Intonation in Fala and its comparison with Spanish, Portuguese and Galician
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Fala is an underdocumented Ibero-Romance language spoken in three towns in Valle de Jálima, in the northwestern corner of the province of Cáceres, Spain. The commonly accepted hypothesis is that it derives from Galician, brought by settlers in the XIII century. The linguistic studies on Fala deal with the lexicon and some phonology. In this paper, we focus on a hitherto untreated aspect of this language: its intonation. We describe the types of pitch accents and boundary tones in declarative utterances and absolute and partial interrogative utterances, and we compare the degree of similarity with its contact language Spanish, with neighboring Portuguese and with Galician.

Four speakers from each of the three towns where Fala is spoken have been recorded (two male and two female, between the ages of 35 and 55; 12 speakers overall). The speakers engaged in semi-spontaneous conversations with an interviewer. First, the subjects responded to questions about their views of the Spanish and Fala ethnolinguistic groups. Then, the subjects posed the same questions to the interviewer. That way, declaratives and absolute and partial interrogatives were collected. From each speaker we selected 20 declarative utterances, between 3 and 12 absolute interrogatives and between 3 and 19 partial interrogatives (434 utterances). We also obtained 540 read speech utterances, from 5 sentences of each type of sentence, rendered 3 times by each speaker (15×3×4×4). Following the AM model of intonational analysis, we transcribed prenuclear and nuclear accents and boundary tones. A total of 5866 pitch accents and boundary tones were analysed.

In read speech, the coincidence between Fala and Spanish is almost complete, for all sentence types. As for spontaneous speech, there are no intonational studies of Spanish in this speech style, so a comparison is only tentative, but there are a few slight differences. In declaratives in Fala, both L+H* and L+>H* (i.e. with delayed peaks) appear most commonly in prenuclear and nuclear position, whereas in Spanish L+>H* can only appear in prenuclear position and L+H* is a nuclear accent (together with L*or H+L*, cf. Beckman et al. 2003, Face 2008 and Estebas-Vilaplana & Prieto 2008, 2010). In absolute interrogatives, L+H* L% is the most common nuclear accent in Fala, contrasting with L* H% in Spanish.

With Galician there are also more similarities than differences, but there are more differences than with Spanish, even in read speech. In Galician declaratives the nuclear accent is reported to be H+L* (Escourido, Fernández Rei, González & Regueira 2008), a pitch accent which is not common in Fala. An interesting fact is that absolute interrogatives in Galician and Fala have a rather similar nuclear contour, L+H* L%.

With Portuguese there are virtually no shared properties.

In sum, Fala is closest intonationally to Spanish and then to Galician. The absolute coincidence in read speech with Spanish suggests the influence of Spanish instruction on Fala speakers. And the fact that Galician and Fala have the same nuclear contours for absolute questions could be a remnant of Galician intonation.
References


