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RUNNING HEAD:

Introduction

Introduction: Polar questions and their responses

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Abstract

Question–answer sequences are arguably among the most basic building blocks for sequences of action in interaction and are ubiquitous among the languages of the world. This chapter reviews and synthesizes the current interactional research on polar questions and answers across languages in order to contextualize the work assembled in this volume. We introduce grammatical and pragmatic resources for forming and recognizing polar questions, discuss principles of polar question design, and overview different types of polar responses. We conclude the chapter with a preview of the included studies, a discussion of their contributions, and suggestions for future research directions.

This book is about one of the most fundamental action sequences found across human societies and socio-cultural contexts: polar questions and their responses. Question–answer sequences are arguably among the most basic building blocks for sequences of action in interaction and are very nearly, if not actually, ubiquitous among the languages of the world (Dryer 2013a; Sadock and Zwicky 1985). They form the interactional backbone of many forms of task-focused workplace interaction, including the courts, education, medical practice, and interviewing of all kinds (Heritage and Clayman 2010; G. Raymond 2003), and they serve as vehicles for many types of other social actions (Schegloff 2007; Steensig and Drew 2008).

Empirical research suggests that polar questions generally are the most common types of questions, occurring with greater frequency than question word questions (Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson 2010). In the last thirty years, polar questions have received increasing attention, particularly in conversation analytic and interactional linguistic research (e.g., De Ruiter 2012; Freed and Ehrlich 2010; Steensig and Drew 2008). The different forms of response to polar questions have similarly attracted increasing interest, and it is these that are the focus of the present volume.

The goal of this Introduction is to review and synthesize the current interactional research on questions and answers across languages in order to contextualize the work assembled in this volume. We conclude the chapter with a preview of the included studies and a discussion of their contributions.

1. What is a polar question?

From the perspective taken in this volume, that of conversation analysis (Sidnell and Stivers 2013) and interactional linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018), questions are initiating actions that request the recipient to provide information concerning something which the recipient is imputed to have more knowledge about (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:217–218). A central aspect in this process is that in the act of questioning a speaker

adopts a stance that the recipient will have, and will be willing to supply, the relevant information (Searle 1969:64-71). While question word questions (such as, *what time is it?* or *how much does it cost?*) request particular information without anticipating a specific response, polar questions solicit information by expressing a proposition that describes a possible state of affairs, and invite the recipient to affirm or deny it. In this way, polar questions make relevant a response that, at the very least, either affirms (confirms) or disaffirms (or disconfirms) the proposition. Different practices can be used to accomplish these responding actions, including response particles, such as *yes* or *no* in English, or *ja* or *nej* in Swedish, and repetitions of a part of the question, such as its verb as, for instance, in Estonian and Finnish (see Response Design section for a detailed discussion).

Because questioners can take up different (epistemic) stances towards the proposition in question (see below), it is useful to distinguish between polar questions that request *(dis)affirmation* and polar questions that request *(dis)confirmation*. Thus, on the one hand, questioners can launch polar questions from a completely unknowing position (K- ‘knowledge minus’) (Heritage 2012a, 2012b). Following Sorjonen (2001a: 36), we will refer to responses to such questions as affirming/disaffirming the question’s proposition. On the other hand, when questions are launched from a somewhat knowing position (K+ ‘knowledge plus’), we will refer to their responses as confirming/disconfirming. Confirming responses can be

produced via dedicated turn shapes (e.g. *that's right* in English, *niin* in Finnish, *genau* in German etc.), but confirmation can also be understood on a sequential basis without a dedicated confirmation token (for example, when a questioner repeats something said by a previous speaker, *A: I'm leaving at ten, B: Ten?, A: Yes.*)

Another important terminological distinction to keep in mind is that between *questions* and *interrogatives*. In conversation analytic (CA) and interactional linguistics (IL) scholarship, questions as an action category are distinguished from interrogatives as a linguistic category. As we discuss below, requests for information – i.e., questions – can be implemented using both declarative or interrogative morphosyntax. Further, interrogative constructions may be deployed in the service of a variety of actions that do not enact questioning as their primary action. These include requests for assistance, offers, invitations etc.

2. The use of polar and content questions in conversation

How common are different kinds of questions and what do they do in interaction? A valuable resource for answering these questions is a quantitative study of questioning in social interactions in ten languages representing a variety of different language groups (Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson 2010). Drawing on a formal CA-based coding framework, this

study showed that, in many languages, polar questions form the majority of the questions asked¹ (see Table 1). In fact, polar questions outnumber content questions in seven out of the ten studied languages by a margin of 2:1 or greater. Among the languages examined in this study, †Ákhoe Hai||om, with a predominance of content questions, appears to be the only exception to this trend.

Table 1. Distribution of Polar, Content and Alternative Questions in Ten Languages²

Language	Author	Polar	Content	Alternative
†Ákhoe Hai om (Namibia)	Hoymann (2010)	41.5%	58.5%	0%
Danish	Heinemann (2010)	75%	25%	<1%
Dutch	Englert (2010)	73%	20.5%	6.5%
English (US)	Stivers (2010)	70%	27%	3%
Italian	Rossano (2010)	59%	39%	2%
Japanese	Hayashi (2010)	85%	15%	<1%
Korean	Yoon (2010)	70%	29%	1%
Lao	Enfield (2010)	72%	27%	<1%
Tzeltal (Mexico)	Brown (2010)	74%	24%	2%
Yéfi Dnye (Papua New Guinea)	Levinson (2010)	61%	39%	--

¹ The study coded a turn construction unit (or a TCU, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) as a question if it was a formal question (having interrogative markings) or a functional question, i.e. a TCU designed to elicit information or confirmation, primarily on pragmatic grounds (see sections 3 and 4 below for a full discussion of these issues). These questions were found to implement the following action categories: requests for information, requests for confirmation, other-initiation of repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977), assessments (seeking agreement), suggestions/offers/requests (seeking acceptance), rhetorical questions, outlouds (not seeking a response, e.g. “where are my keys”) and others (Stivers and Enfield 2010:2623).

² Tables 1-3 is compiled from the cited studies, which are included in the special issue edited by Enfield, Stivers and Levinson (2010).

The study also showed that polar and content questions are clearly differentiated in terms of function. As Table 2 illustrates, while a majority of content questions were devoted to requesting information, in nine of the ten languages only a minority of polar questions were directed to this end. Correspondingly, while large proportions of polar questions were directed to seeking confirmation, almost no content questions were used for this purpose.

Table 2. Distribution of Primary Functions of Polar and Content Questions in Ten Languages

Language	Author	Information seeking		Confirmation seeking		Repair initiation	
		Polar Qs	Content Qs	Polar Qs	Content Qs	Polar Qs	Content Qs
ǀAǀkhoe Haiǀom (Namibia)	Hoymann (2010)	62%	56%	2%	0%	24%	38%
Danish ³	Heinemann (2010)	15%	63%	40%	1%	18%	25%
Dutch	Englert (2010)	7%	77%	51%	0%	21%	23%
English (US)	Stivers (2010)	27%	79%	30%	0%	36%	20%
Italian	Rossano (2010)	26%	75%	47%	0%	17%	29%
Japanese	Hayashi (2010)	19%	72%	58%	0%	4%	26%
Korean	Yoon (2010)	20%	58%	41%	0%	30%	40%
Lao	Enfield (2010)	33%	52%	58%	1%	2%	40%
Tzeltal (Mexico)	Brown (2010)	26%	75%	47%	0%	17%	21%
Yéǀi Dnye (Papua New Guinea)	Levinson (2010)	48%	59%	44%	0%	7%	38%

³ The Danish figures presented here incorporate a correction to a typographic error in the original.

3. Grammatical resources for forming polar questions across languages

The structural properties of questions have been investigated across languages in linguistic typology. Much of this research is based on descriptive materials, such as reference grammars (see Dryer 2013a, 2013b; König and Siemund 2007; Sadock and Zwicky 1985), and is available in the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS; online <https://wals.info>).⁴ Dryer (2013a, 2013b) reports from an examination of 955 languages in WALS, that the three major methods of forming a polar question comprise question particles (63%), interrogative morphology (19%) and interrogative intonation (17%).

Question particles (N = 600) are commonly placed at the end of sentences (59%), while 24% occur in initial position of a sentence. Morphological markings are typically affixed to the verb (Dryer 2013b). Languages that use particles (independent or clitics) and morphological markings for forming polar questions include, for example, Japanese (Hayashi 2010; Hayano 2013), Korean (Yoon 2010), Finnish (Sorjonen 2001a, 2001b), Lao (Enfield 2010), and Indonesian (Hamdani and Barnes 2018).

Prosody is also commonly deployed in forming polar questions. According to Dryer (2013a), 17% (173/995) of the languages surveyed rely

⁴ Initially Dryer's surveys came out in 2005.

on intonation to form polar questions, though Dryer also observes that such languages are underrepresented in the WALSL survey. In addition, many but not all languages (Enfield 2010; Levinson 2010) deploy prosody alongside other grammatical resources in the formation of polar questions. A variety of prosodic contours, not exclusively a TCU-final rise, may be associated with polar questions. For instance, in Russian (Bolden 2016), some varieties of Italian (Rossano 2010), and a number of other languages, a rise-fall pitch accent is used as interrogative prosody. Some studies on the prosody of polar questions have questioned the relevance and import of ‘final rise’ prosody in question formation, and the multifunctionality of final rising prosody is widely recognized (Couper-Kuhlen 2012; Geluykens 1988; Levinson 2012; Ogden and Routarinne 2005; Walker 2014).

A very infrequent method of forming polar questions involves the use of word order that differs from that of declarative clauses, for example subject-auxiliary inversion (in 13/955 languages or 1.4%). Interrogative word order is mainly found in European languages, including Germanic languages, for example Danish (Heinemann 2010), Dutch (Englert 2010) and English (Stivers 2010), as well as Romance languages such as Spanish (C.W. Raymond 2015) and Slavic languages, such as Czech, together with other languages identified by Dryer.

Questioning tags are a further common resource for forming polar questions cross-linguistically (König and Siemund 2007:296-297).⁵ Languages may have a rich repertoire of tags, both positive and negative, lexical (e.g. *right?* in English) and sentential (*isn't it?*), deployed in a final or medial position of a turn constructional unit (TCU). For example, in Italian, lexical tags are the only available morphosyntactic resource for forming polar questions (Rossano 2010). Tags are very common in many languages (see Table 3), such as Danish (Heinemann 2010), English (Stivers 2010), Japanese (Hayashi 2010), Korean (Yoon 2010), and Russian (Bolden 2016), but there are languages where their use is not frequent, for example Finnish.

4. Epistemic asymmetry as a basis of recognizing polar questions

While interrogative polar questions index a putatively unknowing (K-, K minus) stance towards the propositional content of the turn, this stance can also be attributed to the speaker of a declarative turn who will thereby be understood as seeking information (Heritage 2012b; Kamio 1997; Labov 1972:254; Labov and Fanshel 1977:100–101; Pomerantz 1980; Weber 1993). Heritage (2012a, 2012b) observes that the recognition of a

⁵ Dryer's (2013a) survey does not include tags.

declarative utterance (such as arrow 3 in Excerpt 1 below) as requesting information can be understood in terms of the epistemic statuses of the participants, where epistemic status is “an inherently relative and relational concept concerning the relative access to some domain of two (or more) persons at some point in time” (Heritage 2012b:4). These statuses may be relatively enduring (e.g., knowledge, experience or expertise ‘owned’ by the participants) or quite temporary (one participant has recent information on the matter). This type of distinction also appears to be grammaticized as egophoric marking in some of the world’s languages (see for example, Floyd, Norcliffe, and San Roque 2018; Sandman and Grzech 2022).⁶ Thus different question designs can be arrayed on a cline that shows that regardless of grammatical differences, the epistemic asymmetry they instantiate makes them understood as questions:

Excerpt 1 (DEC 1205)

```

1 Doc: 1-> Right. Did you have any problems
2           with your ba:by?
3           (.)
4 Pat:     No:
5 Doc: 2-> The delivery was alright, was it?
6 Pat:     Ri:ght,
7 Doc: 3-> Didn't have any operations,
8 Pat:     °No,°
9 Doc:     Ri:ght, it doesn't sound anything toom- too serious

```

All three arrowed utterances index an underlying assumption that the recipient has primary access to the information in play. Due to this

⁶ Central areas of egophoric languages are Himalayas, Andes, Caucasus and Papua-New Guinea (see for example, Sandman 2016:chapter 7).

epistemic asymmetry, all these turns are interpreted as implementing a request for information or confirmation. However, the grammatical choices of the three sentences embody distinct stances with regards to the speaker’s certainty or uncertainty about the proposition (see section 5.1 below for a discussion of different epistemic stances).

Most, if not all, languages appear to allow their speakers to present questions with a plain declarative (see Table 1), and there are languages (for example, Chalcatongo Mixtec, Dryer 2013a; and Yélf Dnye, Levinson 2010) that have been found to have no linguistic resources (either morphosyntactic or prosodic) to form polar questions. Speakers of these languages must therefore rely on the pragmatics of epistemic asymmetry to be understood as requesting information. A study of question frequencies in conversations in ten languages from a variety of different language groups (Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson 2010) has shown that in six of the nine languages for which data was available, declarative turn designs are the most frequent form of polar question, although the extent of their disparity varies widely (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of Formats of Polar Questions in Conversation in Ten Languages

Language	Author	Declarative	Interrogative ⁷	Tag Question
ǀAkhoe Haiǁom (Namibia)	Hoymann (2010)	41.5%	58.5%	0%

⁷ Interrogative includes both lexico-morpho-syntactic and prosodic interrogative marking here.

Danish	Heinemann (2010)	23%	61%	16%
Dutch	Englert (2010)	38%	34%	28%
English (US)	Stivers (2010)	63%	31%	6%
Italian	Rossano (2010)	--	--	--
Japanese	Hayashi (2010)	39%	31%	30%
Korean	Yoon (2010)	74%	11%	15%
Lao	Enfield (2010)	17%	83%	<1%
Tzeltal (Mexico)	Brown (2010)	74%	24%	2%
Yéfi Dnye (Papua New Guinea)	Levinson (2010)	65%	--	35%

5. Principles of polar question design

Speakers of any language have (linguistically constrained) options in how they design polar questions: for example, what exactly is being proffered for affirmation or confirmation, how the propositional content is formulated (e.g., positively or negatively), how the interrogativity is conveyed, etc. Here we introduce two central aspects of question design: how questions convey epistemic stances and set up preferences for particular responses.

5.1 Polar questions convey epistemic stances

When speakers pose polar questions, they will ordinarily convey a view concerning the likelihood or probability of some state of affairs and the

degree of confidence or certainty with which they hold this view. We take up each of these epistemic orientations in turn.

5.1.1 What is the likely state of affairs

Prior research has shown that polar questions are typically designed to invite affirmation of the state of affairs expressed in the question's proposition (Bolinger 1978; Heritage and C. W. Raymond 2021; Robinson 2020a; Sacks 1987), and do so by presenting a likely state of affairs (Heritage and C. W. Raymond 2021; Robinson 2020a; Pomerantz 1988; Sacks 1987). Likelihood here can be understood as anything from a relevant possibility that something may be the case (e.g., a doctor's question *Have you had a fever* to a patient with a cold) to a strong probability (e.g., *Are you going out now* to a partner who is putting on an overcoat). In general, therefore, grammatically positive questions invite affirming or confirming responses to a state of affairs that is presented as somewhat likely.

The design of questions to address issues of probability can take on considerable significance. In the following case, a community nurse (HV) interviewing the new parents of a first child has learned that the birth process was difficult because the baby became stuck in the birth canal. The interview has reached the point where the nurse is mandated by an official form to ask about the delivery. The parents' earlier description raises the possibility that forceps might have been used, but the question is difficult to frame because the parents did not explicitly mention them:

Excerpt 2 (1A1:14)

1 HV: =So you had a- uh:
2 (1.0)
3 -> You didn't- Did you- You didn't have forceps you had a:=
4 M: =Oh [no:: nothing.
5 F: [()
6 HV: An- and did she cry straight awa:y.

The nurse's first question at line 1 was probably heading towards 'normal delivery' as its final noun phrase. It is abandoned and replaced with a negatively framed declarative question, that may have been the beginning of the final version of the question *You didn't have forceps*. However, this frame is abandoned and replaced with a positively framed interrogative, that was probably headed to *Did you have forceps*. This too is abandoned, and the nurse returns to her earlier formulation *You didn't have forceps you had a:*. Evidently, from the nurse's point of view it is very important to arrive at an appropriate framing of this question. The dilemma she faces is this: In the event that forceps were used, a question like *You didn't have forceps* is incorrect and might be perceived as over-supposing and perhaps playing down the mother's experience. On the other hand, the question *Did you have forceps* would, in the event that none were used, also be incorrect, and could also be perceived as over-supposing, but in the direction of catastrophizing the birth experience. Here, in a 'high stakes' situation, the nurse's overt vacillation on the design of the question evidences her stance as to its sensitivity and the importance of getting it right.

Grammatically negative questions (as in, for example, *he didn't phone you*) present a state of affairs as somewhat unlikely and, in English, are typically implemented in a declarative form (Heritage and C. W. Raymond 2021). This question format frequently indexes a departure from an expected or desirable state of affairs and may be avoided for that reason (C.W. Raymond and Heritage 2021). Alternatively, the negative framing of questions can be managed through the use of negative polarity items in otherwise affirmatively framed questions (e.g. *did he ever phone you*) (see also Couper-Kuhlen, Thompson, and Fox, this volume).

5.1.2 Epistemic (un)certainty

A second and a distinctive aspect of the stance displayed in a question concerns the questioner's stance of certainty about the likelihood of the state of affairs proposed in the question. Interrogatives, tag questions, and declarative questions index different degrees of certainty; through these different forms, the questioner expresses distinct claims of knowledge, varying from an unknowing stance (interrogative format) to a relatively close degree of parity with the answerer (declarative format).⁸

The following case (shown earlier as Excerpt 1) illustrates this variation. Here a doctor questions a recently delivered mother who is complaining about unexplained back pain. The parties have not met before

⁸ See also Drake (2015) for a discussion of the turn-final *or* as a device for conveying the questioner's uncertainty in English.

as the doctor is a *locum*.⁹ His first question, framed interrogatively, entertains the possibility that there have been problems with the baby. Its negative tilt (implemented through the determiner *any*) may reflect the fact that the mother has, to this point, not mentioned any such difficulties (Heritage and C. W. Raymond 2021). The question does not present its producer as strongly committed to the likelihood of a confirming response:

Excerpt 3 (DEC 1205)

```
1 Doc: 1-> Ri:ght. Did you have any problems
2           with your ba:by?
3           (.)
4 Pat:     No:
5 Doc: 2-> The delivery was alright, was it?
6 Pat:     Ri:ght,
7 Doc: 3-> Didn't have any operations,
8 Pat:     °No,°
9 Doc:     Ri:ght, it doesn't sound anything toom- too serious
```

Following the mother's negative response to his first question, the doctor's next question (line 5) explicitly inquires into the delivery using a [statement] + [tag] format. This format more strongly commits to the likelihood that the birth was unproblematic, and its design was likely selected in the light of the mother's previous negative response. The doctor's final question is framed as a minimized declarative question and even more strongly commits to the likelihood that the birth process was unproblematic (C.W. Raymond et al. 2021). Here the three questions ascend a cline of increasing certainty that the birth process was unproblematic and, by implication, that the causes of the mother's back pain will have to be found elsewhere.

⁹ A temporary doctor at the clinic, often replacing a doctor who is on vacation.

These two aspects of epistemic stance – the likely state of affairs and the speaker’s (un)certainly about it – frequently function in combination. For example, a declaratively formed question, by indexing the questioner’s greater level of certainty, will also tend to reinforce the questioner’s stance that a state of affairs is likely. This is readily seen in Stivers’ (2010: 2776) observation that declarative polar questions in her American English data are overwhelmingly used to request confirmation or initiate repair. By contrast, only 4% (n = 5/136) of declarative polar questions were information requests. Polar information requests, on the other hand, were implemented with interrogatives 85% of the time (n = 58/68). Similar findings are reported for Dutch (Englert 2010), Japanese (Hayashi 2010), and Lao (Enfield 2010). As these findings confirm, interrogative formatting expresses the questioner’s stance of uncertainty about the state of affairs under question, and this formatting therefore aligns with the function of requesting information, rather than seeking confirmation.

5.2 Polar questions convey preferences

In general, polar questions establish a context in which the recipient will affirm/confirm the question’s proposition or disaffirm/disconfirm it. These two classes of responsive actions are performed in distinctive ways. In Conversation Analysis, the term *preference* (Pomerantz 1984; Sacks 1987; Schegloff 2007) is used to describe “a structural relationship of asymmetry

between (typically) two alternatives, whereby one is said to be ‘preferred’, or privileged, over the other, the latter being consequently ‘dispreferred’” (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:19, on-line chapter B). Thus, despite its connotations, the term preference does not refer to the psychological characteristics (or desires) of speakers, but rather to structural differences in how affirming and disaffirming responses are produced. Polar questions convey preferences in that affirmations and confirmations are typically produced promptly and straightforwardly, while disaffirmations and disconfirmation are often delayed, mitigated, and prefaced with a variety of turn-initial objects (Kendrick and Torreira 2014; Roberts, Margutti, and Takano 2011) and, where disagreement is at issue, may be accompanied by accounts or explanations (Heritage 1988; Pomerantz 1984).

For example, in (4), in a conversation between two near neighbors in an apartment building, the question on line 1 references a topic they have previously discussed (indexed by the particle *ta*; Bolden 2008, 2009b): chicken that both of them knew to be on sale. The question is checking whether Rachel bought the chicken, which paves the way for a question about its quality (line 3). Rachel’s affirming response (line 2) has the typical features of a preferred response: it is immediate, brief, and unmitigated:

Excerpt 4 (Russian; GM3 1:00)

1 MUS: =<.hTy- kuru ta kupa?la/
 you chicken PRT bought
 Did you buy the chicken?

- 2 RACH: Da:/
 yes
- 3 MUS: Nu nichevo?/ xaro,shaja/=
 PRT nothing good
 NU is it good?

In (5), by contrast, a grammatically positive question receives a negative response that is delayed, mitigated, and expanded with an account (Sacks 1987):

Excerpt 5 (Russian; RP3 5:20)

- 1 RITA: =Slushaj a ty rab^otaesh gde/
 listen PRT you work somewhere
 Listen are you working somewhere
- 2 (0.8)
- 3 ELLA: Nu:: ja vot net/esche schas vot
 PRT I PRT no yet now PRT
 NU I PRT no/ I am still
- 4 kak ras:o-otdyxaju/ nazyvaeca/...
 as once rest so-called
 resting right now/ as they say

In a ten-language study of turn-taking, Stivers et al. (2009:10588) observed that disaffirming or disconfirming responses, as in (4), are delayed across all ten languages by 100-500 ms relative to affirming or confirming responses, suggesting that the early timing associated with affirmation may be a language universal.

More recently, however, Robinson (2020b) has analyzed a sample of ‘low stakes’ (or ‘neutral’) information-seeking questions, showing that that the difference in the timing of affirming and disaffirming responses is less than reported in Stivers et al. (2009), and may not be perceptible for participants. Robinson entertains the possibility that the findings reported by

Stivers et al. arise from a data set that mixes a wide variety of questions and includes questions that do actions other than requesting information/confirmation (e.g., requests for action). Although the issue is presently unresolved, these quantitative results are compatible with the view that questioners generally design their questions to invite affirmative responses by proposing likely states of affairs (Heritage and C. W. Raymond 2021; Sacks 1987), and that the impact of ‘getting it wrong’ may be more significant when the interactional stakes are higher. One of these ‘high stakes’ contexts is when questions are posed in the service of other actions.

5.3 Polar questions as vehicles for other actions

We have so far focused mainly on polar questions that request information (or confirmation) and on aspects of their grammatical design. However, verbal resources deployed to request information may also be used to perform other actions, such as requesting assistance, making invitations and offers, and so on (Schegloff 2007; Steensig and Drew 2008). These actions may impose different demands on response. Requests for action, for example, may invite the recipient to display commitment and support for the requested action, and ultimately for the fulfilment of the request.

In the context of interrogatively formatted requests for action, research recurrently finds that acceptances are a preferred action and

rejections are dispreferred. This means that acceptances are ordinarily produced promptly and straightforwardly while rejections tend to be delayed, prefaced with a variety of turn-initial objects, and accompanied by accounts or explanations for the rejection, typically citing an inability to do the requested action (e.g., Bolden 2017; Davidson 1984; A. Lindström 1997; Zinken 2016). These practices enable interactants to avoid conflict and maintain social solidarity (Clayman 2002; Heritage 1984:265-280; Lerner 1996). These characteristics of preferred and dispreferred responses to requests for assistance (as well as to invitations, offers, etc.) are attested across a wide range of languages (e.g., Rossi et al. 2023).

Prior research has shown that, in designing requests for action, speakers orient to a number of considerations, including the requester's entitlement to the requested action or object and contingencies that might prevent the requestee from fulfilling the request (Curl and Drew 2008; Heinemann 2006; A. Lindström 2005). By deploying an interrogative format to enact a request (rather than, for example, an imperative, such as *Pass the salt*), requesters may convey the stance of low entitlement and high contingency, i.e., the possibility that a request may be rejected (see for example, Rossi in press; Sorjonen, Couper-Kuhlen, and Raevaara 2017; Zinken 2016; Zinken and Ogiermann 2013).

In discussing requests for action implemented via polar questions, Schegloff (2007:73-78) makes a distinction between 'reinforcing' and 'cross-cutting' preferences such requests convey. A positively framed

request ‘reinforces’ a preference for an accepting response. In contrast, when a request is formatted negatively, a preferred accepting response is at variance with the grammatical polarity of the question. Schegloff’s analysis shows the primacy of the social pressures for acceptance over those of grammar/epistemic stance, describing the latter as implementing a ‘tilt’ towards or away from acceptance.

Now that we have outlined grammatical and pragmatic resources for forming polar questions across languages and some basic principles of question design, we turn to the topic of this volume: polar responses.

6. Response design

Outside of Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics, responses to polar questions have been examined from a variety of perspectives, including linguistic typology (König and Siemund 2007: 320–322; Pope 1976:111–133; Sadock and Zwicky 1985; for a review, see Jones 1999:1–51), formal semantics (Farkas and Bruce 2010; Farkas and Roelofsen 2019; Giannakidou 2011; Roelofsen and Farkas 2015), syntax (Holmberg 2016), and discourse pragmatics (e.g., Jones 1999; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Quirk et al. 1985). Typological research has been particularly interested in the relationship between the answer and the polarity of the question. From this perspective, languages have been classified according to the kinds of

answering systems they deploy. Sadock and Zwicky (1985:189-191), and later König and Siemund (2007:276–322), divide languages into three groups with respect to the ways in which simple answers to polar questions can be produced. First, there are *yes/no* languages, like English, German, and Turkish, which use the particle ‘yes’ for a positive answer and the particle ‘no’ for a negative answer. Second, languages like Japanese, Gulf Arabic and Punjabi, deploy an agree/disagree system: When the answer agrees with the polarity of the question, whether the question is positive or negative, a positive particle is used. When disagreeing with the polarity of the question, positive or negative, a negative particle is deployed. Thus, the answer to the question in agree/disagree system is similar to that of yes/no system when the polarity of the question is positive. Third, some languages (such as Welsh) have no special answer words and, instead, deploy a so-called echo system (see especially Jones 1999). In these languages, short responses are often given by repeating the verb of the question, with or without additional material.

Typological research, such as Sadock and Zwicky (1985), presents a useful outline of response systems found in languages, drawing mostly on reference grammars and on native-speaker intuitions. However, these studies have not typically taken up in detail language-internal variation in designing responses. In the following, we present an overview of the CA and IL research on responses to polar questions, which has aimed to discover what speakers accomplish by choosing a particular response option

among the available alternatives. Our brief review covers particle responses, repetitive responses, and responses of other kinds.

6.1 Particle responses

In conversation analysis and interactional linguistics, systematic research into polar questions and responses began in the 1990s (G. Raymond 2003; Sorjonen 2001a; Weber 1993). A major catalyst for the intensification of research in this domain was Geoffrey Raymond's (2003) proposal for a preference for "type-conformity" in answering polar interrogatives in English.¹⁰ Type-conforming responses are those that provide a form of an answer that was made relevant by the polar interrogative, "a *yes* or a *no* (or an equivalent token: *mmhmm*, *mmm*, *uh huh*, *yep*, *yup*, *yeah*, *nah hah*, *nuh uh*, *hah eh*, *huh uh*, *nope*, etc.)" (G. Raymond 2003:946). In contrast, a response without such a particle is defined as nonconforming, produced 'for cause' (for example, due to the perceived inappropriateness of the question by the recipient), and possibly resulting in some form of subsequent disruption to the course of action in progress. Thus, "the choice between a type-conforming and a nonconforming response cannot be treated casually – type-conforming responses accept the terms of a FPP [first pair part], while nonconforming ones indicate some trouble with it or resistance to it" (G.

¹⁰ The interrogatives in G. Raymond's (2003) research include requests for information (mainly) and requests for action.

Raymond 2003:949). “The terms of a FPP” in this quote include a wide range of recipient design considerations, such as “implementing actions appropriate for their recipient, for reflecting what the interactants know in common, for what can be presumed about the matters inquired into, for what has or hasn't been established by prior talk, and so on” (G. Raymond 2003:950).¹¹

Raymond (2003, 2010b) observed that when type-conforming responses (i.e., the particle *yes* or *no*) are part of an expanded response, they will normally and normatively occur at or near the beginning of the turn of which they are part.¹² Thus, from the very beginning of the responsive turn, respondents will normally show that they are addressing the question’s action agenda (Heritage 2010) by delivering the type of answer that the question made relevant (that is, *yes* or *no*). This provides an important interpretive resource for participants (and analysts). As Raymond (2013:172) notes, “in creating a niche or place for the responsive actions such tokens (*yes* or *no*) deliver, FPP speakers posing [*yes-no* interrogatives] provide responding speakers an (expandable) opportunity to manage the ways in which their turns will take up, satisfy, resist, or otherwise deal with

¹¹ In subsequent work Raymond further developed the study of type conformity by differentiating interrogatives and declaratives forms of polar questions (G. Raymond 2010a), examining the prosodic practices in forming type-conforming responses (G. Raymond 2010b), analyzing the ‘slot’ organization of responses for handling the question’s form and the action implemented by it (G. Raymond 2013), and exploring forms of agency and resistance in relation to type-conforming particle responses and repetition responses in English interactions (Heritage and G. Raymond 2012).

¹² Some turn-initial particles, such as *oh* and *well* in English, ordinarily precede the main body of responses (Heritage 2018; see also Heritage and Sorjonen 2018 for a cross-linguistic perspective).

the relevancies set in motion by the composition of the initiating action.” Importantly, when a polar response is deferred within the responding turn, its speaker will be understood to be privileging some other matter over the type-conforming response. For example, if a patient is asked *Do you have any drug allergies* and responds *Not that I know of, no*, she will be understood as privileging the reservation (*Not that I know of*) over the direct type-conforming response (*No*).

Raymond’s research has been highly influential, in the first place, by establishing a context for other research endeavors. Studies into a diverse variety of languages have since explored particle (vs. other kinds of) responses to polar questions, including Estonian (Keevallik 2010), Finnish¹³ (Laury 2018), Dutch (Mazeland and Plug 2010), German (Golato and Fagyal 2008), Greek (Alvanoudi 2022), Japanese (Hayano 2013; Hayashi 2010), Russian (Bolden 2016, 2018), Tzeltal (Brown 2010), Tzeltal, Yukatec and Zapotek (Brown, Sicoli, and Le Guen 2021). Secondly, given that nearly all languages have interrogative resources for forming polar questions (see the earlier discussion), Raymond’s analysis opened up the possibility that particle responses to polar interrogatives are – universally – type-conforming. Subsequent cross-language research by Enfield et al. (2019) gave some support to this position by showing that in a majority, but

¹³ For earlier independent line of work on polar responses in Finnish, see Raevaara (1993), Hakulinen (2001), and Sorjonen (2001a, 2001b, 2018).

not all, studied languages, particle responses are the numerically dominant form of response.¹⁴

The hypothesis of universality of particle responses as type-conforming has not been settled, however. CA and IL research into languages other than English has found that a range of response types, including pragmatically differentiated particle types and echo responses (verb and other types of repeats), are common, and that choices among them could be “used to display speakers’ understanding of the status of the social action implemented in the preceding question” (Keevallik 2010:283). For example, Sorjonen (1996; 2001a:33-92; 2001b) found differences between the Finnish particles *joo* and *nii(n)* as confirmatory responses to (variously formed and positioned) polar questions. Of the two, *nii(n)* represents the basic confirmatory particle, whereas *joo* confirms and treats the question as having initiated a side activity or a departure from main line of action. This research showed that the two particles convey different epistemic stances and have different sequential positions and implications. Differential interactional functions of response particles have been documented in other languages as well, including, for instance, Estonian (Hennoste et al., this volume), German (Golato and Fagyal 2008), and Dutch (Mazeland and Plug 2010). Additionally, prosodic variation in the production of response

¹⁴ This research used face-to-face interactions as data and included nods as a form of interjection, or, in our terms, particle response. For a detailed examination of the use of silent nods as an affirmative response, see Stefani (2021).

particles and their reduplication has been found to be consequential for the understanding of their action (e.g., Bolden 2016; Golato and Fagyal 2008; Persson 2020; Stivers 2004).

A number of languages have different particles to deal with possible mismatches between the action preferences of the question and its grammatical tilt. For instance, Heinemann (2005) shows that in Danish a specific positive particle *jo* is used instead of the regular positive particle *ja* to affirm a negatively tilted question. To illustrate, in (6), Krista and Fie are discussing Krista's new washing machine. In line 5, Fie produces an inference that Krista has not tried the machine (given that she does not know if it is noisy; lines 2-4) in the form a grammatically negative question that displays an expectation of a negative response:

Excerpt 6 (TH/S2/140/Krista & Fie /Jo56)

- 01 F: [Å' den larmer] ikk'.
And it isn't noisy.
- 02 K: Nej det ved jeg ikk' det si'r han
No I don't know about that he says so
- 03 men ve' du
but you know
- 04 hva' [()]
what ()
- 05 F: [Har du prøvet- Har du ikk' prøvet d]en?
Have you tried- Have you not tried it?
- 06 → K: Joh vi prøvet den i går aftes jeg ku'- Der
Yes we tried it yesterday evening, I could- Then
- 07 var vi ude å' gå mens den kørte.
we went for a walk while it was running.

Fie repairs her question (in line 5) from what was started as a grammatically positive interrogative to a negative one, displaying an expectation of a negative *nej* ‘no’ response. Krista, however, begins her response by disconfirming Fie’s assumption with a dispreferred but positive response by using the positive response particle *jo* (transcribed as *joh*, ‘yes2’) instead of *ja* (‘yes1’). Similar differentiations between response particles are found, for example, in French (*si* vs. *oui*), German (*ja* vs. *doch*) and other languages (see for example, Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:247-248; Jones 1999:36-41).

In some languages, different response types may be used for disaffirming vs disconfirming responses to positively formatted polar interrogatives (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:245-247). For example, in Finnish, when a positive request for information is presented from a genuinely unknowing position [K-], it is likely to get as the response a negative verb repeat as in (7). A is planning to make a weekend trip with her boyfriend Matti. In response to her request for a recommendation (not shown), B asks about Amsterdam (line 1).

Excerpt 7 (adapted from Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:245-246)

```

1  B:  oo-t  sä  käy-ny  [Amsterdami-ssa?
      be-2SG 2SG visit-PPC Amsterdam-INE
      Have you been to Amsterdam?
2  A:
      [ ()
3
      (1.0)
4  A:  e-n  oo  >mut< Matti  käy  siel
      NEG-1SG be-STEM but [nameM] visit.3SG DEM.LOC
      {I} haven't but Matti goes there goes there

```

5 työmatka-lla #koko ajan#.
 work_trip_ADE whole time
 on work trips all the time.

A's disaffirming answer (line 4) is in the form of the (appropriately inflected) negative verb (*en oo* 'I haven't;'). In contrast, in response to requests for confirmation, negative particles are typically used. For instance, in (8), while holding up a photograph, Päivi suggests to Matti that it was her grandmother, using a B-event statement (Labov and Fanshel 1977:100-101) that conveys a relatively knowledgeable stance (line 1).

Excerpt 8 (adapted from Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:246-247)

1 Päivi: ↑tää ol-i su-n kummi#täti#
 DEM1 be-PST-3SG you.SG-GEN godmother
 This was your godmother

 ((2 lines of concurrent talk omitted))

2 Päivi: [nii-hän] se ol-i. ((Matilta))
 PRT-CLI DEM3 be-PST.SG3 ((asks Matti))
 That's how it was

3-> Matti: >ei-ku< Juka-n.
 NEG-CLI [lnameM]-GEN
 No, Jukka's

 ((6 lines omitted))

4 Päivi: [↑mä] luul-i-n et tää o-n
 I think-PST-1SG COMP/PRT DEM1 be-3SG
 I thought that this is

5 su-n kum^omitäti^o
 you.SG-GEN godmother
 your grandmother

6 -> Matti: ↑ei::::,
 NEG
 No

In line 5, Matti disconfirms the proposal with a corrective negative marker *eiku* (Haakana and Kurhila 2009; Haakana and Visapää 2014), and

subsequently (in line 14) with a mere negative particle *ei* (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018:205-207).

Research on a variety of languages shows that polar questions may be answered differently depending on the action implemented by the question, which highlights the importance of sequential context. Particles are much more frequent in responses questions that ‘non-primary’ actions, a term Keevallik (2010) uses to refer to questions initiating pre-sequences, repairs, requests for confirmation, and the like. In contrast (as we discuss below in section 6.2), repetitional responses tend to respond to questions implementing ‘primary’ actions, such as a base first pair parts (Enfield et al. 2019; Keevallik 2010). Observations of this kind have been made, for example, for Brazilian Portuguese (Harjunpää & Ostermann, this volume), English (Heritage and G. Raymond 2012; Stivers 2010), Estonian (Keevallik 2010), Finnish (Raevaara 1993; Sorjonen 2001a, 2001b), Korean (Lee 2015), Polish (Weidner, this volume), and Russian (Bolden 2016). Particle responses have also been noted for ‘low stakes’ question-answer sequences, such as bureaucratic form filling (Heritage and Sorjonen 1994), prompting Heritage and Raymond (2012:184) to observe that “‘little questions get little answers.’” A collection of studies of ten languages discussed earlier (Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson 2010) showed questions implementing a ‘non-primary’ actions (requests for confirmation and initiations of repair) are much more common than information seeking ones, the latter making up only 28% (range 14%-62%) across the ten languages in

aggregate (see Table 2 above). Among polar questions, the comparative frequency of these ‘non-primary’ questions relative to the much more infrequent information-seeking ‘primary’ questions likely contributes to the relative frequency of particle responses across most corpora. Together, these findings raise nuanced questions about the status of particle (vs. other kinds of) responses to polar questions, both cross-linguistically and across sequence types. These questions are at the forefront of several contributions to this volume (Bolden, this volume; Harjunpää & Ostermann, this volume; Weidner, this volume).

6.2 Repetitional responses

Repetitions are perhaps the most frequently studied alternative polar response type after particle responses. This research differentiates between different kinds of repetitions, particularly on the basis of how much material is repeated (full vs. different types of partial repeats). In his paper *Confirming Allusions*, Schegloff (1996a) observed that full repeats of preceding questions could function as confirmations in contexts where the repeated elements had already been conveyed allusively. For instance, in (9), from a radio interview, Susan Shreve, a well-known children’s author, explained how she came to write children’s books:

Excerpt 9 (Schegloff 1996a:183)

1 Shr: .hh I started writing: (.) juvenile books
2 fer entirely pra:ctical reasons, .hh
3 (.)
4 Shr: [u- u-
5 IR: [Making money: :.
6 Shr: -> Making [money
7 IR: [Yes (laughter)
8 Shr: that- that practical reason hhh

Shreve's allusive reference to "practical reasons" for writing children's books (line 2) is explicated by the interviewer (IR) with a candidate understanding "making money" (line 5), and this is confirmed by the author with the repeat of "making money" at line 6 and an elaboration "that practical reason" at line 8. Schegloff observed that, in this context, the repeat functioned as a confirmation, and as a means through which the repeating speaker (re-)secures authorship of what was previously stated allusively. He also noted that the "matter of who is agreeing with whom may seem petty, but parties to conversation do care about it, and it can be interactionally quite consequential" (Schegloff 1996a:82-83).

Schegloff's analysis was confined to full repeats of the prior turn (itself an explication of a previous allusion) as the whole content of the repeating turn or as its initial part (see also Sorjonen 2001a:76-80 on Finnish). In a subsequent paper Heritage and G. Raymond (2005) examined full repeats that did not address a previous allusive remark, as in the following case where a mother and daughter are talking about the daughter of a third party (Ann). The mother is explaining that Ann's daughter wants

to follow a new fashion for multiple earrings in a single ear, provoking a disagreement with her mother:

Excerpt 10 (Field 1.1:8)

```
1 Mum:      .hh We:ll. (0.2) Uh you know (.) there's
2           a cra:ze with the girls now to have (.)
3           a secon:d. (1.1) ring ih- a secon:d
4           uh earring in on[e ear.
5 Les:      [Oh: it's very chea:p isn'tit.
6 Mum: -> It's very cheap yes'n this is u- this is
7           what Ann said. An' Ann said (0.3) she-
8           she'll haf (.) tuh have another. (0.5)
9           .hh (.) hole in'er ear...((continues story))
```

Commenting on the daughter's stance, Lesley observes that the fashion is 'very cheap' (line 5), producing the observation in the form of a [statement] + [tag]. Mum's response to that takes the form of a confirming repeat of Lesley's turn followed by an agreement ('Yes') (line 6). She subsequently underscores her confirmation by reference to the child's mother's opinion ('this is what Ann said'). Here Mum privileges confirmation over agreement, in the process leveraging her access to Ann (a party to the dispute) as an element of epistemic primacy in the opinion.

On this analysis, and even without the allusive context (as in 10), full repetitional responses can be used to provide a more committed or agentive response than what a particle response would convey. In some languages, repetitional responses may be used in cases where the recipient of a question is claiming a greater relative epistemic access to some state of affairs than the question had conveyed (e.g., Heritage and G. Raymond 2005). For example, declarative questions, especially, may claim an access

to a state of affairs in the question recipient's domain of knowledge that can prompt the recipient to respond with a confirmatory repeat. In the context of polar requests for action (e.g., via polar interrogatives) where deontic rights and obligations are in play, repetitional responses may be understood as expressing a stronger degree of commitment to fulfill the request (Bolden, this volume; Houtkoop-Steenstra 1987; A. Lindström 2017). In both of these action environments, repetitional responses are understood as having greater assertive force than particle responses.

The current theoretical understanding of the distinction between particle and repetitional responses rests on the following notion, perhaps most fully expressed in Enfield et al. (2019). Considered at a purely propositional level, a particle response affirms the questioner's proposition without its speaker voicing that proposition in so many words. In other words, a particle response is indexically dependent on the question to which it responds and cannot be understood independently of it. With a repetitional response, by contrast, speakers repeat at least some part of a question's propositional content, and to that extent both affirm and assert the proposition as their own (cf. Goffman 1979). Depending on the extent of the repetition, the question's proposition may be understood independently of the question to which it responds. Thus, in English, in a case such as: Q: *Is John coming?* R: *John's coming*, the response can in principle 'stand-alone' as an assertion of a state of affairs, and as embodying its speaker's

independent commitment (whether epistemic, deontic, etc.) to its representation of that state of affairs.

In examining repetitional responses, it is crucial to distinguish between different types of repeats: full clause repeats, verb repeats, including modal and auxiliary verbs, verb repeats with some other parts of the question (e.g., the object), and repeats of other sentence constituents. Much research on repetitional responses has focused on partial repeats and especially repeats of the verb in the preceding question. Studies of these kinds of repetitional responses have been made for Brazilian Portuguese (Harjunpää and Ostermann, this volume), English (Heritage and G. Raymond 2005, 2012; Stivers 2022:122-146), Estonian (Keevallik 2010), Finnish (Laury 2018; Raevaara 1993; Sorjonen 2001a, 2001b, 2018), Greek (Alvanoudi 2022), Japanese (Hayano 2013; Hayashi 2010), Korean (Lee 2017), Polish (Weidner, this volume), and Russian (Bolden 2009a; 2016, this volume).

A key finding arising from this line of research is that the use of verb repeat responses is shaped by the question's epistemic stance and its sequential and action context. For instance, Sorjonen (2001a: 37-44; 2001b; see also Raevaara 1993) found that in Finnish a simple verb repeat is used as an affirmative answer to a particular kind of interrogative construction (with the interrogative particle attached to the finite verb to indicate that the entire proposition is the focus of the question, termed as V-interrogatives). The verb repeat claims to offer new information, creating shared

knowledge, and suggests that the information is part of an in-progress activity. For instance, in (11), Simo asks Pekka about his recent trip to Finnish and Swedish Lapland (lines 1-3), receiving a verb repeat as an affirmative answer (line 4).

Excerpt 11 (adapted from Sorjonen 2001a:43-44)

01 S: No ↑*mite-s* (.) *ol-i-ko ne* *hurja-t* (.) *mite-s* (.)
PRT how-CLI be-PST-Q DEM3.PL wild-PL how-CLI
Well ↑*how* (.) *were they wild* (.) *how* (.)

02 *vaikutt-i-ko ne* *Norja-n* *lumi-myrsky-t* *sinne*
affect-PST-Q DEM3.PL Norway-GEN snow-storm-PL there.to
Did the snow storms in Norway affect there (.)

03 (.) *tei-lle*.
you.PL-ALL
to you. ((PL))

04 P: -> .mt *Vai:kutt-i.* [°*heh .heh heh .heh*°]
affect-PST [

05 S: [Et *sie-ll* *ol-i* *kova tuuli ja*]
PRT DEM3.LOC-ADE be-PST hard wind and
[So there was a strong wind and]

06 (.) *lun-ta* [(*sat-el-i*),]
snow-PAR rain-FRE-PST
(.) it was snowing

In line 4, Pekka responds with a repetition of the finite verb of the question only (*vai:kutti*; without using any of the other material from lines 2-4 or the anaphoric pronoun *ne* ‘they’ as the subject). This provides an affirmative answer to Simo’s question. After the affirmation, Simo presents an understanding of the implications of Pekka’s affirmative answer, topicalizing the response further.¹⁵

¹⁵ For more details about the use of various types of repetitive responses in Finnish, see Sorjonen (2001b, 2001a) and Raevaara (2001).

As mentioned above (section 6.1), the importance of sequential context for understanding response options was also highlighted by Keevallik's (2010) work on Estonian, which showed that verb repeats (and other longer responses) are used to respond to 'primary' actions (such as, base first pair parts), forming a minimal sufficient response to a question that initiates a sequence. Additionally, epistemic stances conveyed by the question have been found to shape response options. For example, Hayano (2013:209-231) found that, in Japanese, when questioners display that they do not consider the proposition as the likely state of affairs, answerers orient to repetitive responses as more relevant for conveying a committed, more assured confirmation, thus aligning with the question.

Mesoamerican languages represent an interesting contrasting case to the argument for the relative markedness of repetitive responses. In these languages/cultures repetitive actions have been found to permeate socio-cultural and conversational practices (Brown 1998, 2010; Brown, Sicoli, and Le Guen 2021). One of these languages, Tzeltal, was found to constitute an exception to the numerical prevalence of particle (vs. repetitive) responses in a study of 14 languages (Enfield et al. 2019). In this culture, the practice of affirming by repetition is motivated by a cultural desire "to share a single position on matters, to be as one in relation to pragmatic matters of knowledge and stance" (Enfield et al. 2019:297-298; Brown, Sicoli, and Le Guen 2021:269).

As the above discussion suggests, there is a considerable variety of repeat response types that show massive variation related, in particular, to the typological affordances of the languages concerned. While it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw generalizations from this diverse literature, it points to several aspects of repetitional response: they may, and often do, have their home in particular action environments that might be different from those where particle responses are normatively expected; they convey distinct (vis-a-vis other response types) epistemic and deontic stances; and their action import may vary depending on what is being repeated (and how, prosodically). Some of these issues are addressed by several contributors to this volume (Bolden, this volume; Harjunpää & Ostermann, this volume; Weidner, this volume). In general, more investigation is called for.

6.3 Beyond particles and repetitions

In this section, we briefly consider other forms of response – both minimal and expanded – that display a stance towards the question asked. Most languages have resources with which responses can be upgraded, for example, *of course*, *por supuesto*, *bien sûr*, and downgraded, for example *maybe*, *kanske*, *vielleicht*, and so on (Betz and Deppermann 2018; Bolden, Hepburn, and Mandelbaum 2023; König and Siemund 2007; Persson, this volume; Sadock and Zwicky 1985; Sorjonen 2018; Stivers 2019). Complex refinements of epistemic stance can be managed through these means. In the

following example, when responding to Nancy’s question at line 5, Hyla treats it obvious that the boyfriend is Jewish (an inference from his family name) by responding *o:f cou:rse* (Stivers 2019:198-199).

Excerpt 12 (HG:II)

```

1 NAN:  W'ts iz last name,]
2 HYL:  =Uh:: Freedla:nd. .hh[hh
3 NAN:                                     [Oh[: ,
4 HYL:                                     [(`r) Freedlind.=
5 NAN:  =Nice Jewish bo:y?
6 HYL:  O:f cou:rse,=
7 NAN:  ='v [cou:rse,]
8 HYL:  [hh-hh-hh] hnh .hhhhh=
9 NAN:  =Nice Jewish boy who doesn'like tih write letters?

```

Contrasting this upgraded response with unmarked particle responses such as *yes*, Stivers (2019:198) observes that the contrast “lies in a problem not with the question’s design but with it having been posed to this recipient at all”. If upgraded responses problematize questioning, Stivers correspondingly argues that downgraded responses, such as *possibly*, convey uncertainty and difficulty in mounting a response, and thus “problematize answering” (Stivers 2019:201), as in the following case (line 2):

Excerpt 13 (TG)

```

1 Bee:  °hmhhh .hh So yih gonna be arou:n this weeken'?,
2 Ava:  Uh::m. (0.3) Possibly.
3 Bee:  Uh it's a four day weeken-I have so much work t'do it
4      isn' funny.

```

Here the doubt or equivocation of Ava’s response at line 2 is, as Stivers (ibid.) notes, reinforced by the ‘hesitant’ delay that precedes it, and conveys

that, in the event that the question was designed to set up a request or invitation, a denial or rejection is a real possibility (see our discussion of Preferences above).

In the case of expanded responses, it is clear that even polar questions that are answered affirmatively may frequently be expanded. In a study of responses to Danish polar questions, Steensig and Heinemann (2013) found that nearly 40% of *yes*-type responses were expanded, many of which occurred in sequential environments that were ‘ripe’ for expansion or in response to question-types, e.g., specification requests, that invited it. In a paper on *yes/no* responses to polar questions, Raymond (2010b) demonstrates that ‘flatly’ intoned versions of *yes* and *no* tend to project that the respondent will not expand or elaborate the response. Expansion of the responsive turn, by contrast, can be projected with slightly rising intonation on these particles. Elements of the production of the particles themselves, including sound stretching, or terminal plosives (as in *Yep* and *Nope*) also project that a response will or will not be expanded (G. Raymond 2010b; see also Bolinger 1946; Heritage and Sorjonen 1994; Hayashi & Hayano, this volume; Lee, this volume; Robinson and Heritage, this volume). Other elements in the pre-beginnings of turns (Schegloff 1996b) including in-breaths and multimodal aspects of early responses (Deppermann 2013; Deppermann, Mondada, and Doehler 2021; Deppermann and Schmidt 2021) lend themselves to projections of this kind.

Beyond expansions, respondents may also, of course, find ways to adjust their responses so as to depart from the terms of questions put to them. One such method is to produce what Stivers and Hayashi (2010) term ‘transformative answers.’ In the following case, Noboru asks Hiroshi about the distance between Boston and New York, framing his request as inviting an opinion about ‘how close’ the two cities are (line 1):

Excerpt 14 (JAPN4573; Stivers and Hayashi 2010:5)

- 1 NOB: (eh) nyu- bosuton tte nyuuyooku kara chikai wake.
Boston QUOT New.York from close reason
Is Boston close from New York.
- 2 HIR: ee::to kuruma de y- yojikan gurai ssu kedo ne:.
well car by 4.hours about COP but FP
Let’s see, (it)’s about 4 hours by car.
- 3 NOB: a yojikan ka.=
oh 4.hours Q
Oh 4 hours.
- 4 HIR: =a ha:i.
Yes.
- 5 NOB: a soo: hu::n.
Oh is that so. I see.

In response, Hiroshi offers an objective measure of distance which, while allowing Hiroshi to decide whether the distance is ‘close’ or not, nonetheless involves, according to Stivers and Hayashi (2010:5), a “retroactive transformation of the question from a question about relative proximity to a question about absolute distance” (see also Bolden 2009a; Stivers 2022:147-178; Vepsäläinen et al. this volume).

A variety of turn-initial objects, produced in response to polar questions, can serve as harbingers of expanded responses, departures from

the agendas of questions, or both. In English, these include address terms (Clayman 2010, 2013), interjections such as *look* or *listen* (Sidnell 2007), and *well* (Heritage 2015). Turn-initial objects serving similar functions have been observed for many languages, including Finnish, Estonian and Swedish (Hakulinen and Seppänen 1992; Hakulinen, Keevallik Eriksson and J. Lindström 2003), French (Persson 2020), Garrwa (Mushin 2018), Japanese (Hayashi and Hayano 2018), Korean (Kim 2018), Polish (Weidner 2018), Russian (Bolden 2018) and Spanish (C.W. Raymond 2018), and there are good reasons to believe that these kinds of interjective particles projecting departures from sequence expectations may be very general across languages.

7. Overview of the volume

The chapters in this volume present qualitative analyses of responses to polar questions across a variety of languages, action environments, and social contexts. The languages featured in the volume – Brazilian Portuguese, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Russian, and bilingual Spanish-English – represent several language families, thus adding to a linguistic diversity of research in this area. The studies vary from providing broad overviews of polar response options (e.g., Chapter 4 on Polish) to being more narrowly focused on specific action

environments (e.g., Chapter 5 on responses to inferences; Chapter 6 on responses to pseudo-tag questions; or Chapter 11 on responses to medical concern solicitations) or specific response types (such as repeats in Chapter 1; specific response particles in Chapters 3 and 7; code switching in Chapter 8; responses without initial polarity items in Chapters 10 and 11; the design of the answers to questions containing *any* in Chapter 12). While most of the chapters rely on ordinary conversation as their primary source of data, some include data from institutional, especially medical, contexts as their main source (as in Chapter 11) or an additional source (as in Chapters 3 and 4). What unites these chapters – beside their topical focus on polar questions and their responses – is their analytic approach: While some chapters include descriptive statistics, the primary analytic approach shared by all authors is that of Conversation Analysis.

The first three chapters of the volume examine the differences between repetitional and particle responses to polar questions across different action environments.

In Chapter 2, Bolden analyzes Russian conversational materials to demonstrate that, compared to particle responses (such as *da* ‘yes’ and *net* ‘no’), repetitional responses constitute a relatively marked response option. The chapter examines the use of repetitions as a response to different actions accomplished by polar questions (including understanding checks; enactments of disbelief; requests for information, and requests for assistance), and shows how repetitional responses are deployed to

problematize some aspect of the action and its implied epistemic or deontic stance. The chapter also argues that, rather than treating responding options as a binary choice – between unmarked particle responses and marked repetitive responses – a full repertoire of responses should be considered, as different kinds of repetitions (e.g., minimal vs. longer) take up different stances towards the question.

In Chapter 3, Harjunpää and Ostermann examine repetitive and particle responses to polar questions in Brazilian Portuguese. Their particular focus is on *é*-responses, which can function as either a confirming particle or as a confirmatory repetition of the question verb. The chapter shows that *é*-responses (either as particles or verb repeats) unproblematically confirm old information. However, they are insufficient to affirm new information, and when used in such contexts, they show only a weak commitment to the veracity of the proposition or treat the issue as ancillary. To fully affirm new information and to embrace the action implemented by the polar question, other minimal repetitive responses are used. The study highlights the linguistic specificity of response options and their dedicated interactional jobs. Furthermore, the findings point to the need to recognize action specificity of what constitutes a ‘type-conforming’ or unmarked response.

Chapter 4 examines polar response options in Polish. Weidner’s focus is on the contrastive deployment of particle and repetitive responses across a variety of sequential environments. The analysis shows that particle

responses are used in subsidiary courses of action to unproblematically confirm the proposition in question and to align with the action it implements. In contrast, repetitive responses enact more agentive stances and are deployed in special environments, such as following a request for assistance. Overall, the chapter highlights the importance of sequential and action contexts in the analysis of different types of polar responses.

Chapters 5 through 7 focus on a particular action context for polar responses: responding to requests for confirmation.

In Chapter 5, using French language data, Persson examines three different ways of responding to polar questions that proffer an inference from prior talk for confirmation: repetition, *voilà*, and *exact(ement)*. The analysis shows that these different types of responses take up different epistemic and agentive stances, such as, reclaiming authorship over the inference (with the repetition), attributing a degree of epistemic agency to the addressee (with *voilà*), and crediting the addressee with greater epistemic independence (with *exact(ement)*). The chapter thus highlights the complexity of confirmation as a type of responsive action and shows how language-specific resources are deployed to convey nuanced epistemic stances.

Chapter 6 examines confirming responses in Korean conversation. Lee focuses on requests for confirmation in the form of “pseudo-tag questions,” a type of polar interrogative constructed by attaching a committal suffix (-*ci*) to the final verb of the turn. The analysis examines

both unelaborated particle responses to such confirmation requests and elaborated conforming and nonconforming responses. Lee shows that particle responses accomplish nothing more than mere confirmation; in contrast, elaborate responses are used to ward off unintended hearings and problematize the legitimacy of the question. Overall, these findings support the argument that simple particle responses constitute an unmarked response option to requests for confirmation.

In Chapter 7, Hennoste, Rääbis, Rumm, and Laanesoo examine two different affirmative response particles, *jah* and *jaa*, in responses to requests for confirmation in Estonian. They show that these two particles, while both enacting confirmation, accomplish somewhat different actions and have different sequential implications. The particle *jah* accomplishes an unproblematic confirmation, leading to sequence closure, while the particle *jaa* conveys some kind of misalignment between the interlocutors, engendering sequence expansion. These findings highlight the importance of examining the question-answer sequences in relation to larger courses of action they participate in and expand our understanding of language-specific response repertoires.

Chapter 8 broadens our understanding of response possibilities further by examining a different kind of response practice available to bilingual speakers: shifting into another language. Drawing on data from Spanish-English bilingual speakers, C. W. Raymond analyses the differences between language concordant and non-concordant (i.e. code-

switched) responses to polar questions. The analysis shows that language concordance is an unmarked response option, while non-concordant responses are used for cause to convey an agentive stance. Overall, these findings argue for a broader consideration of response repertoires.

Chapters 9 through 11 focus on extended responses to polar questions.

Chapter 9 by Hayashi and Hayano draws on Japanese data to examine how responses to polar questions become extended beyond a simple confirmation. They analyse different kinds of clausal extensions and how they are used to modify the turn initial confirmation, for example to qualify it or to problematize the underlying assumptions of the question. The study explores the division of labor between different kinds of grammatical resources for extending a confirming response.

In Chapter 10, Vepsäläinen, Sundqvist, Sorjonen, and Hakulinen analyse Finnish-language responses to interrogative polar questions that do not contain a separate element for expressing positive or negative polarity. The chapter examines a range of interactional contexts in which the polarity of the response might be conveyed indirectly or left for the recipient to infer. The analysis shows that such responses display the answers' orientation to the action relevance of the question and are designed to further the progressivity of the ongoing project.

In Chapter 11, Robinson and Heritage examine a particular interactional context in which a polar question does not make conditionally relevant a particle ('yes') answer. The chapter analyses English-language

physician-patient interaction and focuses specifically on physicians' solicitations of patients' additional concerns (such as, *Is there something else you'd like to address today?*). They show that when such questions are designed so as to renew a prior ongoing questioning activity, patients normatively and unproblematically simply report an additional concern (if they have one), without including a *yes* particle in the response. This finding qualifies our understanding of type-conformity (as proposed by G. Raymond 2003) and underscores the importance of sequential context for analysing question-answer sequences.

In the final chapter of the volume, Chapter 12, Couper-Kuhlen, Thompson, and Fox inquire whether, in English, polar questions with the word *any* (such as, *Are there any questions?*) in fact prefer a negative response. *Any* is typically understood to be a negative polarity marker that implements a negative tilt so that a negative response is a preferred one. The chapter argues, however, that this is not always the case, and that the action implemented by the polar question and its sequential position exert stronger influence on the shape of the response.

8. Concluding remarks

The studies collected in the volume enrich and diversify our understanding of polar questions and their responses. Taken together, they present a

nuanced view of polar responses as a situated social action. Yet many questions remain.

First, what is the scope and meaning of ‘type conformity’? It seems almost certain that type conformity – i.e., the preference for particle responses to polar questions – is not a universal of human interactional conduct. Further, even where ‘type conforming’ responses constitute a numerical majority of responses to polar questions, their use and likelihood of occurrence is strongly shaped by several interactional and linguistic factors including:

- the sequential context in which the question-answer sequence takes place, e.g., whether questions accomplish primary vs. secondary actions and the epistemic stances conveyed by the question (Bolden this volume; Harjunpää and Ostermann this volume; Weidner this volume);
- the perceived objective of the question within a larger course of action (Pomerantz 2017; Robinson and Heritage this volume; Vepsäläinen et al. this volume) in a particular social and institutional context; and
- grammatico-sequential relevancies raised by the question, e.g., the deployment of finite verb repeats in response to V-interrogatives in Finnish (discussed above) or the use of finite verb repeats in response to negatively formatted interrogatives in Russian (Bolden this volume), Polish (Weidner this volume), and other languages.

More cross-linguistic work is clearly mandated here.

Second, the studies collected in this volume demonstrate the importance of going beyond the type conformity/non-conformity binary. Many languages, including English, deploy a wide range of particles to address different sequential and epistemic situations: these clearly need exploration on a language-by-language basis, and in comparative perspective. Future studies are needed to better understand a full diversity of response options, including different types of repetitions, different types of response particles and their prosodic variations, multilingual response practices, and embodied non-vocal resources. Relatedly, we need to specify the work of full vs. partial repeat responses: for example, are ‘larger’ repeats stronger than smaller ones, and if so in what sense? And do finite verb repeats (used in many languages, but not English) have special status vis-à-vis other kinds of responses?

Third, for questions that implement information/confirmation requests (vs. other actions, such as requests for actions, invitation, etc.), how does question design relate to ‘preference’ for a particular type of response? That is, to what extent does a polar question prefer agreement, and how do aspects of question design contribute to the ‘strength’ of this preference (Couper-Kuhlen, Thompson, and Fox this volume)? This issue is quite unresolved, even for English (see the discussion above), let alone the other languages of the world and needs to be investigated both in single languages and comparatively.

Fourth, how are polar responses shaped by actions implemented by polar questions requesting information/confirmation vs. using similar resources for implementing a deontic action (requesting, inviting, etc.)? More research is called for to explicate constraints and relevancies different actions implemented via polar interrogatives impose on responses and different aspects of response design for managing these relevancies.

It is our hope that the studies collected in this volume – both their findings and the questions they have raised – stimulate research on polar questions and their answers in many more typologically diverse languages.

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