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CONSTRAINING FORCE OF INTERROGATIVE FORMS

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This paper deals with a specific kind of work that can be done by means of interrogative forms in face-to-face communication. By using the method of Conversation Analysis we show how participants in conversations can indicate to the interlocutors what kind of response they would 'prefer' in relation to the action initiated by the first pair part. Some of the more important devices for achieving this effect are: choosing a particular grammatical form over the other, polarity of the interrogative or incorporating expressions which would give an utterance a certain bias. Thus constructed interrogatives are found to be more assertive or more constraining than their neutral variants.

Key words: interrogatives, constraining, preference structure, epistemics, assertive forms.

1. Grammatical form

Some interrogative forms are found to carry more implications than others. Wh-interrogatives, for example, can carry presuppositions that are damaging for the addressee, as they "introduce the presuppositions obtained by replacing the wh-word by the appropriate existentially quantified variable, for example *who* by *someone*, *where* by *somewhere*, *how* by *somehow*, etc." (Levinson 198:184). That is how presuppositions are realized in the utterances of the type *when did you stop beating your wife*. These utterances are found to be very tricky to respond to as they carry the load of two presuppositions: a) that x was beating his wife and b) that x stopped beating his wife at some point. Example (8) (line 01) taken from real-life data illustrates how presuppositions which are embedded into wh-questions are used to perform the action of accusing.

If the same content was packaged into a yes/no format and we got the utterance: *did you stop beating your wife?* the situation would not get any better; there is a presupposition that x was beating his wife and that there is a possibility

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that he is still doing so. Whereas the *wh*-questions leave the interlocutor more space when replying: in the case of *when did you stop beating your wife*, x can easily reply *I have never beaten my wife*; yes/no questions are designed to have a more restricted space for the interlocutor to manoeuvre, i.e. either a *yes* or *no* is expected in reply. In the case of *did you stop beating your wife?*, then, the grammar of the interrogative pulls x towards supplying either *yes* or *no* as a reply, but whatever option would get x into trouble. See example (8) for illustration of how both yes/no and *wh*-interrogatives can perform accusations.

Therefore, one can say that the very grammatical form of yes/no interrogatives *restricts* or *constrains* the answering space for the addressee. Quirk et al. (1985) use the term *conduciveness* to express that by using a certain form speaker is predisposed to a certain type of answer. In this paper I use the term *constraining* to talk about the same phenomenon.

The practical application of the constraining force of interrogatives has been noted in different types of institutional interaction, most prominently in news interviews (Clayman and Heritage 2002; Clayman et al. 2007; Heritage and Roth 1995; Heritage 2002; Heritage 2003). As Heritage (2003:67) notes "Yes/no questions are recurrent sites of conflict between interviewers and interviewees; when talking about sensitive issues, interviewers pursue interviewees until they take a certain position and reply by either 'yes' or 'no'" (for further details and examples see Heritage 2003).

2. Negative interrogatives

While positive yes/no questions constrain an answerer to either a *yes* or *no* answer, a type of questions more notorious for their constraining force are negative interrogatives (Clayman and Heritage 2002; Heritage 2002; Heritage 2003). Quirk et al. (1985) say that there exists a negative orientation in 'questions' which contain a negative form. According to them negative orientation gives away an element of surprise or disbelief, a combination of old and new expectation. Initially, the speaker was hoping for a positive reply, but present evidence seems to point towards the answer being a negative one. In such a way, by producing an utterance *aren't you ashamed of yourself?* the speaker is expecting a *no* answer. There is an implication that the interlocutor is not ashamed, while he/she should be, or that the speaker is surprised he/she is not ashamed.

It has to be pointed out that Quirk et al. (1985) study invented examples which prevents them from seeing certain things clearly. In the news interviews interaction negative interrogatives get to be revealed in a slightly different light compared to what Quirk et al. (1985) propose about these forms. The naturalistic data revealed that negative interrogatives are not understood as information-seeking despite their interrogative form. Clayman and Heritage (2002), Heritage (2002), Heritage (2003) show that neither questioners nor answerers treat negative interrogatives as information-seeking. Contrary to Quirk et al. (1985) Heritage shows that these forms, at least in the context of news interviews, are built to prefer yes answers. To get the point clearly one should take a look at the following naturally produced interviewer's utterance:

(1)

IR: but shouldn't you be preaching unity now instead of this class warfare which you: which you: talk about.

Taken from Clayman and Heritage (2002:218)

First of all, it is obvious that the above utterance pushes the interviewee towards a yes answer. The IR's position also becomes clear, which is that IE should be preaching unity. It is clear that the IR's utterance is less of a question than a statement. And the interlocutors treat it that way in their responses too. As the IR takes the position towards the matter treated in the utterance, interviewees, as Heritage reports, recurrently respond to these utterances by agreeing or disagreeing with the interviewer. Their impulse is to use utterances like: I do not agree with you or well, prove that. Therefore, these interrogatives are found to do a much more aggressive job than simply asking for information. For a more detailed explanation of how these utterances are heard as taking a certain position, see Heritage (2002).

There are a couple of grammatical variants in Serbo-Croatian that vaguely match negative interrogatives in English as quoted by Mrazović and Vukadinović (1990). One of them are interrogatives formed by putting the interrogative particle *zar* at the beginning of the utterance. Mrazović and Vukadinović state that these utterances convey a shade of surprise and doubt concerning the content expressed by the utterance. Therefore, by saying:

(2)

Zar je Miloš dobar čovek?
'Zar' aux. Miloš good man?

Is Miloš a good man? (By using 'zar' the speaker builds in a presumption that Miloš is not a good man)

Taken from Mrazović and Vukadinović (1990:454)

the authors claim that the interlocutor expresses surprise and that the meaning of the utterance is approximately *who claims that?*

In the actual example below taken from our police interrogations data we can see that the police officer does not express his surprise by means of the *zar* fronted interrogative. However he does express doubt concerning the content of the previously produced suspect's statement. Example (3) below is produced following a suspect's story about how he ended up buying a stolen vehicle. After hearing the suspect's detailed account, the detective produces the following turn:

(3)

Dt1: .hh ali zar ne:MA↑ >tu neke ne<logi:ČNOsti,
.hh but zar not:HAS↑ >there some il<logi:CALity,
but isn't there something illogical about that?

First of all, this example is very similar to the above quoted example (1) in that both examples have *but* prefaces. Additionally, they are both negative interrogatives. By means of the 'but' preface the detective establishes a contrast between suspect's response and what he wants to know (Heritage 2003). It is obvious that the *zar* fronted interrogative is not designed to ask for information, but so that the detective can take his position regarding the suspect's story. Dt1 basically displays his opinion that the suspect's story is unacceptable in some ways. The interrogative incorporates the proposition *there is something illogical about that* (suspect's story) and is designed to receive a confirmation of the proposition. However, by agreeing with the detective's position the suspect can get himself into trouble.

3. Preference structure

So far I have discussed one reason why interrogatives can be perceived as constraining. That is their grammatical form. Another source of constraining force is preference structure. Preference structure is a structural phenomenon, studied and discussed in depth by Raymond (2000). Raymond states that once the first pair part

(FPP)¹ is initiated certain preference/dispreference structure is activated by it, which puts constraints onto the SPP the addressee is going to design. As certain action is initiated by the FPP, it shows a preference for a certain second pair part (SPP) which would perform a matching action. Also, the grammatical form that FPP speaker chooses from a number of options limits the number of forms the SPP speaker can choose from. I will explain Raymond's observations on the following example taken from my data set:

(4)

01	Dt2:	ne uzimaš DRO:gu? jel? Not (you)take DRU:gs? is it? <i>you don't take drugs right?</i>
02		(.)
03	Sus:	A? HA? <i>Ha?</i>
04		(.)
05	Dt2:	>ne uzimaš dro:gu<? >not (you)take) dru:gs<? <i>you don't take drugs?</i>
06		(0.2)
07		(0.8) ((background voices))
08	Sus:	slabo poorly <i>not often</i>
09		(.)
10	Dt2:	nemo:j nikako to: ti je o toga da zna:š

¹ Adjacency pairs, considered by conversation analysts to be minimal units of organization, involve carrying out the action through addresser's utterances, so called first pair parts (FPPs) and addressee's responses, so called second pair parts (SPPs). Atkinson and Drew (1979), speaking about the role of sequential placement of utterances within certain adjacency pair types, state that there is a list of instances of adjacency pairs such as questions-answers, requests/invitations-acceptances/rejections, summons-acknowledgements, accusation-denials and so on.

"If a speaker produces an utterance which by virtue of such features as its syntactic form, or conventional properties, is heard as the first part of an adjacency pair, the recipient of that may be expected to produce a second part in the same pair. So not only are the parts in a pair ordered relative to one another, but the next speaker's utterance which follows a first part should not be any second part, but one from that pair to which the first part belongs: hence, for example, return greetings may not be done to requests."

(Atkinson and Drew 1979: 50)

do:n't at all that: you is from that that(you)kno:w
don't at all, that's what it's from, just so you know

The grammatical form of the FPP in line 01 *ne uzimaš DRO:gu? jel?* establishes the initial terms for the response to be provided by the SPP speaker. The form initiated is a declarative with an appended tag, by which the FPP speaker makes *yes* or *no* relevant next. Moreover, the chosen FPP utterance, negative in form, establishes a preference for a *no* over a *yes*. The expected negative reply is what Raymond terms a preferred answer. In addition to the constraints mobilized by the grammatical form of the FPP utterance, the action delivered by this FPP activates a preference for a corresponding SPP action. Raymond notes that most frequently speakers produce responses that conform to the constraints embodied in the grammatical form, and they orient to performing a matching SPP action. In his work, however, Raymond focuses particularly on the deviant cases, those that behave differently from what is *usual*. So, in the example in line 01, by applying the negative form *ne uzimaš DRO:gu?*, the detective signals that the *expected* reply is *no*. If that was a reply the suspect would have produced, Raymond would term it a conforming answer, as it goes along with the terms proposed in the FPP. However, the speaker produces neither a *yes* nor a *no*, what Raymond calls a *non-conforming* reply. He says:

"Fundamentally, type-conforming responses accept the design of a FPP and the action it delivers as adequate, while nonconforming SPPs treat the design of a FPP and the action it delivers as, in some way, problematic."

Raymond (2000:78)

Non-conforming responses can, then, be understood as the SPP speaker's attempt to avoid the action that either a *yes* or *no* would deliver in the sequence. In the above example, the detective's utterance at line 1 *you don't take drugs right?* seeks confirmation, but it represents a preliminary to the advice the detective proffers in line 10. By supplying a nonconforming answer, the suspect shows that there is something problematic about the FPP. The dispreferred and non-conforming reply is a sign of resisting the terms of the detective's FPP. There are other elements of dispreference in example (4): a repair in line 03, long silence in lines 06 and 07, which also reveal that the speaker opposes the delivery of the action.

4. Epistemic stance

Another element which can make an interrogative more or less constraining is the interrogative's epistemic value. Speakers are constantly concerned with the management of rights and responsibilities related to knowledge and information. Claiming certain level of knowledge, for instance, claiming superior knowledge over the addressee's can put constraints onto his/her response. Koshik (2002) has noted that a type of questions encountered in student - teacher one-to-one writing sessions achieve their value from the epistemic stance of the speaker. She calls these questions reversed polarity questions (RPQs) which are simple positive polar interrogatives, which when posed, are responded to with a negative answer. Looking at the following example

(5)

01	ST:	an like (0.2) um(0.5) that woulda get em
02		off the hook cause then: how can the law
03		punish em.cause (0.2) they're: rushing
04		ta help the grandparents.
05	TJ:	good idea.
06		(1.0) ((TJ: vertical headshake))
07		[didja tell me that?
09		[((TJ gestures toward ST))
10		(1.5) ((TJ points to text))
11	ST:	think so,
12		(1.0) ((TJ eyegaze on text; ST shifts eyegaze to TJ))
13	TJ:	um:.
14		(1.0) ((TJ &ST eyegaze on text; TJ gestures w/ pen
15		above text from top to bottom of paragraph))
16		is it clear?
17	ST:	no

Taken from Koshik (2002:1862)

one can note that in lines 01-04 the student is trying to explain to the teacher a point he/she wanted to make in his/her paper . Then, in line 05 the teacher agrees with the student, stating that his/her explanation was a good idea. And then in line 07 the teacher utters what seems to be a simple yes/no question seeking information. However, based on the response of the student from line 10 on it cannot be claimed to be so. Koshik explains that when the teacher asks *didja tell me that?* in line 07, he/she is not asking for information that he/she does not have. He/she has already read and commented on the student's paper and knows that the student did not talk about the matter in the essay. Koshik explains that this may be one way in which RPQs in general are understood as such: "prior to asking the RPQ it

has already been established, either from the immediate linguistic context or from the extra-linguistic context, that the questioner has access to the information which answers the question, and it is in this way that RPQs are heard as epistemic stance displays rather than as information-seeking questions" (Koshik 2002:1869). Koshik suggests that answers to reversed polarity questions agree with the epistemic stance or implied negative assertion displayed in the interrogative. So, due to the negative stance these interrogatives convey, the interlocutors orient to the negative answer.

A good example of interrogatives which display epistemic stance are Serbo-Croatian yes/no interrogatives. The default form of these interrogatives is created by means of the clitic *li* and seems to be asking for information. By using these interrogatives the speaker indicates he/she has no knowledge of the matter inquired about. However, a variant of this form from which the particle *li* has been omitted (non-*li* interrogatives) seems to have a different epistemic value. The very fact that *li* gets to be omitted, takes away the *information-seeking* and *no knowledge* mode and gives way to presuppositions to be built in.

In extract (6) below, I am focusing on lines 07-11, more precisely, on the forms of interrogatives containing the verb *znaš* ((you)know) + *complement*. Note that these utterances (lines 07, 10) are characterized by an absence of the clitic *li* and an overt personal pronoun; the second person singular is marked via verbal morphology.

Extract (6) comes from an interview with a suspect in a theft case. The theft took place in a factory located in a suburban area. The suspect is one of the factory fitters. Prior to this extract Dt2 inquires about the suspect's acquaintance with another person who may be involved in the case, and by doing so, he initiates a new topic. The detective is obviously trying to establish a possible link between the two suspects. The suspect denies knowing the mentioned person, and after Dt4's probing, it becomes clear that Dt2 named the individual wrongly. Dt3 and Dt1 are then trying to come up with the right name of the person they are actually asking the suspect about. The detectives finally identify the party as Petko Binic, lines 01-05.

(6)

01 Dt1: a:: PE>tko<ǂ=
oh PE>tko<ǂ
Oh, Petko?

02 Sus: =m hhh

03 Dt3: PEtko, prezime?
 PEtko, surname?
Petko, surname?

04 (0.1)

05 Dt1: >Binić.<
 >Binic.<

06 (.)

07 Dt3:	>zna:š TOga<?=
	>(you)kno:w THat<?=
	<i>do you know that one?</i>

08 Sus: =zna:m toga:h.
 =(I)kno:w that:h.
I know that one

09 (.)

10 Dt3:	ZNA:š PEtko Bini[ća.]
	(you)KNO:W Petko Bini[c.]
	<i>do you know Petko Binic?</i>

11 Sus: [zna:m]
 [(I)kno:w]
I know

12 Dt3: KA>ko se < poznajete?
 HO>w refl.<(you)know?
how do you know each other?

As the identification has been made and the referent determined in line 01, Dt3 addresses Sus by asking >znaš toga<? – ‘do you know that one?’. It is worth noting here that the transition to this turn is almost immediate: there is only a short silence in line 06. The second *znaš* form in line 10 is also preceded by a micro pause. This greatly differs from *li* interrogatives, which tend to be more sharply boundaried off from the topic of previous talk by longer silences and other interactional devices (Cerović, 2010). This is primarily because *li* interrogatives tend to be sequentially initial and co-occur with newly introduced topics. As can be noted in extract (6), the topic of Petko Binic was established prior to the line 01 and the *znaš* form signals that the *Petko* topic is still on. Another device which does the same job is the indexical *toga* – ‘that one’ in line 07 which topically links the turn to previously mentioned Petko and to the wrongly named individual prior to turn 01. The fact that *znaš* forms in lines 07 and 10 are not sharply delimited from the previous talk goes

along with both their sequential position and their relation to the current topic. As one can note, the two forms occur further down the sequence and differently from *li* forms which signal new topics refer back to the previously introduced ones.

To sum up, *non-li* interrogatives have their own epistemic value. While *li* interrogatives express a neutral information-seeking mode with very little presupposed, *znaš* interrogatives are epistemically less neutral. They claim more knowledge on the part of the speaker, or to be more precise, they express speakers' expectations regarding the response at hand. As a consequence of their epistemic load, these interrogatives cannot be purely information-seeking, but their role could be described as seeking confirmation of a speaker's assumptions. By choosing the *non-li* form *znaš toga* - 'do you know that one' in line 07, the detective conveys to the suspect his epistemic standing. There are two major presuppositions of the detective that become salient in this case: 1) the detective assumes that the suspect has a certain kind of knowledge about Petko Binic (this is sometimes supported by the prosodic features of these utterances: the fact that there is no overt interrogative marker enables the speaker to articulate *znaš* the way it would be articulated in statements, so that the verb form, which is heard first, can sometimes be heard as stating *you know*) , and 2) he also has the expectation that he would receive an affirmative response.

It is now worth looking at how interlocutors respond to *non-li* forms. As the role of the *non-li* interrogative forms can be summarized as asking for confirmation of the speaker's assumption concerning the addressee's state of knowledge, it is expected that these would be responded to by either confirming or disconfirming the interlocutor's assumptions/own state of knowledge. This is exactly what happens in the two occurrences of *non-li* interrogatives in extract (6). By using the *non-li* form in line 07 Dt3 expresses that he assumes that the suspect has some knowledge about Petko Binic and asks for a confirmation/disconfirmation of his assumption/suspect's knowledge. In line 08 the suspect produces a matching activity: he responds with a verb repeat *zna:m* and confirms both the detective's assumptions and his own state of knowledge. The same is evidenced by the response to the second *non-li* interrogative in line 11: another verb repeat *znam* - 'I know'.

5. Assertive forms

Interrogatives have been observed to change their quality whenever they get some kind of appendage. Interrogatives prefaced by *and*, for example, in health-

visitor data are noted to signal a survey filling mode to the interlocutor (Heritage and Sorjonen 1994). Clayman and Heritage (2002) report that journalists questioning presidents can tilt the question to prefer either a *yes* or *no* answer, by appending different types of prefaces to it.

Quirk et al. (1985) have noted that polarity can be turned around by means of what they term *assertive forms*. These are words like *someone*, *already*, *really* and so on, which can be incorporated into interrogatives, due to which, the utterances are heard to prefer either a positive or a negative reply. Quirk et al., thus, state that if *someone* is incorporated into an utterance, it tilts the interrogative towards a *yes* answer. Therefore, *did someone call last night?* presupposes that *someone called last night* and that the reply would be positive. *Really*, on the other hand would give an utterance a negative polarity. Thus, a speaker saying *do you really want to go now?* expects to get a negative reply. Quirk et al. also note that if a negative interrogative, which otherwise has negative polarity, incorporates one of the assertive items, it gets biased towards a positive reply: *didn't someone call last night?*, then, is designed to get a *yes* as an answer.

While studying to what extent news interviewers are neutral when interviewing their guests, Heritage (2003) talks about how the above mentioned assertive items are used in the service of the action to be performed. He notes that interviewers, in their attempts not to be explicitly taking a certain position, can still embody preferences by means of incorporating the items like *seriously* or *really*. Heritage found that *seriously* and *really* are used to state a position which contradicts the interlocutor's and to prefer responses that contrast what interviewees would state. Thus, in example (7) the interviewer states

(7)

01 IR: Do you (.) s :eriously believe that President Bush,
02 or Bill Clinton again is going to endorse either
03 one of those.

Taken from Heritage (2003)

there is a presupposition that neither Bush nor Clinton will do the endorsement and the interviewer's stance is tilted towards *no*. That is how, only by incorporating one item, an utterance gets to be heard as hostile by the interviewees. In a similar way,

the word *any* would tilt the question towards *no* in is there any justification for all that?

The use of an assertive form is evidenced by the following example in which Dt2 accuses the suspect of having debts. The accusation is delivered in line 01 in the form of a wh-interrogative 'who do you owe money?' and via an embedded presumption *you owe money to somebody*. The detective bases the accusation on the premises that the person, who has debts, has a motive for participating in a theft.

(8)

01 Dt2: KOME SI TI: DUŽAN PAre?
TO WHOM are YOU: OWE(adj) MOney?
who do you owe money?

02 (0.5)

03 Sus: °nikome. (0.1)((click)) kome?°
°no one. (0.1)((click)) to whom?°
No one. to whom?

04 (0.6)

05 Dt2:	jes du- du- dužan- >jes ti duža:n nekom pare?< aux(you) o- o- owe- >aux.you o:we someone money?< <i>Do you owe money to someone?</i>
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06 ((click))

07 Sus: esam BA:nci
yes(I am) to BA:nk
Yes, to the bank

08 (0.5)

09 Dt1: koliko?
how much?
How much?

When responding, the suspect signals a certain resistance towards answering the *loaded question* (indicated by the gap in line 02). Then, in second position, he produces a denial and challenges the detective's prior move by means of a partial repeat. The turn of our interest containing an assertive form *someone* occurs in line 05. The (0.6) pause in line 04 announces some sort of delay and the detective makes a number of restarts which indicate his difficulty in formulating his next action. The delay and restarts may have occurred due to the defensive nature of

prior suspect's rhetorical question. Then finally we can see the detective review his position: he backs down by producing 'do you owe money to someone?'. The initial accusation has disappeared from this turn and it no longer overtly claims that the suspect has debts. Instead, it looks like an information-seeking question. However, the presence of assertive form *someone* in 'do you owe money to someone?' indicates that this is not a complete backdown and that the detective still believes the suspects owes money to a certain party. This proves to be true and we evidence that the suspect's conforming response in line 07 is performed in a conforming way: he provides a confirmation which is then followed by a justification.

6. Conclusion

This work reviews different ways in which interlocutors can make their 'questions' constraining. We have seen that Wh-interrogatives can carry harmful presuppositions for the interlocutor, while the grammar of the polar interrogatives pulls the answerer towards supplying either a *yes* or *no* in reply. Negative interrogatives on the other hand state the interlocutor's position instead of asking for information. We have also seen that preference structure and incorporated epistemic stance can make a question prefer this or that kind of answer. Finally, assertive forms like *someone*, *already*, *really* and so on, which can be incorporated into interrogatives, can tilt the utterances towards either a positive or a negative reply.

Such features of interrogative forms indicate that what we usually call 'questions' is a very complex phenomenon extremely difficult to be precisely defined. It goes without saying that many things have to be taken into consideration when studying the phenomenon of questioning. This is particularly true of studying such social actions as criticising, accusing, incriminating and similar actions performed by means of interrogative forms in various types of naturally produced interactional events.

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Apstrakt

Ovaj rad tretira posebne radnje koje se mogu ostvariti korišćenjem upitnih formi u direktnoj komunikaciji. Upotrebom metode analize razgovora, pokazujemo kako učesnici u razgovoru mogu da ukažu sagovorniku na to kakav odgovor bi „preferirali“ u odnosu na akciju koja je inicirana prvim dijelom para. Neki od bitnijih sredstava za postizanje ovoga su biranje određene gramatičke forme prije neke druge forme, polarnost upitnog oblika ili uključivanje izraza koji bi nekom iskazu dali određenu pristrasnost. Ovako konstruisane upitne forme se doživljavaju kao izražajnije i agresivnije u odnosu na svoje neutralne varijante.

Ključne riječi: upitni oblici, primoravanje, struktura preferentnosti, epistemika, deklarativni oblici.