

## Expletive and covert negation in Finnish YNQs: evidence from object case-marking and PIs

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**Introduction.** In what follows, I argue that positive and negative yes-no questions (YNQs) in Finnish show all four logically possible combinations of [ $\pm$ pronounced] and [ $\pm$ interpreted] negation. The evidence comes from object case-marking and licensing of polarity particles.

**Background.** Kiparsky (1998) shows that structural object case-marking in Finnish is semantically conditioned: when the VP is bounded, the structural case of the object is accusative (ACC), and when the VP is unbounded, it is partitive (PAR). According to Kiparsky (1998: 18), an unbounded VP has either an unbounded head (V) or an unbounded argument, which allows unifying the two functions proposed in the literature for the Finnish PAR: PAR can be due either to the quantitative indeterminacy of the argument ('NP-related partitive') or to the unboundedness of the predicate ('aspectual partitive', characterised in terms of unboundedness in Ikola 1961, Heinämäki 1984, Leino 1991, and in terms of resultativity in Itkonen 1976, Hakulinen and Karlsson 1979, Larjavaara 1991). VPs of negative declarative sentences are unbounded (Heinämäki 1984), and therefore an object that would otherwise find itself in a bounded VP with ACC in fact carries PAR when negation is present.

Finnish negation is expressed using a negative auxiliary that agrees with the subject in person and number, but carries no tense marking. This has led to the suggestion that it base-generates in a position above tense but below FinP/PolP, where it moves for  $\phi$ -marking (Holmberg et al. 1993, Holmberg 2003). NegP must be low enough to make the VP unbounded.

(1) shows a positive and a negative declarative with an inherently bounded verb.

- |        |                           |              |  |    |                                    |             |              |
|--------|---------------------------|--------------|--|----|------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| (1) a. | Ost-i-n                   | poro-n       |  | b. | E-n                                | osta-nut    | poro-a       |
|        | buy-past.1sg              | reindeer-ACC |  |    | neg-1sg                            | buy-pastprt | reindeer-PAR |
|        | 'I bought a/the reindeer' |              |  |    | 'I didn't buy a/the/some reindeer' |             |              |

Neutral, non-clefted Finnish YNQs are formed by head-movement of the finite verb or auxiliary (the highest visible head in IP) to the CP, where the enclitic question particle *-kO*, subject to vowel harmony, attaches to the head (Holmberg 2003, 2013). In negative YNQs, it is the negative auxiliary that is fronted (see example (2) below). Answering YNQs in Finnish is most often done using a finite verb (either a verb or a negative auxiliary, the choice of which defines whether the answer is positive or negative), but there exists also a word for 'yes', *kyllä*.

Responses to the YNQs that constitute the data should be analysed in terms of their properties as responding assertions (Farkas and Bruce 2009). Besides an absolute polarity feature ([+] for positive, [-] for negative), responding assertions have a relative polarity feature that is determined by the comparison of the absolute polarity feature of the response and that of the sentence radical that the question requires to be decided (for details, see Farkas and Bruce 2009). Confirming responses, where the author of the response expresses agreement, have the relative polarity feature [same], meaning that the absolute polarity features of the discussed sentence radical and the response sentence radical are identical: with reversing responses, where the author of the response disagrees, the absolute polarity values are different, and the relative polarity feature is [reversing].

According to Holmberg (2014), the Finnish focus particle *-kin* is closely related to the question particle *-kO*: both require a focus-marked element in their c-command domain, and attach to fronted focus-marked material. *-kin* is often analysed as a positive polarity focus particle with a negative polarity counterpart, *-kAAAn*: in Karttunen and Karttunen (1976), it is argued that while these particles do not contribute to the truth values of the sentence, they contribute a conventional implicature (or a presupposition) regarding alternative sentences. Their additive meanings are akin to 'too', 'also' and 'either', and they may also be scalar. It can be argued that *-kAAAn* is a negative polarity particle in that it requires a semantically negative environment to be licensed (Levinson 2008). The status of *-kin* as a purely positive polarity particle is plausible.

**Data.** In Finnish, object case can vary between ACC and PAR in both positive and negative YNQs with an inherently bounded verb. This is shown in (2). In YNQs of both polarities, PAR can be either NP-related (when the object is quantitatively indeterminate, a mass noun in this case) or aspectual (whenever the PAR-marked object is not quantitatively indeterminate in this case).

- |        |   |         |              |              |              |
|--------|---|---------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| (2) a. | Ost-i-t-ko  | sinä    | poro-n       | //           | poro-a?      |
|        | buy-past.2sg.kO   | you-NOM | reindeer-ACC |              | reindeer-PAR |
|        | 'Did you buy a/the reindeer // a/the/some reindeer?'    |         |              |              |              |
| b.     | E-t-kö  | sinä    | osta-nut     | poro-n       | // poro-a?   |
|        | neg-2sg.kO  | you-NOM | buy-pastprt  | reindeer-ACC | reindeer-PAR |
|        | 'Didn't you buy a/the reindeer // a/the/some reindeer?' |         |              |              |              |

Attaching one of the two polar focus particles *-kin* and *-kAAAn* on the object leads to the following pattern: PAR-*kin* on the object leads to the loss of the readings requiring aspectual PAR (\*a, \*the), while ACC-*kaan* is ungrammatical.

- (3) a. Ost-i-t-ko      sinä      poro-**n-kin**      //      poro-**a-kin?**  
 buy-past.2sg.kO you-NOM reindeer-ACC.kin      reindeer-PAR.kin  
 ‘Did you buy a/the reindeer // \*a/\*the/some reindeer, too?’
- b. E-t-kö      sinä      osta-nut      poro-**n-kin**      //      poro-**a-kin?**  
 neg-2sg.kO you-NOM buy-pastprt reindeer-ACC.kin      reindeer-PAR.kin  
 ‘Didn’t you buy a/the reindeer // \*a/\*the/some reindeer, too?’
- c. Ost-i-t-ko      sinä      \*poro-**n-kaan**      //      poro-**a-kaan?**  
 buy-past.2sg.kO you-NOM reindeer-ACC.kAAAn      reindeer-PAR.kAAAn  
 ‘Did you buy a/the/some reindeer, either?’
- d. E-t-kö      sinä      osta-nut      \*poro-**n-kaan**      //      poro-**a-kaan?**  
 neg-2sg.kO you-NOM buy-pastprt reindeer-ACC.kAAAn      reindeer-PAR.kAAAn  
 ‘Didn’t you buy a/the/some reindeer, either?’

The negative YNQs in (3b) and (3d) show Ladd’s ambiguity (Ladd 1981): when the object bears ACC-*kin*, the question is biased so that a positive answer is expected, while PAR-*kaan* on the object leads to a negative answer bias. Interestingly, the answer biases are also found in positive YNQs: (3c) with PAR-*kaan* also shows a negative bias, while (3a) with ACC-*kin* is associated with a positive bias.

**Possible accounts relying on presupposition, reconstruction or VERUM.** Kaiser (2002) argues that the ACC/PAR alternation in YNQs is due to a difference of presupposition projection: with a factive inherently bounded verb like *huomata* ‘notice’, ACC on the object signals total projection of an existential presupposition, while PAR signals local projection. Although this is a possible difference between two YNQs with ACC/PAR, I disagree with the exhaustiveness of this pairing: ACC can also appear on an object although there is only local projection, and PAR can appear when there is total projection. For now, there seems to be no clear and stable link between object case and presupposition.

As Finnish negation merges low, between a tense projection and a projection responsible for  $\phi$ -marking, and moves to the CP in negative YNQs, one could account for the correlation between object case-marking, PIs and answer bias by postulating that negation may reconstruct. When it is interpreted in the CP, the object of the positively biased question bears ACC-*kin*: when it is interpreted in its merge position, the object of the negatively biased question bears PAR-*kAAAn*. The problem of this analysis is that it leaves the across-polarity parallel unexplained.

An account based on VERUM (Romero and Han 2004) would face the same challenge: as Ladd’s ambiguity in YNQs with preposed negation is argued to correspond to a scopal ambiguity between VERUM (an operator regulating the strength with which a proposition is proposed to be added to the common ground) and negation, it is not clear straight away how the biases of the positive YNQs would be explained.

**Proposal.** In light of the data presented above, I argue that the paradigm of Finnish YNQs shows the four logically possible combinations of [ $\pm$ pronounced] and [ $\pm$ interpreted] negation. [ $\pm$ pronounced] tracks the absolute polarity feature of the sentence radical of the YNQ: [+pronounced] corresponds to [-], while [-pronounced] corresponds to [+]. When negation is [+interpreted], the object is marked with PAR, and the negative particle *-kAAAn* is licensed (as well as other negative polarity items): if the positive particle *-kin* is attached to the object instead of *-kAAAn*, only a quantitatively indeterminate interpretation of the noun is available. When negation is [-interpreted], the object is marked with ACC, and *-kAAAn* is not licensed. The two interesting cases, [+pronounced, -interpreted] and [-pronounced, +interpreted], correspond to expletive and covert negation respectively. Although the biases are clear when the focus particles are present, they are also detectable without them. Under this account, the possibility of both neutral and biased YNQs is due to structural ambiguity.

Further support for the view comes from the fact that the relative polarity feature of the response can now be determined by comparing the value of [ $\pm$ interpreted] negation instead of [ $\pm$ pronounced] negation with the absolute polarity of the response. Absolutely positive responses intuitively feel confirming whenever the object bears ACC, and reversing whenever the object bears PAR: this could not be accounted for without separately considering pronunciation and interpretation.

Finally, further work should explore the link between [+pronounced, -interpreted] negation YNQs and exclamatives (with pronounced negation and positive polarity items) on the one hand, and between [-pronounced, +interpreted] negation YNQs with rhetorical questions (with unpronounced negation and negative polarity items) on the other.

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