

The Interpretive Contribution of *li* in Macedonian

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Puzzle. The syntactic restrictions on the question particle *li* in Macedonian, among other Slavic languages, has been a longstanding issue (Rudin 1999 et al., Arsenijević 2011). Less is known, however, about the semantic and pragmatic licensing of *li*. As shown in (1)-(3), *li* is optional in polar questions (unlike Bulgarian).¹

- (1) Ima Pepsi?
 have.3SG Pepsi
 ‘Is there Pepsi?’
- (2) Pepsi li ima?
 Pepsi LI have.3SG
 ‘Is there PEPSI?’
- (3) Ima li Pepsi?
 have.3SG LI Pepsi
 ‘IS there Pepsi?’

While it has been stated that *li* is a focus particle (Rudin et al. 1999, Schwabe 2003, Lazarova-Nikovska 2003), it is far from clear what the exact semantic and pragmatic differences between the questions in (1)-(3) are. It has been suggested that questions with *li* signal that a negative answer is expected (Englund 1979). However, this analysis is not supported by empirical data. The goal of this research is to provide such data by presenting the results of a questionnaire in which we compared the acceptability of *li* in various contexts.

Hypotheses. Following Rudin etc., we hypothesize that *li* is a focus particle. We consider two possible effects that focus can contribute, namely that (i) *li* contributes *uniqueness* (e.g. the focused noun is the only relevant alternative) (Zimmerman 2010) or that (ii) *li* shapes the Question under Discussion (QUD) and conveys *surprise*.

Methodology. Our hypotheses are tested using a questionnaire built around 2 factors: 1) question type (3 levels: +*li*, -*li*, cleft) and 2) context type (3 levels: neutral, unique, non-unique). Both the *unique* and *non-unique* contexts include *surprise*. Participants are asked to rate a question’s naturalness in a specific context on a 1-5 Likert scale. An example is given in (4).

¹ Note that there is also the Q-particle *dali*, however this does not fall within the scope of our research.

- (4) a. You are celebrating Vasilica with your family, when the pogača is being shared. Traditionally, there is a coin in the pogača and whoever finds it will have a prosperous year. Suddenly your aunt, who has had a bad year, lets out a scream. You ask:
- b. Tebe li ti padna pari-čka-ta?
 2SG.DAT.PRO LI 2SG.DAT.CL fall.3SG.PRES money-DIM-DEF.F
 ‘Did YOU get the coin?’

(4) is an example of a *unique* context, because there is exactly one person who can find a coin.

The survey is distributed among 35 speakers from Skopje, Veles and Prilep (Central dialects), Ohrid (Western) and Strumica and Štip (Eastern), as to take possible micro-variation into account.

Results. We expect *surprise*, rather than *uniqueness* to be the licenser of *li*-questions, suggesting that essentially the contribution of *li* is to shape the QUD. This research contributes to longstanding issue with empirical data and provides a base for cross-linguistic research and comparison of Macedonian *li* to other Slavic languages.

References

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