

Two strategies for affirmative response to polar questions in Bamileke Medumba

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Overview. In Medumba, there are two ways to say “yes” as a response to a polar question. To see this consider the example in (1), where the polar question can be answered with either *íj̃j̃* (1A1) or *íj̃j̃j̃* (1A2).

(1) Q *ú kí mb^hú áá*
 2SG feed dog Prt
 “Did you feed the dog?”

A1. *íj̃j̃!*

A2. *íj̃j̃j̃!*

Given these two response markers, the question arises as to whether they differ from each other, and if so how. The goal of this paper is to explore this question. In particular, we show that the two response markers differ in their response target. While *íj̃j̃* is used to respond to the propositional content (henceforth p) of the polar question, *íj̃j̃j̃* is used to respond to a bias introduced in the polar question (henceforth Bias).

Differences between the two response markers. We identify three key differences between the two response markers which indicate that they differ in their target of response. (i) *íj̃j̃* but not *íj̃j̃j̃* can be followed by the positive propositional content introduced in the question. A3 but not A4 is a possible response to the question in (1).

A3: *íj̃j̃ (mú kí mb^hú)* A4: *íj̃j̃j̃! *(mú kí mb^hú)*
 Yes 1SG feed dog Yes 1SG feed dog

This difference follows if the two particles differ in their target of response: while *íj̃j̃* responds to p and hence p can be repeated in the answer, *íj̃j̃j̃* responds to the Bias. Since the Bias introduced in (1) is negative (see A1 & A2 2016) the positive proposition cannot be repeated. However, if indeed *íj̃j̃j̃* responds to the negative Bias introduced in (1) we expect that the negative proposition can be repeated despite the fact that it is a positive response marker. This is indeed the case and constitutes the second difference between the two particles. (ii) *íj̃j̃j̃* but not *íj̃j̃* can be followed by the negative proposition, which corresponds to the negative bias introduced in (1).

A5: *íj̃j̃j̃ (mú kúù? kí mb^hú)* A6: **íj̃j̃ (mú kúù? kí mb^hú)*
 Yes 1sg Neg feed dog Yes!1sg Neg feed dog
 Yes! I didn't feed the dog

iii) If indeed *íj̃j̃j̃* responds to the Bias, we predict that it cannot be used to answer neutral polar questions. This is indeed the case as shown in (2). The question particle *kí* is used with neutral polar questions and in this context only *íj̃j̃* but not *íj̃j̃j̃* can be used:

(2) Q: *ú kí mb^hú kí*
 2SG feed dog Prt
 “Did you feed the dog?”

A1 a. *íj̃j̃ (mú kí mb^hú)*

A2 b. *#íj̃j̃j̃*

Conclusion. In line with current research on the syntax and semantics of polar response markers (Holmberg 2016, Krifka 2013, A2 in press) we argue that the differences are syntactically conditioned. While *íj̃j̃* takes the propositional structure as its complement, *íj̃j̃j̃* takes the speech act structure as its complement.

Selected References: **Holmberg, A.** 2016. *The syntax of yes and no*. Oxford University Press. **A1** and **A2.** 2016. Polar questions in Medumba (ms). **Krifka, M.** 2013. Response particles as propositional anaphors, *Proceedings of Semantics and Linguistic Theory (SALT) 23*. 1-18. **A2** in press. Response particles beyond answering. Bailey, L. and M. Sheehan (eds.) *Order and Structure in Syntax*. Language Science Press.