

# Dimensions of bias in polar questions: evidence from Hungarian

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The talk wishes to contribute to the current intensive discussion on the types and sources of bias in polar questions by calling attention to and offering a formal account of some robust, but previously unnoticed systematic differences in the use of the two polar root interrogative form types in Hungarian, and discussing some of their consequences for theories of bias.

**Previous work.** Although classical formal semantic theories (cf. Hamblin, 1973; Groenendijk and Stokhof, 1984) assign positive polar questions, negative polar questions and alternative questions the same interpretation, a line of research starting with the seminal paper of Ladd (1981) shows that the choice between these forms is highly constrained. Büring and Gunlogson (2000), van Rooij and Šafářová (2003), Büring and Gunlogson (2000); Romero and Han (2004), Reese (2007) and Krifka (to appear) consider bias be based either solely on contextual evidence or on previous knowledge of the speaker. Sudo (2013) argues for a modular approach to bias, and shows how the choice between three pairs of positive and negative polar interrogatives in Japanese is to be explained if a distinction is made between (public) evidential bias and (private) epistemic bias (i.e., compatibility with previous knowledge of the speaker).

**Data.** (1a) illustrates a Hungarian polar interrogative marked solely by a characteristic rise-fall tone on the penultimate syllable of the sentence, referred to as a  $\wedge$ -interrogative, whereas (1b) shows one marked by the *-e* interrogative particle attached to the (verbal) predicate, referred to as an *-e*-interrogative:

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| (1) a. A rabszolgád vagyok $\wedge$ ?<br>the slave.your be.1sg<br>'Am I your slave?' | b. A rabszolgád vagyok-e?<br>the slave.your be.1sg-E<br>'Am I your slave?' |
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Besides being synonymous, the forms illustrated in (1a) and (1b) can equally express certain biased question uses such as exam questions, pedagogical questions, or monological questions (Truckenbrodt, 2004), although they are not freely substitutable for each other in all other contexts. Positive  $\wedge$ -interrogatives can express information questions, and available for a range of special question readings and indirect uses. Positive *-e*-interrogatives are also available for the expression of information questions, but cannot encode grounding questions (van Rooij and Šafářová, 2003), indirect requests, indirect invitations, questions asked to start a conversation, or rhetorical questions. For example, (1b) cannot have a rhetorical question reading, the preferred interpretation of (1a). Since the negative counterpart of (1b) does give rise to a rhetorical reading, a compositional approach seems to be necessary.

**Proposal.** It is argued that the asymmetries listed above are to be accounted for in a modular approach to bias types like the one proposed by Sudo (2013). *-e* is then claimed to introduce a contextual presupposition that neither of the answers follows nonmonotonically from individual public commitments or the common ground, whereas negation is argued to express that the speaker's private beliefs support the positive answer to the question.

***Selected references:***

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