John Coates (Göttingen)   OS 04.06.2019

Commitment Space semantics and Yes/No question intonation contours:

a report on an empirical study of Catalan, and a preview of possible common ground with English

——————————

Abstract

A recent report from Barcelona by Pilar Prieto and her team of researchers concluded that there was significant interaction in Catalan between, on the one hand, Yes/No question intonation contours and, on the other, 'conversational context', which seemed to include a number of concepts from formal semantics like epistemic commitment(s), evidentiality etc.

Her study owes a good deal to Krifka's Commitment space semantics, and uses some of his terminology, which I shall briefly present at the OS.

Can these results be carried over to English? I shall present six authentic Yes/No questions recorded from a half-hour interview on BBC-TV, with a rich 'conversational context', to see if we can find any commonalities with the findings for Catalan.

Keywords: intonation, yes/no questions, bias, speaker commitment, epistemicity