

Isn't it that propositional term answers automatically lead to exhaustification in inferentials?

The view from Hungarian *nem-e* interrogatives

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The talk explores the form and interpretation of an understudied negative polar interrogative clause type to be referred to as *nem-e*-INT(errogative) in Hungarian, illustrated in (1-b), comparing it regarding form and interpretation to the so-called “inferential constructions” (cf. Delahunty 1990; Delahunty and Gatzkiewicz 2000; Delahunty 2001; Declerck 1992; Ikarashi 2014; Otake 2002) in various languages on the one hand, and to the Scottish Gaelic propositional cleft (cf. Sheil 2016), on the other.

- (1) a. A: Miért nincs még itt Mari? ‘Why isn’t Mari still not here?’
b. B: Nem-e le-késte a buszt? *nem-e*-INT
nem-Q VM-missed the bus.ACC
‘Isn’t it that she missed the bus?’

A *nem-e*-INT contains the surface constituent *nem-e*, consisting of the negative particle *nem* and the interrogative particle *-e*. Whenever *nem-e* is followed immediately by a prefixed verb, the prefix (a verb modifier, VM) is situated immediately in front of the verb, as in positive declaratives and interrogatives. This property distinguishes *nem-e*-INTs from the two “canonical” negative interrogative form types in Hungarian, in (2-a)–(2-b) below, which are marked by a rise-fall prosody and by *-e* cliticized onto the verb, respectively, and both of which display VM-V inversion. (The *nem* V VM order is due to the V being attracted to NegP, cf. É. Kiss 2009.)

- (2) a. Nem késte le a buszt \wedge ? ‘Didn’t she miss the bus?’ negative \wedge -INT
b. Nem késte-e le a buszt? ‘Didn’t she miss the bus?’ negative *-e*-INT

Nem-e-INTs were shown in Gyuris (t.a.) to contain *outside negation* (cf. Ladd 1981), require epistemic but be incompatible with non-epistemic (deontic or bouletic) speaker expectation biases, and not being available for encoding indirect reproaches, offers, requests, or rhetorical questions.

Further properties of *nem-e*-INTs that our semantic account will closely rely on include, first, that *nem-e*-INTs, as opposed to the two other negative interrogatives in Hungarian, are infelicitous out of the blue, in contexts with no unresolved question under discussion (QUD, cf. Roberts 1996). (Cf. Otake 2002.)

- (3) A to B: I have to ask you something.
a. #Nem-e át-ment János a vizsgán? ‘Isn’t it that János passed the exam?’
b. Nem ment-e át János a vizsgán? / Nem ment át János a vizsgán \wedge ? ‘Didn’t János pass the exam?’

Second, types of unresolved QUDs for *nem-e*-INTs include, in addition to questions asking for a reason or explanation, in (1) (cf. Ikarashi 2014), *how*-questions asking for a method, in (4) (cf. Sæbø 2016), and questions asking for a result, in (5) (inspired by an example by U. Eco, cited in Delahunty and Gatzkiewicz 2000):

- (4) A to B: How did this guy leave the apartment?
A/B: Nem-e le-csúszott az ereszen? ‘Isn’t it that he slid down the gutter?’
(5) A to B: What happens when men stop believing in God?
A/B: Nem-e el-kezdenek nem hinni semmiben? ‘Isn’t it that they start not believing in anything?’

Third, utterances of *nem-e*-INTs cannot felicitously be followed by the isolated response particle *igen* ‘yes’, *de* G. ‘doch’, or *nem* ‘no’. Felicitous answers to (1-b) in the relevant context include those in (6).

- (6) a. (Nem,) nem késte le. ‘(No,) he didn’t miss it.’
b. (Nem,) a kocsija romlott el. ‘(No,) his car broke down.’

These data suggest that *nem-e*-INTs of the form ‘*nem-e* α ’ are not simply used to ask whether the denotation *p* of α is true, but whether *p* constitutes a *term* answer to the QUD. For (1-b), the QUD corresponds to the denotation of (1-a), and a full answer to the latter would be of the form ‘She is not here because she missed the bus’. This means, in general, that *nem-e*-INTs are to be interpreted schematically as $\mathcal{P}(p)?$, where \mathcal{P} is a variable that stands for a property of propositions, whose value is specified by the QUD.

(7) [_{CP}₁ ... [_{NegP} Nem [_{FocP} az van-e [_{IP}₁ ... [_{CP}₂ hogy [_{IP}₂ le-késte a buszt]]]] ...]
 not that be-Q that VM-missed the bus.ACC
 'Isn't it that she missed the bus?'

We assign to (constituents of) the example in (7) the following denotations:

- We will set apart *nem-e*-INTs from other occurrences of *nem-e*, including non-standard negative *-e*-INTs, in (9), with VM-V inversion, and “particle” uses of *nem-e* (with *-e* doubling) to mark the speaker’s uncertainty, for politeness, (10), and argue against lumping the three together as “non-(/sub-)standard negative interrogatives”.

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