

# Particle responses to negative polar questions with high vs. low negation

Berry Claus | Felix Frühauf | Sophie Repp | A. Marlijn Meijer | Manfred Krifka



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## Low vs. high negation polar questions (Ladd 1981)

### Polar questions with low negation

- propositional negation
- used to double-check the negative proposition
- German example in (1)

(1) Haben die Forstbeamten die Tannen noch nicht untersucht?  
have the foresters the fir trees yet not checked  
'Have the foresters not checked the fir trees yet?'

### Polar questions with high negation

- extra-propositional negation
- used to double-check the positive proposition
- German example in (2)

(2) Haben die Forstbeamten die Tannen nicht schon untersucht?  
have the foresters the fir trees not already checked  
'Haven't the foresters checked the fir trees already?'

Previous experimental studies (Hartung 2007, Roelofsen et al. 2012, Domaneschi et al. 2015):

low and high negation questions differ in their felicity conditions in terms of contextual evidence (cf. Büring & Gunlogson 2000) and the speaker's prior belief (cf. Romero & Han 2004)

## Present study: low vs. high negation questions as antecedents of response particles

Theoretical accounts of response particles fall into two types

response particles as elliptical constructions (Kramer & Rawlins 2011, Holmberg 2013)

response particles as propositional anaphors (Krifka 2013, Roelofsen & Farkas 2015)

Proponents of ellipsis as well as of anaphor approaches predict differences between low and high negation questions in the use and interpretation of response particles, but for different reasons:

Ellipsis approaches: high negation = syntactically high (Kramer & Rawlins 2011, Holmberg 2013: for English)

Anaphor approach: high negation = speech act level (Krifka 2013: for English and German, see also Repp 2013)

Implication: Answers to high negation questions should act like answers to positive polar questions

## Two experiments: German response particles *ja* (≈'yes') and *nein* (≈'no')

Two acceptability-judgment experiments

German native speakers (n=24 in each experiment) were presented with dialogues, consisting of a polar question and a bare particle response (see sample items)

Task: judging the naturalness + suitability of the response on a scale ranging from 1 (very bad) to 7 (very good)

Each dialogue was preceded by a scene setting passage, which served as the dialogue's context and included information on the responding person's knowledge on the polar question. This information was varied to manipulate his/her expected answer:

knowledge = p → expected answer = positive

knowledge = -p → expected answer = negative

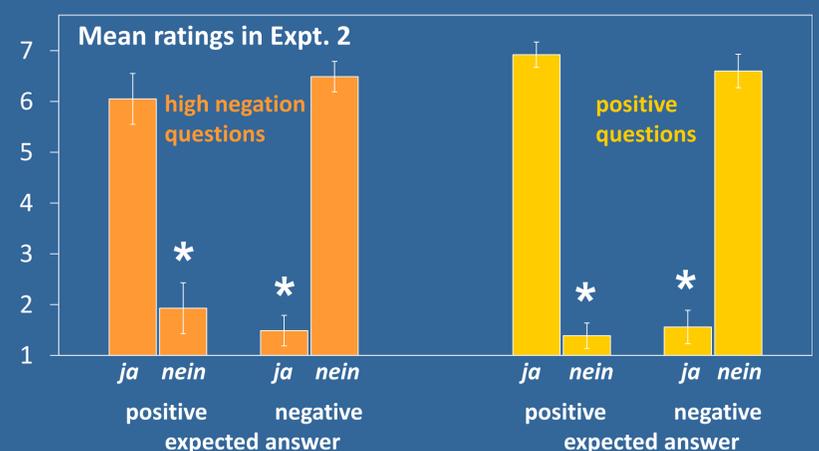
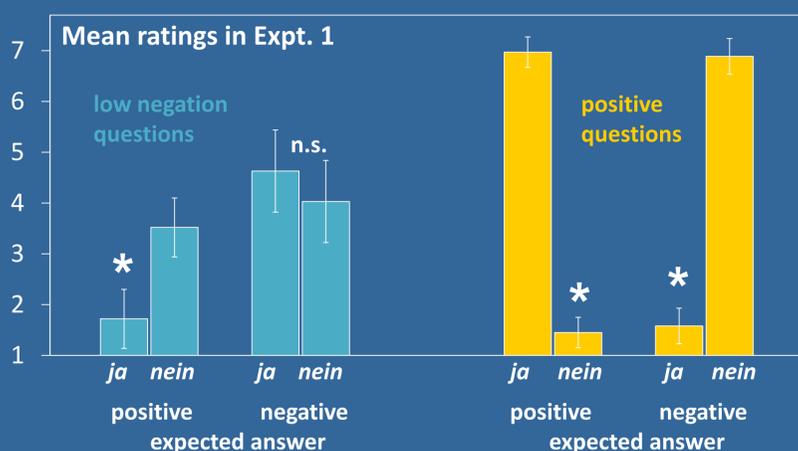
Expt. 1: low negation + positive polar questions

Expt. 2: high negation + positive polar questions

To differentiate high from low negation, we used the negative vs. positive polarity elements *noch* ('yet') and *schon* ('already'), see (1) and (2)

Each item in EXPECTED ANSWER (pos./neg.)  
2x2 versions X RESPONSE PARTICLE (*ja/nein*)

24 items w/ negative polar questions (Expt. 1: low negation, Expt. 2: high negation) + 24 items w/ positive polar questions



### low negation questions

same basic results as with negative assertions as antecedents (Claus et al. submitted)

### positive polar questions

same basic results as with positive assertions as antecedents (Claus et al. submitted)

overall: interaction of QUESTION TYPE, EXPECTED ANSWER, and RESPONSE PARTICLE

→ different preference patterns for the two question types

### high negation questions

### positive polar questions

} analogous preference patterns

overall: interaction of QUESTION TYPE, EXPECTED ANSWER, and RESPONSE PARTICLE

→ stronger particle effect with positive polar questions than with high negation questions when the expected answer was positive

## Sample items, translated from German

### Low negation question

Anke and Simon are volunteers in an animal shelter. The shelter veterinarian is carrying out a new vaccination scheme. In the morning, the vet has talked to Simon. She has told him that she has vaccinated the cats yesterday. **manipulation of expected answer** will vaccinate the cats tomorrow.

Later, Anke and Simon are talking about the vaccinations. Anke wants to know which animals the vet hasn't vaccinated yet.

Anke: Has the vet not vaccinated the cats yet?

Simon: Yes./No. **manipulation of particle**

### Positive polar question

Ludwig and Hildegard have their large garden redesigned. This morning, the gardener told Hildegard that he has sown the lawn yesterday. **manipulation of expected answer** will sow the lawn in a couple of days.

During lunch, Hildegard and Ludwig are talking about the redesigning of their garden. Ludwig would like to know what the gardener has done already.

Ludwig: Has the gardener sown the lawn already?

Hildegard: Yes./No. **manipulation of particle**

### High negation question

Maren and Britta teach at a primary school. They are organizing the school's summer party with several parents. Britta just came to know that the parents

have already bought the drinks. **manipulation of expected answer** will buy the drinks tomorrow.

Later that day, Maren and Britta are talking about the preparations for the party. Maren is wondering why the drinks are still on the to-do list.

Maren: Haven't the parents bought the drinks already?

Britta: Yes./No. **manipulation of particle**

## Conclusion

results provide first experimental evidence that high and low negation questions differ in preference patterns for response particles

general result of different preference patterns for the two kinds of negative polar questions is consistent with ellipsis (Kramer & Rawlins 2011, Holmberg 2013) and anaphor (Krifka 2013) approaches to response particles; however: ellipsis approaches face empirical difficulties (Roelofsen & Farkas 2015, Claus et al. submitted)

results are promising with regard to carrying out more precise tests of the answer options of negative and positive polar questions and their theoretical accounts