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Presupposition and Negation in Yes-No Questions

On the surface level, negative questions differ from positive questions only in the presence of the negative - function word not and nie for English and Polish respectively. However, the disparity in opinions on the nature of negative questions suggests that the problem is more complex than it would seem at first. Let us mention a few approaches to negative questions in order to show the main points of divergence.

Quirk says: "As interrogative is not in equal relation to both positive - declarative and negative we should not expect positive and negative questions to contrast identically to positive and negative statements ... A positive question is neutral as to the answer that is expected. However, the negative question form has been developed in English as a way of showing a Speaker's surprise that the context has implied that the answer is "no".
/1972:55/

1/ Isn't your car working?

2/ Haen't the boat left already?

"Negative orientation, found in questions containing a negative form of one kind or another, is complicated by an element of surprise or disbelief which adds implications of positive meaning. In questions 1/ and 2/, there is a combining of a positive and a negative attitude, which we may distinguish as the Old Assumption/positive/ and New Assumption/negative/. Because the Old Assumption tends to be identified with the speaker's hopes or wishes, negative question often expresses disappointment or annoyance. A second type of negative question combines not/the formal signal of negative orientation/ with the assertive items which are the formal signals of positive orientation:

3/ Didn't someone call last night?
4/ Hasn't the boat left already?

Such questions are similar to statements showing disbelief:

5/ Surely someone called last night". /1972:390/

A slightly different opinion on negative questions was presented by D.R. Langendoen who says that "one asks a negative question if one expects that the answer to the corresponding affirmative question will be "yes". /1970:169/

Apparently, Langendoen does not subdivide negative questions into further groups but rather tries to find one deep structure for all negative questions. He suggests that the deep structure of the question:

6/ Aren't you coming?

is of the following form:

"I request you to tell me whether you aren't coming or whether you are coming".

However, he concludes: "Now, it is unusual in speech to place a negative alternative before an affirmative one, so perhaps when this device is used in the construction of interrogative sentences it signals the expectation on the part of the speaker that the answer will be "yes". I make this proposal diffidently however, since it is very possible that there is some deeper explanation". /1970:170/

The opinion that negative questions expect a positive answer is shared by Schachter. However, Schachter suggests a different deep structure for negative questions. He derives a negative question from the same deep structure as the corresponding tag question. Hence a question:

7/ Hasn't John left?

has the same deep structure as:

8/ John has left, hasn't he?

The divergence between the interpretations of negative questions signals that the problem is interesting and that it may be worth further examination. Moreover, all proposals that have been presented are put forward in a rather hesitant manner, which suggests that neither of the authors seems to be convinced that the solution he offers is ultimate.

Let us mention one more approach to negative questions, which sheds a new light on the problem. A. Borkin who examines the distribution of polarity items in Yes-No questions divides

negative questions into three groups:

- negative questions that are meant to elicit confirmation rather than information,
- negative questions that are invitations,
- negative questions expecting a "no" answer.

Borkin comes to the conclusion that the distribution of polarity items seems to be random unless we take into account assumptions of a speaker, be they positive or negative. The occurrence of polarity items seems to depend mainly on these assumptions, for example negative polarity items occur in questions expecting a negative response, never in questions expecting a positive response, that is in questions accompanied by positive assumptions of a speaker. She gives a great number of examples, out of which let us quote a few:

- questions expecting a positive response - odd -
- 9/ ? Doesn't Charlie bat an eye when you threaten him?
- 10/ ? Won't Max get here until 4 o'clock?
- 11/ ? Doesn't William drink a drop?
- 12/ ? Didn't someone lift a finger to help you?
- questions expecting a negative response - Good -
- 13/ Doesn't Charlie bat an eye when you threaten him?
- 14/ Won't Max get here until 4 o'clock?
- 15/ Doesn't William drink a drop?
- 16/ Didn't anyone lift a finger to help you?

Borkin concludes her article with the following statement: "What I hoped to show is that we cannot hope to give an adequate account of the facts presented here without taking into account the speaker's assumptions and objectives, that is, information not accessible from surface structure facts or from a single transformational derivation". /1971:61/

Borkin's suggestions certainly open up a new perspective on analysing negative questions. However, her claim that assumptions should be incorporated into scientific study of language would find many opponents among linguists who maintain that assumptions are an extralinguistic factor and should not be incorporated into the grammatical model at all. This problem seems to be a part of a wider controversy about the distinction between performance and competence, controversy which is still not resolved. However, for the purposes of the present paper let us,

following Lakoff's line of argumentation, make the assumption that: "The study of the relationships between a sentence and those things that it presupposes about the nature of the world by ways of systematic rules is part of the study of linguistic competence. Performance is another matter. It is when extralinguistic factors enter in judgements of well-formedness / such as factual knowledge, cultural background and so on /". /Lakoff, 1971/

As the problem of negation in Yes/No questions seems to pose serious difficulties, let us now clarify certain issues connected with negation itself, and only then shall we analyse the relation between presupposition and negation.

There are two types of negation distinguished by linguists. Halliday calls them simple and transferred negation:

" 1// 1 I / didn't come because / he/told me // - simple neg.
 tone 1 - falling = It was because he told me that I didn't come.
 4// 4 I / didn't / come because he / told me // - transfer-
 red neg. tone 4 - fall-rise = It wasn't because he told me that I came". /1967:34/

The two types of negation differ in meaning and the intonation contours are different. Also Jackendoff recognizes the two types of negation in his analysis of negative sentences. He suggests that type A, with the falling tone has different presupposition than type B, with the rising tone. Here are examples:

- Type A
 17/ FRID didn't see John.

Presupposition: λ_x / x didn't see John / is well-formed
 Assertion: λ_x / x didn't see John /

Therefore, negation is part of presupposition of the sentence.

- Type B
 18/ FRID didn't see John. /Bill did/

Presupposition: λ_x / x saw John / is well-formed
 Assertion: λ_x / x saw John /

Here negation underwent the rule Association with Focus, and thus negation is not part of presupposition. In other words, negation is disassociated from presupposition. "In effect then, the B accent coupled with negation means that the focus is an incorrect value to satisfy a positive presupposition; the A ac-

cent coupled with negation means that the focus is a correct value for a negative presupposition". /1972:354/ Therefore, negation undergoes association with focus optionally. Jackendoff gives also definitions of the scope and the range of negation. "The scope of negation consists of everything commanded by the negative morpheme and to its right, ..., the scope of negation must be determined from the surface structure configuration". /1972:349/ "The range of negation is the part of the surface structure in which the focus must be located in order for the negation to associate with it. The range is the entire sentence except for the material before the subject. But in particular, the subject is in the range of an auxiliary negation". /1972:355/

A different account of negation and the most interesting for us, was presented by Krzeszowski /1974/ who calls the two types of negation pure negation and modal negation. "Modal negation involves the act of negation on the part of the utterer of the sentence and is represented in the semantic structure by the second performative "Dissent from" with R as its subject. The pure negation consists in negating an element within the nuclear subconfiguration". /1974:88-89/

The two types of negation have different deep structures or semantic inputs as Krzeszowski calls them. Modal negation has the verb "dissent from" as its second performative whereas pure negation has "assent to" as its second performative. Thus the two readings of a negative sentence:
 19/ John didn't stroke the dog.

are of the following form:

I: I think it is false that John stroked a dog /someone says he did/ - modal negation,

II: I think it is true that John didn't stroke a dog /someone says he didn't or in fact John didn't stroke a dog/ - pure negation. The two readings differ with respect to presupposition involved in each reading". /1974:89/

As far as negative questions are concerned, Krzeszowski does not present any examples of their semantic inputs, he only mentions that negative questions are characterized by the performative complex EXPECT and ASSENT TO /ibid:87/ From the above, it follows that modal negation cannot be present in negative questions, because this type of negation must be characterized

by the performative "dissent from" with R_g as its subject. Therefore, the subconfiguration underlying negative questions can be represented as:

A₄ΔPR_β / A_gΔP₁ / R_jΔfL_k / X ///ΔtLy

or in less abstract terms:

I EXP you SOMETHING_β / you ASSENT TO
/ SOMETHING₁ / { SOMETHING₂ / SOMEBODY₃ } dissent from /X//

where "SOMETHING_β" is the direct object of the first performative and introduces the subconfiguration containing the content of the expectation; "SOMETHING₁" is the direct object of the second performative and introduces the subconfiguration underlying the proposition to be questioned, while "SOMETHING₂/SOMEBODY₃" is an element of the questioned subconfiguration X, correlative with an element in X, and constituting the focus of the question. Therefore negation is always obligatorily associated with focus unlike in declarative sentences, where negation does not have to be associated with focus. Presupposition then is positive, which results in "positive orientation" of the question. That is why the hearer has the intuitive feeling that the speaker expects a positive answer.

In Polish, negative questions are formed by inserting the negative function word nie, however, the position of the word nie is not as fixed as not is in English, because Polish lacks the neg hop which exists in English and sister adjoins not to the left of the modal or have or be. In Polish nie remains in the same position in which it was introduced by T_{neg}. //Krzyszowski, 1974:202-203/ That is, in Polish nie usually occurs right in front of the element which is negated. Therefore if we have a question:

20/ Czy Janek wyszedł?

its negative counterparts are as follows:

21/ a. Czy Janek nie wyszedł?

b. Czy to nie Janek wyszedł?

c. Czy to Janek nie wyszedł?

d. Czy Janek nie wyszedł?

These questions can be paraphrased as follows:

22/ a. Is it true that John hasn't left?

- a. Isn't it true that John has left?
- b. Isn't it true that JOHN has left?
- c. Is it true that JOHN hasn't left?
- d. Is it true that JOHN HASN'T LEFT?
- d. Isn't it true that JOHN HAS LEFT?

When we take into account all the above questions it appears that only questions 21/a with the 22/a' reading, 21/b and 21/d with the 22/d' reading are similar or equivalent to the English negative questions we considered before, because they have positive presuppositions, negation is associated with focus and in effect they have positive orientation. Therefore, their semantic input is of the form:

A₄ΔPR_β / A_gΔP₁ / R_jΔfL_k / X ///ΔtLy

that is of the form identical to that of English negative questions. However, the remaining questions cannot be assigned the above semantic input because they are not equivalent to the questions we have just discussed. Let us have one more look at them:

- 21/ a. Czy Jane nie wyszedł?
- 22/ b. Is it true that John hasn't left?
- 21/ c. Czy JANEK nie wyszedł?
- 22/ c. Is it true that JOHN hasn't left?
- 21/ d. Czy Janek NIE WYSZEDŁ?
- 22/ d. Is it true that JOHN HASN'T LEFT?

To start with, negation is not associated with focus and thus forms part of presupposition. Hence, presupposition here is negative unlike in former questions where it was positive. In other words, the speaker wants to know whether focus, which is positive is a correct value for a negative presupposition. In the previous set of negative questions / we shall call them Type I / the speaker asked whether focus was an incorrect value for a positive presupposition. The other type of negative questions / Type II / seems to be similar to the questions which Quirk names "negative orientated negative questions".

- 23/ Hasn't the boat left | yet?
 - 24/ Didn't anyone call last night?
- These questions, like their Polish counterparts, seem to

have negative presupposition, however, it is not as obvious in English as it is in Polish. Recalling Quirk's remarks about the Old Assumption/positive/ and New Assumption/negative/ accompanying such questions, let us reconstruct the situation in which such a question can be asked. The speaker is convinced that something is a fact when he encounters a situation which contradicts the fact. Therefore, he wants to obtain information whether his conviction was right or wrong, and in this way his Old Assumption becomes the focus of the question while the so called New Assumption is the presupposition of the question. Of course, this explanation is simplified and schematized to a great degree but it helps to capture the difference in meaning between Type I and Type II of negative questions.

Type II, unlike Type I does not ask for confirmation, but is closer in this respect to a neutral Yes/No question with a negative element present in its structure. Therefore, its semantic input should be that of a Yes/No question, and not of a negative question with EXPECT and ASSESS TO as a performative complex. Thus, the configuration underlying the question:

25/ Didn't John stroke a dog? = Is it true that John didn't stroke a dog?

is of the following form:

$\Sigma / R_5 / A_4 \Delta PR_{\beta} / A_4 \Delta P_1 / R_2 / R_3 / A_4 \Delta P_5 / \Delta tTLZ /$
 $at I_2 / R_2 / R_3 / A_4 \Delta P_5 / \Delta tTLZ / \Delta tFL_2 / R_3 / A_4 \Delta P_5 / Past / \#$

where:

1. did John stroke a dog
2. John stroked a dog
3. John stroke a dog
4. John
5. a dog

- FL - dissent from

Focus here is: John stroked a dog, and the whole configuration expressed in less abstract terms has the following form:

I IMP /to/ you SOMETHING_β / you YES/NO
 SOMETHING₁ / { John stroked } / be in / John didn't
 a dog stroke a dog ///

where SOMETHING_β introduces the configuration containing the content of the command, SOMETHING₁ introduces the subconfiguration underlying the proposition to be questioned, { John stroked a dog } is the focus of the question.

The configuration underlying the question:

26/ Didn't John stroke a dog? = Isn't it true that John stroked a dog?

would have the following form: / for the sake of comparison /,

$\Sigma / R_5 / A_4 \Delta PR_{\beta} / A_4 \Delta P_1 / R_2 / R_3 / A_4 \Delta P_5 / \Delta tTLZ / \Delta tFL_2$
 / R₃ / A₄ΔP₅ /

Therefore, Type I and II of negative questions, in spite of being formally identical on the surface, have different semantic inputs which gives justice to native speaker's intuitive feeling that they are different in meaning. Their identical surface form is due to operation of transformational rules: T_g, face form is due to operation of transformational rules: T_g, T_{role ad}, T_{do support}, which cause that negation is always placed in the initial position in questions, making it hard to determine what its scope and range are. Therefore, if Jackendoff's proposal that range and scope of negation should be determined from the surface structure were applied to negative questions, both types of negative questions would have the same range and scope of negation, which may not be true. In the first type of negative questions, focus is in the scope of negation, whereas in Type II of questions it is not, which suggests that both the range and the scope of negation should be determined from the deep structure which reflects the relations between focus, negation and presupposition.

As in Polish nie remains in the same position in which it was inserted by T_{neg}, it is easier to determine its scope and range from the surface structure than it is in English, however, this is not always the case. Therefore, also in Polish the range and the scope of negation should be determined from the semantic input.

Finally, the following question rises: If the two types of negative questions are formally identical in English, and identical or similar in Polish, how does the hearer recognize

which type of negative question was used by the speaker?

The two types of negative questions must differ in intonation contours. However, a detailed account of intonation patterns unfortunately falls beyond the scope of the present paper. Another factor, and by no means a more reliable one is context, linguistic or non-linguistic. This factor brings us to the conclusion that only text grammars can give a fruitful account of negative questions.

To supplement the present analysis of negative questions let us mention declarative questions of the form:

27/ John hasn't left yet?

28/ He didn't finish the race?

It seems that these questions are similar in meaning to Type II of negative questions and may be used in the same contexts, and particularly, if fear of ambiguity arises, that is, if context is not clear enough to specify whether Type I or Type II of a negative question was used by the speaker.

There is one further problem which must be taken up. The hypothesis which has emerged in the course of the present paper differs from the analyses presented so far in postulating two distinct deep structures for what has been put, up to now, under one common heading of "negative questions". In comparison to earlier theories this solution complicates grammar to a certain degree. However, theories which postulated one common deep structure for negative questions could not explain phenomena like polarity items and their occurrence in negative questions, negative or positive orientation of negative questions. The introduction of two distinct deep structures solves these problems, which lets us believe that this fact justifies somewhat the present analysis.

Streszczenie

Niniejsza analiza poświęcona jest relacji pomiędzy presupozycją a negacją w pytaniach ogólnych w językach polskim i angielskim, jako że problem ten nie otrzymał jeszcze jednoznacznego opracowania. Autorke, w oparciu o model gramatyczny semantyki generatywnej, próbuje ustosunkować się do istniejących analiz i przedstawić swe własne rozwiązanie.

Pytania ogólne zawierające negację podzielono na dwie grupy o różnych strukturach semantycznych. Podział został zastosowany zarówno do materiału polskiego jak i angielskiego. Rozwiązanie to odmiennie jest od poprzednich analiz, które postulowały jedną głęboką strukturę dla pytań ogólnych zawierających negację. Postulowanie dwu różnych struktur komplikuje gramatykę w pewnym stopniu, jego niewątpliwą jednak zaletą jest możliwość wyjaśnienia pozytywnej i negatywnej orientacji pytań, a także określenia reguł występowania wyrażen nacelchowanych pozytywnie lub negatywnie.

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