

Alternative Questions/Interrogatives in Albanian Language



Linguistics

Keywords: interrogatives/alternative questions in Albanian language, Polar alternative questions, interrogative particle 'a', word order, intonation, The disjunction "apo", etc.

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Abstract

Questions or interrogatives are the second most commonly used class of sentences, besides declarative ones. The classification of questions is not only one of the most treated topics in linguistics, but also the one that encounters many problems. In Albanian linguistics, there are classifications of questions, but there are also problems related to the terms used in describing these classes and subclasses and the grouping of interrogatives in each class. One of the two main classes of questions/interrogatives is alternative questions. This paper aims at making a clarification and classification of alternative questions and alternative interrogatives based on the semantics and syntax of the Albanian language. Furthermore, it is to be claimed that there are two sub-types of alternative questions/interrogatives, i.e. polar alternative questions and disjunctive alternative questions.

1. Introduction

According to Huddleston, there are a number of independent dimensions which we can use to classify questions, but the one we will firstly be focused on, is the one that classifies questions according to the set of possible answers provided (Huddleston, 1994).

According to this dimension, questions are classified into three groups:

1. *polar questions*, they provide a set of two answers: one has the proposed content expressed in the question;
2. *alternative questions*, their possible answers include a set of alternatives given in the question itself;
3. *variable questions*, they have a proposed content including a variable: the answers express propositions derived by substituting a particular value for the variable.

Cruse admits that there are two basic types of question: 'Yes-No questions' and 'X-questions'. Yes-No questions present a proposition and ask whether it is true or not. In contrast, X-questions present a proposition with a term which is missing. They request an answer which fills in the gap to form a true proposition (Cruse, 2006).

Renzi, Salvi and Cardinaletti in *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione*, classifies questions into two groups depending on the answers: questions of type "X" and alternative questions (Renzi, Salvi, & Cardinaletti, 2001).

In Albanian Grammar, based on the meaning of the sentence, questions are divided into two categories, *comprehensive questions* (*pyetje tërësore*) and *partial questions* (*pyetje të pjesshme*) (ASHSH, 2002). It is necessary for these two definitions to be revised, because the term used to classify questions is misused for the classification of interrogative sentences. In this way, these terms are not appropriate.

Despite the differences we encounter theoretically, referring to semantics we categorize questions in two classes: *variable questions* and *alternative questions*. Variable questions are those for which semantics displays a variable that must be replaced with an element in the answer. Alternative question are questions which have two or more alternatives expressed explicitly or implied by the context.

In this paper we will focus on and treat alternative questions in Albanian language.

2. Alternative questions/interrogatives

Theoretically, in various literature, we have encountered different attitudes concerning the recognition of two different categories of questions: polar questions and alternative questions. Karttunen distinguishes two categories of questions, alternative questions and wh-questions. According to him alternative questions and polar questions belong to a single category, that is alternative questions. On the other side, polar questions represent a syntactic subcategory of alternative questions (Karttunen, 1977). Others share the opinion that they are two separate semantic categories. Biezma, who further continues Bolinger's opinion (Bolinger, 1978), claims that there is a fundamental difference in their semantics, though she admits that the two types of questions include lists, i.e. in both types of questions there are lists of possibilities that could be answers to these questions (Biezma, 2009). So, in alternative questions just like in polar questions, there are lists of choices: in alternative questions (disjunctive questions) the list represents two or more alternatives; meanwhile in polar questions the list represents only two alternatives, yes or no.

Based on the fact that in both types of questions, alternatives are presented to the interlocutor, it is to be emphasized that these two types of questions are part of a major class, known as alternative questions.

In Albanian linguistics, the term *alternative interrogative sentence* (*fjalë pyetëse alternative*) is used by Rami Memushaj to refer to the interrogative sentences constructed with the disjunction *apo*, in “*Fonetika e shqipës standardë*” (The Phonetics of Albanian Standard Language) (Memushaj, 2009).

As mentioned above, *alternative questions* will be called interrogative sentences which show in their semantic structure a selection among alternatives. Alternatives, which occur between questions, may or may not arise explicitly in the sentences' structure.

(1)

a. *A ma shisni mua?* (Faik Konica, *Doktor Gjilpëra*, f. 109)

b. *Ka ardhur apo jo ora e larjes?* (Elena Kadare, *Nusja dhe shtetrrëthimi*, f. 143)

Based on alternatives we have two kinds of alternative interrogative sentences: interrogative sentences in which alternative options appear explicitly in the question as exclusive alternatives which are connected with the disjunction *apo* or rarely *a* and interrogative sentences which exhibit polar alternative to an understanding of the questions which will be implemented in response to a positive or negative reply. We call the first *disjunctive alternative question* and the second *polar alternative question*.

3. Polar alternative questions/interrogatives

In the Albanian syntactic literature these questions are named *comprehensive questions* (ASHSH, 2002) or *general questions* (Çeliku, 2012). Comprehensive questions are defined as sentences in which the speaker wants to know something that he does not know. He does this in order to ensure the authenticity of a fact that he knows, but it is not completely sure, or strengthen it, with the assertion of the interlocutor, expressing his own thought (ASHSH, 2002).

(2)

a. *Mos jeni edhe ju nga krahinat tona? – Jo, tha ai.*

b. *Ky është proverb? – Po.*

c. *Kjo paska qenë lumturia jote? – Po, kjo ka qenë.*

These two terms comprehensive questions and general questions seem inappropriate to refer to a syntactic unit as interrogative sentence or even a question as semantic unit. Based on semantics we will use the term *polar alternative questions* for these units, instead of comprehensive questions or general questions. Considering the fact that there is a distinction between interrogative as a syntactic unit and question as a semantic unit, we will use the term *polar alternative question* to refer to the semantic unit and *polar alternative interrogative* to refer to the syntactic unit.

Polar alternative questions may or may not have the interrogative form. The example (2/b) is in the declarative form, but it is a polar alternative question, as it can be confirmed by the answer *yes (po)*.

We should not confuse the polarity expressed by negative particles in the sentence with the semantic polarity selection for an answer.

(3)

a. *Do të vish me ne?*

b. *Nuk do të vish me ne?*

Both (3/a) and (3/b) are polar alternative questions because they both may have a set of two polar alternatives as an answer. To both questions the answer may be *po, do të vij* (yes, I will come) and *jo, nuk do të vij* (no, I will not come).

On the other side, polar alternative interrogatives are broadly known as *yes/no interrogatives*. In the formation of polar alternative interrogatives different languages generally use the following elements, in descending order according to their occurrence frequency: (i) special intonation patterns, (ii) interrogative particles, (iii) the addition of special tags, (iv) disjunctive-negative structures, (v) a change in the relative order of the sentence constituents and (vi) certain particular verbal inflections (Konig & Siemund, 2007). Depending on the type of language, the above mentioned features may not appear all. Languages might use one or several features to distinguish polar alternative questions. Therefore, in order to prove the foregoing we are trying to make a comparison between an interrogative sentence in Italian, in English and in Albanian language.

(4)

a. *Did you find it?*

b. *Arriverai?*

c. *A ka terrorizmi fe? (Mapo, 24 mars 2016)*

In order to form polar alternative interrogatives, Albanian language uses the interrogative particle “*a*” and the appropriate word order; English uses the auxiliary verb *did* and a change in the word order, meanwhile in Italian, intonation is the main tool.

Polar alternative interrogatives in Albanian show the following syntactic features:

a. The interrogative particle ‘a’

According to Kroeger, in a number of languages, the yes-no questions (polar alternative questions-RT) contain a clitic or a particular particle. Interrogative particles are usually placed in one of the three positions: at the beginning of a sentence, at the end of a sentence or the second element in a given sentence (Kroeger, 2005). In Albanian language the interrogative particle “*a*” is a grammatical morpheme that serves to mark polar

alternative interrogatives. Koleci and Turano consider it as a Q-morpheme, because it has no inflection (Koleci & Turano, 2011). It is placed before the predicate or the verb. Between the two, that is the particle “a” and verb, we cannot insert other constituents, despite the cases when we need to add the verb modifiers as negative particles, modal auxiliaries, aspectual auxiliaries etc.

(5)

a. *A ju kujtohet ç'na tha Ministri i Botores?* (Fatmir Gjata, *Këneta*, f. 174)

b. *Dhe thotë me vete: A mos pashë ëndërr?* (Mitrush Kuteli, *Vepra 4*, f. 58)

c. *S'di ç'të them. Ia përsërita se s'dija ç'të thosha, pastaj e pyeta se a do të thoshte kjo se do të kishte ngjyrim kundër Shqipërisë?* (Ismail Kadare, *Mëngjeset në kafe Rostand*, f. 46)

d. *Po ne, a do të sulmojmë? – e pyeti një shok komisarin, që kalonte shpeshherë nga sektori ku rrinte Gori.* (Petro Marko, *Hasta la vista*, f. 275)

As it can be seen from the examples mentioned above, in (5/d) the particle “a” can be preceded by topicalized constituents.

The particle “a” plays a special role in polar alternative interrogatives in Albanian language. The particular order of the interrogative particle “a” determines the order of other constituents in the sentence. In (6) the order of the constituents does not allow the particle “a” at the beginning of the sentence, or behind the adverb “ashtu”. Meanwhile (6/ b) and (6 / c) are not grammatically correct sentences in Albanian.

(6)

a. *Ashtu mendon ti, Murat?* (Dritëro Agolli, *Njeriu me top*, f. 216)

b. **A ashtu mendon ti, Murat?*

c. **Ashtu a mendon ti, Murat?*

In order to use the particle “a” at the beginning of the interrogative sentence above, we have to change the order of the constituents as in sentence (7).

(7) *A mendon ashtu ti, Murat?*

Whereas the sentence (8/a) can accept the realization of the interrogative particle “a” in preverbal position (8/b).

(8)

a. *Di ndonjë këngë ti, Agush?* (Dritëro Agolli, *Njeriu me top*, f. 114)

b. *A di ndonjë këngë ti, Agush?*

The use of the interrogative particle “a” (Q-morpheme) in (8) and not in (6), shows that we have to do with two different structures, one is an interrogative sentence and the other, on the basis of its structure, is a declarative sentence (*Ashtu mendon ti. / you think so.*). Example (6) is a declarative sentence, which, through an interrogative intonation, is used as a polar alternative question.

b. Word order

A change in the order of the words to mark the question usually involves the movement of a verbal or auxiliary element towards the beginning of the sentence (Kroeger, 2005). This is true for English language. In Albanian, interrogative sentences have the opposite word order when compared to declarative sentences. In interrogatives, the subject inverts its position with the predicate and is placed in the end of the sentence.

(9) *A do të zgjidhet kjo punë ndonjëherë?* (Dritëro Agolli, *Njeriu me top*, f. 249)

Albanian language is characterized by a free word order. This free word order feature of the Albanian language is used for different stylistic purposes. Word order indicates where the speaker focuses on, what he is emphasizing or highlighting (ASHSH, 2002).

(10) *Po ti, a e dije se duke ardhur drejt takimit me mua po vije drejt vdekjes së nënës?* (Fatos Kongoli, *Ëndrra e Damokleut*, f. 144)

In (10) the focused item, the subject “ti”, which in a normal order would be behind the verb “dije”, since it is an interrogative sentence, has moved forward.

c. Intonation

Interrogative intonation is a discourse key tool which serves to form the polar alternative questions in Albanian. It combines with the constituents' order and the other elements in interrogative sentences. Interrogatives are characterized by a rising intonation (Memushaj, 2009).

(11) *Kanë ardhur të gjithë?* ↑

Rising intonation is the only element in this sentence that differentiates it from the declarative sentences. If it is uttered with a lowering intonation it would be a declarative sentence.

4. Disjunctive alternative questions/interrogatives

In Albanian language syntax, disjunctive interrogative sentences (alb – fjali pyetëse veçuese) were first treated by Çeliku (Çeliku, Karapinjalli, & Stringa, 1998, 2011). In the Albanian Grammar these sentences are known as *double questions* (pyetje dyfishe) or *exceptional questions* (pyetje përjashtimore) (ASHSH, 2002).

Disjunctive alternative questions are questions which require from the interlocutor the selection of a true answer from the disjointed alternatives expressed in the question. Their suitable answer would be one of the alternatives expressed in the question.

(12)

a. *Presidentin e ardhshëm duhet ta zgjedhë ky parlament apo parlamenti tjetër?* (Sot, 11 prill 2016)

b. *Është një profesion i ri apo ka ekzistuar më parë?* (Shqiptarja.com, 28 prill 2016)

In (12/a) the answer should be one of the alternatives, “ky parlament” or “parlamenti tjetër” presented by the disjunction phrase; meanwhile in (12/b) the answer should be one of the alternatives presented by the disjointed clauses, “është një profesion i ri” or “ka ekzistuar më parë”.

Pullum & Huddleston share the opinion that there do not exist three different types of clauses which correspond to the three semantic types of questions, but there are only two types of clauses, which are open and closed interrogatives (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). They do not treat the conjunction *or* as a marker of the clause type, because it can stand between clauses and therefore cannot belong to any structural clause type. Furthermore, the disjunction “or” in English is used in both types of sentences, in declaratives and in interrogatives. The distinction between an interrogative reading and a declarative reading is made only by intonation.

In Albanian language the disjunctive alternative question is marked with a linguistic unit. In this way it has a different form in comparison to other interrogatives. In Albanian *a, apo, o, ose, daç... daç, ja... ja, ndo... ndo, qoftë... qoftë* are disjunctions (ASHSH, 2002). These disjunctions are used in different types of sentences. For example “*apo*” and “*a*” (disjunction) are particularly used in interrogatives whereas “*ose*” is used in declaratives.

(13)

- a. *Ju jeni ndërtues ujësjellësi apo kronistë katundesh?* (Ismail Kadare, *Lulet e ftohta të marsit*, f. 134)
 b. *E kupton apo bënë sikur nuk e kupton?* (Fatos Kongoli, *I humburi*, f. 174)

In (13) we cannot use *ose* instead of *apo*. Using this substitution, that is *ose* instead of *apo*, would undoubtedly change the sentence from an interrogative one into the declarative type as in example (14).

(14)

- a. *Ju jeni ndërtues ujësjellësi ose kronistë katundesh.*
 b. *E kupton ose bënë sikur nuk e kupton.*

These examples show that *apo* is specialized in marking disjunctive questions in Albanian language, so we can say that disjunctive alternative interrogatives provide a subclass of alternative interrogatives in Albanian.

Another language which uses a special disjunction marker for interrogatives is Kannada, a Dravidian language spoken in southern India. Amritavalli has noticed that the particle *-oo* cannot connect two declarative sentences. It is used as a disjunction of questions: more precisely, as an alternative question (Amritavalli, 2003). The disjunctive connector in languages as Malayalam, Sinhala and Japanese is homophonous with the question particle (Jayaseelan, 2007). This shows that polar alternative questions and disjunctive alternative questions share a common feature.

Disjunctive alternative interrogatives in Albanian show these features as the most relevant:

a. **The disjunction “apo”**

The disjunction *apo* is used to coordinate both clauses (15/a, b) and phrases (16/a, b).

(15)

- a. *E ka ngranë apo do ta hajë këtë grurë?* (Proza Popullore, *Vëllimi VI*, f. 372)
 b. *Ti tremb akoma apo t’u lutem?* (Petro Marko, *Qyteti i fundit*, f. 278)

(16)

- a. *Me vezë apo me zog do të bleshë?* (Jakov Xoxe, *Lumi i vdekur*, f. 146)
 b. *Suat bëj Verdhomën apo edhe Kol Shpërvjelin?* (Jakov Xoxe, *Lumi i vdekur*, f. 501)

A special case in which Albanian uses the disjunction *apo* is when forming the question tag *apo jo*. The negative particle “*jo*” is used to replace the negative form of the positive alternative that precedes the disjunction *apo*. This question tag in Albanian language has only this form, since it has no positive alternative such as “**apo po*”.

(17)

a. *A e di kush është ai, apo jo?* (Fatmir Gjata, *Këneta*, f. 183)

b. *Ju s' keni qenë këtu atëherë, apo jo?* (Ismail Kadare, *Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*, f. 133)

The question tag is added at the end of a sentence to form a disjunctive alternative question. The preceding clause may have an interrogative form as in (17/a) or a declarative form as in (17/b).

Intonation

In English intonation is the main feature that distinguishes a disjunctive alternative question from a polar alternative question. According to Pruitt & Roelofsen, the final pitch contour is the most informative prosodic feature: disjunctive questions with a final fall are generally interpreted as alternative questions, meanwhile disjunctive questions with a final rise are generally interpreted as yes/no questions (Pruitt & Roelofsen, 2013).

In Albanian language it is combined with the disjunction “*apo*” to mark disjunctive alternative questions. In disjunctive interrogative sentences the end of the intonation curve is similar with the intonation curve of the declarative sentences (Memushaj, 2009). The pitch curve rises in the disjunction as it is provided in the example in (18).

(18) *Blushin e shihni pjesë të PS apo↑ ka shkuar shumë larg?* (Koha Jonë, 5 prill 2016)

The intonation curve is affected by the focus. In general the focused element has the highest values of the pitch.

5. Conclusion

Alternative questions in Albanian are divided into two subclasses; polar alternative questions and disjunctive alternative questions. These two types of questions correspond with the two types of interrogatives, that is polar alternative interrogatives and disjunctive alternative interrogatives. Polar alternative interrogatives are characterized by the use of the interrogative particle “*a*” in the beginning of the sentence and in the change of the subject predicate order. Subject usually goes at the end of the sentence. These two structural features combine with the rising intonation contour. Disjunctive alternative interrogatives are characterized by the use of the specialized disjunction *apo* and by the intonation contour. A special case of disjunctive alternative interrogatives are those whose second alternative is replaced by the negative particle *jo*, forming in this way the question tag *apojo*. The specialized function of the disjunction *apo* in disjunctive questions is a particular element in the interpretation of sentences that have this unit in their structure as a special type of interrogatives in Albanian language.

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