Question Tags as Biased Answers
Jiri Kaspar (UCL)

INTRODUCTION   The present text considers a subset of Czech tag questions. It argues that the tags in (1) and (2), introduced by *že*, function as biased answers to the questions in (3) and (6). The clauses in (1) and (2) to which the tags are attached are therefore taken to be interpreted as the questions in (3) and (6), respectively. The bias is viewed as a means of avoiding contradiction by confirming the polarity of the clause to which the tag is attached. Since the speaker utters both parts of the tag question, he/she cannot use a tag that disconfirms the polarity of the clause to which it is attached.

BACKGROUND I   Tag questions are generally understood as comprising two parts: an anchor and a tag. The anchor is that part of the question to which the tag is attached. In the least marked use, the anchor has declarative force and the tag has interrogative force. In Czech, the polarity of the tag is typically identical to the polarity of the anchor. From a crosslinguistic point of view, this is rather unexpected. Usually, the polarity of the tag is the opposite from the polarity of the anchor (see Sailor (2012)). Czech has a number of elements that can be used as question tags, and the subordinating conjunction *že* ('that') is one of them. The particle can appear on its own (i.e., without any auxiliary verbs and polarity particles). As a consequence, *že* has been claimed to have neither positive nor negative polarity (see Urešová (2008)). However, as demonstrated in (1) and (2), *že* can be followed by either *ano* ('yes') or *ne* ('no'), depending on the polarity of the anchor. (Note: The vertical lines indicate intonation phrase boundaries, and the curly brackets mark a set of mutually exclusive alternatives.)

(1)   Jakub   ti   lhal | že   {ano/*ne}?
       Jacob.NOM you.DAT.CL lie.PST   that yes/no
       'Jacob lied to you, didn't he?'

(2)   Jakub   ti   nelhal | že   {ano/ne}?
       Jacob.NOM you.DAT.CL not-lie.PST   that yes/no
       'Jacob didn't lie to you, did he?'

What is puzzling is the asymmetrical distribution of the polarity particles: while the tag in (1) can comprise only *ano*, the tag in (2) can comprise either *ano* or *ne*.

BACKGROUND II   Rising declaratives without negation can be interpreted as positive rising declaratives (see (11)) or positive questions (see (12)). Consider the following example.

(3)   Jakub   ti   lhal?
       Jacob.NOM you.DAT.CL lie.PST.3SG.MASC
       'Jacob lied to you?'

When interpreted as a positive rising declarative, the polarity of (3) can be confirmed by *ano* (see (4)) and denied by *ne* (see (5)). When interpreted as a positive question, the polarity of (3) can also be confirmed by *ano* (see (4)) and denied by *ne* (see (5)).

(4)   Ano (| lhal). CONFIRMATION   (5)   Ne (| nelhal). DENIAL
       yes   lie.PST.3SG.MASC   no   not-lie.3SG.MASC
       'Yes (, he lied to me).'   'No (, he didn't lie to me).'

According to Gruet-Skrabalova (2015), rising declaratives with negation can be interpreted as either negative rising declaratives (see (13)) or negative questions with expletive negation (see (14)). Consider the following example.

(6)   Jakub   ti   nelhal?
       Jacob.NOM you.DAT.CL not-lie.PST
       'Jacob didn't lie to you?'

Question Tags as Biased Answers
Jiri Kaspar (UCL)

When interpreted as a negative rising declarative, the polarity of (6) can be confirmed by *ano* (see (7)) and denied by *ne* (see (8)). When interpreted as a negative question with expletive negation, the polarity of (6) can be confirmed by *ne* (see (9)) and denied by *ano* (see (10)).

(7) Ano (| nelhal). ^{CONFIRMATION}
    yes   not-lie.PST.3SG.MASC
    'Yes (, he didn't lie to me).'

(8) Ne (| lhal). ^{DENIAL}
    no   lie.PST.3SG.MASC
    'No (, he lied to me).'

(9) Ne (| nelhal). ^{CONFIRMATION}
    no   not-lie.PST.3SG.MASC
    'No (, he didn't lie to me).'

(10) Ale ano (| lhal). ^{DENIAL}
     but yes   lie.PST.3SG.MASC
     'Yes (, he lied to me).'

Gruet-Skrabalova (*ibid.*) argues that the possibility of confirming (6) by either (7) or (9) stems from the possibility of interpreting the negation as either true or expletive. Rising declaratives with true negation ask about a negative proposition (i.e., ? [¬P]), and rising declaratives with expletive negation are interpreted as positive questions (i.e., ? [P or ¬P]).

(11) Positive rising declaratives
    (a) Polarity: positive
    (b) Semantics: ? [P]
    (c) Confirmation: *ano* (= P)
    (d) Denial: *ne* (= ¬P)

(12) Positive questions
    (a) Polarity: positive
    (b) Semantics: ? [P or ¬P]
    (c) Confirmation: *ano* (= P)
    (d) Denial: *ne* (= ¬P)

(13) Negative rising declaratives
    (a) Polarity: negative
    (b) Semantics: ? [¬P]
    (c) Confirmation: *ano* (= ¬P)
    (d) Denial: *ne* (= ¬ ¬P)

(14) Negative questions with expletive negation
    (a) Polarity: negative
    (b) Semantics: ? [P or ¬P]
    (c) Confirmation: *ne* (= ¬P)
    (d) Denial: *ano* (= P)

ANALYSIS Semantically, anchors with positive polarity are either positive rising declaratives (see (11)) or positive questions (see (12)), while anchors with negative polarity are either negative rising declaratives (see (13)) or negative questions with expletive negation (see (14)). The apparently odd distribution of *ano* and *ne* in question tags involving *že* can be straightforwardly explained by assuming that the tag itself functions as a biased answer. Above, I mentioned that Gruet-Skrabalova (2015) argues that a yes-no question with positive polarity (see (3)) can be confirmed only by *ano* (see (4)), and that a yes-no question with negative polarity (see (6)) can be confirmed by either *ano* (see (7)) or *ne* (see (9)). As far as question tags with *že* are concerned, I have demonstrated that a positive anchor is compatible only with a tag that comprises *ano* (see (1)), and that a negative anchor is compatible with a tag that comprises either *ano* or *ne* (see (2)). Given that the speaker utters both the anchor and the tag, the tag must serve as a confirmation of whatever the polarity the anchor expresses. This is where question tags differ from answers to yes-no questions. A congruent answer to a yes-no question may contradict whatever the polarity of that questions is. This is so, because the yes-no question and the corresponding answer are not uttered by the same speaker. The question tag, on the other hand, functions as a biased answer confirming the polarity expressed by the anchor.

CONCLUSION The proposed analysis relates the distribution of polarity particles *ano* and *ne* in question tags introduced by *že* to the distribution of homophonous answering particles used in answering yes-no questions that take the shape of declaratives.

[1] Gruet-Skrabalova, Hana (2015). Verbs and particles in minimal answers to yes-no questions. In Slavic Grammar from a Formal Perspective: The 10th Anniversary FDSL Conference, Leipzig 2013, ed. Gerhild Zybatow, Petr Biskup, Marcel Guhl, Claudia Hurtig, Olav Mueller-Reichau, and Maria Yastrebova, volume 35 of Linguistik International, 197–215. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH. **[2]** Sailor, Craig (2012). Tag Questions and the Typology of VP Ellipsis. Manuscript. **[3]** Urešová, Miroslava (2008). Anglické tázací dovětky. A seminar paper on tag questions in Czech and English.