The pragmatics and prosody of declarative 'questions' and interrogative questions

Matthijs Westera, Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Speakers of English seem to use rising intonation to indicate that one of the conversational maxims may have been violated. In my (2017) PhD dissertation I develop this idea into a theory of 'Intonational Compliance Marking' (ICM). In this talk I will apply the ICM theory to two cases: question-like rising declaratives and rising/falling interrogatives. I will first show how certain basic assumptions about pragmatics (e.g., when it is permissible to violate a maxim at all) predict three core features of the former: their question-likeness, the epistemic bias they express and their badness out of the blue. I then show which further assumptions are needed for the ICM theory to also cover (interrogative) questions, concentrating on their (non-)exhaustivity/exclusivity effects. A central assumption will be that, whereas intonation marks (non-)compliance with the maxims, interrogativity indicates a kind of opting out. With this in place it is shown that certain superficial differences between rising declaratives and interrogatives in fact derive from a common core, while conversely certain superficial commonalities derive from distinct underlying mechanisms.