



## Evaluation and bias in negative yes-no questions\*

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**Dimitrova, Margarita. 2022. Evaluation and bias in negative yes-no questions.** *Linguistic Research* 39(3): 405-429. The goal of the present work is to discuss the properties of negative yes-no questions capitalising on data from Bulgarian. Negative yes-no questions have traditionally been considered a case of *expletive* or *pleonastic* negation, i.e. the negation marker is void of negative content and does not contribute to the negative interpretation of the structure. In view of this property, given languages, like Bulgarian and other Slavic and Balkan languages, display an intriguing blocking of Negative Concord in yes-no questions (Dimitrova 2020a) which prevents the co-occurrence of the negation marker and *n-words* (Laka 1990). Rather, the negation marker is only compatible with positive indefinites underlying the speaker's bias towards the positive value of the proposition (Ladd 1981). Considering the data from Bulgarian and building on some intriguing patterns between negative yes-no questions and given types of subjunctive main and embedded clauses (Giannakidou 2016; Dimitrova 2020b), we propose that the negation marker is not *expletive* but rather contributes to the expression of the speaker's evaluations and kind of attitude, displaying a relation to the domain of *nonveridicality* (Giannakidou 1998; Yoon 2011). (Center of Linguistics of the University of Lisbon)

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### 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the properties of negative yes-no questions focusing on the relation with the expression of the so called *positive bias* and the speaker's evaluations towards the truth of the proposition.

As widely discussed in the literature (Ladd 1981; Brown and Franks 1995; Romero and Han 2004; Reese 2006; Holmberg 2016; a.o.), the occurrence of negation in yes-no questions gives rise to biased structures underlying the speaker's belief in the positive

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value of the proposition. Traditionally, it has been assumed that negation occurring in yes-no questions is *expletive* and, thus, void of negative content (Brown and Franks 1995; Espinal 1997). By virtue of this property, it does not contribute to the negative interpretation of the structure. This however, does not seem to be the entire story, considering the bias negative yes-no questions systematically denote. In Ladd's (1981) seminal work, the well-known distinction between two different types of negation, namely *Inner* and *Outer negation*, has been put forth in order to capture the different readings of negation. It has been suggested that while Inner negation consists in a request for the confirmation of a negative inference, giving rise to what has been defined as *negatively biased yes-no questions*, Outer negation denotes the speaker's belief in the positive value of the proposition, resulting in the so called *positively biased questions*.

Interestingly, in more recent works (Holmberg 2016), negative yes-no questions have been approached from the perspective of the relation between the syntactic position of the negation marker and the expression of either positive or negative bias. Holmberg (2016) distinguishes between two possible occurrences for the English *not*: (i) a "low", TP-internal position, as in (1) and (ii) a "high", TP-external position, as in (2):

- (1) Is John not coming?
- (2) Isn't John coming?

As discussed by this author, while (1) denotes the speaker's request for confirmation of the negative inference "John is not coming", the structure in (2) conveys the idea that John *is* coming and, thus, the speaker's positive bias. In view of examples like those in (1) and (2), Holmberg (2016) suggests that the so called positive bias is a result of a *high* negation occupying a position within the CP domain, where it scopes over the polarity variable [ $\pm$ Pol] (Holmberg 2012).

Besides the syntactic position of negation, another intriguing aspect concerning negative yes-no questions appears with regards to the distribution of the polarity items (PIs). Crucially, it appears that the occurrence of positive (PPI) and negative (NPI) polarity items can further favour the expression of, respectively, positive (3a) and negative (3b) bias, as in the examples below:

- (3) a. Isn't there some vegetarian restaurant?
- b. Isn't there any vegetarian restaurant?

As illustrated by (3), the occurrence of PPIs or NPIs favours the expression of a given type of bias: PPIs favour the Outer negation reading and, thus, contribute to the expression of positive bias, as in (3a). In contrast, NPIs, as in (3b), favour the expression of Inner negation and negative bias towards the truth of the proposition.

Building on the English examples in (3), in the present work we address the expression of Bulgarian negative yes-no questions and the distribution of PPIs and NPIs. Differently from English, Bulgarian displays an intriguing blocking of Negative Concord (henceforth NC), which can be regarded as evidence supporting the idea that positively biased yes-no questions are only compatible with positive indefinites, or PPIs. Observe the example in (4) below:

- (4) \* Ivan ne kupi li ništo?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q nothing  
 Intended reading: Didn't John buy anything?

The data in (4) triggers some important questions regarding (i) the position negation occupies in structures like (4) and (ii) the reason why negation is unable to licence post-verbal n-words, as Bulgarian *ništo* “nothing” in (4). Building on previous works discussing (i) and (ii) (Dimitrova 2020a), we propose an analysis of negative yes-no questions suggesting that their syntactic expression involves a higher rising to the functional projection EvaluativeP (Ambar 2000, 2003, 2016) which triggers, on the one hand, the so called *expletive* reading of the negation marker and, on the other, the positive bias conveyed in negative yes-no questions related to the evaluation of the state of affairs and the truth of the proposition.

The paper is organised as follows. In section 2, we focus on the properties of negative yes-no questions capitalising on data from *positively biased questions*. In section 3, we discuss data from Bulgarian negative yes-no questions and the distribution of n-words. In section 4, we address some recent analyses dedicated to the relation between *expletive* negation and the notions of *evaluation* (Ambar 2003, 2016) and *nonveridicality* (Giannakidou 1998, 2016). In Section 5, we draw our proposal for analysis. Section 6 concludes the paper.

## 2. On the syntax of negative yes-no questions and the expression of positive bias

As mentioned above, the factors triggering the expression of positive bias in negative yes-no questions and its relation to the semantic properties of the negation marker have been subject to many discussions. Traditionally, negative yes-no questions have been regarded as an instantiation of *expletive negation* (Brown and Franks 1995; Espinal 1997), given that negation does not contribute to the negative reading of the structure. Accordingly, it has been assumed that negation is semantically void of negative content.

Discussing data from Russian in which, similarly to the Bulgarian example in (4) above, NPIs are banned from co-occurring with the negation marker in negative yes-no questions, Brown and Franks (1995) argue that this blocking of NPIs' licensing is a result of what these authors call *Forced Pleonastic Negation*. Observe the example from Russian in (5) below:

- (5) Ne znaet li \*nikto / kto-nibud' iz vas kak èto delaetsja?!  
 NEG know Q \*no-who / who-any of you how this is done  
 "Does any one of you know how this is done?"

(Brown and Franks 1995: 261)

According to these authors, differently from the canonical *pleonastic negation*, in negative yes-no questions like (5), the expletive negation is *forced* by the occurrence of the interrogative operator. In order to account for the reading of the negation marker, Brown and Franks (1995) assume the existence of a Negation Operator (NO) situated in the Spec, NegP, responsible for the licensing of negation. According to this work, in structures like (5), the negation marker raises with the verb to adjoin to the interrogative particle *li*. As it is no longer in the scope of its licenser, it acquires an expletive reading.

The analysis proposed in Brown and Franks (1995) correctly captures the behaviour of negation in Russian yes-no questions like (5). However, even though it felicitously explains why negative yes-no questions are not truly negative, it fails to account for the fact that these structures consistently differ from their positive counterparts when it comes to the expression of bias. As mentioned above, negative yes-no questions systematically convey the *positive* reading of the structure, i.e. they express positive bias or the speaker's belief in the positive value of the proposition. Positive yes-no questions, on the other hand, are neutral with respect to the speaker's beliefs<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the existence of the

so called positive bias in fact supports the idea that the negation marker is not semantically void of content and does not occur only optionally in yes-no questions (Brown and Franks 1995; Espinal 2000). Rather, the occurrence of negation contributes to the expression of the speaker's evaluations.

Several additional aspects of the characterisation of negative yes-no questions remain unsettled, especially when it comes to the syntactic structure underlying the expression of bias. As mentioned in the previous section, the expression of positive bias appears to be related to the position occupied by the negation marker. In Brown and Franks (1995), it has been assumed that the negation marker raises higher to the CP domain. A similar proposal has been put forth in Holmberg (2016), according to which the negation marker in English yes-no questions can occur in two distinct structural positions: it can occur TP-externally or TP-internally. According to this author, what affects the divergent interpretations of negative yes-no questions denoting either positive or negative bias, is the syntactic position the negation marker occupies. Observe the examples in (6) below:

- (6) Q1: Do you want coffee? (neutral)<sup>2</sup>  
 Q2: Don't you want coffee? (positive bias)  
 Q3: Do you not want coffee? (negative bias) (Holmberg 2016: 40)

According to (6), positive bias is restricted to those structures in which the negation marker occurs in a higher position, as in (6Q2). Observe that in (6Q2) negation attaches to the high auxiliary. In contrast, negative bias is denoted by those cases in which negation remains below T, scoping over the lexical verb, as in (6Q3).

Besides contributing to the expression of a given type of bias, we can further observe that the position of the negation marker also affects the behaviour of the answering system. As discussed in the literature (Martins 1994; Kramer and Rawlings 2010; Holmberg 2012), positive yes-no questions are commonly answered by the particles 'yes' or 'no' which either confirm or contradict the truth of the proposition, as shown below in (7):

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- 1 Note that the expression of the speaker's commitment towards the truth of the proposition can be also encoded in a special word order, as the SVO order of English yes-no questions. Gunlogson (2002) dubs such structures *Declarative Questions* and claims that the declarative SVO order conveys the speaker's high degree of commitment towards the truth of the proposition.
- 2 Holmberg (2016) uses the label *neutral yes-no questions* when referring to positive yes-no questions considering that these structures are neutral with respect to bias.

(7) Q: Do you drink coffee?

A1: Yes.

A2: No (Holmberg 2016: 41)

Curiously, in negative yes-no questions, on the other hand, the behaviour of the answering system depends on the position of the negation marker. As shown in Holmberg (2016), questions with *low* negation occurring TP-internally are incompatible with a simple ‘yes’ (cf. (8A1)). As illustrated by (8A2), the answers contradicting the negative value of the question are those echoing the finite verb:

(8) Q: Do you not drink coffee?

A1: (??) Yes.

A2: Yes, I do.

A3: No. (Holmberg 2016: 41-42)

Interestingly, in contrast to (8), positively biased negative yes-no questions, as in (9) below, pattern positive yes-no questions, as in (7), in which the answering particles “yes” and “no”, respectively, confirm or contradict the truth of the proposition. Observe that the negative yes-no question with high negation in (9) below displays the same behaviour:

(9) Q: Don’t you drink coffee? (I believe you do, but I still want to double-check)

A1: Yes.

A2: No. (Holmberg 2016: 41-42)

The way the positively biased interrogative in (9) is answered gives rise to many important questions. The existence of patterns between answering a positive yes-no question, as in (7) above, and a positively biased negative yes-no question, as in (9), suggests that there is indeed a relation between the behaviour of the answering system and the expression of the speaker’s beliefs or evaluations. What is more, the examples in (7)-(9) further raise questions regarding the distinction between *polarity-based* and *truth-based* answering system (Martins 1994; Holmberg 2012; a.o.). We leave the discussion of this matter for future research.

Leaving aside the questions related to the behaviour of the answering system and the syntactic expression of negative yes-no questions, another important point here concerns the discourse function and properties of negative yes-no questions with positive bias. Differently from positive yes-no questions, negative yes-no questions appear to be infelicitous *out of the blue*. As observed in Holmberg (2016), positively biased negative questions moreover pattern TAG-questions in several aspects. As noted by this author, both (10a) and (10b) denote the meaning of “I believe this is the road to Lund but I still want to double-check” (Holmberg 2016: 183):

- (10) a. Isn't this the road to Lund?  
 b. This is the road to Lund, isn't it?

Additionally, TAG-questions and positively biased negative yes-no questions appear to be both compatible with answers like ‘So it is’ and ‘That’s right’, as illustrated by (11) and (12):

- (11) Q: Isn't this the road to Lund? (‘I believe it is, but I still want to double-check’)  
 A1: ? So it is.  
 A2: ? That’s right.  
 (12) Q: This is the road to Lund, isn't it?  
 A1: So it is.  
 A2: That’s right. (Holmberg 2016: 182-183)

Note that, in contrast, neutral positive yes-no questions, like (13), are incompatible with such answers:

- (13) Q: Is this the road to Lund?  
 A1: \*So it is.  
 A2: \*That’s right. (Holmberg 2016: 182-183)

According to Holmberg (2016), the fact that structures like (13) are incompatible with answers like “So it is” and “That’s right” is a result of the fact that they denote the set of alternatives {p, ¬p} (Hamblin 1973). In contrast, TAG-questions, like (12), denote

only one positively specified alternative, followed by a TAG that indicates the negative alternative and the Q-force.

As for positively biased negative yes-no questions, as in (11), they pattern TAG-questions in displaying only one positively specified primary alternative. According to Holmberg (2016), given that high negation scopes over T and over the alternatives  $\{p, \neg p\}$ , it invalidates the negative alternative of the question and, thus, triggers the positively biased meaning. Considering these properties, in Asher and Reese (2005, 2007) it has been suggested that TAG-questions and positively biased negative yes-no questions consist in complex speech acts denoting an assertion and a question, much like in Ambar (2000, 2003) on structures with *wh-in-situ* and *non-pure* fronted *wh*-questions in European Portuguese.

### 3. Bulgarian negative yes-no questions

With the above brief observations on the main properties of negative yes-no questions and the position of the negation marker in languages like English, in this section, we focus on Bulgarian negative yes-no questions. As discussed in section 1, the data from Bulgarian yes-no questions is particularly intriguing when it comes to the distribution of the PIs and to the blocking of NC (Dimitrova 2020a).

Importantly, as in the Russian example in (5) above, Bulgarian yes-no questions also display an overt interrogative operator, the particle *li*, which is the element responsible for the licensing of these structures. As widely discussed in the literature (Izvorski 1995; Rudin et al. 1999; Bošković 2001; Dimitrova 2020b; a.o.), in Bulgarian the particle *li* occupies two main positions in the structure: (i) a position following the inflected verb, as in (14a), and (ii) a position following an XP different from the verb, as in (14b):

- (14) a. Ivan pročete    li knjigata?  
           John read.3p.sg. Q book.def  
           “Did John read the book?”
- b. Knigata    li pročete    Ivan?  
           book.def    Q    read.3p.sg John  
           “Did John read THE BOOK<sup>3</sup>?”



Importantly, the different occurrences of *li* result in different types of questions. Thus, while (14a) is *neutral* and consists in a simple request for information, the question in (14b) is a focus yes-no question, being the focalised constituent *knigata* “the book”.

In Dimitrova (2020b), following Holmberg (2012), it has been proposed that Bulgarian yes-no questions display a polarity head PolP responsible for the codification of the polarity value of the structure. Thus, it has been suggested that the Bulgarian particle *li* is externally merged in Pol° and denotes a polarity algorithm [x, ¬x], much like in Hamblin (1973). What is more, it has been assumed that, in neutral V-*li* questions like (14a), the verb raises to Pol° where it attaches to *li*. The verb then absorbs the polarity algorithm [x, ¬x], giving rise to the formation of the alternatives [V, ¬V].

Similarly, in focused, or XP-*li* yes-no questions, like (14b), it is an XP different from the verb the element that attaches to *li*. Assuming that *li* displays a dual nature and behaves as a head or a maximal projection (Kayne 1991; Chomsky 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin 1994), Dimitrova (2020b) proposes that it can either merge in Pol° or in Spec, PolP. In XP-*li* questions, the XP raises to *li* in Spec, PolP, resulting in the formation of the set of alternatives [XP, ¬XP]. As noted in Dimitrova (2020b), the so called *focus* meaning of XP-*li* questions like (14b) stems from the way the polarity algorithm applies to the structure. In such cases, it is not the V but an element XP different from the verb the one that absorbs the polarity algorithm. As a result, the question is about the XP that attaches to *li* and not about the entire proposition. As claimed by this author, the *focus* meaning XP-*li* questions display is rather a presupposition in need of confirmation.

The properties of the interrogative particle *li* are particularly important when it comes to the discussion of Bulgarian negative yes-no questions and the blocking the NC. What is more, in view of the cross-linguistic variation with respect to allowing for NC (Laka 1990; Zanuttini 1994, 1997; Haegeman and Zanuttini 1995; Giannakidou 1998, 2001; Matos 1999; Zeijlstra 2004; a.o.), Bulgarian has been considered a *strict negative concord language* (Giannakidou 2001), in which NPIs obligatorily co-occur with the negation marker, as shown in (15):

- (15) a. Ivan \*(ne) kupi ništo.  
 John not bought.3p.sg. nothing  
 “John didn’t buy anything.”

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3 Capital letters indicate focus throughout the paper.

- b. Nikoj \*(ne) kupi knjigata.  
 Nobody not bought.3p.sg. book.def  
 “Nobody bought the book.”

Importantly, the obligatory co-occurrence between the negation marker and the NPIs does not give rise to double negation reading but rather contributes to the expression of the same logical negation.

Curiously, even though Bulgarian NPIs are always licensed by clause-mate negation, the data from yes-no questions illustrates an unexpected blocking of NC. Observe the example in (15), repeated below for convenience as (16), and its interrogative counterpart in (17):

- (16) Ivan ne kupi ništo.  
 John not bought.3p.sg. nothing  
 “John didn’t buy anything.”
- (17) \*Ivan ne kupi li ništo?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q nothing  
 Intended reading: Didn’t John buy anything?

The ungrammaticality of (17) appears to be a result of the intervening particle *li* which somehow blocks the relation between the negation marker and the NPI *ništo* “nothing”. Interestingly, the structure in (17) improves when the NPI is replaced by its positive counterpart, the PPI *nešto* “something”:

- (18) Ivan ne kupi li nešto?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q something  
 “Didn’t John buy something?”

The question in (18) is well-formed. Nevertheless, differently from (17), it yields the Outer negation reading, i.e. the question in (18) is biased towards the positive value of the proposition (Ladd 1981). What is more, the examples in (16) and (17) above draw a clear-cut opposition between declarative and interrogative structures. Observe that nothing goes wrong for NC in declarative structures like (16), where there is no intervening material blocking the relation between the negation marker and the NPI

occurring in its scope. NC is only blocked in yes-no questions where the interrogative particle *li* occurs, as in (17).

The story gets more complicated when considering the behaviour of the PPIs, as in (19) below:

- (19) a. \*Ivan ne kupi nešto.  
 John not bought.3p.sg. something  
 Intended: John didn't buy something.
- b. Ivan ne kupi li nešto?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q something  
 "Didn't John buy something?"

As shown in (19a), the PPIs are ungrammatical in the scope of negation (an exception is *Metalinguistic Negation*, Horn 1989). Nevertheless, they are compatible with negative yes-no questions, as in (19b), which suggests that the PPI *nešto* "something" is not in the scope of negation.

As mentioned above, the intriguing data discussed here is not new to the literature. Similar cases from other languages, namely Russian and Serbian-Croatian, i.e. languages which also employ the particle *li* in the formation of yes-no questions, have been previously noticed. As mentioned in section 2, in Brown and Franks (1995), the blocking of NC in Russian yes-no questions stems from what the authors call *Forced Pleonastic Negation*. Milićević (2006), discussing data from Serbian-Croatian, observes that, besides the structures with *li*, Serbian-Croatian displays another type of yes-no questions disallowing the co-occurrence between negation and NPIs. Observe the example in (20) below:

- (20) Da nije Vera videla ikoga / \*nikoga?  
 COMP not.AUX Vera see.PART anyone noone  
 "Is it possible that Vera saw someone?"  
 "Could Vera have seen someone?" (Milićević 2006: 33)

The structure in (20) displays the blocking of NC, observed previously in yes-no questions with *li*: the negation marker does not license the NPI *nikoga* "no one" and is compatible with the PPI *ikoga* "anyone". In Milićević (2006) the data in (20) has been

accounted for by assuming a high semantically vacuous NegP situated above TP and below CP. By virtue of its *expletiveness*, high negation is unable to license NPIs occurring in its scope.

Importantly, even though the particle *li* does not occur in (20), we can observe that the structure displays the subjunctive particle *da*, which is the element responsible for the licensing of the Subjunctive mood in Serbian-Croatian. As widely discussed in the literature, while Romance languages display subjunctive verbal morphology (Picallo 1984; Quer 1998; Kempchinsky 2009; Ambar and Jiménez-Fernandéz 2014; a.o.), Slavic and Balkan languages employ special subjunctive particles (Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, 2001 on Romanian *să*; Krapova 2001 on Bulgarian *da*; Giannakidou 2009 on Modern Greek *na*) which are obligatory verb-adjacent. What is more, some recent works discussing the properties of mood selection (Giannakidou 1998, 2009; Palmer 2001; Marques 2009, 2010; Ambar 2016) argue that the selection of the subjunctive is not a mere consequence of the semantic contrast *realis/irrealis* and the properties of given predicates, like volitional, directive and emotive-factive predicates. Rather, it correlates with the expression of the speaker's kind of attitude and evaluations, associated with a particular type of modality and with the concept of *nonveridicality* (Giannakidou 1998). Subjunctive main clauses, like the subjunctive yes-no question in (20) above, are particularly revealing when it comes to the discussion of these properties of the subjunctive mood.

Giannakidou (2016), discussing Modern Greek subjunctive yes-no questions argues that they express the so called *evaluative subjunctive* captured under the possibility modal *might*. As discussed by the author, differently from standard yes-no questions denoting the set of alternative propositions  $\{p, \neg p\}$ , subjunctive yes-no questions, like (20), are about the *possibility of p* (Giannakidou 2016: 200). In our view, these observations towards structures like (20) and its relation to the subjunctive mood are crucial for the analysis of negative yes-no questions, especially when it comes to the expletive reading the negation marker acquires in such contexts and to the expression of bias. We come back to this discussion in section 4.

Going back to Bulgarian negative yes-no questions and the blocking of NC in these structures, another important fact appears when it comes to the licensing of Bulgarian NPIs occurring in yes-no questions. Observe that, even though the NPIs are not felicitous post-verbally, as in (17) above, they are grammatical in those structures in which they attach to the interrogative particle *li*, as illustrated in (21):

- (21) Ništo li ne kupi Ivan?  
 nothing Q not bought John  
 “Didn’t John buy anything?”

Note that the behaviour of the NPI *ništo* “nothing” patterns that of the focused XPs, discussed above. Consider again the example in (14b), repeated as (22) for ease:

- (22) Knigata li pročete Ivan?  
 book.def Q read.3p.sg John  
 “Did John read THE BOOK<sup>4</sup>?”

In Dimitrova (2020b), it has been suggested that the behaviour of the NPIs in structures like (21) is a result of the fact that NPIs are quantifiers denoting a set of alternatives (Giannakidou 1998, 2006). Due to this property, the NPIs obligatorily take part of the questioned portion of the structure patterning *wh*-words in *wh*-questions. Under this view, the licensing of NPIs, like *ništo* “nothing” in (21), involves raising to Spec, PolP where it attaches to the particle *li*. For the time being, we will assume this proposal.

#### 4. Expletive negation: evaluation and *nonveridicality*

In the previous section we have shown that NC in Bulgarian yes-no questions is seemingly blocked by the occurrence of the interrogative particle *li*. By virtue of NC blocking, the licensing of the NPI *ništo* “nothing” is precluded and its occurrence in the structure gives rise to ungrammatical sentences, as (23):

- (23) \*Ivan ne kupi. li ništo?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q nothing  
 Intended reading: Didn’t John buy anything?

As discussed in section 1, ungrammatical structures like (23) have been commonly

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4 Capital letters indicate focus throughout the paper.

considered a case of *expletive negation*: the negation marker is void of negative force, reason why it does not contribute to the negative interpretation of the sentence and, consequently, does not license post-verbal NPIs. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, this analysis towards negative yes-no questions fails to account for the positively biased reading they denote.

As shown in Espinal (1997, 2000), the occurrence of *expletive negation* is not limited to negative yes-no questions but extends to other structures, such as the so called *Degree Wh-Exclamatives*. Observe the example in (24) below:

- (24) A cuántas pessoas (no) habrá matado este dictador!  
 To how many people not have+FUT.3psg killed this dictator  
 “So many people must have been killed by this dictator!”  
 (Espinal 2000: 48)

As discussed in the literature (Espinal 1997, 2000; Ambar 1999, 2000, 2003; Portner and Zanuttini 2000; Zanuttini and Portner 2003; a.o.), Degree Wh-Exclamatives codify the meaning of extreme degree quantification. Crucially, the extreme degree meaning appears to be somehow related to the occurrence of the negation marker. Similarly to yes-no questions, the negation marker does not contribute to the negative interpretation of the structure. Rather, its occurrence in such structures underlies the extreme degree meaning.

Under the analysis proposed in Espinal (1997), negation occurs somehow optionally in structures like (24). According to this author, the extreme degree quantification meaning is licensed by an Intensifier Operator originating in the projection Int(ensifier) P(hrase) situated above CP. Wh-words occurring under the scope of the Intensifier Operator then acquire the extreme degree reading. As for the *expletiveness* of the negation marker, Espinal (1997) proposes that it derives from a mechanism dubbed *Logical Absorption* (Espinal 1992): negation is absorbed by the Intensifier operator, the result being the lack of negative force.

The picture gets more complicated when discussing the properties of expletive negation from the perspective of the parallels between its occurrences in negative yes-no questions and Degree Wh-Exclamatives, on the one hand, and in subjunctive clauses, on the other. Basing on data from Korean and Japanese, Yoon (2011) argues that expletive negation is not void of content but rather has a special semantic contribution to the meaning of the structure. In Yoon’s terms, expletive negation displays a close relation

to the subjunctive mood and, thus, to the concept of *nonveridicality* (Giannakidou 1998). In fact, according to this author, expletive negation is a type of subjunctive marker and is therefore restricted to occur with *nonveridical* predicates. Curiously, considering the data from Korean (25a) and Japanese (25b), Yoon (2011) observes that expletive negation always appears in the scope non-factive or interrogative complementisers, like Korean *ci/kka* and Japanese *ka* (Miyagawa 2010):

- (25) a. John-un Mary-ka oci-**anh**-ul-**{ci/kka}** kitayha-ko issta.  
 John-Top Mary-Nom come-Neg-Fut-NFcomp hope-Asp  
 “John hopes that Mary might come.”
- b. John-wa Mary-ga ko-**nai-ka(-to)** kitaisi-te iru.  
 John-Top Mary-Nom come-Neg-NFcomp hope-Asp  
 “John hopes that Mary might come.” (Yoon 2011: 109)

Note that the non-factive complementisers *ci/kka* in Korean and *ka* in Japanese (Miyagawa 2010) are also question particles: an observation that draws an important parallel with the interrogative particle *li* licensing Bulgarian yes-no questions. According to Yoon (2011), the occurrence of elements such as the non-factive complementisers like Korean *ci/kka* and Japanese *ka* is related to the existence of a likelihood scale codifying the speaker’s evaluations. As noted in Yoon (2011: 109) “*the employment of a non-factive complementizer strongly indicates the epistemic subject’s undecidedness concerning the realization of the content of the embedded proposition.*” According to this author, the occurrence of non-factive complementisers, as shown in (25a-b) contributes to the expression of uncertainty with respect to the truth of the proposition. Expletive negation, on the other hand, denotes the meaning of *unlikelihood*. Due to this property, expletive negation is dubbed *Evaluative Negation* in Yoon (2011).

As briefly discussed in section 3, the relation between expletive negation and the concept of *nonveridicality* is furthermore supported by the data from Serbian-Croatian, discussed in Milićević (2006), and repeated below for convenience:

- (26) Da nije Vera videla ikoga / \*nikoga?  
 COMP not.AUX Vera see.PART anyone noone  
 “Is it possible that Vera saw someone?”  
 “Could Vera have seen someone?”

Crucially, the particle *da* occurring in the example in (26) is also the element responsible for the licensing of the subjunctive mood in Serbian-Croatian<sup>5</sup>. By virtue of this property and similarly to yes-no questions in which the particle *li* occurs, the subjunctive question in (26) also displays expletive negation. As a consequence, the occurrence of the NPIs is precluded.

More revealing evidence supporting the relation with the subjunctive and *nonveridicality* and illustrating the patterns between the occurrences of expletive negation in negative yes-no questions and in subjunctive contexts is discussed in Dimitrova (2020b), considering data from Bulgarian. Interestingly, the alleged blocking of NC observed in Bulgarian negative yes-no questions is also at play with predicates like Bulgarian *straxuvam se* ‘I am afraid’ which can select either the indicative or the subjunctive in its complements. Observe the example in (27) below with the subjunctive particle *da* responsible for the licensing of the subjunctive in Bulgarian:

- (27) *Straxuvam se da ne doide \*nikoj / njakoj.*  
 Be\_Afraid.1p.sg Refl SUBJ not come.Pres.Perf no one/ someone  
 ‘\*I am afraid that anybody will not come.’  
 ‘I am afraid that somebody might come.’

Similarly to negative yes-no questions, in (27) the negation marker does not display the usual negative reading of negative declaratives and, therefore, does not license NPIs like *nikoj* ‘no one’. Nevertheless, differently from negative yes-no questions where the interrogative particle *li* intervenes between the negation marker and the NPIs, in (27) the licensing of NC is precluded even though there is no intervening material. The negation marker occurring in (27) is rather a case of *Evaluative negation* (Yoon 2011) i.e. it does not contribute to the negative interpretation but rather conveys the meaning of *unlikelihood* and, thus, the belief that it is unlikely that somebody comes.

Let us now take a look at the structure in (28) below where the predicate *straxuvam se* ‘I am afraid’ selects the indicative mood in its complement and, therefore, occurs with the indicative complementiser *će* ‘that’ rather than the subjunctive particle *da*:

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5 As previously noticed in the literature (Todorović 2012), Serbian-Croatian disposes of two homophonous versions of *da*: one occurring with indicative verbs and another occurring with subjunctive verbs. They have been both considered complementisers.



- (28) Straxuvam se će ne e kazal ništo / \*nešto na majka si.  
 Be\_afraid.1p.sg. Refl that-IND not is said nothing/ something to mother his  
 ‘I am afraid that he didn’t say anything to his mother.’

As shown (28), the selection of the indicative in the complement clause clearly affects the reading the negation marker acquires, as well as the distribution of the NPI *ništo* “nothing” vs. the PPI *nešto* “something”. Note that, in contrast to the subjunctive example in (27) above, in (28) negation displays the standard negative reading and, moreover, felicitously licenses post-verbal NPIs like *ništo* “nothing”, being the occurrence of PPIs like *nešto* “something” precluded.

The contrasts between (27) and (28) are particularly revealing when it comes to the way mood selection affects the reading negation acquires. As discussed in the literature (Marques 2009, 2010; Ambar 2016; a.o.), the indicative-subjunctive divide correlates with the denotation of the speaker’s beliefs with respect to the truth of the proposition: as argued in Ambar (2016), while the indicative is the mood of assertions, i.e. the proposition is taken to be true, the subjunctive mood is the mood of evaluations denoting the speaker’s kind of attitude towards the state of affairs described. Thus, differently from the subjunctive clause in (27), the example in (28) with the indicative conveys the speaker’s belief in the truth of the proposition in the embedded domain, i.e. the belief that he didn’t say anything to his mother.

In Ambar (2016), the indicative-subjunctive divide has been related to the activation of the speaker’s projections AssertiveP and EvaluativeP, proposed in earlier works (Ambar 2000, 2003). Considering the properties of each mood, the type of predicates selecting them and the relation to *(non)veridicality*, Ambar (2016) claims that AssertiveP is the projection of the indicative, accounting for *what the speaker knows*. EvaluativeP, on the other hand, accounts for the speaker’s evaluations and type of attitude. According to this author, this is the projection of the *nonveridical* domain, accounting for the subjunctive mood and encoding the property of *evaluation*.

Considering the observations made in this section and assuming that the relation to *nonveridicality* is what triggers the so called expletive meaning of the negation marker and, hence, the ban on n-words in Bulgarian negative yes-no questions, we will suggest that EvaluativeP also projects in negative yes-no questions accounting for the denotation of the speaker’s evaluations.

## 5. Towards an analysis of negative yes-no questions and expletive negation

Building on the parallels between three distinct type of structures displaying expletive negation and blocking NC, namely (i) negative yes-no questions, (ii) Degree Wh-Exclamatives and (iii) subjunctive main and embedded clauses, and following previous works on the properties of such structures and their relation to *nonveridicality* (Giannakidou 1998, 2016; Yoon 2011; Ambar 2016; a.o.), the proposal for analysis we put forth here relies on the activation of the functional projection EvaluativeP. In our view, the activation of EvaluativeP successfully captures the properties of negative yes-no questions and the so called positive bias they denote, on the one hand, and the expletive reading of negation and the ban on n-words, on the other.

In the previous analyses dedicated to negative yes-no questions in languages displaying the interrogative particle *li* (Brown and Franks 1995; Milićević 2006), it has been suggested that the expletive meaning of negation in such contexts is a result of the occurrence of *li*. In section 3, we showed that two types of *li*-questions have been distinguished in Bulgarian: (i) the neutral V-*li* questions in which *li* follows the verb, as in (29a), and (ii) the focus XP-*li* questions in which *li* follows an XP different from the verb, as in (29b):

- (29) a. Ivan pročete li knjigata?  
 John read.3p.sg. Q book.def  
 “Did John read the book?”  
 b. Knigata li pročete Ivan?  
 book.def Q read.3p.sg John  
 “Did John read THE BOOK?”

In fact, the syntactic position and distribution of the particle *li* have been subject to many discussions. Rudin et al (1999) argue that the particle is a complementiser generated in C°. Izvorski (1995), on the other hand, suggests that *li* is merged in Foc°. As mentioned in section 3, in Dimitrova (2020b), it has been assumed that Bulgarian yes-no questions display the structure in (30) below:

- (30) [IntP [Int° [*u*Pol], [*u*V] [PolP [Pol° li [x, ¬x]] [TP [T° [vP [v° [VP [V°

According to (30), the syntactic expression of Bulgarian yes-no questions involves a polarity head PolP (Holmberg 2012, 2016) encoding the polarity value of the structure. What is more, under the analysis in (30), in Bulgarian the denotation of polarity features is a result of the occurrence of the particle *li*. In this work *li* has been regarded as the interrogative element introducing the polarity algorithm  $[x, \neg x]$  in which  $[x]$  can be either the verb or an XP different from the verb, as in (29a) and (29b), respectively. The polarity algorithm is the core ingredient for the denotation of polarity, i.e. the denotation of the set of alternative propositions  $\{p, \neg p\}$  (Hamblin 1973). In neutral yes-no questions, like (29a) above, the particle *li* is externally merged in Pol<sup>0</sup> where the verb attaches to it giving rise to the creation of the set of alternatives  $[V, \neg V]$ . The functional head Int displays an unvalued  $[u\text{Pol}]$  feature and an unvalued  $[uV]$  feature. The valuation of these features triggers the movement of the verb and the particle *li* to which it has adjoined. *Li* values the unvalued  $[u\text{Pol}]$  feature while V values the unvalued  $[uV]$  feature.

As for focus yes-no questions, like (29b), in which the particle *li* follows an element XP different from the verb, Dimitrova (2020b) assumes that *li* is externally merged in Spec, PolP where the constituent XP attaches to it and absorbs the polarity algorithm  $[x, \neg x]$ , everything else being equal. In the present work, we will follow this analysis of Bulgarian yes-no questions and will assume that the particle *li* is externally merged in Pol.

Coming back to negative yes-no questions, another important point concerning their syntactic expression appears with regards to the position occupied by the negation marker. Since Pollock (1989), it has been agreed that negation heads its own projection: Neg(ation) P(hrase) situated below TP. Still, many questions regarding the position of NegP remain unsettled, namely when it comes to languages' divergent behaviours with respect to the position of the negation marker. Zanuttini (1994, 1997) distinguishes between two groups of languages when it comes to the position of negation: (i) languages with pre-verbal negation, like Italian and Spanish, a.o. and (ii) languages with post-verbal negation, like Occitan, Franco-Provencal and the Gallo-Italic languages of Northern Italy, such as Piedmontese, Lombard and Veneto, a.o. Considering the language variation between (i) and (ii), Zanuttini (1994) proposes that the negation marker is generated in NegP situated below TP but negation is interpreted in a higher functional position, namely PolP, accounting for the polarity value of the structure. For the time being, we will follow Zanuttini's (1994) analysis and will assume that NegP is situated below T.

With the above observations concerning, on the one hand, the structure of Bulgarian

yes-no questions and, on the other, the position of NegP where negation originates, we now proceed to our proposal for analysis of negative yes-no questions, assuming the structure in (31) below:

- (31) [EvalP Op [Eval° [IntP [Int° [PolP [Pol° li [x, ¬x] [TP [T° [NegP [Neg° [vP [v° [VP [V°

As discussed in the previous section, in the present work we adopt Ambar's (2003) proposal for the structure of the Left Periphery of the sentence according to which EvaluativeP and AssertiveP are the speaker's projections and take part of the domain defined as the Common Ground (Heim 1982). Following this proposal, we suggest that EvaluativeP projects in negative yes-no questions being the domain responsible for the codification of the speaker's evaluations and kind of attitude. Under (31), the syntactic expression of positively biased negative yes-no questions involves higher raising of the negated verb to Eval°, triggered by the existence of an Eval Op, as further illustrated in (32b):

- (32) a. Ivan ne kupi li nešto?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q something  
 "Didn't John buy something?"  
 b. [TopP Ivan<sub>k</sub> [EvalP Op [Eval° ne kupi<sub>i</sub> li<sub>j</sub> [IntP [Int' ne-kupi<sub>i</sub> li<sub>j</sub> [PolP  
     John Neg bought Q  
     [Pol° ne kupi<sub>i</sub> li<sub>j</sub> [TP Ivan<sub>k</sub> [T° ne-kupi<sub>i</sub> [NegP [Neg° ne [vP Ivan<sub>k</sub> kupi<sub>i</sub>  
     nešto]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]  
     something

The derivation in (32b) proceeds as follows: as in standard yes-no questions, the negated verb raises to Pol° where it attaches to the particle *li*. The complex *V-li* then raises to Int° for reasons related to the valuation of the unvalued [*u*Pol] feature and the unvalued [*u*V] feature. Higher raising to Eval° is then triggered by the Eval Op. With the proposal in (32b), we suggest that negative yes-no questions consist in a case of the so called *Evaluative Negation* (Yoon 2011) which does not contribute to the negative interpretation of the structure but rather performs an evaluative function related to the

denotation of bias towards the positive value of the proposition. As a result of the evaluative property, the negation marker (32) can co-occur with positive indefinites like Bulgarian *nešto* “something.”

What is more, the activation of Evaluative is also regarded as the trigger for the ungrammaticality of the structure in (4) above, repeated for ease as (33), illustrating the blocking of NC in Bulgarian:

- (33) \*Ivan ne kupi li ništo?  
 John not bought.3p.sg Q nothing  
 Intended reading: Didn't John buy anything?

Assuming that negation in negative yes-no questions performs an evaluative function related to the expression of the speaker's bias and kind of attitude, the ban on the co-occurrence between negation and n-words is seen as a result of the evaluative property of the negation marker and the relation to *nonveridicality* the structure displays. Given that negation is not truly negative, it is unable to license n-words, resulting in the ungrammaticality of structures like (33). It is important to note that the ungrammaticality of (33) can be also regarded as a result of the behaviour of Bulgarian n-words and the patterns between n-words and focus XP constituents (c.f. (14) above) discussed in section 2. For the time being, we leave the discussion of this question for future research.

## 6. Conclusion remarks

Our goal in this paper is to discuss negative yes-no questions capitalising on the expletive meaning of negation which is seemingly void of negative content and favours the expression of the speaker's belief in the positive value of the proposition. The fact that negative yes-no questions express positive bias has been furthermore addressed from the perspective of Bulgarian negative yes-no questions which denote an unexpected blocking of NC precluding the occurrence of n-words. Considering these data, we noticed some intriguing parallels concerning the properties of expletive negation in (i) negative yes-no questions, (ii) Degree Wh-Exclamatives and (iii) subjunctive main and embedded clauses. Considering the contexts in (i)-(iii) and assuming that the relation to *nonveridicality* is what triggers the expletive meaning of negation and the characteristic

evaluative flavour denoted in such contexts (Yoon 2011), we proposed that negative yes-no questions, like subjunctive clauses, activate the functional projection EvaluativeP (Ambar 2003, 2016) accounting for the speaker's evaluations and kind of attitude.

Many questions remain unsettled especially when it comes to the behaviour of the answering system, the properties of the Eval Op, the formation of the alternatives {p, ¬p} in negative yes-no questions denoting positive bias and the position of the negation marker. These questions will be discussed in future research.

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