

## *YES, NO AND SO*

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1.0. Consider the following questions:

1. Is he going to London tomorrow?
2. Are they at the theatre this evening?
3. Has David gone home?
4. Did it rain yesterday?
5. Do the Browns live in England?
6. Did Tom buy a new car?
7. Can your brother swim well?
8. Have you time today?

All of the above questions are representatives of the large group of the so-called Yes-No Questions, or Polar Interrogative Questions. That is, each of the questions can be answered by either *Yes* or *No*. What is interesting about these questions is that each of them consists of a choice of alternatives, one of them positive and the other one negative. Therefore, questions 1 - 8 can be paraphrased in the following way:

- 1a. Is he going to London tomorrow or is he not going to London tomorrow?
- 2a. Are they at the theatre this evening or are they not at the theatre this evening?
- 3a. Has David gone home or has David not gone home?
- 4a. Did it rain yesterday or did it not rain yesterday?
- 5a. Do the Browns live in England or do the Browns not live in England?
- 6a. Did Tom buy a new car or did Tom not buy a new car?
- 7a. Can your brother swim well or can your brother not swim well?
- 8a. Have you time today or have you not time today?

It follows from the above examples that the task of the listener is simplified to just choosing between the two offered possibilities. And thus, if the positive

alternate is decided upon, the speaker is provided with an affirmative answer to his question, and when the negative alternate is chosen the speaker is provided with a negative answer. Consider:

- 1b. Yes, he is.
- c. No, he isn't.
- 2b. Yes, they are.
- c. No, they are not.
- 3b. Yes, he has.
- c. No, he hasn't., etc.

to justify but a few. Generally speaking, each of the answers consists of a *Yes* or *No* implying that the whole sentence is either positive or negative, and of the positive or negative disjunct of the question. However, it is also possible for the listener to answer in the following way:

- 1d. Yes, I think so.
- e. No, I don't think so.
- 2d. Yes, I hope so.
- e. No, I don't suppose so.
- 6d. Yes, he said so.
- e. No, he didn't say so., etc.

where both *Yes* and *No* are present marking the status of the whole sentences but what follows them are not disjuncts of their corresponding questions. The problem that arises is whether it is possible to judge responses (b — e) by the same set of criteria or whether (d) and (e) responses should be sharply separated from (b) and (c), and not considered proper answers to their corresponding questions.

To solve the problem we would like to briefly analyse the process of formulating the affirmative (*Yes*), negative (*No*), and *So*-type of responses and see what their semantic implications are.

## 2.0. *Yes and No.*

Let us assume that the speaker asks the listener one of the following questions:

- 1. Is he going to London tomorrow?
- 3. Has David gone home?
- 4. Did it rain yesterday?
- 6. Did Tom buy a new car?
- 8. Have you time today?

As has been already pointed out, each of the above questions is, in fact, a set of

alternatives. This means that at the very moment of being exposed to the question asked, the listener is provided with a choice of alternatives one of which constitutes the proper answer to the speaker's question.

For a situation like this to be true one condition must be fulfilled, namely that the listener in fact possesses the necessary information. However, for the sake of the present investigation it is assumed that this condition is met.

Thus, the questions asked by the speaker have actually the forms represented by 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a and 8a. If the listener's knowledge of his world permits him to agree with the positive alternate, the speaker receives an affirmative answer to his question. Compare:

- 1b. Yes, he is.
- 1b'. Yes, he is going to London tomorrow.
- 3b. Yes, he has.
- b'. Yes, he has gone home.
- 4b. Yes, it did.
- b'. Yes, it rained yesterday.
- 6b. Yes, he did.
- b'. Yes, he bought a new car.
- 8b. Yes, I have.
- b'. Yes, I have time today.

On the other hand, it may be that the negative alternate is true according to the listener's knowledge of his world, and thus the negative part of the question constitutes the proper answer:

- 1c. No, he isn't.
- c'. No, he is not going to London tomorrow.
- 3c. No, he hasn't.
- c'. No, he has not gone home.
- 4c. No, it didn't.
- c'. No, it did not rain yesterday.
- 6c. No, he didn't.
- c'. No, he did not buy a new car.
- 8c. No, I haven't.
- c'. No, I have not time today.

2.1. Notice that it is not necessary for the proper answer to a *Yes-No* Question to repeat the positive or negative alternates in their full forms. For an answer to be properly constructed and fully understood, it is enough to consist of either *Yes* or *No*, which are overt syntactic markers of affirmation or negation, plus subject and verb of the question. If the question concerns the

second person singular or plural, then the *you* from the question is changed into *I* or *we* in the answer, cf. 8 b, c. Apart from this, if the verb of the question is an ordinary verb, i.e., one about which we ask by means of an auxiliary verb *Do* or *Did*, then, in the case of an affirmative answer it is either retained, as in (4b) and (6b), or is replaced by the respective ordinary verb, as in (4b') and (6b'), which are more syntactically elaborate counterparts of 4b and 6b.

2.1.1. The optionality of the presence or the absence of the object from the answer can be accounted for on the basis of the strict situational context of question and answer. Thus, for example, if the speaker asks (9):

9. Are you a doctor?

the listener may answer:

9a. Yes, I am.

leaving out the object, i.e., *a doctor*, as it has its antecedent in the immediately preceding question, and repeating it in the answer is not necessary for the proper understanding of the answer.

2.2. However, answers where only one of the two constituents of a proper answer is present also exist in English, cf.:

10. Are they coming?

- a. Yes, they are.
- b. Yes.
- c. They are.

where (a) is the proper answer. Is there any difference between a, b and c responses, or do (b) and (c) have the same semantic status as (a), since they consist of one of the two constituents of (a)?

For most of my informants (British English speakers), there was a clearly marked difference between (a) and (c) answers. For all native speakers of English (a) is a spontaneous answer to its preceding question, containing, apart from the confirmation of the positive alternate of (10), no hidden information. Thus, 10a constitutes what we call in the present paper the proper answer to its corresponding question.

(10c) also tells the speaker that the positive alternate of the question is the true one, but apart from this it also carries with itself some additional information, such as warning, disappointment, anxiety, etc. The type of information is deduced either from the circumstances of the conversational situation, or simply from the tone of voice, special intonation applied, etc. But even when

(10c) is uttered with the normal falling intonation typical of answers, it still contains the additional overtones.

(10b) is treated by some of native speakers on a par with (10a), while for others it has the semantic status very much resembling that of (10c). Thus, even though the latter group is smaller, it is by no means possible to include (10b) in the group of proper answers.

The investigation carried out for negative responses proved the above observations. Therefore, it can be safely said that the English proper answer to its corresponding question is only that one which semantically contains no other information than that of confirming one of the two alternates included in the question itself, and syntactically it must consist of the syntactic marker of semantic affirmation or negation, i.e., *Yes* or *No* together with the corresponding alternate of the question. Responses which carry with themselves additional semantic information and which appear on the surface in an abbreviated form are not proper answers in English. This, of course, means that these responses do not fulfil the requirements of a given speech situation and not that they are semantically or syntactically deviant structures.

3.0. Polish Polar Interrogative Questions, the same as the English ones, also consist of a choice of alternatives, cf.:

- 11. Czy on jedzie jutro do Londynu czy też nie jedzie jutro do Londynu?
- 12. Czy (on) poszedł już do domu czy jeszcze nie poszedł do domu?
- 13. Czy padało wczoraj czy też nie padało wczoraj?
- 14. Czy on kupił nowy samochód czy nie kupił nowego samochodu?
- 15. Czy masz dziś czas czy też nie masz dziś czasu?

Each of Polish polar interrogatives can be answered by either *Yes* or *No*, i.e., *Tak* or *Nie*. All three types of English responses are also permitted in Polish, cf.,

- 1. Is he going to London tomorrow?
- b. Yes, he is.
- f. Yes.
- g. He is.
- 11. Czy on jedzie jutro do Londynu?
- a. Tak, jedzie.
- b. Tak.
- c. Jedzie.

It is very interesting to notice that, just as in English, Polish (11b) and (11c) responses do not fulfil the requirements of being proper answers to (11). If one responds to (11) by (11c) there is always some hidden information accompanying the response, e.g., *He is, and don't ask me any more questions*

(*Jedzie i nie zadawaj mi więcej pytań*), or *He is, and I hope he'll buy me the things I asked him for* (*Jedzie i mam nadzieję, że kupi mi rzeczy, o które go prosilam*), etc. As for (11b), for some speakers it sounds as if the listener wanted to cut the conversation short, sounding even impolite, while for others there is nothing curious about it and they are inclined to assign it the same status as that of (11a).

Thus, a generalization can be made that in spite of the different syntactic character of the two languages, both in English and in Polish proper answers are only those responses that in terms of semantics provide the information of, and only of, the truth of one of the two alternates of the question and which, in syntactic terms, consist of *Yes* or *No* (*Tak* or *Nie*) marking the semantic choice plus the corresponding alternate, in its full or abbreviated form.

3.2. This brings us to the problem of the importance of *Yes* and *No* (*Tak* and *Nie*). The fact that they must always appear at the very beginning of the answer, or that they may even, for some speakers, stand for the whole answer, might suggest that these are the earliest specified constituents in the whole process of formulating an answer.

The only request the speaker puts to the listener asking his question is that he either agrees or disagrees with one of the two alternates included in his question, and that is how the listener begins formulating his answer. The two alternates are in complementary distribution, i.e., if one is true the other one is false; if we agree with one, we simultaneously disagree with the other. The two alternates express opposite negativity. We should thus suggest that the *Yes* and *No* (*Tak* and *Nie*) are in their most underlying form represented as something like AFFIRMATION and NEGATION, or POSITIVE and NEGATIVE, and in further derivation they are replaced by *Yes* and *No*, respectively. The immediate consequence of the primary choice is the follow-up of either positive or negative alternate of the question. Thus, the primary choice of POSITIVE or NEGATIVE would be the governing one upon which the remainder of the answer would depend.

#### 4.0. *The problem of So.*

To show that it is not, however, possible to draw a strict boundary between affirmative and negative answers differentiated by means of *Yes* or *No* markers, let us analyse a few examples:

1. Is he going to London tomorrow?
  - d. Yes, I think so.
  - e. No, I don't think so.

2. Are they at the theatre this evening?
  - d. I think so.
  - e. I don't think so.
3. Has David gone home?
  - d. Yes, I hope so.
  - e. I hope so.
6. Did Tom buy a new car?
  - d. Yes, he said so.
  - e. He didn't say so.

The most striking features of these types of answers are (1) that they are introduced by *Yes* or *No* (though these are sometimes optional), and (2) what follows the *Yes* or *No* is not, in any case, the positive or negative alternate of the preceding question. These two facts seem to cast doubt on our posited analysis of proper affirmative and negative answers. Were we then right in stating that the proper answers to the type of questions under discussion, i.e., Yes-No Questions, are only those responses which begin with either *Yes* or *No* which are in turn followed by either positive or negative alternate of the question itself? In the above presented examples, both *Yes* and *No* are (or can be) present, but none of the alternates appears. Indeed, they are replaced by completely new strings of words. How should these responses be accounted for? Could they be assigned the label of proper answers to their corresponding questions because of the introductory *Yes* and *No*, and should we thus modify the definition of the proper answer to a Yes-No Question? The problem seems rather complicated.

4.1.1. First of all, there is clearly a difference between the *Yes* and *No* of examples (1b,c) and (1d, e). It is by no means possible to omit the introductory *Yes* or *No* in the former, while deleting these from (1d, e) changes neither the meaning nor the syntactic structure of the whole response, cf. examples (2d, e) or (3e). This observation can lead to the following conclusion:

Whenever the speaker asks his question he always expects the listener to confirm either the positive or the negative alternate included in his question (and, as has been already pointed out, for the matter of the present analysis we assume that the speaker's knowledge of the facts is proper). From the nature of the choice it follows that the proper answer must be either affirmative — and thus introduced by *Yes*, or negative — introduced by *No*. And there are no grounds for existence of any other response such that it could be named "proper answer".

Coming back to our examples, the very fact that *Yes* or *No* do not necessarily have to be present in the responses makes for excluding them from the group of proper answers. Apart from this, none of the alternates is present in the responses, which is another clue for further analysis.

4.2. The meaning of a proper answer is obvious — the listener provides the speaker with the necessary information missing from his knowledge of his world. Does, however, the listener fulfil this condition in the case of the latter type of responses? Is the speaker fully satisfied with the information he receives? We do not think so. *Yes* and *No* appearing at the beginning of the responses are not syntactic markers of AFFIRMATION and NEGATION, reserved for proper answers only. These are markers saying that the whole sentence expresses agreement or disagreement, in the same way as they function in positive or negative declarative sentences:

16. You played truant again, Bill!  
 a. Yes, I did.  
 b. No, I didn't.
17. John is coming to see us this Monday.  
 a. Yes, and we are all waiting for him.  
 b. No, he's sent a cable calling off his visit.

4.2.1. Let us now examine the part of the response that follows the *Yes* or *No*. As it appears from the examples (1d, e—3d, e and 6d, e), all of the responses have one feature in common (regardless of whether the response is positive or negative). This common feature is *so* which appears in each of the cited examples. It seems, then, that *so* is quite important in this type of response. And indeed, after closer examination, it appears that what *so* stands for is the positive alternate of the preceding question. Compare:

1. Is he going to London tomorrow?  
 d'. (Yes,) I think he is going to London tomorrow.  
 e'. (No,) I don't think he is going to London tomorrow.
6. Did Tom buy a new car?  
 d'. (Yes,) he said he bought a new car.  
 e'. (No,) he didn't say he bought a new car., etc.

Notice, however, that if *Yes* and *No* are deleted from the (d') and (e') responses, then the result is an "ordinary" positive or negative statement, and there is no indication of these being responses to any type of questions. Therefore, there must exist a constraint saying that whenever, during formulation of these sort of responses, the *Yes* or *No* are deleted, the positive alternate must be simultaneously replaced by *so*, otherwise the resulting structure is ambiguous.

4.2.2. It should be noticed that only one of the alternates can appear in *So*-responses, namely the positive one. This is due to the obligatory single

negation rule, typical of English. Thus, in the case of a negative response, the negation is first of all included in the introductory part of the structure and therefore only the positive alternate can be present.

4.3. Another important fact is that between *Yes* or *No* and *So* (or the positive alternate of the question), there always appears a verb such as *think*/*don't think*, *say*/*don't say*, *hope* and also *expect*/*don't expect*, *suppose*/*don't suppose*, *guess*, etc. We think that with these verbs occurs the crucial difference between the proper answer and *So*-answer to a Yes-No Question. Compare:

- 1b. Yes, he is.  
 d. Yes, I *think* (he is) (so).  
 c. No, he isn't.  
 e. No, I *don't think* (he is) (so).
- 3b. Yes, he has.  
 d. Yes, I *hope* (he has) (so).
- 6b. Yes, he did.  
 d. Yes, he *said* (he did) (so).  
 c. No, he didn't.  
 e. No, he *didn't say* (he did) (so).

In all of the (d) and (e) responses the main stress is not on the alternates but on one's *thinking*, *hoping* or *saying so*. The general meaning of these verbs is that of doubt, hesitation. And this is how one could semantically distinguish between proper answers, which are firm, doubtless ones, and *So*-responses, which are hesitant, sometimes even misleading. There is clearly a difference between saying *Yes, I will come* and *Yes, I hope I will come*, or *No, Susan can't swim very well* and *No, I don't think Susan can swim very well*.

4.4. If we investigate a few examples from Polish we can observe that the same situation as in English occurs; compare:

11. Czy on jedzie jutro do Londynu?  
 a. Tak, jedzie.  
 c. Tak, sądzę, że jedzie/tak.  
 b. (Nie), nie jedzie.  
 d. (Nie), sądzę, że nie jedzie/nie.  
 e. (Nie), nie sądzę, że jedzie/tak.
14. Czy on kupił nowy samochód?  
 a. Tak, kupił.  
 c. Myślę, że kupił/tak.  
 b. Nie, nie kupił.  
 d. Myślę, że nie kupił/nie.

In Polish the negative hesitant answer can be provided in two different ways — either by using the same form of the verb of *saying, thinking, etc.* as for the positive hesitant answer with the negation following it, e. g.:

11. Czy on jedzie jutro do Londynu?  
 c. Sądzę, że tak.  
 d. Sądzę, że nie.

or one can simply negate the verb of *saying, thinking, supposing so* without adding any other components:

- 11e. Nie sądzę.  
 Nie myślę.  
 Nie podejrzewam.

However, if one wants the structure to be followed by the corresponding alternate of the question, then it must always be, the same as in English, the positive alternate:

- 11e'. Nie sądzę, że jedzie.  
 14. Czy on kupił nowy samochód?  
 e. Nie podejrzewam, żeby kupił.

Stylistically, there is a slight difference between responding by (11 d) or (c) and (11e) or (11e'). In the case of the latter responses one sounds more convinced (but not fully convinced!) about somebody's doing or not doing something. But the component of doubt and hesitation is still present and this allows us to classify English and Polish *So*-responses in the group of *Hesitant Answers* to their corresponding questions. This automatically excludes them from the group of *Proper Answers*.<sup>1</sup>

4.5. Two observations can be stressed again: (1) that only in the case of proper answers is the occurrence of *Yes* and *No* obligatory, and (2) both in English and in Polish (optional) *Yes* and *No* appearing at the beginning

<sup>1</sup> It should be noticed here that *So*-responses do not always function as *Hesitant Answers*. They can also have the effect of weakening negative responses, e.g.:

18. Can I go with you?  
 a. I don't think so.

instead of *No, you can't*, which would sound rather harsh. *So*-responses can also be another variation of a positive answer to a question:

19. Is that book interesting?  
 a. I guess so.

Both 18a and 19a are, however, cases of sociolinguistic and not of semantic character, and that is why we did not deal with them in the present analysis.

of *So*-responses function as markers of positive or negative statements, and they do not originate as semantic notions of *AFFIRMATION* and *NEGATION* of proper answers.

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