Title: Negative interrogatives
Category: Oral

Typological work on negation has concentrated on the negation of declarative main clauses with verbal predicates (e.g., Dahl 1979, Miestamo 2005). In recent years the range of topics has widened and attention has also been paid to negative imperatives (van der Auwera & Lejeune 2005) as well as non-verbal and existential negatives (Eriksen 2005, Veselinova 2007). However, there is no typological survey of negative interrogatives to date. This paper aims to fill this gap with respect to polar interrogatives (yes/no-questions); information questions (wh-questions) will not be addressed.

The study is based on an extensive language sample. To the extent possible, the sample will include at least one language from each of the genera listed by Dryer (2005). Frequency counts will be based on an areally and genealogically balanced subsample of the overall variety sample. The data is drawn from reference grammars and other available sources as well as from personal communication with specialists of particular languages. The central research question is how negative polar interrogatives are expressed in the world’s languages. Special attention will be paid to how they differ from negative declaratives on the one hand and positive polar interrogatives on the other.

In many languages negative polar interrogatives are expressed by the regular combination of negative and interrogative marking. In German (1), polar interrogatives are formed by placing the finite verb at the beginning of the clause and declarative negatives by placing the negative marker nicht in a postverbal position. Negative polar interrogatives simply combine these two constructions and show no special effects.

In some languages negative polar interrogatives show special structural characteristics vis-à-vis either declarative negatives or positive polar interrogatives, or both. In Estonian (Erelt 2003), positive polar interrogatives are marked by the particle kas (2b) and negation by a construction involving the negative auxiliary ei (2c). Negative polar interrogatives, however, are marked by a special particle ega (2d). In Halkomelem (Galloway 1993), positive polar interrogatives are expressed by the interrogative auxiliary lí (3b) and negatives with the negative auxiliary ʔə́ wə (3c), but these cannot cooccur, and negative interrogatives have the interrogative suffix -ə on the negative auxiliary (3d). In Igbo (Green & Igwe 1963), positive polar interrogatives are marked by low tone before the verb, but negative interrogatives do not have a distinct tonal question form. In Egyptian Arabic (Gary & Gamal Eldin 1982), the marking of negation in declaratives depends on aspect, the perfective using the discontinuous marker ma-... ʃ and the imperfective having a choice between ma-... ʃ and preverbal mif. However, this restriction does not apply in negative interrogatives, and mif can be used in perfectives as well.

This study will explore how common it is for negative interrogatives to show special structural characteristics that are not straightforwardly derivable from the properties of negative declaratives and positive polar interrogatives, and whether and how the special properties of negative interrogatives can be classified into cross-linguistic types. The data will be analysed in terms of the notion of asymmetry as defined by Miestamo (2005). Functional explanations will also be sought for the cross-linguistic findings.

Negative interrogatives are especially interesting in languages where positive polar interrogatives and negative declaratives have some properties in common. These include languages in which positive polar interrogatives and negative declaratives share a morphological form (e.g., Imonda) and languages in which polar interrogation is expressed by the disjunction of a positive predicate and its negation (e.g., Kobon). In Imonda (Seiler 1985), polar interrogation can be expressed with the suffix -m on the verb (4b). The suffix -m is also used in negative declaratives with the negative particle së (4c). Negative interrogatives are expressed by a special construction involving the negative particle auki and the auxiliary verb fe ‘do’ (4d). In Kobon (Davies 1989), polar interrogation is expressed by repeating the verb in a negative form (5b). The closest thing to a negative interrogative can be formed by adding aka ‘or’ at the end of a negative clause which results in a leading question (5d) (this element can also follow an affirmative with the same effect). Languages such as Imonda and Kobon will be given special attention in the paper and the solutions they adopt to form negative interrogatives will be discussed in detail.
(1) German (constructed examples)

a. *du singst*  
2SG sing.2SG

‘You sing.’

b. *singst du?*  
sing.2SG 2SG

‘Do you sing?’

c. *du singst nicht*  
2SG sing.2SG NEG

‘You don’t sing.’

d. *singst du nicht?*  
2SG sing.2SG NEG

‘Don’t you sing?’

(2) Estonian (Erelt 2003: 108 [except 2c which is constructed by the author])

a. *sa tule-d täna meile*  
2SG come-2SG today 2 PL.ALL

‘You will come to visit us today.’

b. *kas sa tule-d täna meile?*  
Q 2SG come-2SG today 2 PL.ALL

‘Will you come to visit us today?’

c. *sa ei tule täna meile*  
2SG NEG come today 2 PL.ALL

‘You won’t come to visit us today.’

d. *ega sa (ei) tule täna meile?*  
NEG.Q 2SG NEG come today 2 PL.ALL

‘Won’t you come to visit us today?’

(3) Halkomelem (Galloway 1993: 238–239, 314-315)

a. *k’wə́ c-l-ə xw-cə l*  
see-happen.to-3 SG.OBJ-1SG.SUBJ DEF fly

‘I see a fly.’

b. *lí-cx ə́ k’wə́ c-l-ə xw*  
Q-2SG.SUBJ see-happen.to-3 SG.OBJ DEF.F Susan in DEF path

‘Do you see Susan in the path?’

c. *ʔə́ wə́ lí-s yə́ tə́ ñə́ sə́ ə́ tə́ sə́ l*  
NEG.3 AUX-3 tell-2PL NEG.3-Q AUX-3 tell-2PL

‘They didn’t tell you folks.’

‘Didn’t they tell you folks?’

(4) Imonda (Seiler 1985: 92, 171, 174)

a. *tëla-pef ha-pia-f*  
husband-POSS MOT-come-PRES

‘Your husband is coming.’

b. *ne uagl-f-me ?*  
2 go-PRES-NEG/Q

‘Are you going?’

c. *ehe së eg-l-uagl-f-me*  
3 NEG follow-OBJ.NSG-go-PRES-NEG/Q

‘He does not follow them.’

d. *kapul õm ha-pia auaia fe-i-me ?*  
plane yesterday MOT-come NEG do-PST-Q

‘Didn’t the plane come yesterday?’

(5) Kobon (Davies 1989: 5, 22, 78, 94)

a. *yad kaj mɨ́ d-öp*  
1 SG pig be-PERF.3SG

‘I have a pig.’

b. *ne kaj ap mid-öp (aka) mid-ag-öp ?*  
2 pig INDEF be-PERF.3SG (or) be-NEG-PERF.3SG

‘Have you any meat?’

c. *nipe ip bag ñ-ag-a*  
3 SG.OBJ say give-NEG-RMPST.3SG

‘He did not tell me.’

d. *kale kañ mɨ́ d-ag-öp aka ?*  
plane yesterday MOT-come NEG do-PST-Q

‘You haven’t any bananas?’


