Division of labour between polar interrogatives in Hungarian: a study in dialect semantics

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Goal

- To present the first experimental study on the use conditions of the two matrix positive polar interrogative form types in Hungarian, in two dialects.

Previous work

We rely on

- theoretical work on the general principles determining the division of labour between forms encoding positive vs. negative polar questions: Ladd (1981), Büring & Gunlogson (2000), van Rooij & Šafářová (2003), Romero & Han (2004), Farkas & Bruce (2010), and Sudo (2013), etc.,
- claims to the effect that the felicity of these forms is sensitive to the availability of "compelling contextual evidence" (Büring & Gunlogson 2000) – *evidential bias*; and the speaker's beliefs, expectations stemming from the norm or what the speaker desires – *epistemic bias* or *original speaker bias*,
- work on the interaction between the *bias profiles* of different form types within and across languages (Farkas & Roelofsen 2017, Gärtner & Gyuris 2017, etc.), and
- experimental studies on factors influencing the choice between forms encoding polar questions: Roelofsen et al. (2013), Domaneschi et al. (2017).

Data

The matrix positive polar interrogatives investigated here are the following:

(1) *Esik az eső/\?*
falls the rain
'Is it raining?'

(2) *Esik-e az eső?*
falls-PRT the rain
'Is it raining?'

(1): **/\(rise-fall)-I(nterrogative)**
marked by a rise-fall tune (L*HL%, peak on the penultimate syllable)
full-fledged interrogatives, not "rising declaratives" (allow NPIs)

(2): **-e-I(nterrogative)**
marked by the *-e* interrogative particle

Gyuris (2017):

- *-e*-Is: mark "evidential anti-bias" (incompatible with compelling contextual evidence for p or $\neg p$, require a "neutral context"),
- /\-Is: compatible with "neutral contexts" (C1) and with contexts where compelling contextual evidence for p is present (C2),
- this contrast explains why
  - *-e*-Is are used as a default in formal, official situations (e. g. court proc.)
  - *-e*-Is are dispreferred to form requests
- neither form is sensitive to epistemic bias.

Aims and hypotheses

Background:

- No published research on dialectal differences between the availability of matrix *-e*-Is vs. /\-Is to encode information-seeking questions.
- Informal evidence indicates that speakers in Western Hungary and in Budapest consider matrix *-e*-Is dispreferred in informal speech, whereas speakers in (certain regions of) Eastern Hungary do not.

Aim of current study:

- to investigate whether the preferences above can be confirmed experimentally, by comparing speakers who grew up and live in Budapest or the surrounding area (Dialect 1) and speakers from a specific region in Eastern Hungary (the area of Gyöngyös, Dialect 2), and
- to see whether increased acceptance rates for *-e*-Is (if they indeed exist) influence the acceptance rates for /\-Is.

Hypotheses:

H1: Speakers of D1 disprefer *-e*-Is in both C1 and C2.
H2: Speakers of D1 find /\-Is acceptable both in C1 and C2.
H3: Speakers of D2 disprefer *-e*-Is in C2, but find them as acceptable in C1 as /\-Is.
H4: Speakers of D2 find /\-Is less acceptable in C1 as in C2.

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Materials and methods

- Two experimental groups: 40 speakers of D1, 32 speakers of D2.
- Factor 1: C1 vs. C2,
  Factor 2: /\-I vs. *-e*-I.
- Items: a context description (presented in writing), cf. (3a)–(3b), followed by one interrogative form (presented aurally), cf. (4)–(5).
- Naturalness scores for the target sentences in the context from 1 (unnatural) to 5 (completely natural).
- Online query form (OnExp, UGöttingen), 24 exp. trials and 32 fillers.
- Statistics: linear mixed-effect models with random intercepts, fixed effects: context (C1 vs. C2) and form type (-e-I vs. /I), random effects: participant and situation.

(3) My friend Peti had a birthday last weekend. I know that he asked his parents for a smartphone.
  a. When I enter the classroom on Monday I can see that he is busy playing with a phone, smiling. I ask him the following:
  b. When I enter the classroom on Monday I can see that he is busy searching through his bag. I ask im the following:

(4) *Megkaptad-e az okostelefont a születésnapodra?*
VM.received-PRT the smartphone.ACC the birthday.your.onto
'Did you receive a smartphone for your birthday?'

(5) *Megkaptad az okostelefont a születésnapodra/\?*
'Did you receive a smartphone for your birthday?'

Results

- /\-Is were clearly preferred to *-e*-Is. Difference in medians: 3 scores, $p < 0.001$ for both groups.
- *-e*-Is: low ratings in both contexts C1 and C2.
- Overall rating of *-e*-Is significantly higher in C1. Difference in medians: 1 score, $p < 0.001$.
- In both groups, both forms received higher scores in C1 than in C2.
- For /\-Is, the effect of context was significant in both groups ($p < 0.001$).

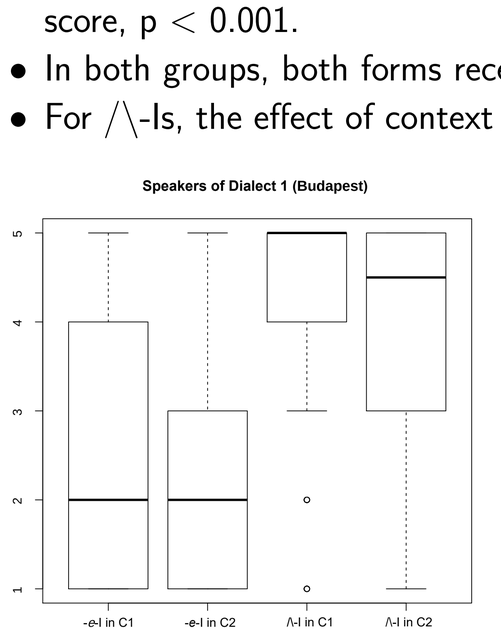

Figure 1

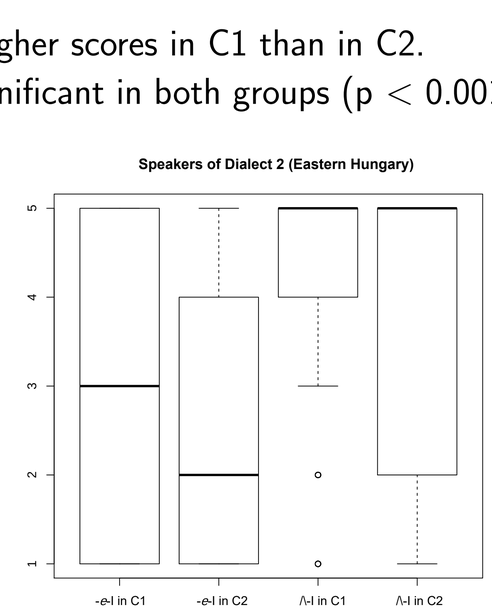

Figure 2

Discussion

H1: ✔, but the scores for *-e*-Is in C1 vs. C2 differ significantly for D1 speakers.
H2: ✔, but the scores for /\-Is in C1 vs. C2 differ significantly for D1 speakers.
H3: ✗, D2 speakers did not find *-e*-Is as acceptable in C1 as /\-Is, but the scores for *-e*-Is also differed significantly in C1 vs. C2.
H4: ✗, the scores given by D2 speakers for /\-Is are relatively high in both C1 and C2, although they are rated lower in C2.

Thus:

- both forms are rated higher in C1 than in C2 by both groups
- *-e*-Is are generally rated higher by speakers of D2 than those of D1.

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