Implicit negation in Turkish yes/no questions

Beste Kamali
Universität Bielefeld

Turkish yes/no questions are formed with a clitic that attaches to a focused element. In contexts where such a constituent is missing, the clitic may attach to the verb or, surprisingly, to the object. I show that the former can felicitously be answered "no", can license NPIs, and even surface with a negation in embedded contexts; but not the latter. I argue that the range of differences is due to the former being bipolar questions while the latter monopolar, in the sense of Krifka (2014).

From the SOV declarative in (1a), various YNQs can be made just with differing clitic placement.

(1)　　a.　Ali dün　　　yemek yaptı.
　　　　　　Ali yesterday dinner made
　　　　　　'Ali made dinner yesterday.'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Declarative
　　　　b.　Ali **mi** dün　　　yemek yaptı?
　　　　　　Ali MI yesterday dinner made
　　　　　　'Was it Ali who made dinner yesterday?'　　　　　　　　　　Subject attachment
　　　　c.　Ali dün yemek yaptı **mı**?
　　　　　　'Did Ali make dinner yesterday?'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Verbal attachment

A typical broad focus scenario is not expressed by (1c), but instead with attachment on the object. This is shown by the appropriateness of the two options in the 'guess what' scenario in (2).

(2)　　A:　Guess why the kitchen is in a mess?
　　　　B1:　Ali dün　　　yemek **mi** yaptı ?
　　　　　　　Ali yesterday dinner MI made
　　　　　　　'Did Ali make dinner yesterday?'　　　　　　　　　　　　　VP2=Broad focus
　　　　B2: #Ali dün yemek yaptı **mı**?
　　　　　　　'Did Ali indeed make dinner yesterday?'　　　　　　　　　　　Verbal=not

Alternative questions reveal clearly the possible alternatives in the two cases. (2B1) can compare TP alternatives (3a), while (2B2) can only compare polarity alternatives (3b).

(3)　　a.　Ali dün　　　yemek **mi** yaptı, mutfakta　　kıyamet **mi** koptu?
　　　　　　Ali yesterday dinner MI made kitchen-loc hell　　　MI broke.loose
　　　　　　'Did Ali make dinner yesterday, or did hell break loose in the kitchen?'　　　　VP2=TP alts
　　　　b.　Ali dün　　　yemek yaptı **mı**, yapmadı　**mı** ?
　　　　　　Ali yesterday dinner made MI　not.made MI
　　　　　　'Did Ali make dinner yesterday, or not?'　　　　　　　　　Verbal=Polarity alts

This affinity between the verbal attachment and polarity can be observed in at least three other important respects. First, the verbal attachment question may be answered "no".

(4)　　Q:　Yemek yedin　**mi**?
　　　　　　Dinner ate-2sg MI
　　　　　　'Have you had dinner?' 2
　　　　A:　Hayır. / Hayır, yemedim.

No. / No, I haven't.

A "no" answer does not adequately resolve the question in the case of the object attachment question. A communicative answer might provide an explanation.

(5)   Q: Yemek **mi** yedin?
           Dinner MI ate-2sg
           'Have you had dinner?' 1
     A: # Hayır. / #Hayır, yemedim. / Hayır. Alışverişten geliyorum.
           #No. / # No I haven't. / No. I was out shopping.

Secondly, NPI licensing is only possible with verbal attachment (6a) and not any other, including the broad focus object attachment (6b).

(6)   a. Ali hiç   yemek yaptı **mı**?
         Ali never dinner made MI?
         'Did Ali ever make dinner?'   Verbal→NPI licensed
      b. *Ali <**mi**> hiç   <**mi**> yemek <**mi**> yaptı?
         Ali MI   never MI   dinner MI   made
         Intended: 'Did Ali ever make dinner?', 'Did ALİ ever make dinner?' etc.   *NPI

Note that wh questions do not license NPIs in Turkish. Only negation and the verbal attachment YNQ.

(7)   *Kim hiç   yemek yaptı?
      Who never dinner made?
      'Who's ever made dinner?'   WhQ→*NPI

Thirdly, the embedded nominalization of the verbal attachment question involves a negation, in the form of a V-or-not-V periphrasis. All other cases surface with standard embedded nominalization and retain *-mI* where it would be in the direct question.

(8)   a. Yemek **yap-ıp**   **yap-ma**-dığ-ın-ı   merak   ettim.
         dinner make-conv make-neg-nomin-2sg-acc I.wondered
         'I wondered if you were (indeed) making dinner.'
      b. Yemek **mi** yap-tığ-ın-ı   merak   ettim.
         dinner MI make-nomin-2sg-acc I.wondered
         'I wondered if it was you making dinner that I was hearing.'

It looks like verbal attachment YNQs have an 'implicit negation' that licenses NPIs, surfaces in embedded nominalization and allows "no" answers. I formalize this intuition in terms of focus alternatives and argue that a negative focus alternative in verbal attachment questions is responsible for the paradigm. The verbal attachment question encodes a bipolar question, where the focus alternatives are {p, ¬p}. Object attachment questions, on the other hand, are monopolar. ¬p is not a focus alternative. They are felicitous in broad focus contexts via a process of focus projection.

    This paradigm of yes/no question felicity in Turkish can be addressed without recourse to the notion of bias. It appears that this is because the grammar clearly distinguishes bipolar questions from others.

References

Krifka, Manfred. 2014. Focus and Contrastive Topics in Question and Answer Acts. Ms. October 2014, HU Berlin/ZAS.