

Chapter 10

The simple sentence

In this chapter I describe various functional-typological phenomena centring on the simple sentence, many of which are morphosyntactically expressed across the different structures that have been described so far. These are: (1) major speech-act-related clause types (declarative, interrogative, and imperative), (2) expressions of proper inclusion, equation, state, location, and possession, (3) negation, (4) valency changing, and (5) tense-aspect-mood systems.

10.1. Speech acts and clause types

As summarised in TABLE 10–1, there are three clause types that are grammaticalised for three major speech acts, i.e. statement, question, and command (Lyons 1977; Givón 1984). The encoding devices are intonation, verb morphology, and focus marking.

TABLE 10–1. Speech act and focus marking

Speech act	Clause type	Focus marking	Verb inflection
STATEMENT	Declarative	= <i>du</i>	– Imperative
QUESTION	Interrogative	= <i>ru</i> (Yes-No type)	– Imperative
		= <i>ga</i> (Information type)	– Imperative
COMMAND	Imperative	None	+ Imperative

There are also mismatches between clause type and speech act, e.g. the interrogative clause type may express a (polite) command. These are described in §10.1.4.

10.1.1. Declarative clauses

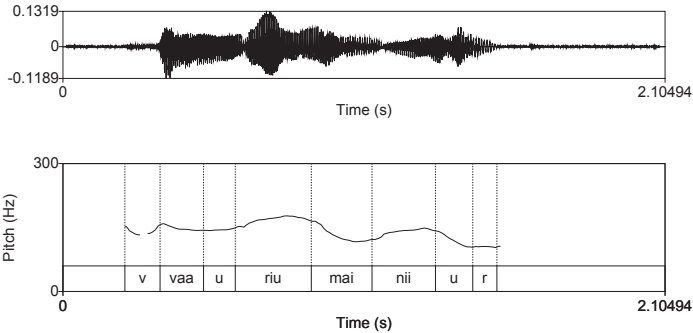
A declarative clause may be syntactically distinguished from an interrogative clause by the choice of focus marker if a focus marker is present. The focus marker for declaratives is =*du*, as opposed to =*ru* or =*ga* for interrogatives.

(10–1) *mm=mu=du* *fau-tar*.

- potato=ACC=FOC eat-PST
 ‘(I) ate potato.’ [Declarative]
- (10–2) *mm=mu=ru* *fau-tar?*
 potato=ACC=FOC eat-PST
 ‘Did (you) eat potato?’ [Yes-No interrogative]
- (10–3) *nau=ju=ga* *fau-tar?*
 what=ACC=FOC eat-PST
 ‘What did (you) eat?’ [Wh-interrogative]

There is a prosodic feature that distinguishes declaratives from interrogatives and imperatives. In declarative clauses the prosodic pattern generated by the alternating rhythm (§2.9.3) is directly manifested:

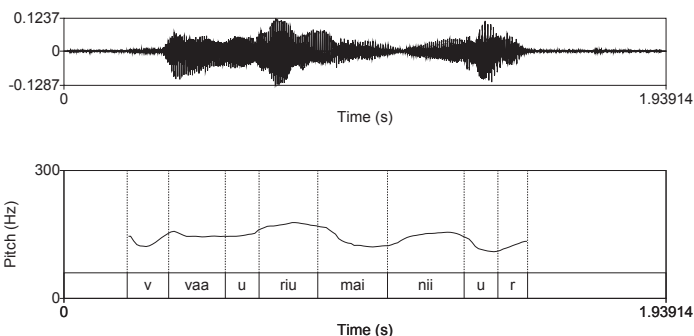
- (10–4) *vva=a* *uri=u=mai* *nii+ur-Ø*
 2SG=TOP that=ACC=too boil+PROG-NPST
 (vvaa)_H (urir)_H(mai)_L (nii)_H(ur)_L
 ‘You are boiling that, too.’ [Declarative]



Interrogative clauses often carry a rising terminal contour superimposed on the rhythmic pattern. In (10–5) and in (10–6) the rising contour occurs somewhere around the final mora of the sentence-final word(-plus).¹

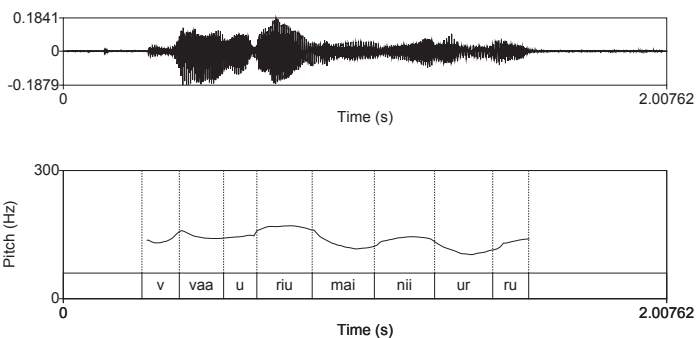
- (10–5) *vva=a* *uri=u=mai* *nii+ur-Ø?*
 2SG=TOP that=ACC=too boil+PROG-NPST
 ‘Are you boiling that, too?’ [Interrogative: final rising contour]

¹ The pitch tracks here were extracted from the speech of a native speaker of Irabu (male, age = 67 in 2006), and processed with the software application *Praat*.



Note that in (10–6) below the word-plus ends in the question marker, and the rising contour occurs on the question marker rather than on the verb (as in (10–5)).

- (10–6) *vva=a* *uri=u=mai* *nii+ur-Ø=ru?*
 2SG=TOP that=ACC=too boil+PROG-NPST=Q
 ‘Are you boiling that, too?’ [Interrogative (with question marker): final rising contour]



An imperative clause does not have the final rising contour observed in interrogative clauses. However, the final L-toned foot in imperatives is pronounced with a slightly higher and flatter contour than in declaratives.

- (10–7) *vva=a* *uri=u=mai* *nii+ur-i.*
 2SG=TOP that=ACC=too boil+PROG-IMP
 ‘Keep boiling that, too.’