

Morphosyntactic asymmetries in polar answers: Egophoricity and beyond

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The answer to polar questions can take the form of an interjection or that of a repetition (e.g., Enfield et al. 2019). The latter often exhibits patterns of ellipsis or of structural asymmetries:

- (1) Mandarin (elicited)
- a. *tā lái le ma?* ‘Did (s)he come (already)?’
3SG come PFV Q
- b. *tā méi(yǒu) lái.* ‘(S)he did not come (yet).’
3SG NEG.EX come

While in example (1a) aspect is overly marked with the particle *le*, it is expressed by the existential negator in the answer (1b). No such asymmetry exists in affirmative answers.

The first part of the talk gives a brief overview of cross-linguistic properties of polar questions (e.g., Hölzl 2018) and sketches a simple typology of asymmetries in polar question-answer sequences. The second part addresses a specific asymmetry that can be encountered in languages with egophoricity (e.g., San Roque et al. 2017). Egophoric systems exhibit a binary distinction of egophoric and allophoric markers that usually show interactions with questions as shown in Table 1 (Widmer & Zúñiga 2017: 420).

Table 1: Typical behavior of egophoric markers in declarative and interrogative sentences

Person	Declarative	Interrogative
1	EGO	ALLO
2	ALLO	EGO
3	ALLO	ALLO

The asymmetry is only encountered with speech act participants. An example can be found in Amdo Tibetan (2), where the egophoric marker is used in a question referring to a second person.

- (2) Amdo Tibetan (Ebihara 2011: 70)
- tɕ^ho wol ə-jən?* ‘Are you Tibetan?’
2SG Tibetan Q-COP.EGO

The paper discusses cross-linguistic evidence for this asymmetry (e.g., Floyd et al. 2018), speculates about the role of exact repetitions, such as in the third person, for the speed of language change, and sketches possible avenues for further research.

References

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