General assumption and claims:

Aim: Accounting for the pitch movement realized on the rightmost syllable of utterances (UPs) in French. Here, we focus on questioning interrogatives.

Observation: Questioning interrogatives are usually associated with a falling nuclear contour (nuclear fall, henceforth L*) but a final movement (aligned with the declination slope, rising or falling), generally occurring on the last syllable, is observed. Very often, the L* is aligned with the penultimate syllable and the last syllable is realized as a rise, or a fall, or a continuation of the contour. The choice between the three contours is meaningful.

Claims:
– Final movements are reflexes of boundary tones restricted to the right edge of Utterance Phrases (this edge may coincide either with the right edge of the nuclear or the post-nuclear domain). Accordingly: M%, H% or L%.
– Final movements convey a meaning pertaining to the call-on-addressee (post-nuclear domain). Accordingly: M%, H% or L%.

Prosodic analysis of boundary tones

Material: Two corpora:
- a corpus of 60 wh-interrogatives making up the instructions of a production experiment recorded by a professional linguist in a sound-proof room. All features a falling contour. (CP-corpus/Pro-Gram).
- a corpus of interrogatives extracted (on a perceptual basis) from ESTER: recorded radio speech (news, talk-show, interviews, etc.).

Analysis of the elicited material:
- Tokens with a final H are never identified with tokens with a nuclear rising contours (nH) by speakers of French.
- Hs are aligned with the nucleus of the syllable (while nH are aligned with the onset)
- Hs may be realized at the end of appendices, even though a falling contour is realized on the rightmost edge of the nuclear domain (Beyssade et al 2007).
- Hs are observed in 60% of the CP-corpus.

Figures (from left to right): Figure 1 illustrates a simple interrogative with a nuclear fall; Figure 2 illustrates a bh at the edge of the nuclear zone; Figure 3 shows a bh at the edge of a postnuclear zone.

Preliminary results of two perceptual tests (one judgement test and one identification test)

Judgement experiment (Praat listening experiment script):
Task: Judging whether the question fits in the context or not (closed choice)
Stimuli: 4 radio extracts ending with a question. The Bt is manipulated (bHigh, bMid, bFall). 3 reiterations of the same extracts were presented in a random order (+ 4 extracts x 3 conditions x 3 times = 36 stimuli). The participants could listen to a stimulus only once; there was no time limitation for answering.
Participants: 20 native speakers of French, adults, aged 20-35 years
Hypothesis: The felicitous (non felicitous fit of questions in context depends on the choice of BTs, which depends on the relation between questioner and questionee.

Expected answers: Rate (in %) of correct answers

Identification experiment (Praat listening experiment script):
Task: Judging whether the speaker is asking in a neutral, conciliatory or peremptory way.
Stimuli: 5 questions extracted from the ESTER-corpus. The Bt of each question is manipulated (bHigh, bMid, bFall). 3 reiterations of the same extracts were presented in a random order (+ 5 questions x 3 conditions x 3 times = 45 stimuli). The participants could listen to a stimulus only once; there was no time limitation for answering.
Participants: 21 native speakers of French, adults, aged 20-35 years.