The dialect of Cologne: Form and functions of nuclear rising-falling intonation contours

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Intonational research has until recently primarily been concerned with the intonation of standard varieties. Most remarkably, descriptions of the standard variety of German do not entail any systematic account of the kind of nuclear rising-falling contours existing in Cologne and other western and southern dialect areas of Germany (Gilles et al.). Nevertheless, nuclear rising-falling contours are a very prominent feature of Cologne intonation, showing a regular formal pattern and orderly functional distribution. The present paper will deal with fundamental aspects of the form of nuclear rising-falling contours in Cologne, and their conversational functions in everyday communication will be discussed.

The formal analysis will take into consideration the widely accepted description of standard German intonation, GToBI (Grice et al. 2002). For an adequate phonological interpretation of the Cologne rising-falling contour, however, a high phrase accent is necessary, whereas the rise of standard German rising-falling contours is to be interpreted as a high trailing tone following a L*. Thus, the Cologne intonation system differs crucially from the standard German system in this respect.

The functional analysis is theoretically and methodologically based on the insights of Interactional Linguistics (Selting et al. 2001). The analysed data consists of conversational data from interviews and two reality-tv shows, broadcasted in the 1990ies. It will be demonstrated that the rising-falling contours function as a turn-holding device for ‘native speakers’ of the dialect of Cologne.