSTRACT

The increasing popularity of the audio-lingual approach to language teaching requires the availability of detailed contrastive analyses between the student's native language and the language to be acquired to ensure the most effective teaching. While such studies have been prepared for the segmental features of the most frequently taught languages, the suprasegmentals, that is, stress and intonation patterns, have not been investigated as thoroughly. The importance of intonation and therefore of studies in the field of intonation is apparent, however, since any utterance in language is a construct with the two constituents grammatical structure and intonation.

This study was devoted to the investigation of the intonation of questions in English and German to determine areas of agreement, similarity, and divergence. Structural characteristics, taking English as a point of departure, were the criterion for division into five main types of questions:

1. Questions with Interrogative Morpheme
2. Questions with Sentence Initial Predicate
3. Alternative Questions
4. Tag Questions
5. Statement Structure with Question Intonation.

For each of these types the possible intonation contours were determined together with the resulting meaning differences.

The investigation showed identical intonation in the majority of cases. With yes/no questions and information questions an important difference was found pertaining to the frequency of occurrence of one contour. This was true particularly for southern Germany while usage in northern Germany was more nearly that of English.

For a native speaker of American English the most difficult question type to acquire would seem to be the tag question since both structural and intonational differences were found.

When applied to teaching, these results indicate that the student must at least be made aware of the alternate form of intonation mentioned above. The patterns for tag questions, however, will have to receive special emphasis to ensure both correct recognition of their meaning as well as proper production on the student's part.