# Motivation

Pragmatic skills usually do not receive dedicated instruction in L2 classrooms. This study aims to document how L1-English L2-Spanish speakers in university Spanish classes at various proficiency levels produce politeness in information-seeking yes-no questions, with a focus on intonational strategies.

Investigating the development of intonation of politeness in information-seeking yes-no questions have received little attention in the literature. In Castilian Spanish, polite information-seeking yes-no questions are realized as H\* M%, whereas neutral ones are realized as L\* H% or L+H\* H%. However, politeness can be expressed differently in other varieties of Spanish. For example, Mexican Spanish uses L\* H% for polite yes-no questions, whereas L\* LH% is used for neutral yes-no questions. Due to the variety of patterns available across Spanish varieties for neutral and polite information-seeking yes-no questions, it would be interesting to see what intonational strategies L2 Spanish speakers exposed to various varieties employ.

This research will help determine how parts of the L2 pragmatic and intonation systems are developed, both of which are understudied domains in L2 research. It will also inform on the areas of intonation that should be focused on in instruction.

# Background literature

## astruc2016intonational

Production of politeness strategies used by 14 adult L1 UK English beginner L2 Spanish and 12 L1 Spanish participants.

Native speaker data collected via discourse completion task, consisting of offers and requests controlled for social distance, power, and the cost of the request/offer.

28 speech acts of L2 speaker data collected by oral assignments recorded by students as part of their classwork. Assignments were randomly selected by tutor based on the student’s perceived proficiency by tutor. Students left telephone message for friend asking what they did last night, suggesting something they could do together that weekend, and request for a call back.

Investigated results through Brown and Levinson’s (1987) universal model of linguistic politeness and investigated intonation through the Autosegmental Metrical framework (Ladd 1996).

Native speakers combine use of different lexical and morpho-syntactic devices with specific intonational patterns.

L2 Spanish used limited range of morpho-syntactic strategies, reinforced with intonation that are often transferred from L1 eg falls typical of polite UK English.

This is a novel study investigating intonational strategies of politeness in L2 Spanish. I would like to build off of this by having a larger sample size of speech acts, a range of proficiencies so that we can see how politeness strategies may develop, and a different elicitation task. Since the students are being evaluated for homework, this may not be representative of their most natural speech productions, as they may have practiced or repeated the audio various times to “get it just right”. Instead, I would like to use a discourse completion task.

## herrero2020perception

Perception of intonational strategies of politeness for commands and polite requests compared between 26 L1 Spanish speakers and 22 L1 Chinese L2 Spanish speakers. The L2 Spanish participants were in a B1 level Spanish course and had lived for at least 3 years in Spain before study.

Stimuli produced by 4 L1 Spanish speakers. 20 sentences, each produced twice: once as a command, once as a request, so 40 utterances total, 10 from each speaker, controlled for power, distance, and ranking of imposition.

Participants rated sentences on a 5-point Likert scale according to degree of politeness (1 = most impolite, 5 = most polite).

L2 Spanish perceived polite requests as less polite than L1 Spanish. L1 and L2 Spanish patterned similarly for politeness of commands. L2 Spanish don’t perceive prosodic cues of commands vs requests as clearly as L1 Spanish.

Suggests that L1 Chinese L2 Spanish don’t rely on prosodic cues as much for politeness. They may consider all imperatives as impolite.

## herrero2020unintentional

Perception of requests produced by L1 Mandarin L2 Spanish in Madrid, evaluated by 90 L1 Spanish. L2 participants enrolled in A2/B1 level Spanish language courses. Stimuli created by creating roleplay situations (e.g. asking a client of a restaurant to wait a minute for a free table) and instructed to be as polite as possible. 100 stimuli selected divided into 3 sets of 33 target items. L1 Spanish read the context, were asked to imagine themselves in the situation, and then listened to stimuli. They rated the utterances on a 6-point Likert scale (0 = most impolite, 5 = most polite).

Only 16 (of the 100 target items) were evaluated as impolite. These utterances were analyzed within the Melodic Analysis of Speech framework (Font and Cantero 2009). [NEED TO CHECK THIS FRAMEWORK OUT.]

Took relevant F0 values (mainly vowels), calculated percentage of variation of each absolute value with regard to previous value, which was then standardized [at what point of the vowel did they take the F0 value?].

Analysis revealed that the 16 utterances perceived as impolite coincided with melodies associated with impoliteness in Spanish e.g. final fall, peak on “no” in “No llame más”, peak on “tú” in “Quiero que tú cambie”.

None of the 16 utterances use intonational strategies to mitigate the lexical-grammatical aggressiveness such as final inflections circumflexes, prominence in unstressed vowels, final ascending interrogative inflections and suspended finals [where did they get these cues from?]. Even though they used other pragmatic strategies (e.g. “gracias”), utterances were still perceived as impolite.

Demonstrates the importance of teaching intonation in the L2 classroom, as lexical-grammatical features do not seem to be sufficient to mitigate impoliteness.

## estebas2014evaluation

Compares the evaluative differences of pitch range in Spanish and English. For example, a sentence “it was lovely” ~ “riquísimo” in English and Spanish differ in natural production, despite sharing similar speech acts. In English, a “broader” pitch range (e.g. higher pitch excursion) is a natural response, whereas a “narrower” pitch range is natural in Spanish. If the English utterance were produced with a narrow pitch range, it would be considered as rude, whereas a broad pitch range in Spanish would be considered over-excited. Results in misunderstandings, and could be perceived as offensive or impolite.

Hypotheses: 1) sentences produced with low pitch range will be evaluated as “polite” in Spanish and “rude” in English; 2) sentences produced with high pitch range will be interpreted as “polite” in English and “over-excited” in Spanish.

Hypotheses evaluated by perception test.

1 bilingual Spanish-English speaker produced 2 utterances in response to the question What did you buy ~ ¿Qué compraste? ; Mandarins ~ Mandarinas. Utterances manipulated in Praat to alter scaling of F0 speak, while maintaining steepness of slope in four degrees (from high to low in English and low to high in Spanish), so 10 items in total.

15 L1 Madrid Spanish and 15 L1 UK English completed perception test. Participants listened to 25 repetitions of stimuli in their L1 and evaluated if they were an *expected response* or *non-expected*. They were instructed that “expected” means “natural, polite or nice”, whereas “non-expected” meant “rude, impolite, or over-excited”. Over 375 stimuli evaluated in total.

Results show categorical cut-offs for both English and Spanish stimuli. 96.5% of English utterances produced with a high pitch range evaluated as *expected*. 61.5% of English utterances produced with narrow pitch range evaluated as *non-expected*, which indicates that a narrow pitch range can still be evaluated as polite in English.

Spanish data is more categorical. 91.1% of narrow pitch range utterances evaluated as *expected*, whereas only 17% of broad pitch range utterances were evaluated as *non-expected*.

Highlights importance of instruction on intonation in the L2 classroom to prevent miscommunications.

[I’m not sure how I feel about the evaluative method. The bundles “expected, natural, polite or nice” and “unexpected, rude, impolite or overexcited” seem really loaded.]

## bernal2018teaching

Spanish sociopragmatics from sociocultural perspective, focusing on face management, politeness, and impoliteness in natural colloquial conversations in L1 Spanish. Discourse analysis of authentic, colloquial conversations in the area of Valencia, Spain. Develops categories for studying (im)politeness, which sometimes may overlap.

[Not sure that this is entirely relevant for my paper, need to read it fully.]

## mennen2015beyond

L2 Intonation Learning theory (LILt). L1 and L2 intonational differences categorized by four dimensions (with comparisons between H\* L% in Spanish & English):

1. Inventory & distribution of categorical phonological elements (systemic)

2. Phonetic implementation of categorical elements (realizational)

3. Functionality of categorical elements/tunes (semantic)

4. Frequency of use of categorical elements (frequency)

## brown1987politeness

[Need to read.]

## nadeu2011pitch

Politeness is not correlated with height of boundary tone, and it is context-dependent. Participants presented with smiling face rated the utterance as more polite regardless of boundary tone, whereas utterances accompanied by a neutral face were rated as less polite.

Vergis et al. (in press)

Caballero et al. (2018)

Font and Cantero (2009) – Melodic Analysis of Speech framework

Alcón Soler and Martínez-Flor (2008) – “interlanguage pragmatics”

Bravo (2005) sociocultural pragmatics.

# Research questions

1. Is the nuclear configuration a locus for a prosodic politeness strategy in L2 Spanish for information-seeking yes-no questions?
2. What nuclear configurations will be produced by L2 Spanish for neutral and polite information-seeking yes-no questions?
3. Will there be a correlation between boundary tone height and politeness?

# Hypotheses

The elicited data will be evaluated through the LiLT model for L2 intonation (Mennen 2015).

1. The majority of Spanish varieties thus-far documented for intonation use H% to form information-seeking yes-no questions. Caribbean varieties, as well as Galician Spanish, are noted to use an L% boundary tone for the same question type. However, it is unexpected that the L2 Spanish speakers will have been exposed to Caribbean or Galician varieties. Although the boundary tone is typically H%, different varieties produce nuclear pitch accents H\*, L+H\*, and L+¡H\*. Polite information-seeking yes-no questions do not have a direct correlate with specific nuclear configurations; however, H\* M%, L\* H%, and L+H\* H% have been documented as “polite” for information-seeking yes-no question across varieties. Since there is overlap between neutral and polite nuclear configurations, it is not expected that L2 Spanish speakers at any proficiency will categorically use nuclear configurations to distinguish between neutral and polite information-seeking yes-no questions.
2. Following the LiLT model of L2 intonation, it is expected that L2 Spanish speakers will produce L\* H% and L+H\* H% nuclear configurations due to their overlap in form and function between English and Spanish, which would suggest a positive transfer from L1 to L2.
3. According to Ohala’s “frequency code” (1983, 1984, 1996), high F0 is related to “politeness”, so we would expect that a higher boundary tone peak is associated with politeness.

Although I do not expect to find categorical differences in the nuclear configuration of neutral and polite information-seeking yes-no questions, this study remains an important contribution to rule out the nuclear configuration as a locus of politeness strategy realization for this sentence type in L2 Spanish. Furthermore, this provides a corpus for further analysis of what other prosodic methods L2 Spanish may employ to signal politeness in information-seeking yes-no questions.

# Participants

At least 10 participants.

# Methodology

Language background:

* Years studying Spanish
* Study abroad experience
* Lextale

FOR HIGH-PROFICIENCY: Discourse completion task.

FOR LOW-/INTERMEDIATE-PROFICIENCY: Reading task.

Elicit information-seeking yes-no questions.

Control for power, distance, and ranking of imposition (Brown & Levison 1987).

27 items total (+/-power X +/- distance X +/- ranking of imposition)

Some possible contexts:

* Asking for an item at a store from a cashier.
* Asking a friend if they’re cold.
* Asking professor if you need hand in assignment today.
* Asking a boss if they work tomorrow.