Intonation System of the Kagoshima Dialect in Japan

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Abstract
In general, it is said that interrogative sentences have a final rising intonation (Bolinger, 1978). Modern standard Japanese also uses a rising tone at the end of wh-questions and yes-or-no questions. However, this rule is not true of some Japanese dialects. For instance, in the Kagoshima dialect, spoken in Kagoshima Prefecture in the nation’s southern island of Kyūshū, a falling pitch appears both in wh-questions and yes-or-no questions. One may wonder why such differences in interrogative intonation are observed among Japanese dialects. It is closely related to the structure of interrogative sentences. Japanese dialects can be categorized into two types: (i) dialects in which there must be an interrogative final particle in an interrogative sentence and (ii) dialects in which it is not necessary to have an interrogative final particle in an interrogative sentence. In the former type, which is represented by the Kagoshima dialect, there is a tendency to use a falling pitch at the end of interrogative sentences. In the latter type, which is represented by the Tōkyō dialect, a rising tone at the end of a sentence conveys the interrogative meaning.

1. Intonation at the end of interrogative sentences in the Tōkyō dialect
The Tōkyō dialect has a final rising tone both in wh-questions and yes-or-no questions (Moriyama, 1989). The following are examples of such interrogative sentences. (The shaded part indicates an interrogative word form or an interrogative sentence final particle.)

(1a) nani=ŋa hocii↑
  what=NOM want
  (What do you want?)
(1b) nanika hocii↑
  something want
  (Do you want anything?)

Sentence (1a) is a wh-question, and sentence (1b) is a yes-or-no question, both of which are usually pronounced with a rising tone. If the former sentence is pronounced with a falling pitch, such a sentence (1a’) can be interpreted as a question with a modal meaning of reproach or antipathy. For example, such a sentence can convey impatience: “I bought this and that for you. What more do you want?” If sentence (1b) is pronounced with a falling pitch, such a sentence (1b’) means: “I (the speaker) want something.”

(1a’) nani=ŋa hocii↓
  what=NOM want
  (What do you want?)
(1b’) nanika hocii↓
  something want
  (I want something.)

Take a look at the following examples. Sentence (2a) is a wh-question, and sentence (2b) is a yes-or-no question, both of which are pronounced with a rising tone. (Note: /-no/ is not an interrogative sentence final particle.)

(2a) dare=to kjo:to=e it=ta no↑
  who=COM Kyōto=LOC go=PST SF
  (Who did you go to Kyōto with?)
(2b) hanako=to kjo:to=e it=ta no↑
  Hanako=COM Kyōto= LOC go=PST SF
  (Did you go to Kyōto with Hanako?)

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  something want
  (Do you want anything?)
If sentence (2a) is pronounced with a final falling pitch, such a sentence (2a’) can be interpreted as a question with a modal meaning of reproach or antipathy. In short, it means to question someone closely: “Who did you go to Kyōto with, behind my back?” For example, if your boyfriend or girlfriend cheated on you and went to Kyōto with somebody else, you might have such a conversation.

(2a’) dare=to kjo:to=e it=ta no↓ who=COM Kyōto=LOC go=PST SF (Who did you go to Kyōto with?)

If sentence (2b) is pronounced with a final falling pitch, such a sentence (2b’) conveys that I (the speaker) went to Kyōto with Hanako.

(2b’) hanako=to kjo:to=e it=ta no↓ Hanako=COM Kyōto=LOC go=PST SF (I went to Kyōto with Hanako.)

The sentence final particle /-kal used in the Tōkyō dialect is generally said to convey an interrogative meaning. In reality, however, the sentence final particle /-kal can have an interrogative meaning only when a rising tone is used at the end of a sentence. If a sentence with the final particle /-kal is pronounced with a final falling pitch, the sentence conveys the speaker’s acceptance of the fact, as indicated by the following example.

(3) hanako=to kjo:to=e it=ta ka↑ Hanako=COM Kyōto=LOC go=PST SF (Did you go to Kyōto with Hanako?)

Sentence (3), pronounced with a rising tone, is an interrogative sentence asking whether the addressee went to Kyōto with Hanako. However, sentence (3’), pronounced with a final falling pitch, can be used in a case where the speaker mutters to himself/herself and reluctantly accepts the fact that you went to Kyōto with Hanako. In the Tōkyō dialect, therefore, /-kal is not necessarily used to convey an interrogative meaning. An interrogative sentence is made by adding a final rising intonation to /-kal, rather than just by adding /-kal at the end. In yes-or-no questions in the Tōkyō dialect, interrogative meaning can be conveyed by using a sentence-final rising tone only.

(3’) hanako=to kjo:to=e it=ta ↑ Hanako=COM Kyōto=LOC go=PST SF (Did you go to Kyōto with Hanako?)

The same goes for wh-questions. It is clear from the interrogative word form included that it is an interrogative sentence. Therefore, such a sentence should not need to be pronounced with a final rising tone. (In English, a final falling pitch is used in wh-questions, like “What is this?”) In the Tōkyō dialect, however, a final rising tone is generally used in wh-questions. Thus, in this dialect, a final rising tone serves as an interrogative marker. Conversely, a sentence that is not pronounced with a final rising pitch is regard as a non-interrogative sentence or an interrogative sentence with a special meaning.

2. Intonation at the end of interrogative sentences in the Kagoshima dialect

Next, let us consider intonation at the end of interrogative sentences in the Kagoshima dialect. As I mentioned earlier, in this dialect, both wh-questions and yes-or-no questions are pronounced with a falling pitch (Kibe 2000, 2011). Please look at the following examples.

(4a) nai=ga hocika ka↓ what=NOM want SF (What do you want?)

(4b) naika hoci ka↓ anything want SF (Do you want anything?)

Sentence (3), pronounced with a rising tone, is an interrogative sentence asking whether the addressee went to Kyōto with Hanako.
Sentences (4a) and (5a) are wh-questions, and (4b) and (5b) are yes-or-no questions. The word /-kal at the end of sentences (4a), (4b), and (5a), and the word /-jal at the end of sentence (5b) are all interrogative sentence final particles. These sentences are all pronounced with a final falling pitch. If these interrogative sentences are pronounced with a rising tone, they urge the addressee to respond. For instance, sentences (4a\'), (4b\'), (5a\') and (5b\') mean “I definitely want to know what you want,” “I definitely want to know if you want anything,” “I definitely want to know who you went to Kyōto with,” and “I definitely want to know whether you went to Kyōto with Hanako,” respectively. However, these sentences have no negative meanings, such as “reproach” or “antipathy.” Instead, they are polite interrogative questions, expecting a response from the addressee.

In contrast with the Tōkyō dialect, the Kagoshima dialect always has some interrogative word form (interrogative marker) in yes-or-no questions. A sentence without an interrogative marker sounds awkward.

3. Comparison between the Tōkyō dialect and the Kagoshima dialect

The tables show whether there is any interrogative word or interrogative sentence final particle in each example sentence, and the relations between the presence/absence of such an interrogative marker and rising/falling intonation at the end of the sentence. In the tables, ○ denotes that the sentence is an ordinary interrogative sentence; △ means that the interrogative sentence contains a positive or negative meaning; and × indicates that the sentence is not regarded as an interrogative sentence or that it sounds awkward.
The tables given above can be summed up from the perspective of requirements for interrogative sentences.

(9) In the Tōkyō dialect, a final rising intonation serves as an interrogative marker. In most cases, therefore, interrogative meaning can be conveyed by using a rising tone at the end of sentences. “kjō:to ↑” (Kyōto?) and “iku↑” (You go?) can be regarded as interrogative sentences. (This is similar to English.)

(10) In the Kagoshima dialect, a final rising intonation does not function as an interrogative marker. Instead, an interrogative word or an interrogative sentence final particle serves as an interrogative marker. In this dialect, “kjo:to ↑”(Kyōto?) and “iku↑” (You go?) sound awkward. To make these sentences more natural as Kagoshima dialect, it is necessary to add the interrogative sentence final particle /-ka/ or /-ja/: “kjoto ja:↓” and “iku ka:↓” Moreover, these sentences are pronounced with a final falling pitch.

The question that arises here is why interrogative sentences are pronounced with a falling pitch, rather than a rising tone, in the Kagoshima dialect. Since there is an interrogative word or interrogative final particle that serves as an interrogative marker, it might be expected that they are pronounced with a rising tone as well. (In the Tōkyō dialect, interrogative sentences with interrogative word forms are pronounced with a rising tone.) The reason is that in many types of sentences, including interrogative sentences, in the Kagoshima dialect, a rising tone at the end of sentences conveys “politeness.” Take a look at the following examples.

(11a) a=ja hune kēad do↑
That=FOC ship COP SF
(That is a ship.)
(11b) a=ja hune kēad do↓
That=FOC ship COP SF
(That is a ship.)

Both sentences (11a) and (11b) mean that that is a ship. However, (11a) sounds more polite than (11b). It is believed that the same rule has been applied to interrogative sentences. So, a final falling pitch is usually used in interrogative sentences, and a final rising tone is used when a question is asked in a more polite way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intonation of interrogative sentences in Japanese dialects can be categorized into the following types.

(A) Rising tone <Tōkyō dialect>
Interrogative sentences are pronounced with a final rising tone, regardless of whether any interrogative word or interrogative final particle is used or not. A rising tone at the end of the sentence serves as an interrogative marker.

(B) Falling tone <Kagoshima dialect>
Interrogative sentences always contain interrogative word forms or interrogative final particles, and such sentences are pronounced with a final falling pitch. Final rising intonation reflects politeness, and it does not serve as an interrogative marker.

References


