

Katharina Frödrich

Functions of ‘Uptalk’ in Australian English

A Tool to Express Humor

Abstract: ‘Uptalk’ is a frequent intonation pattern in Australian English (AusE) and has been thoroughly researched. Previous studies showed that ‘uptalk’, i. e., a raised pitch at the end of an intonation unit that is realized on declarative utterances, where a lowered pitch would be expected, may fulfill several interactional and more general functions in AusE. Among these are keeping a turn, expressing positive emotions, reducing the social distance between interlocutors, and establishing common ground. In this paper, the functions of uptalk in the speech of two AusE speakers, who recorded a podcast episode, are examined. The results coincide with prior findings. Notably, uptalk was used to express humor, jokes, or irony, which is an additional interactional function that has not yet been discussed in previous studies. In this study, an auditive impressionistic analysis was conducted. The findings need to be interpreted under the premise that they are based on a subjective research method. Since few researchers have investigated the connection between uptalk and humor, irony, and jokes, and because the scope of this study is limited, further research on the functionality of uptalk is needed. Lastly, this study demonstrated that using podcasts as data is a valid alternative to other methods.

Introduction

Definition of ‘Uptalk’ and Article Overview

Throughout the past five decades, a specific rising intonation pattern commonly referred to as ‘uptalk’ has caught peoples’ interest. In popular media, uptalk is described as turning statements into questions by adding a pitch raise at the end of an utterance, and it is often interpreted as a sign of uncertainty and nervousity and a lack of confidence.¹ A more adequate and descriptive definition was proposed by Paul Warren, a New Zealand professor of linguistics, who defined it as “[a] marked rising intonation pattern found at the ends of intonation units realised on declarative utterances, and which serves primarily to check comprehension or to seek feedback”.²

Uptalk occurs in different contexts and under various names such as ‘Valley Girl Talk’, ‘High Rising Terminal’ (HRT), ‘upspeak’, and ‘Australian Question(ing) Intonation’ (AQI), but ‘uptalk’ currently seems to be the most widely accepted term.³ As the different names already indicate, it is not restricted to one variety of English, but can be observed in Australian English (AusE), New Zealand English, Canadian English, and American English, among others.⁴ With uptalk evidently being a very widespread phenomenon, it is unclear when and where it first appeared.⁵

1 Cf. Paul Warren, Janet Fletcher: *Phonetic Differences between Uptalk and Question Rises*, p. 148.

2 Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 2.

3 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 21.

4 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 69-99.

5 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 103.

The objective of this qualitative study is to verify previously identified functions of uptalk by using new data. This is done by investigating which functions uptalk takes in the speech of AusE speakers in a particular podcast episode. In the theoretical framework, definitions of uptalk are discussed, and an overview over uptalk in AusE and its different functions is provided. Following that, the data and the methodology used in the analysis are explained, and methodological considerations are stated. Thereafter, the results of the functional analysis of the instances of uptalk found in the data are presented. Subsequently, these results are discussed. In the conclusion, a summary of the study and suggestions for further research are given.

Theoretical Framework

The present study focuses on the functions of uptalk and only includes limited information on the speakers’ backgrounds, which is why this is not a primarily sociolinguistic study. As uptalk is a feature of intonation and, essentially, a marked pitch change, this study may be classified as research in prosody and suprasegmental phonetics.⁶ Previous research has also shown that the analysis of the functions of uptalk can be connected to certain aspects of conversation analysis, for instance the organization of turn-taking within a discourse.⁷ In the following, the most common definitions of uptalk are discussed and a working definition is provided. Following that, the results of previous research on uptalk in Australian English are presented. Finally, the various functions that have been ascribed to uptalk are elaborated on.

Definitions of ‘Uptalk’

As uptalk is not only a frequently researched intonation feature in linguistics, but also a widely discussed phenomenon in popular media, numerous definitions have been proposed. Paul Warren legitimately notes that “[i]t is important to remember [...] that discussions of uptalk, HRT, upspeak, AQI and so on may not be discussions of precisely the same phenomenon”.⁸ Hence, when conducting research on uptalk (in any variety of English), it is crucial to consider the fact that various intonation features have been studied under the label ‘uptalk’ and that these may not be comparable.⁹

Since December 2016, uptalk has an entry in the Oxford English Dictionary (henceforth OED), which defines it as “[a] manner of speaking in which declarative sentences are uttered with rising intonation at the end, a type of intonation more typically associated with questions”.¹⁰ From a linguistic perspective,

6 Cf. Thomas Herbst: *English Linguistics*, p. 54.

7 Cf. Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, p. 4.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 70.

10 John A. Simpson: *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

this definition poses problems. The definition given by the OED, which resembles the one used in popular media, implies that uptalk simply means using question-like intonation with statements. However, prior research has shown that the term 'question' describes several types of utterances that may have very different functions and structures.¹¹ At least in varieties of English, questions are not necessarily marked by rising intonation,¹² as "[...] English intonation does not adhere to a [simple] model whereby statements have falling intonation and questions have [rising] intonation".¹³ As mentioned in the introduction, the more accurate definition proposed by Paul Warren will be used as a working definition throughout this study.¹⁴ His definition implies that uptalk may fulfill relevant functions in verbal interactions, all of which will be further discussed below, in the section Functions of 'Uptalk'.

'Uptalk' in Australian English

Because uptalk is perceived as a relatively frequent intonation pattern in AusE, a considerable amount of research has been conducted on the High Rising Terminal or Australian Question(ing) Intonation, as it is often called in the context of AusE.¹⁵ Linguists noticed the presence of this intonational feature as early as the 1960s, but research really took off in the mid 1970s, when the evidence for uptalk in AusE increased.¹⁶ Over time, numerous significant studies on the communicative functions, phonetic forms, syntactic environments, and structures of uptalk were conducted. As Warren provides an excellent critical summary and review of the most influential research on uptalk in AusE, the individual studies will not be elaborated on in great detail in this paper.¹⁷

The origin of uptalk in AusE is unclear. Guy et al. propose three theories but note that these are merely hypothetical.¹⁸ Although they investigate instances of uptalk as an intonational change in progress in Sydney, they argue that it might not have originated there, but in another Australian metropolis or even a rural area, where it had simply not been recorded.¹⁹ Their second explanation refers to work by William Labov who hypothesized that instances of immigration impact existing orders of group roles and identities, and may lead to the emergence of new group identities that are marked linguistically by a linguistic innovation.²⁰ Therefore, they argue that, after World War II, when countless groups of non-native speakers from countries such as Italy, Greece, Turkey, and, for instance, Lebanon immigrated to Australia, the rise of uptalk in AusE was

11 Cf. Paul Warren: Uptalk, pp. 1, 21.

12 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 21, 23, 25; *id.*: The Interpretation of Prosodic Variability, p. 17.

13 Paul Warren: Uptalk, p. 25.

14 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2.

15 Cf. Janet Fletcher, Jonathan Harrington: High-Rising Terminals and Fall-Rise Tunes, p. 215.

16 Cf. Paul Warren: Uptalk, p. 70.

17 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 70-74.

18 Cf. Gregory Guy et al.: An Intonational Change in Progress, pp. 48 ff.

19 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 49.

20 Cf. William Labov: The Social Origins of Sound Change, pp. 533 f.

triggered.²¹ Lastly, they conjecture that the immigrant groups’ arrival may have caused a higher need to check for comprehension by means of intonation and therefore, uptalk became a frequently used feature.²² What is noteworthy about uptalk in AusE is its distribution across different social dimensions such as age, class, sex, and ethnicity. Early research suggested that uptalk is mostly present in the speech of young Australian women.²³ Later studies partly refuted this claim and argued that uptalk is being used by both Australian men and women.²⁴ Generally, uptalk is widely considered characteristic of the speech of adolescent AusE speakers.²⁵ Moreover, research showed that, at least in the past, the usage of uptalk was associated with lower social class.²⁶ In the context of Australia, no specific ethnic group has been associated with strikingly high use of uptalk.²⁷

Functions of ‘Uptalk’

As in other varieties of English, uptalk in AusE is stigmatized and often interpreted as a sign of deference and uncertainty. However, linguists have found it to have more positively connoted meanings and so-called interactional functions. Among these are verifying the listener’s comprehension,²⁸ establishing common ground,²⁹ asking for the listener’s permission to continue one’s turn in a given conversation,³⁰ and requesting minimal (non-)verbal feedback such as a nod, smile, ‘okay’ or ‘mhh’ from the listener.³¹ Further research suggests that uptalk may fulfill even more interactive communicative functions such as jointly constructing narrative or descriptive texts, that is a personal account or a description of events or knowledge, while simultaneously checking and assuring the listener’s engagement and comprehension.³²

21 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 49.

22 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 50.

23 Cf. Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, p. 5; Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 39; Janet Fletcher, Jonathan Harrington: *High-Rising Terminals and Fall-Rise Tunes*, p. 216.

24 Cf. Janet Fletcher, Jonathan Harrington: *High-Rising Terminals and Fall-Rise Tunes*, p. 226; Janet Fletcher, Deborah Loakes: *Patterns of Rising and Falling*, p. 42.

25 Cf. Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 24; Neil Courtney: *The Nature of Australian*, p. 27; Janet Fletcher, Deborah Loakes: *Patterns of Rising and Falling*, p. 46.

26 Cf. Keith Allan: *The Component Functions of the High Rise Terminal Contour*, p. 19; Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 37.

27 Cf. Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, pp. 39 ff.; Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 120.

28 Cf. *ibid.*

29 Cf. Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 56.

30 Cf. Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, p. 4; Joseph C. Tyler: *Expanding and Mapping the Indexical Field*, pp. 286, 293; Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 65; Julia Hirschberg: *Pragmatics and Intonation*, p. 533.

31 Cf. Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, pp. 4, 12; Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 44; Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 58; Keith Allan: *The Component Functions of the High Rise Terminal Contour*, p. 127; Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, pp. 4, 12; Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 44.

32 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 25, 43 f.; Janet Fletcher, Deborah Loakes: *Patterns of Rising and Falling*, p. 43; Jeannette McGregor, Sallyanne Palethorpe: *High Rising Tunes in Australian English*,

More general functions ascribed to uptalk, which might prove to be relevant for the present analysis, need to be taken into consideration. Due to its representation in popular culture and mass media, uptalk is often understood to signal uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of confidence on the part of the speaker,³³ because it sounds as if the speaker is questioning the truthfulness of their statement. Uptalk may also be falsely “[...] interpreted as a speaker’s need for listener approval or acceptance [...]”³⁴ since declaratives begin to sound like questions.³⁵ Furthermore, speakers who use uptalk are sometimes perceived as aggressive and encroaching.³⁶ Contrary to the belief that it is an indication of insecurity, research has shown that uptalk may also be associated with authority and that confident persons in superior positions use uptalk as well.³⁷ Moreover, it is linked to the expression of excitement, clarity, and understandability.³⁸ Lastly, it has been argued that uptalk seeks to reduce the social distance between the hearer and the listener,³⁹ and that it “has an important [referential] component, acting as a means of signaling salient chunks of information, and thus [encouraging] the hearer’s continued involvement in the discourse”.⁴⁰

Additionally, studies suggested that uptalk helps organize the informational structure of a discourse by distinguishing new information from information that is already shared by interlocutors.⁴¹ Hence, speakers can shift the focus of attention and coordinate a conversation by means of uptalk. Lastly, scholars have noted that through uptalk, certain ‘communicational norms’ have changed: there appears to have been a shift from simply telling information to interlocutors to sharing it with them.⁴² As demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, scholars have acknowledged the fact that uptalk does not serve a single purpose, but may fulfill multiple functions simultaneously, which makes it a fascinating feature to conduct further research on. Based on the observations that were discussed in this subsection, uptalk is expected to primarily perform interactional functions in the data that is analyzed in this paper.

Material and Methodology

This study explores which functions uptalk fulfills in the speech of AusE speakers. As previously mentioned, the majority of instances of uptalk that were found in the data were expected to fulfill interactional functions. In order to verify this,

p. 174.; Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, p. 4; Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, pp. 57 f.

33 Cf. John C. Wells: *English Intonation. An Introduction*, p. 37; Joseph C. Tyler: *Expanding and Mapping the Indexical Field*, pp. 288, 292; Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 51.

34 Joseph C. Tyler: *Expanding and Mapping the Indexical Field*, p. 304.

35 Cf. Billy Clark: *The Relevance of Tones*, p. 650.

36 Cf. Joseph C. Tyler: *Expanding and Mapping the Indexical Field*, p. 292.

37 Cf. Winnie Cheng, Martin Warren: *CAN i help you*, pp. 100 f.

38 Cf. Joseph C. Tyler: *Expanding and Mapping the Indexical Field*, p. 292.

39 Cf. Barbara Bradford: *Upspeak in British English*, p. 34.

40 Barbara Bradford: *Upspeak in British English*, p. 35.

41 Cf. Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, p. 62.

42 Cf. Gerhard Leitner: *Australia’s Many Voices*, pp. 237 f.

an episode from the podcast *Lingthusiasm*, a podcast about linguistics hosted by the Canadian internet linguist Gretchen McCulloch and the Australian linguist Lauren Gawne, was chosen as the data for the analysis.⁴³ In this study, episode 21, called ‘What words sound spiky across languages? Interview with Suzy Styles’, which was published on Spotify on June 22 in 2018, was analyzed and the speech of two AusE speakers, namely Lauren Gawne, who functioned as the host, and Suzy Styles, an Australian developmental psychologist, was studied.⁴⁴ The particular episode has a duration of 37 minutes and the transcript consists of a total of 6225 words and 206 turns. Each speaker had exactly 103 turns, which makes it a balanced conversation.

While the topic of the episode was, as usual, defined beforehand, the interview may be categorized as unscripted and as relatively natural speech. As for every podcast episode, a verbatim transcript is provided on the *Lingthusiasm* website, which, according to the website, is lightly edited from the original audio to ensure better readability. It provides the foundation for the analysis. Because not all interjections are noted in these transcripts, the missing minimal verbal feedback of the respective listener was added manually (in square brackets), and upwards arrows (↑) were added to mark perceived incidences of uptalk.

As the focus of this study is on functions of uptalk and not, for example, attitudes towards uptalk or its phonetic characteristics, methods such as guided speaking or perception tasks, statistical analyses, or acoustic analyses of pitch contours with programs such as Praat would not adequately answer this study’s research question and go beyond the constraints of this paper. Hence, an auditory analysis, which involves close listening to the recordings as well as marking and counting instances of uptalk, was carried out. Only those examples of uptalk found in the data that were clearly distinguishable when listening closely will be presented and discussed. Instances of uptalk in both ‘turn-medial’ and ‘turn-final’ positions, with turn being “[...] any section of talk by one of the participants in the dialogue, excluding minimal responses”,⁴⁵ will be considered and discussed in terms of their functions. For the classification and definition of functions, the ones discussed in the sections on ‘Uptalk’ in Australia and Functions of ‘Uptalk’ were used. The more general and the so-called interactive functions that have been identified in previous studies provide a large pool of potential functions to choose from, which is why they serve as the basis for the analysis. In the analysis, the function which, depending on the conversational context, was perceived as the most reasonable one, was assigned to an instance of uptalk.

It does not yet seem to be common practice to use podcasts as linguistic data, particularly when investigating uptalk. But this paper shows that using anglophone podcasts can be an interesting data source for linguists. Numerous podcasts are freely available online and many provide verbatim transcripts, which

43 All episodes are freely available on the *Lingthusiasm* website and new episodes are published once a month. Please visit <https://lingthusiasm.com/tagged/episodes> to view all episodes (accessed 9 October 2022).

44 Due to the study’s limited scope, the AusE speakers’ speech will not be classified as Cultivated, General, or Broad, a distinction frequently made between the varieties of AusE.

45 Jeannette McGregor, Sallyanne Palethorpe: *High Rising Tunes in Australian English*, p. 184.

saves researchers a tremendous amount of time as there is no need to find and interview participants and transcribe the data. Moreover, publicly available podcasts are usually recorded under ideal circumstances with high-quality technical equipment, meaning that there is little to no background noise, voices are not distorted, and the overall sound quality is good. The usual podcast setting is people coming together and having dialogues or group discussions in a friendly and relaxed setting, which does not resemble a classic interview but more so a casual conversation between acquaintances or friends. This potentially helps to reduce or prevent the observer's paradox and elicit natural speech. Lastly, considering the impact of a global pandemic or other factors that may inhibit researchers' mobility, podcasts are excellent alternatives to travelling and conducting linguistic fieldwork.

Methodological Considerations

Not only do the intonation features previously studied under the name of uptalk take different shapes and functions, they have also been investigated from numerous perspectives and by means of different methods, which makes cross-varietal comparisons even more difficult. In the context of AusE, some researchers relied on small datasets⁴⁶ whereas others used larger corpora of spoken language.⁴⁷ Depending on the aspect of uptalk that was of particular interest to the scholars, different methods such as sociolinguistic interviews,⁴⁸ matched guise subjective reaction tests,⁴⁹ questionnaires,⁵⁰ intonation analyses,⁵¹ frequency analyses,⁵² and map tasks were used.⁵³ Logically, as the research questions and focuses of individual studies differ, these diverse approaches and research methods yield quite distinct insights and results.⁵⁴ For instance, quantitative studies which use large corpora produce results that lend themselves for statistical analyses. On the contrary, studies that are based on smaller language samples may be better fit for in-depth analyses of the phonetic characteristics of uptalk and, for example, attitudes towards the phenomenon. Because this paper's scope is limited and the focus of this study is on the functionality of uptalk, a qualitative approach was chosen. By restricting the size of the language sample, a thorough analysis of individual instances of uptalk is made possible. As mentioned before, the analysis is based on a subjective research method, meaning that a single researcher

46 Cf. Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, p. 6; Jeannette McGregor, Sallyanne Palethorpe: *High Rising Tunes*, p. 179.

47 Cf. Janet Fletcher, Deborah Loakes: *Patterns of Rising and Falling*, p. 43; Janet Fletcher, Jonathan Harrington: *High-Rising Terminals and Fall-Rise Tunes*, p. 221; Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 33.

48 Cf. Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*, p. 6.

49 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 5, 8.

50 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 7.

51 Cf. Janet Fletcher, Deborah Loakes: *Patterns of Rising and Falling*, p. 44; Janet Fletcher, Jonathan Harrington: *High-Rising Terminals and Fall-Rise Tunes*, p. 221.

52 Cf. Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*, p. 34.

53 Cf. Jeannette McGregor, Sallyanne Palethorpe: *High Rising Tunes*, p. 179.

54 Cf. Paul Warren: *Uptalk*, pp. 171, 185 f.

interprets the functions of the individual instances of uptalk. This was found to be the most suitable method considering the study’s research question.

Analysis and Results

This section summarizes the results of the qualitative auditive analysis of uptalk in the speech of the two AusE speakers. The results are presented in Table 1, which contains the functions of uptalk that were found in the data as well as their absolute frequencies and the total number of occurrences. Relative frequencies of particular functions are given as percentages in the text. In total, 35 individual instances of uptalk were found. Overall, uptalk was found to perform a broad variety of functions, all of which could be classified as interactional functions. Additionally, a previously unmentioned interactional function, namely uptalk as an expression of humor and irony, was identified.

Arranged from highest to lowest frequency of occurrence, Table 1 illustrates which functions uptalk took in the speech of Lauren Gawne and Suzy Styles, and where the instances of uptalk are found in the transcript. Occasionally, the number of lines does not match with the number of occurrences, which is due to

Function	Number of occurrences	Lines
Checking whether the listener is still following	14	<u>58</u> , <u>75</u> , <u>143</u> , <u>171</u> , <u>172</u> , <u>234</u> , <u>235</u> , <u>242</u> , <u>416</u> , <u>458</u> , <u>488</u> , <u>494</u>
Signaling salient chunks of information	12	<u>53</u> , <u>57</u> , <u>143</u> , <u>171</u> , <u>172</u> , <u>250</u> , <u>251</u> , <u>252</u> , <u>261</u> , <u>310</u>
Requesting to hold the floor/continue speaking	6	<u>75</u> , <u>251</u> , <u>261</u> , <u>458</u> , <u>460</u> , <u>542</u>
Requesting minimal (non-) verbal feedback from the listener	5	<u>8</u> , <u>155</u> , <u>234</u> , <u>235</u> , <u>416</u>
Constructing a narrative text	5	<u>53</u> , <u>67</u> , <u>488</u> , <u>494</u> , <u>523</u>
Expressing humor or irony	5	<u>61</u> , <u>122</u> , <u>339</u> , <u>513</u> , <u>523</u>
Expressing positive emotions (such as excitement)	4	<u>7</u> , <u>9</u> , <u>540</u> , <u>542</u>
Checking the listener’s comprehension	3	<u>143</u> , <u>242</u> , <u>310</u>
Establishing common ground	3	<u>57</u> , <u>58</u> , <u>67</u>
Inviting the listener to actively participate	1	<u>155</u>
Maintaining/keeping a conversation going	1	<u>460</u>
Total	59	

Table 1: Functions of Uptalk in the Speech of Two AusE Speakers. Instances of Uptalk with Multiple Functions are underlined.

the fact that in certain lines, various instances of uptalk occurred. In this sample, uptalk is mostly used as a checking mechanism (23,7%), the marking of crucial information (20,3%), and a floor-holding technique (10,1%). The low frequency of uptalk as a turn-extending-mechanism may be explained by the observation that there were very few overlaps and interruptions and a balanced speech flow. In 20 instances, which may be found in the lines highlighted in gray, uptalk could be argued to fulfill multiple functions. Because Gawne and Styles are well-acquainted colleagues, the fact that uptalk rarely served as a means of establishing common ground (5%), maintaining the conversation (1,6%), and inviting the listener to participate (1,6%) is rather unsurprising. They did not need to get to know each other as they already share knowledge based on their professional backgrounds, and they both willingly came on the podcast and, assumingly, wanted to actively contribute to a lively conversation.

Remarkably, the two AusE speakers used uptalk as an expression of humor and irony (8,4%), a function that has not been mentioned in previous papers. For instance, Lauren Gawne, one of the analyzed AusE speakers, used uptalk to create a humorous effect:

119 Lauren: I think it's worth, like, always making clear these things that the
 120 kids are hearing these sentences long before they can clearly say,
 121 "Yesterday, I saw a cat." [Mmm] You know, they're probably not saying it
 122 [Mh] quite that sophisticatedly. † [Laughter]
 123 Suzy: Yeah.

Figure 1: Screenshot of a Passage from Episode 21 Showing Uptalk in Connection to Humor.

In this situation, the word 'sophisticatedly' is used to, in a way, mock toddlers for their not yet fully developed language production skills. The tentative, i. e., not blurted out, utterance of 'sophisticatedly' and the instance of uptalk are immediately followed by laughter, which shows that the intention to create a humorous effect was successful. Based on the fact that intonation constructs context and meaning,⁵⁵ it is not surprising that uptalk as an intonation feature may serve to create humor, jointly construct a joke, or convey irony.

Discussion

The results obtained in the analysis answer the research question, namely which functions uptalk takes in the speech of the two AusE speakers under investigation. The analysis demonstrates that the respective speakers predominantly used uptalk to generally structure the discourse and ensure a lively conversation. All the functions identified in the present data set may be classified as interactional, thereby corroborating the hypothesis that uptalk primarily performs interactional functions in the speech of the two AusE speakers investigated. Moreover, uptalk fulfilled more than a single function in the majority of cases. These findings further add to and confirm earlier investigations on uptalk and its functions

55 Cf. Jill House: *Constructing a Context with Intonation*, p. 1543.

in AusE.⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, however, not all of the functions defined in the theoretical part of the paper were present in the data. For instance, the speakers did not use uptalk to reduce social distance between them. This is likely due to the fact that Suzy Styles and Lauren Gawne are well-acquainted colleagues.

Because the podcast is produced for a broad audience, it is questionable whether the instances of uptalk are directed at the current discourse partner or actually targeted towards the ‘end user’ of the podcast. Perhaps the speakers (subconsciously) deployed the functions with the thought in mind that others will listen to the podcast later. This would further explain the high frequencies of uptalk as a means to keep the conversation amusing and alive. The interlocutors want to pay attention to each other and actively engage in the conversation, not least because they are recording their conversation and will make it available to the public. As illustrated in the example given in the section above (Figure 1), uptalk is used to express humor and irony to make their content even more appealing and entertaining.

The method chosen for this study, namely an auditive impressionistic analysis, clearly comes with some methodological limitations. In qualitative research where a single researcher analyzes a linguistic variable, perhaps even under time pressure and lack of resources, relying on subjective impressions and introspection is often inevitable. Hence, the results of the present study should be interpreted under the premise that they are based on a fairly subjective research method. However, the results obtained call for further research, which could verify the newly identified function of uptalk as an expression of humor, jokes, and irony. In a possible follow-up study, other, less subjective research methods could be used, and the quantity of data could be increased in order to yield statistically significant results. Analyses of larger quantities of data would help to determine whether the use of uptalk in this function was a onetime observation or whether there may actually be a pattern behind it.

Conclusion

The present study investigates the functions of uptalk, an intonation feature frequently found in numerous varieties of English, in the speech of two Australian English speakers. The results confirm findings of prior research on uptalk and its respective functions in Australian English (AusE). In that regard they confirm the study’s hypothesis, namely that the instances of uptalk found in the data set chosen for the study – an episode of *Lingthusiasm*, an anglophone podcast about linguistics – mainly perform so-called interactional functions.

In addition, in this dataset, the speakers frequently used uptalk to express humor, construct a joke, or convey an ironical meaning – an additional interactional function that has not yet been mentioned or discussed in previous research.

56 Consider Gregory Guy et al.: *An Intonational Change in Progress*; Paul Warren: *Uptalk*; Gregory Guy, Julia Vonwiller: *The Meaning of an Intonation*; Keith Allan: *The Component Functions of the High Rise Terminal Contour*; Jeannette McGregor, Sallyanne Palethorpe: *High Rising Tunes in Australian English*.

This suggests that the creation of humorous effects may be an additional function of uptalk, which is possibly not limited to AusE. Hence, the present study contributes relevant insights into research on uptalk and its functions.

An additional significant contribution was made by using anglophone podcasts as data, which, considering the fact that podcasts have not been used as a data source for research on uptalk before, may be seen as a methodological innovation. In times of a global pandemic, when conducting fieldwork, especially on phonetic and phonological aspects of language, is severely hampered, it is highly recommended to resort to podcasts, which feature speakers from different anglophone countries and for which verbatim transcripts are available, as data sources for all kinds of linguistic analyses. In this article, the advantages and disadvantages of this research method are discussed in the section on methodology.

This study highlights the relevance of conducting further research on the functions of uptalk: further investigation is needed to confirm whether conveying jokes and irony can be added to the repertoire of the functions of uptalk. Other researchers could use the same data to investigate the functions of uptalk in the speech of AusE speakers by means of different research methods, or simply analyze other aspects of uptalk. However, subsequent studies should not be limited to AusE, since uptalk is an intonation feature characteristic of numerous varieties of English. Developing a more universal definition of uptalk that is more applicable to distinct varieties of English could be advantageous, as it would enable researchers to compare their findings more easily.

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