SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ENGLISH AND POLISH QUESTION-ANSWERING SYSTEMS

ANNA CHAREZIŃSKA

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Despite some syntactic differences between English and Polish questions, it seems justified to claim that in English and Polish the relation between a question and its answer is of a similar nature in the sense that a proper answer supplies the information asked for in the question. Therefore, it seems possible to express the question answer relations by way of systematic rules which would hold true for two or more language. It goes without saying that the choice of the theoretical framework for such an analysis is of prime importance and preconditions the shape of the final results. It has been argued more than once by Contrastive Generative grammarians that some language facts cannot be compared along purely syntactic lines, i.e. without resort to semantics and pragmatics, if the comparison is to be meaningful and revealing. The present paper is meant to provide some support for the above claim, however, at the present moment we are not able to offer a formal analysis of the English and Polish question-answering systems, but a preliminary discussion on the subject.

The English question-answering systems were discussed by E. Pope (1972, 1973), therefore the English material will be taken from her analysis. It seems worthwile devoting more space to Pope's account since her claims are of a universal nature and might hold true also for the Polish material. Pope establishes two question-answering systems possible in natural languages: a positive-negative system and an agreement-disagreement question-answering system. In the former system an answer is positive (Yes) if it does not contain a sentential negation in its highest clause and negative (No) if it does. This system operates in English. In the agreement-disagreement system an answer is agreeing (Yes) if it matches the question with respect to negativity and disagreeing if it does not. There are four categories of answers to Yes-No questions:

positive question ⟨ positive answer (P.A.-positive agreement)
                   ⟨ negative answer (N.D.-negative disagreement)
negative question ⟨ positive answer (P.D.-positive disagreement)
                   ⟨ negative answer (N.A.-negative agreement)

Agreement and disagreement mean syntactic agreement and disagreement with respect to the negativity of a question and its answer.

As far as positive questions are concerned, despite some syntactic differences (discussed in a number of works, e.g. Fisiak et al. 1978, Krzeszowski 1974) we may assume that Polish and English questions are basically similar and are used in similar contexts but for the fact that "a number of English positive questions appear in Polish as negative questions ... In English a negative question might sound rude, while in Polish it is just the more polite way of asking ("would-you-mind" type) e.g.

Have you seen him between eleven and twelve?
Czy nie widziałeś go ... "(Cygan 1973 : 321)

Answers to positive questions are always:[1]

No+neg S and Yes+S
Nie+neg S and Tak+S

irrespective of the answering system operating within the language:

Has John left yet?
No, he hasn't.
Yes, he has.
Czy Janek już wyszedł?
Nie, jeszcze nie.
Tak, już wyszedł.

A negative answer always means disagreement whereas a positive answer means agreement.

The situation becomes more complex when we turn to negative questions as the two systems diverge. English, which basically has the positive-negative system, displays the following phenomenon: (Pope 1973 : 489):

1) Q. Doesn't anybody like you?
   No (not(anybody likes me)) ⇒ Nobody likes me (N.A.)
   (not not (anybody likes me)) ⇒ (ø) (anybody likes me)
   ⇒ ? Yes, somebody likes me.   (P.D.)

2) Q. Does nobody like you?
   Yes (nobody likes me)   (N.A.)
   ? No (not) nobody likes me() ⇒ Nobody doesn't like me
   No, somebody likes me.   (P.D.)

In the first example we see the positive-negative question-answering system at work while in the second set of answers the agreement-disagreement system comes into prominence. The latter system is however less favoured in English and operates only when questions with NP negation are not considered to be negative.[2]

Pope's rules for English answers are as follows:

Sneg answer-→negative (No)
-Sneg answer→positive (Yes) (Pope 1972 : 199).

These rules hold true also for texts where a negative statement is followed by a confirmation or a denial of what has been previously asserted:

3) He doesn't want to work.
   No, he doesn't.   (N.A.)
   Yes, he does.   (P.D.)
   *Yes, he doesn't.
   *No, he does.

Therefore, if a negative statement or question is followed by a negative response, it means agreement on the part of the hearer.

As has been stated by Zabrocki (Fisiak et al. 1978 : 193) "in Polish, however, the use of "nie" always indicates a disagreement, the denial of what has been previously asserted, e.g.

A: On nie chce pracować. B: Nie, on chce. (disagreement)
                            (?Nie, on nie chce)

A: On chce pracować. B: Nie, on nie chce. (disagreement)
                            (?Nie, on chce)"

Therefore, the relation between a statement and its comment or response seems to be of agreement-disagreement type, and we might apply Pope's rules (1972 : 199), in a slightly paraphrased form, to the above sentences:

αSneg statement, -αSneg comment →disagreement
αSneg statement, αSneg comment →agreement

---

1. Nie — positive sentence or Tak — negative sentence does not necessarily mean that the answer must be formulated in this way, it may mean that the answer would be of that form if No or Yes were to be followed by a sentence.

2. Pope introduces the notion of Discourse Sentential negation which she defines in the following way: "In a set of related sentences, the first sentence is an instance of DS negation if only the obligatory negative placement rules have applied to it. The obligatory rules are the one that attaches negatives to the auxiliary and the one that incorporates negatives into indefinites which precede the auxiliary ... Consequently, only negative questions (those with a negative attached to the auxiliary) are instances of discourse sentential negation" (1972:201).

Naturally, absolute negation (nie) is employed whenever a disagreement between a statement and its comment occurs.

It seems that by way of analogy these rules might be applied to negative questions and their answers. (Cygan 1973 : 324) states:

"In answers to general questions (and in comments on statements) in the English system the form of the question (or statement) does not count, the answer (comment) being entirely dependent on the actual fact (extra-linguistic situation). In Polish two factors, viz both the form of the question (statement) and the situation are interrelated and bear upon the form of the answer (comment). If the two systems are thought of in mathematical terms, the English system is reminiscent of addition of a relative number (positive or negative) to a number which is indifferent as to its sign, i.e. "O" (since only $O=+O$ or $-O$) ... The Polish system, which involves two factors, resembles mathematically multiplication of relatives numbers, where two identical signs yield a positive result, while two opposite signs result in the negative meaning of the product. Thus for Polish we have:

Form of question	Fact	Answer
positive	positive	tak
positive	negative	nie
negative	positive	nie
negative	negative	tak"

From the above table it follows that Polish is a language of the agreement-disagreement question-answering system. However, as the following quotations from various literary works show, this is too broad a generalization:

6. Czy nic panią nie zaniepokoiło?[3]
   Nie, nic.
   Didn't anything alarm you?
   No, nothing.
7. Czy pani doprawdy nie wie co się stało?
   Nie, nie wiem.
   Don't you really know what happened?
   No, I don't know.
8. Czy moja żona nie telefonowała?
   Nie.
   Didn't my wife telephone?
   No.

9. Czy nie zostawił jakiejś wiadomości?
   Nie, nic nie zostawił.
   Hasn't he left some message?
   No, he hasn't left anything.
10. Czy któryś z panów nie znalazł mego długopisu?
    Owszem, zostawił pan na biurku.
    Hasn't one/some of you found my pen?
    Why yes, you have left it on the desk.
11. Ty też nie przychodzisz?
    Tak. (nie przychodzę)
    You too aren't coming?
    Yes. (I'm not coming)
12. Nie ożeniłeś się?
    Nie, nie ożeniłem się.
    Didn't you get married?
    No, I didn't.
13. Czy z pana nigdy się nie wyśmiewała?
    Nie.
    Didn't she ever laugh at you?
    No.
14. Czy nie zwracał się do pana z prośbą o pożyczkę wielce szanowny książę?
    Didn't His Highness Prince ever tap you for a loan?
    No, he didn't.
15. Czy kogoś jeszcze nie ma?
    Tak, paru osób.
    Is someone not here yet?
    Yes, a few people.
16. Czy nie zdążę już na żaden pociąg?
    Nie, zdąży pani.
    Won't I catch any train?
    No, you will.
17. Nie lubisz mnie, Cortez?
    Ależ tak, lubię cię.
    You don't like me Cortez?
    Why yes, I do like you.

As can be seen from the above examples, answers to negative questions may take the following forms:

Nie+negative sentence (6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14)
Tak+negative sentence (11, 15)

3. The examples come from the following sources: example 6: Clifford (1970:56); example 7: Clifford (1970:81); example 8: Kłodzińska (1969:146); example 9: Kłodzińska (1969:187) example 10: Kłodzińska (1969:96); example 11: Pisarkowa (1975:172) example 12: Dostojewski (1977:276); example 13: Dostojewski (1977:493); example 14: Dostojewski (1977:508).

Tak+positive sentence (10, 17)
Nie+positive sentence (16)

In view of the above facts two questions arise. One is whether we should treat all questions containing the negative particle "nie" in preverbal position as negative questions. If so, what is the principle governing the distribution of absolute *Tak* and *Nie* answers in Polish?

It is not always clear which sentences should be treated as negative. For Cygan a sentence is negative when the verb is negative:

"Instead of a negative sentence (negative verb) we may have the negative element placed next to some other part of the sentence the result being a positive sentence with only part of it negative". (1973 : 306). However, Pasicki (1976 : 106) is of a different opinion:

"It seems that sentences ... where only the verb phrase is negated, ought to be treated as ordinary affirmative sentences containing a negated element, rather than as negative sentences". A nice way out of this seeming impasse is offered by Nagucka's proposal (1978 : 35—36):

"The initial statement is that for S two notions are relevant, that of modality and that of proposition.

S — Modality Proposition

Modality contains semantic primitives, one of which is "I diswant" (Nolo) responsible for negation ... In our understanding of the mental act of negation there are two different relations affected by it and next involved in the grammatical process of negativization. They are: 1) the relation between NPs and VP, or the relation between VP and NPs, and 2) the relation between Det and N ... By convention we may agree that whenever in the derivation of the sentence there appears any one or all of the relations given above the process of negativization may take place, or to put it differently, any relation specified in terms of grammatical categories (1—2) is liable to the act of negation, or rather that any act of negation refers to any or all of the relations specified in grammatical terms". Hence all sentences containing negation have the following semantic structure:

nolo r (argument (s) VP)

In negative questions modality would have to contain additionally the semantic primitive which would be responsible for the interrogative function of the sentence. Yet the exact nature of the relation between the two semantic primitives is still unclear. There is no doubt, however, that negative questions are of a very complex semantic character in their deep structure and that they carry additional implications and expectations which are absent in positive questions. Employing a negatiove question "the speaker seems to be communic-

ating the fact that recent evidence suggests that the question will elicit a negative answer although previously the speaker would have expected an affirmative answer. "(Chafe 1970 : 322). In other words, a negative question has a positive supposition[4] and a negative expectation, in the sense that it expects a negative answer. Some types of negative questions seem to be exceptional in this respect however, as they either expect a positive answer or are neutral, i.e. have no bias at all, e.g.

18. Czy któryś z panów nie znalazł mego długopisu?
    Hasn't one of you found my pen?
19. Czy nie dzwonił ktoś do mnie?
    Didn't someone call me?
20. Czy nie widziałeś gdzieś mojego zeszytu?
    Haven't you seen my notebook somewhere?
21. Czy nie jesteś jeszcze głodna?
    Aren't you still hungry?
22. Czy nie mógłbyś mi podać tamtą książkę?
    Couldn't you hand me that book?

Semantically, these questions are equivalent to their respective positive questions, that is, they are merely requests for information. It seems that they do not carry the implications which are typical of negative questions. They may even use the Accusative object case (e.g. 6, 22) although normally the object takes the Genitive case in negative sentences. Quite surprising then is the fact that in place of assertive-indefinite referential NPs their non-assertive-non-referential counterparts are sometimes used in these questions:

23. Czy nie dzwonił nikt do mnie?
24. Czy nie widziałaś żadnego z moich studentów?

As these questions expect a positive answer, a Tak+negative sentence answer would sound strange:

Czy nie dzwonił nikt/ktoś do mnie?
?Tak, nikt nie dzwonił.

A Nie+negative sentence answer sounds correct:

Nie, nikt nie dzwonił.
?Nie, dzwonił ktoś

---

4. Supposition is used here in the meaning of Pope: "Supposition of a question is not its expected answer, but the speaker's original belief with regard to the matter at hand. (By original belief I mean what the speaker had been supposing just prior to the event that prompted him to ask the question)". 1972:105).

Also a Tak+positive answer answer may be used:

Owszem[5] {
Tak   } dzwonił ktoś, ale nie przedstawił się.

Czy nie jesteś jeszcze głodna?

?Tak, już nie jestem
Nie, już nie jestem
Tak, jeszcze jestem
?Nie, jeszcze jestem

Note that in the last question "jeszcze" has the meaning "still" as in the positive sentence, therefore in a negative answer "już" meaning "any more" has to be used[6].

Since the answers to this type of questions are of the form Nie+negative sentence or Tak+positive sentence, one might be tempted to claim that this is an instance of the positive-negative question-answering system at work. Yet, it seems that a more faithful interpretation would be given if we did not take the form of the question into account but rather its meaning, which is clearly positive, not negative. How to account then for the presence of negation in these questions and what semantic interpretation is available for them, particularly that questions of the same form may have a negative meaning; compare:

25. Czy kogoś jeszcze nie ma?
    Is somebody not here yet?
26. Czy ktoś czegoś jeszcze nie podpisał?
    Has somebody not signed something yet?
27. Czy on często nie dotrzymuje słowa?
    Is it often that he doesn't keep his promise?
28. Czy wielu twoich kolegów nie dostało się na studia?
    Did many of your friends fail to get to the university?
29. Czy ktoś nie widział jeszcze moich nowych obrazów?
    Has someone not seen my new pictures yet?

These questions, like the former type, also use non-specific referential forms "ktoś", "coś" (someone, something) but negation seems to play quite a different role here. Compare:

A. Czy ktoś nie widział moich nowych obrazów?
   (I don't know where they are, perhaps someone has seen them somewhere)

---

[5] "Owszem" is stronger than "tak", meaning "why yes". Perhaps that is why, it is more readily used in positive answers to negative questions than "tak" which is felt to be too weak.

6. Consult Pasicki's paper "JUŻ, JESZCZE and their English equivalents" on the distribution of these adverbs with regard to negation.

B. Czy ktoś nie widział (jeszcze) moich nowych obrazów?
   (If there's anybody who hasn't seen them, I have them in my studio.)

In question B. negation is restricted to the verb only resulting in a different meaning, viz the speaker is interested in the negative fact, that is, in *not seeing* the pictures, whereas in question A. he is interested in a positive fact, i.e. in somebody's *seeing* the pictures. Not surprisingly then, the answers are different:

A. Czy ktoś nie widział moich nowych obrazów?
   Nie (nikt nie widział)
   Owszem, ja widziałam. Są...
B. Czy ktoś nie widział jeszcze moich nowych obrazów?
   Owszem, *ja* nie widziałam.
   Yes, I haven't seen them
   ?Nie, ja nie widziałam
   Nie, wszyscy widzieli
   ?Tak, {
              wszyscy widzieli
              ktoś widział
              ja widziałam
            }

30. Czy on często nie dotrzymuje słowa?
    Tak, często (nie dotrzymuje)
    ?Tak, {
              zawsze dotrzymuje
              nie często
              rzadko
            }
    Nie, {
              nie często
              zawsze dotrzymuje
              rzadko
            }

31. Czy któryś z referatów nie został jeszcze wysłany?
    Hasn't some paper been sent yet?
    Tak, tylko nie wiem który (nie został wysłany)
    Yes, but I don't know which one (hasn't been sent yet)
    ?Nie, tylko nie wiem który
    Nie, wszystkie już zostały wysłane
    No, all of them have been sent already

32! Czy kogoś nie lubisz?
    Nie, *nikogo* nie nie lubię ———→ Wszystkich lubię
    No, I don't like nobody ———→ I like everybody
    Tak, ale nie powiem kogo (nie lubię)
    Yes, but I won't tell you whom (I don't like)
    ?Nie kogoś nie lubię
    ?Tak wszystkich lubię

Answers to the above questions take the following form:

    Nie+positive sentence
    Tak+negative sentence

where "tak" is the confirmation of the form of the question and "nie" means disagreement through the intermediate stage of negating the form of the question and is realized either as a sentence with no negation or as a sentence with two negatives present, being then an overt negativization of the question:

    Czy wielu twoich kolegów nie dostało się na studia?
    Nie, *niewielu nie* dostało się na studia

Therefore the relation between these questions and their answers is that of agreement-disagreement. Notice that in contrast to the previous type of questions where ktoś, coś (somebody, something) forms could be substituted with nikt, nic (nobody, nothing) forms, here the substitution results in a considerable change of meaning:

    Czy kogoś jeszcze nie ma?
    Czy nikogo jeszcze nie ma?

In the second question, negation is not limited to the verb only and the difference in meaning and therefore in the scope of negation between the two questions seems to parallel the difference in scope between the following sentences:

    "Some of the girls didn't come.
    /s some EXIST /s neg/ some of the girls came/
    None of the girls came.
    /sneg/ssome EXIST/s some of the girls came/" (Hogg 1977:108).

Compare:

    A. Czy ktoś jeszcze czegoś nie podpisał?
    B. Czy nikt jeszcze niczego nie podpisał?
    A. Czy kogoś nie lubisz?
    B. Czy nikogo nie lubisz?
    A. Czy ktoś nie zdał egzaminu?
    B. Czy nikt nie zdał egzaminu?

Questions B. have a positive supposition and a negative expectation, therefore they often express astonishment, whereas questions A. are more neutral in this respect, that is, the speaker may have no supposition whatever as to the matter at hand, however, it is usually a negative event which prompts him to ask the question, hence the negative expectation of the question which is confirmed by a "tak" answer when the fact is negative. On the other hand, questions B., although they also seem to expect a negative answer, they may

be freely answered with a Nie+negative sentence answer, perhaps because the expectation is weakened by an accompanying positive supposition:

33. Telefony? Phone calls?
    Nie było ani jednego. There were none.
    Jak to... Milo Rainey nie telefonował?
    How come... Didn't Milo Rainey call?
    Nie, Dade, No. Dade.
    (Tak, nie telefonował)
34. Jak to nikogo nie ma?
    How come nobody's here?
    Nikt tu nie był?
    Nobody was here?
    Nie, nikt. No, nobody.
    (tak, nikt)
35. Czy nie ma tu już mojego męża?
    Ins't my husband here any longer?
    Nie, już go nie ma, No, he isn't here
    (Tak, już go nie ma)
36. Czy nikt nie wysłał jeszcze referatu na Konferencję?
    Hasn't anybody sent his paper for the Conference yet?
    Nic, nikt No, nobody
    (Tak, nikt)
37. Czy nie dostałaś jeszcze wszystkich zaliczeń?
    Haven't you got all the signatures yet?
    Nie, jeszcze nie mam wszystkich
      No, I haven't got all of them
      (Tak, jeszcze nie mam wszystkich)

It turns out that both Tak+negative sentence and Nie+negative sentence are possible answers, however the former seem to me less natural. Still both possibilities exist in Polish, which means that the positive-negative and the agreement-disagreement question-answering systems coexist and that both "tak" and "nie" in answer to:

    Czy nic nie kupiłaś?
    Tak
    Nie

may mean "I haven't bought anything". If we wanted to deny the expectation of the question, a one-word answer would be unsatisfactory and confusing. Therefore, a fuller answer would have to be used:

    Ależ tak, kupiłam.
    Nie, kupiłam.

This confirms Pope's hypothesis that Positive Disagreement is the most difficult category of answers to Yes-No questions. "There is no doubt that the act of disagreeing is more marked than the act of agreeing. It constitutes a departure from what is expected... If a question is negative in form, the easy answer is the one that is also negative in form" (Pope 1972:188).

Quite surprising then is the fact that in Polish not infrequently both possible answers are used:

38. Czy nikogo nie spotkałaś
    Did you meet nobody?
    Tak, nie, nikogo. Yes, no, nobody.

The first answer is the confirmation of the negative expectation of the speaker and the second is the answer to the question.

So far we have divided negative questions into three groups from the point of view of their answers:

1) questions with Tak+positive sentence and Nie+negative sentence answers — Pope's positive-negative question-answering system,
2) questions with Tak+negative sentence and Nie+positive sentence answers — Pope's agreement-disagreement question-answering system,
3) questions with either Tak+positive sentence and Nie+negative sentence or Tak+negative sentence and Nie+positive sentence answers — Pope's systems coexist here.

In the light of the above facts it seems impossible to formulate any rules for the Polish questions on the basis of syntactic facts alone, as Pope has done for English. In Pope's account, the choice of a No or Yes answer is dependent on the deep structure of the question or rather on the distinction between obligatory and optional negative placement rules. Since Polish lacks optional negative placement rules, the question-answering systems cannot be formulated in terms of such a distinction. Moreover, it seems that the terms: Agreement and Disagreement, if they are to be applied meaningfully to the analysis of Polish question-answering systems, are bound to mean somewhat more than just the negativity switch between the question and its answer. Agreement and disagreement are relative of the speaker and the hearer rather than of the question and its answer. One might argue that it is impossible to agree or disagree with a Yes-No question, however, if we assume that all questions either expect a "positive" or a "negative" response, which is the case even with the so-called neutral questions, then we may posit a rule of pragmatic implicature relating every question to the "invited" or "expected" answer. Hence, the hearer would confirm or deny the proposition implied pragmatically by the speaker. As to positive questions, they usually expect a positive answer, although the expectation is relatively weak when compared to that of nega-

tive questions. The latter are usually accompanied by a complex set of presuppositions, implications and expectations. It is difficult to say at the moment why some negative questions expect a positive response while other, which are very similar or identical in form, expect a negative answer. Too little attention has been devoted to the semantics and pragmatics of negative questions, for us to be able to solve that problem now. There is no doubt however, that better understanding of these issues is prerequisite to any conclusive account of the Polish question-answering systems.

SOURCES

Clifford, F. 1976. *Żegnaj Grosvenor Square*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax. Trans. by Ir na Doleżal-Nowicka.

Dostojewski, F. 1977. *Idiota*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy. Transl. by Jerzy Jędrzejewicz.

Kłodzińska, A. 1969. *Świetlista igła*. Warszawa: Czytelnik.

Pisarkowa, K. 1975. *Składnia rozmowy telefonicznej*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

REFERENCES

Chafe, W. 1976. *Meaning and the structure of language*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Cygan, J. 1973. "Negation in English and Polish". *PSiCL* 2. 295—330.

Fisiak, J., et al. 1978. *An introductory English-Polish contrastive grammar*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Hogg, R. M. 1977. *English quantifier systems*. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company.

Krzeszowski, T. P. 1974. *Contrastive generative grammar. Theoretical foundations*. Łódź: Uniwersytet Łódzki.

Nagucka, R. 1978. *Negatively phrased utterances in English*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Pasicki, A. 1976. "JUŻ, JESZCZE and their English equivalents". *PSiCL* 5. 103—110.

Pisarkowa, K. 1975. *Składnia rozmowy telefonicznej*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

Pope, E. 1972. *Questions and answers in English*. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, The M.I.T.

Pope, E. 1973. "Question-answering systems". *CLS 9*. 482—492.