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Responding to negative (biased) questions: Russian vs. German

Response particles like *yes* and *no* in principle may fulfil two functions: they may affirm or reject the truth of a previous utterance (truth-based strategy), or they may signal the polarity of the response (polarity-based strategy). The difference becomes relevant in responses to assertions or questions with a negation. For instance, in response to the claim *Peter doesn't ski*, a particle like *yes* in principle may signal that the claim is true, i.e. *yes* signals agreement with the antecedent utterance, that Peter doesn't ski, but it may also signal that *Peter does ski*, i.e. *yes* signals the positive polarity of the answer. Languages differ with respect to which of these functions the individual response particles preferably realize – or in how far these functions (or strategies) are combined: there has been much research on cross-linguistic as well as inter-individual variation on this issue in recent years (e.g. Brasoveanu et al. 2013; Krifka 2013; Goodhue & Wagner, 2015, 2018; González-Fuente et al. 2015; Meijer et al. 2015; Roelofsen & Farkas 2015; Li et al. 2016; Claus et al. 2017; Farkas & Roelofsen 2019; Repp et al. 2019). ♦ The current study focuses on Russian in comparison to German. Russian has been argued to combine truth-based and polarity-based strategies and to also regularly employ other response strategies like the repetition of the finite verb (González-Fuente et al. 2015; also Esipova 2019). According to this literature, in responses to negative antecedents, the particle *net* 'no' is preferably used in affirmations, i.e. to signal the truth of the antecedent, but it may also be used in rejections, i.e. to signal negative polarity of the answer. The particle *da* 'yes' can only be used to signal agreement, i.e. truth, but *net*, which can also fulfil this function, seems to be preferred over *da*. German shares with Russian the restriction of the *yes*-type particle *ja* being restricted to affirmations and the option of using *nein* 'no' for this function, but there is inter-individual variation regarding the preferential use of *nein* vs. *ja*, with a majority of speakers preferring *ja* over *nein* (Claus et al. 2017). Otherwise the languages differ in that German has a dedicated particle for rejections of negative antecedents, *doch*, which Russian does not have. ♦ For Russian, the literature does not distinguish between different kinds of negative antecedent, viz. negative assertions vs. questions (cf. Esipova 2019). However, there are reasons to believe that this distinction plays a role. On the one hand, there are empirical observations to this effect in other languages (Holmberg 2015), so this issue requires more detailed investigation. On the other hand, it has been observed that negative polar questions express certain contextual and epistemic biases (Ladd 1981; Romero & Han 2004; Repp 2009; Sudo 2013). These biases have been argued to correlate with different scope relations regarding the negation and other semantic operators (Romero & Han 2004), or to be the result of the negation being able to denote different operators: propositional vs. illocutionary (Repp 2009). Considering that response particles have been argued to be anaphors or anaphoric operators that pick up a proposition from the previous utterance (Krifka 2013; Roelofsen & Farkas 2015; Farkas & Roelofsen 2019), it is to be expected that the precise semantics of the negation in questions will have an impact on the meaning and use of the response particles. Evidence to this effect comes from German. Claus et al. (2016) and Repp (2019) discuss experimental evidence from acceptability rating studies which shows that negative polar questions with so-called high negation (*hn*, see below for discussion) come with the opposite answer pattern than negative assertions: they are answered as if they were positive questions: *ja* signals positive polarity and *nein* signals negative polarity. Now, for *hn* polar questions it has been argued that the negative marker does not denote propositional negation but the illocutionary operator FALSUM, which scopes over a positive proposition (the speaker has an epistemic bias for the truth of that proposition, see below). The answer pattern in questions with FALSUM can be

explained on the assumption that *ja* and *nein* pick up this positive proposition, that is p in $[[Q \text{ FALSUM } [p]]] = \{\text{FALSUM } p, \text{not FALSUM } p\}$. Repp (2019) also presents evidence that negative polar questions with so-called low negation (*ln*, which express a bias, too) and questions with ‘neutral’ negation (*nn*), which both are assumed to contain propositional negation, do not show the same response pattern as *hn* questions. Yet neither do they show the response patterns of assertions. In fact, these question types lead to great uncertainty regarding the meaning and use of *ja* and *nein*, with average acceptability ratings being rather low for both particles in affirmations and rejections.

◆ In this talk, we will present experimental data for Russian negative questions. Russian preferably uses declarative syntax for ‘neutral’ polar questions, which is relevant in this context because declarative questions in languages like German or English are not neutral and come with different biases than polar questions (Gunlogson 2002; Trinh 2013). To indicate the biases that have been described for negative polar questions, Russian may use the interrogative particle *razve* ‘really’, and the particle *li*, which marks ‘questioned constituents’. Our investigation of these differences in conjunction with the different response systems that have been described for German vs. Russian will improve our understanding of bias in questions on the one hand, and on the meaning and use of response particles, on the other hand. We expect to get deeper insights into how language-specific morpho-syntactic characteristics of negative questions influence the way anaphoric response particles pick up antecedent propositions, and how this interacts with the language-specific semantic-pragmatic specifications for the meaning and use of the response particles. ◆ We will present evidence from three experiments (24 items, 24 fillers, 24 participants each) on different kinds of negative questions: *hn*, *ln* and *nn* questions. All experiments have a 2×2 design with the factors STATE OF AFFAIRS and PARTICLE, see (1). In the context for each item, a state of affairs is described such that the person later giving the answer (Dima) knows what is factually true. In experiments 1 and 2, there will also be information about previous assumptions of the person asking (= epistemic bias) and some contextual evidence (= evidential bias) that is incompatible with these assumptions. In such a situation, *hn* questions double-check the previous assumption of the person asking (p), and *ln* questions double check the evidence ($\neg p$). The idea that *hn* encodes a non-propositional operator like FALSUM is supported by the observation that PPIs like *uže* ‘already’ can occur in these questions, while NPIs like *eščě* ‘yet’ cannot. In *ln* and *nn* questions, this is the other way round. The task of the participants in our experiments is to rate the acceptability of the response, which will be *da* or *net*. The experiments are currently being run.

(1) [Exp 1/2/3] Olga and Dima are preparing a business trip to Milan. Nina, their secretary, is helping them. This morning, Dima talked to Nina and learned that...

...she will book the flights next week. STATE OF AFFAIRS: $\neg p$ (negative p – not done yet)

...she has booked the flights already. STATE OF AFFAIRS: p (positive p – done already)

[Exp 1/2] Just before they go home, Olga and Dima are talking about the business trip. Olga assumes that Nina has organized everything and the departure time is fixed. So she is a little surprised when Tom suggests taking an earlier flight.

Olga:	Exp 1:	Razve Nina uže	ne zabronirovala biletu?	[high negation]
	Exp 2:	Razve Nina eščě	ne zabronirovala biletu?	[low negation]
		really Nina already / yet	not booked tickets	
		‘Hasn’t Nina booked the flights already / yet?’		

[Exp 3] Just before they go home, Olga and Dima are talking about the business trip. They are discussing the things that Nina has not done yet.

Olga: Nina **eště** ne zabronirovala bilety?
'Has Nina not booked the flights yet?'

[neutral negation]

[Exp. 1/2/3] Dima: Da / Net, ... (in accordance with state of affairs)

PARTICLE: *yes / no*