

MINIMAL AND NON-MINIMAL ANSWERS TO YES-NO QUESTIONS

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Abstract

Against the theoretical and methodological background of conversation analysis (CA), the author addresses the issue of the contextual conditions for a specific type of grammatical phenomenon: answers to yes-no questions. She distinguishes five kinds of answers: two minimal ones, one next to minimal one, and two sentential types of answers. Minimal and non-minimal types of answers are shown to be doing different kinds of work in an interaction, full sentence answers addressing a wider range of features oriented to in the context either by the questioner or in the interpretation. The different types are placed along a confirmation-negation continuum.

Keywords: Yes-no question, Answer, Conversation, Typology, Grammar and context

1. Introduction

This paper is a spin-off of the work on a descriptive grammar of contemporary Finnish that has been going on for the past five years in Helsinki under my leadership. In this project, we are not only describing the units and constructions of standard literary Finnish but we are also trying to account for certain recurrent features and practices of the spoken vernacular.

Looking at questions from the point of view of spoken language, it is obvious that they should not be handled without discussing answers, as well. Traditionally, questions have been described more or less in isolation from their context. As there was nothing substantial to say about answers on the basis of previous syntactic work on questions in Finnish, I began to think about how to widen the paradigmatic array of possible answers and to look for the contextual conditions for the "outer syntax" of various kinds of answers. In this process, the methodological help to turn to was conversation analysis (CA).¹

In my paper, I am going to discuss five kinds of answers: Two minimal ones and

¹ For the points made in sections 1-2, I have been able to draw on of the results of previous conversation analytic work on Finnish, mainly of the work carried out on questions and answers by Liisa Raevaara (1993) and on minimal answers by Marja-Leena Sorjonen (forthcoming). The database of the research this article is based on is drawn from the corpus of everyday conversations at the Department of Finnish, University of Helsinki. The database that does not include particle answers, consists of altogether 175 positive answers. Of these, 55 are of the type SV-.

one next to minimal one plus two kinds of sentential answers. In the end, I am going to place them tentatively on a continuum with an affirmative answer at one end and a negative answer at the other.² So, this exercise, if not conclusive with respect to the outcome, will hopefully illustrate the challenge in trying to look for the contextual conditions for certain grammatical phenomena that have not been included so far in descriptive grammars.

The founding father of CA, Harvey Sacks, made the claim that there is no such class of non-sentences that can be recognized as answers (1992: 25). This claim is probably more true of a language like English than it is of Finnish, for reasons that will become clear in what follows (see section 3). On the other hand, as he pointed out (*ibid.*), something is recognized as an answer in the last resort as part of the sequence it occurs in. What we are faced with then is a decision about in what ways and on what level of delicacy semantic and pragmatic features should play a role in the description of the category ‘answer’.³

As regards yes-no questions and answers to them, there are classifications in linguistic typologies that group languages according to the way they minimally answer a polar or yes-no question that has the interrogative format (cf. Sadock & Zwicky 1985: 189-191). There are three basic alternatives:

1. **Yes-no languages** like English, which has the particle *yes* for a positive answer, and the particle *no* for a negative answer.

2. **Agree-disagree systems** like Japanese: There is a positive particle if the answer agrees with the polarity of the question, and a negative particle if the answer disagrees with the polarity of the question.

3. **Echo systems**, where there are no specific answer words but instead, prototypical minimal answers are given by **repeating the verb** of the question, possibly accompanied with other material like adverbials. These languages would use partial repeat also as an answer to focussed disjunctive questions. Accordingly, questions like *Is it today that you are leaving for Budapest?* would be positively answered with repeating the focussed item *today*. In traditional descriptions, Finnish has been characterized as representing the third alternative.

2. Typological description vs. actual practise

In Finnish, a yes/no question is formed by fronting the verb and attaching to it a question clitic *-kO* (a colloquial variant is *-ks*). A positive answer is given by repeating the verb of the question, while the indexical element, i.e. person suffix on the verb gets changed to

² Space does not allow me to take up the forms of negative answers beyond mentioning the basic type.

³ In a speech community where verb repeat is the basic minimal answer, votes and polls present an intriguing problem. In the Finnish parliament, the choice available is *jaa/ei* ‘yes/no’. Outside the parliament, the particle *jaa* has approximately the meaning ‘well I dunno’ or, in other contexts, ‘oh’. The historical explanation is that when the predecessor of the present parliament was established, the majority of members had Swedish as their mother tongue. The particle *jaa* was, then, the right positive answer in Swedish. In the referendum about joining the European community, the choice offered to voters was *kyllä/ei*, where the particle *kyllä* is one that usually co-occurs with a full sentence answer (see example 11). In isolation, it is considered as substandard.

correspond to the deictic origo of the respondent. Example (1) is an invented grammar book type example that tends to get copied to typological descriptions. The negative answer is formed with a negative verb *ei* that is also inflected in person, optionally followed by a special negative form of the main verb.

(1)

Q: Tule-t-ko mukaan?
 come-SG2-Q along 'Are you coming along?'

A: Tule-n. | E-n (tule).
 come-SG1 no-SG1 come
 'Yes.' 'No.'

A' Minä tulen (mukaan).
 'I am coming (along).'

However, conversation analysts have recently pointed out that the Finnish system is in fact more varied than what typology makes us assume (Raevaara 1993; Sorjonen forthcoming). In addition to the verb repeat, a minimal answer to polar questions may also be given with the particle *joo*, and the negative answer with an uninflected form of the negative word (*ei*), which, in isolation, is in the process of being grammaticalized to a negative particle. In earlier grammars, the particle *joo* has been ignored and regarded as substandard, but it has been emancipated by recent conversation analytic research, the result of which is that vernacular Finnish must be seen as representing a mixed system, consisting of the alternatives repeat and particle.

What Raevaara (1993) and more recently and explicitly Sorjonen (forthcoming) have claimed is that the choice between an affirmative answer that repeats the verb, and a particle answer is dependent on the sequential position as well as on the form of the question. Whether the question is presented in an interrogative or in a declarative form will have a bearing on the form of the answer. According to Sorjonen, repeats offer an affirmation of a question that is interrogative, a genuine request for information. Moreover, she found that the activity opened by the question or inclusive of it, typically needs to be continued after the verb repeat answer. To illustrate this claim, see Example (2), where the question opens a pre-request sequence.

(2) [Pre-request: Pursuing the right person]

E : On-ks toi äiti kotona.
 is-Q that mother home-at 'Is your mummy there.'

S : O:n
 i:s 'Yes'

E : Pyydä-t sä puhelimeen,
 ask-SG2 you phone-to 'Would you ask her to (come to) the phone,'

Additional examples illustrating the affirming use of the verb repeat are given in (3) and (4). In (3), the answer with the repeated verb *vaikutti* (line 4) is emphatic (notice the stress, marked with underlining, and the lengthening of the first syllable, marked with the colon), conveying the affect of the narrated experience. The questioner is a knowing participant,

and he is able to fill in the details in the story by the answerer (lines 5-6).

(3) [Talking about a hiking trip to Lapland: Emphatic affirmation]

- 1 S: No ↑mites oliko ne hurjat (.) mites (.)
 'Well ↑how were they furious (.) how (.)
- 2=> vaikutti-ko ne Norjan lumimyrskyt sinne
 affected-Q the Norwegian snowstorms there
 did the Norwegian snowstorms affect you there'
- 3 (.) teille.
 (.) you-to
- 4 V:=> mt Vai:kutti. [heh .heh heh .heh]
 affe:cted.
- 5 S: [Et siell oli kova tuuli ja] (.)
 'so there was a heavy wind and (.)
- 6 lunta [sateli,]
 snow falling'
- 7 V: [Kovat tuulet] oli kolmena päivänä
 'heavy winds were during three days
- 8 ja: yhtenä oikeen tosi (.) kova lumimyrsky.
 and: in one a real truly (.) heavy snowstorm.'

In (4) the boy's answer *haluun* occurs as an important prerequisite for getting the invitation to stay overnight at the girlfriend's. The girl Erja wants to make sure of the boy's feelings before letting him come over.

(4) [Boy and girl negotiating about him staying over;]

- 1 Pynde: Tuu-n-ks mä sinne,
 come-SG1-Q I there, 'Shall I come there,'
- 2 (1.0)
- 3 Pynde: tai [↑saa-n-ks mä tulla
 or ↑may-SG1-Q I come 'or may I come?'
- 4 Erja: => [hhh No haluu-t sä vai?,
 [hhh well want-SG2 you or?, 'Well do you want to?,
- 5 Pynde:=> haluu-n,
 want-SG1 'Yes,'
- 6 Erja: no @↑tuu sitte h@
 'Well ↑come then'

When the particle *joo* is offered as an answer, on the other hand, it will provide the questioner with a confirmation of something (s)he has inferred either from the preceding conversation or on the basis of more general knowledge, and is just checking out the inference with the recipient. Examples that illustrate this are (5-6). These are all instances of second position questions that do not initiate the topic. In (5), the speaker is asked about

something that she has herself just said in her own preceding turn, and so in line 3 she is just confirming what she has already said.

(5) [Checking on the acceptance of an invitation]

- 1 S : Voidaan me tulla.
 can-PL1 we come. 'We can come '
 2 T : Voi-tte-ko,
 can-PL2-Q 'Can you'
 3 S : Joo::.. 'Yes'

In (6), the topic is about a mutual friend who is moving away, and leaving S's workplace. The question (line 5) involves an inference of what the friend might be doing in her new home town: Here, the turn final particle *sitte* 'then' is a sign of inference.

(6) [Presenting the question as arising from the story]

- 1 S: °Voi: hitto et se on ollu vähä tip:pa silmäs
 'Oh: hell has she been a bit tearful
 2 ollu joka päivä täälä ja halattu on miljoona
 been every day here and we've hugged a million
 3 kertaa päi: [vässä ja tapute]ltu toisiamme ja,
 times a day and patted each-other and,'
 4 V: [Joo::,]
 5 V: =>.mhh Meinaa-k se nyt jäähä kottii sitte.
 mean-Q she now stay home then.
 'Is she going to stay at home now then.'
 6 S: =>Joo::, ↓Joo::.
 7 (.)
 8 S: Ja gradua rupee sit tekee ja --
 'And will begin to write her thesis then and --'

The conclusion of this section is that it is only with respect to answers offered to genuine requests for information that the typologists made a correct claim. However, as there are so many other functions to a question, the text book picture given in typologies and grammars for that matter is not very informative.

3. Next to minimal answers

In addition to minimal answers that are normally the only types mentioned in the literature, there are, of course, a number of non-minimal or non-conforming answers, as Geoffrey Raymond (2000) prefers to call them. In this section, I shall take up next to minimal answers, which are formed by combining the two minimal ones: Verb repeat + particle. This two word format does not occur in other contexts but is one that is exclusively used as an answer. The issue here is whether we can define the difference of use of this answer

type with respect to the two minimal answers presented above.

The use of these next to minimal answers is illustrated by examples (7-8). Excerpt (7) comes from a phone call between friends one of whom (T) is having his apartment redecorated. The person Kalle whose greetings he conveys to the caller (lines 2-3), is someone giving him a hand in the redecoration.

(7) [Checking on the whereabouts of the person talked about]

- 1 S : *M*iten teiän remontti?,
'How (is) your redecoration?'
- 2 T: .hh ↑No< *K*allelta terveisiä, h [h eh]
.hh '↑Well< *K*alle sends (his) greetings,' h [h eh]
- 3 S: [Aha. Kiitos.]
[‘Oh. Thanks.’]
- 4 T: [Mä sanoin tänään-]
[‘I said today- ‘]
- 5 S:=> [Onks se teillä nyt].
[‘Is he with you now.’]
- 6 T:=> *Q*n joo. Mä sanoin- se on ollu koko vii:kon.
‘(He)is yes. I said- he has been the whole wee:k.’
- 7 S: *J*oo: ,
- 8 T: .mhh Mä sanoin sille päivällä et mä oon ajatellu
.mhh ‘I said to him today that I’ve been thinking
- 9 täs soittaa teille [nin se käski sa]noo terveisiä.
here of calling you [so he told (me) to se]nd greetings.’
- 10 S: [*J*oo: .]
- 11 S: Voi hitsi,
‘Oh gee,’

At line 4, speaker T is beginning to tell something. However, his turn is aborted. At line 8, where he resumes the talk, we see that he was in fact about to tell more about Kalle. The interruption is caused by a question by S concerning the whereabouts of Kalle, the very same person. Before pursuing his talk on Kalle, T briefly answers the question with a verb + particle formatted answer. In this context, the answer clearly marks the closing of the adjacency pair, which is thus marked as a side sequence.

Example (8) illustrates a slightly similar case. Here, the speakers are making plans about a next meeting. V, who has missed the current one, is trying to enter talk (line 2) overlapping the primary speaker but has to abort. Subsequently, she enquires about the possibility of calling the place of the meeting (line 3), and receives the answer verb + particle, which will give her space to elaborate on her suggestion (lines 5-6).

(8) [Deciding on whether to make it to a meeting]

- 1 S : Et me sovittiin sama paikka [(.) ens]maanantaina,=
'So we agreed on the same place [(.) next] monday, '=
- 2 V : [No mut e-]
[Well but i-]

- 3 V :=>Voi-ks sinnes soittaa:, =
 can-Q there-to phone 'Is it possible to phone there'
- 4 S :=>Voi joo.
 can yes. 'It is yes'
- 5 V : et jos mä soitan täältä niinku kuuen aikaaj ja tota: kysyn
 'so if I call from here like around six and um: ask
- 6 et kauaks: onks siin:ä mitää järkee enää ltulla
 that long:-Q is-Q the:re any sense anymore lto come'

My interpretation is that this 'mixed minimal answer' often involves a side sequence, or an exchange consisting of an adjacency pair only. The verb repeat part in the answer orients to the fact that the question is a genuine request for information, whereas the final particle *joo* suggests a closure of the sequence.

4. Full sentence answers

4.1. Answers with SV- order performing a repair

In this section, I am going to discuss the conditions under which answers are extended beyond the next to minimal format. I am especially concerned with turns that are formulated as declarative sentences and more specifically, such sentences that are not verb initial. They have the unmarked SV word order of a context free statement and, on the face of it, there is no element in them that would reveal them as answers. The answerhood can thus only be read from their sequential positioning. In a language like Finnish, an utterance consisting of just a finite verb form can in fact correspond to a full finite sentence when it carries the person suffix equivalent to a subject pronoun. However, unlike a statement with an SV order and with an explicit subject, the single finite verb will typically be recognised as an answer or at least as some kind of responsive turn.

But why then offer an answer with the SV- word order? - For example, to the question in example (1) above, *Are you coming along*, we might find the full sentence answer (1A') *Minä tulen mukaan* 'I am coming along?', but it is not immediately obvious what the conditions for the occurrence of this answer would be. To find out something about the conditions, let us look at two examples (9-10) in which the question seems to be a genuine request for information. Instead of the expected repeat of the finite verb of the question, however, in each of them, the answer consists of a full sentence.

In example (9), the answerer makes substantial changes in the grammar provided by the question; in example (10), the changes are lexical. Extract (9) comes from a phone call between two expert metal workers. Speaker Sami is giving a detailed account of his polishing-up work on a wedge, with further advice to the recipient about how to give the finishing touches to the object.

(9) [Professional talk: Repairing the implications in the question]

- 1 Sami: Joo et tota mä kattelin ei (siin) jos siin alkaa
 'Yeah so um I was looking no (there) if you begin to

- 2 viilaa niin siin meneep (.) ik- ikä pe [rkele.
file it so it will simply take up all your life dam [ned it.]
- 3 Vesa: [Siin on niin
[‘There are so
- 4 monta eri kulmaa kyl[lä.h]
many different angles KYL[LÄ. h’
- 5 Sami: [Siin on ne kul]mat ja sit se:
[‘There are the angles and then the:
- 6 se ellän kulmaki on terävä nin sit (.) si(i)t ainaki
the L-shaped angle is sharp so then (.) from that one at least
- 7 siit yläosast hyvä ottaa vähä pyöreämmäks ja,
from the top part it is good to make it a bit more round and,’
- 8 Vesa:=> Sai-t sä taivu-tettuu kunnolla ne,
got-SG2 you bend-CAUS properly them,
‘Did you get them bent properly,’
- 9 Sami:=> Ne taipu iha:n siististi joo [et siin ei oo] (.)
they bent qui:te neatly yes [so there not is (.)
‘They bent just neatly yes [so there is no
- 10 Vesa: [Joo joo:.]
[‘Yes ye:s.’
- 11 Sami: p- rautasahalla et se oli:#:# .hh (.) ei siihen
b- iron saw-ADE so it wa:#:# .hh (.) not it-ILL
w- with an iron saw so it was .hh (.) it took no more
- 12 menny tota ni (0.6) ei siihen menny tun:tii-kaa ku
went PRT PRT (0.6) not it-ILL went hour-CLIT when
than an hour to
- 13 ne teki ja taivutteli.
them \emptyset did and \emptyset made-bend.
do them and bend them.’
- 14 Vesa: °↑Just joo:°
°↑Quite yea:°

To Vesa’s question, ‘did you get them bent properly’ (line 8), Sami gives an affirmative but a full sentence answer, with some systematic grammatical changes as compared to the question. The agentive subject *sä* ‘you’ (at line 8) is replaced by an inanimate patient subject *ne* ‘they’ (line 9), and the transitive (causative) verb *taivu-tta-a* (‘to get bent; to manage to bend’) is changed for the corresponding intransitive one, *taipu-a* ‘to bend’. In addition, the verb construction which in the question includes a modal element (*sai-t* ‘could-SG2’), conveying the sense of overcoming a difficulty, is replaced by the single, non-modal verb *taipu* ‘bent’, which emphasizes the non-problematic nature of the job in question. Even the adverb *kunnolla* ‘properly’ in the question (line 8) that carries a normative sense is changed in the answer to *siististi* ‘neatly’. The implications of the job being a difficult one are thereby wiped out with the nonchalant description of an effortless event (‘they bent just neatly’).

What the example illustrates is the fact that, even when the answer given is an

affirmative one, the recipient may, for one reason or another, distance him/herself from some of the senses or implications conveyed by the question. This is achieved by presenting a statement of one's own instead of a verb repeat which is tied to the choices offered in the question. However, the respondent marks his statement explicitly as an answer by attaching the confirming particle *joo* to the end of it, before launching in an elaboration of the job description. It was claimed above in connection with examples (7-8) that the particle in the format Verb + *joo* marks the exchange as a side sequence or suggests otherwise the closing of the sequence. It is not obvious that the particle conveys the same effect in this connection. Rather, its task here is to mark the end of the answering part of the turn.

The answerer subsequently pursues the topic, and gives detailed evidence of how and why the job was so easy. This could be interpreted so that he is thereby treating his answer as one that departs from the implications of the question. This interpretation would agree with the claim made by Geoffrey Raymond (2000) in his dissertation that (in his terms) "non-conforming", (i.e. non-prototypical) answers tend to require an account or reason for departing from the minimal answer. Alternatively, Sami's activity could be viewed as seizing the opportunity of becoming the principal speaker, and not just remaining in the position of giving minimal answers to the co-participant's questions. Paradoxically enough, in this elaboration, Sami himself resumes the causative form of the verb (cf. line 13: *Ne teki ja taivutteli* 'one did them and bent them') offered by Vesa in the first place but which he departed from in the answer proper.⁴

An account can take several guises, as will be seen in the next example. Example (10) illustrates another context typical of a full sentence answer. Earlier in this call, the main speaker Mari was telling her recipient Eeva about the sad occasion of her dear workmate Riitta leaving and moving to another part of the country. This bit was illustrated as Example (6). In the present extract, lines 1-4 are part of Mari's telling about another friend who has been helping her. With the exclamation at the end of line 4 she can be heard to return to the topic of the leaving workmate. Subsequently, the recipient directs a matter of fact question to her about the time of her friend's (Riitta's) leaving.

(10) [Same call as in example 6; gentle repair of the question]

- 1 M: .hhh Joo::.. Ja sit ku se vielä ossaa vähä
 . hhh 'Ye::s. And so when she even knows a bit how
 2 ruottiks [k_omm_ento_ida] ja [tämmöst]
 to comment in Swedish and [that sort of]
 3 E: [>Nii ni_i::.<] [Joo::.]
 [>'Yes yes::<] [ye:a..']
 4 M: näinnik.kääst .että .hh [.hh] @Voi °sentää.hh°@
 kind of a .way .so .hh [.hh] @ Oh my °goodness° .hh@
 5 E: [Joo::..]

⁴ There is one more grammatical detail worth pointing out in line 13. Sami is not using the 1st person verb form but the so called zero subject, i.e. 3rd person singular verb form without an overt subject. As has been shown by Laitinen (1995), the use of a zero person opens up the space for anyone - also the recipient - to identify himself as the subject of the activity in question (cf. Laitinen 1995).

- [Yea:]
- 6 E: => No tuota< (.) vielä siitä Riitasta ni lähtöö-kö
Well PRT< (.) still that-of 1stName-ELA so leave-SG3-Q
'Well um< (.) still about Riitta is she going to
- 7 => se nyt sitte heti:.
it now then immediately.
leave right away then.'
- 8 M: => Se muuttaa huomenna. Tavarat lähtee e Pieksä[mäelle.]
it move-SG3 tomorrow things leave-SG3 uh PlaceNAME-ALL.
'She is moving tomorrow. Her baggage is setting off for Pieksä[mäki.]
- 9 E: [Ō luo]:ja.
['Oh my Go:]d.'

Instead of a simple affirmative answer by repeating the verb of the question (cf. *lähtöö-kö*, 'leaves' line 6), the recipient Eeva answers with a full sentence that has the same syntactic frame as the question: Subject, Verb, Adverbial (line 8). She uses an anaphoric pronoun *se* 'she' as the subject phrase in her answer (line 8), tying it to the person (*Riitta*) mentioned in the question. Yet she changes both the verb and the adverbial for more specific ones than what were used in the question.

In general, using a full sentence with a SV order instead of a VS format enables the answerer to change the verb; the initial verb behaves in this respect like a verb repeat. Here, the answer with an initial subject enables the recipient to change verbs: From *lähtee* 'leaves' (line 6) to the verb *muuttaa* 'moves' (line 8). The recipient's verb is one that requires an intentional, preferably human subject, and that implicates 'not returning'. The verb choice also disambiguates between 'leaving the work place' and 'moving away from the town'. In the next utterance, possibly to be seen as an account for her departure of the verb repeat format, Mari adds information about the 'baggage leaving', using now the verb offered by the questioner, just like in the previous example.

The full sentence answer, then, seems to achieve several goals at the same time: While offering an affirmative answer, it also more or less discreetly produces a repair of something in the question by changing some or several of the linguistic details in the description of the state of affairs that were presented in it. In addition, it may change the positions of the speaker so that the answerer will take over and become the main speaker.

4.2. Full sentence answers orientating to more than just the question

As was pointed out in connection with example (9), some sentence formatted answers have the confirming particle *joo* attached to the end. While this particle did not seem to affect the orientation of the answer as compared to those without the particle, there was another, initially placed particle that seemed to do so. This is the particle *kyllä* that was used in the EU-referendum (see note 3). The particle *kyl(lä)*, roughly glossed in dictionaries as 'sure', 'really', 'indeed', is among the most frequently used particles in Finnish conversations. Its use is sequentially restricted: It does not occur in interrogative nor in imperative formatted sentences that are typically used as first pair parts. Their home base are statements that are

responsive in one way or another.⁵

In the next two examples, like in examples (9) and (10), the respondents make changes in the verb offered in the preceding question. Yet, intuitively, the answers are more clearly aligning with the positive alternative of the yes/no question than in the cases with a plain SV-formatted answer. In example (11), the speakers are negotiating about putting up a job announcement on the departmental notice board.

(11) [The answerer is orienting to the doubts in the context]

- 1 I: .hh- (.) †voisik sä panna sen.
 .hh- (.) † could you put it. ((up on a notice board))
 2 (.)
 3 M: hjoo kun sanot vaan että mitä siihen panna [an.
 hyeah when you just tell me what to put in [it.
 4 I: [o- on-ks sul
 [i- is-Q you-ADE
 ['Are you
 5 => nyt niin kiire että sä- e:hdik-sä ottaa.
 now so busy that you- have-time-Q-you take.
 so busy now that you- have you got the time to take it.'
 6 M: =>†kyllä minä kerkiä-n ottaa. joo
 †Kyllä I have-time-SG1 take. yeah
 'Kyllä I can manage to take it. Yes'

The caller Ilona asks if the recipient Maija could put up an announcement (line 1). Having received a positive response (line 3), she goes on asking if Maija has the time to 'take it' (i.e. write down the information needed for the announcement) right away (*nyt* 'now', line 5). In her answer, Maija admits having the time (line 6) but does this with a verb choice of her own, using a synonym taken from her own vernacular. We can ask ourselves once again, why it is that Maija is not giving a minimal answer, the verb repeat. The solution will be found by looking more closely into the context. We already noted that Ilona does not proceed right away to the question that we are focussing on: She has already checked the circumstances with her first question at line 1 by asking Maija a favour. With her answer to Ilona's question, at line 3, Maija agrees to do the favour but presents conditions on her help.

Ilona's question at lines 4-5 can be analysed in relation to Maija's conditional agreement. Taking down a dictation of an announcement is potentially time consuming, and there is the possibility that Maija might not have the time. The question turn consists of two parts: Ilona begins by asking whether Maija is occupied ('are you so busy now that'). She then interrupts herself after the conjunction *että* 'that' and the subject pronoun *sä*- 'you' thus aborting the projected negative subordinate clause ('that you cannot take [down the facts]'). As a self-repair, Ilona subsequently produces a more straightforward question ('have you got the time'). In this instance, Maija's full sentence answer, with the initial modal particle

⁵ In a turn, *kyl(lä)* can occur in several alternative positions, usually fully integrated in the sentence. It occurs (i) turn and utterance initially like other response particles, but it is also found (ii) in the middle of an utterance, and even (iii) turn and utterance finally. In answers, however, the particle is always initial.

kyllä seems to function as a reassurance, producing a more explicitly confirming answer than a mere verb repeat would be, thereby doing away with the doubts created by the preceding exchange. The rise in pitch (marked with an upward arrow) when she utters the particle *kyllä* adds to the sense of reassurance that the action conveys.

The reassurance must thus be seen not only against the question at the end of the previous turn but against the entire previous turn: The turn-final question is preceded by another one expressing doubts about the possibility of getting Maija to do the job right away. Thus, Maija's answer is orienting to both parts of the turn at once. With her choice of the roughly synonymous modal verb (*kerkiää* line 6; cf. *ehtii*, line 5) Maija avoids a verbatim repetition of the question. It is hard to pin down the difference in flavour that the change of modal verbs brings about.⁶ Once again, attached at the end of the turn, this time as a separate intonation unit, there is the confirming particle *joo*, ending the presequence and opening up space for the anticipated activity.

The next example also involves a presequence (lines 4-5), the outcome of which is an invitation for a lunch date. In her answer, the recipient, Arja, responds with a full sentence that makes use of and modifies the elements offered in the question. The plain verb be ('are you' is replaced in the answer by a verb group that includes the modal auxiliary *voisin* 'I could'). The modal verb, the stress on the verb, and the subjunctive mood implicate Arja's conditional willingness to negotiate the proposal.

(12) [Answerer also orients to the (problematic) projection of the question]

- 1 AR: Arja Rautiainen
1stNAME SURNAME
- 2 K: Kantola täällä hei
Surname here hi,
- 3 AR: ↑no ↓hei.
↑Well ↓hi
- 4 K:=> Olek-ko sä tänäpä^{nä} syömässä täällä.
be-SG2-Q you this-day eating-INE here.
'Are you eating here today.'
- 5 AR:=> Kyllä mä voi-si-n olla.=joo.
KYLÄ I could-SG1 be.=yeah.
'Kyllä I could be. =Yes.'
- 6 K: Erinomasta.=Mutta mihin aikaan.
'Excellent. =But at what time?'
- 7 AR: Mikäs sulle sopis.=
'What would suit you? '=
- 8 K:=> Heti<.
'Right away.'
- 9 AR: Siel on nyt kyl kauhee ruuhka.
There is now KYL terrible crowd.

⁶ Elsewhere (Hakulinen 2000) I mentioned that the verb used by the respondent Maija has in certain vernaculars, a broader meaning of availability than just having the time. All that we can say for sure is, however, that the verb did get replaced by its synonym; the rest is speculative.

'There is a terrible crowd KYL at the moment.'

Despite the fact that the mood of the verb in the answer differs from that of the preceding question, the answer does not convey the implication of resistance or unwillingness. Rather, it shows the speaker's orientation to both the question as such and to its projection of the subsequent invitation. Let us look into the sequel to the exchange. The positive response is received by Kantola with enthusiasm (line 6). The negotiation about a time that would suit both speakers brings up the problem that was possibly foreshadowed by Arja with her use of the particle *kyllä*. While Kantola would be free to proceed to have lunch right away, Arja is hesitant because of the "terrible" crowd in the dining room.

To conclude the observations on examples (11-12), we can make the following generalization. As compared to the plain SV-formatted answers, those prefaced with the particle *kyllä* do not seem to present a repair of the proposition given in the question even if they involve changes in the expressions offered in the question. Instead, *kyllä*-prefaced answers explicitly align or acquiesce with the question, the sense of alignment being conveyed through the initial particle. As distinguished from the prototypical minimal answers with the verb repeat, on the other hand, the *kyllä*-prefaced ones make use of the possibility, given by the full sentence format, of modifying the finite verb of the question in one way or another, thereby specifying the nature of the alignment. In the paradigm of answers, then, the *kyllä*-type sentential answer functions as a half way house between a complying verb repeat and a plain SV- sentence.

The final example is one where the full sentence answer is identical with the preceding question as regards propositional content. The extract is taken from a tv-debate on the rights and wrongs of women's studies. This is the opening question put to one of the 'defendants' of the field: An obvious first pair-part in a presequence that will be followed by loaded questions typically directed to feminists.

(13) [TV-interview; answer fends off a challenge]

Jokke : .hh Päivi Istala, ole-tte-ko te (.) feministi.

.hh 1stNAME SURNAME be-PL2-Q you (.) feminist

.hh 'Päivi Istala, are you (.) a feminist.'

(1.0)

Päivi : mt Kyllä minä ole-n ↑feministi ja minua voi kyllä myös

mt KYLLÄ I be-SG1 ↑feminist and I-PAR ∅ can KYLLÄ also

'KYLLÄ I am a ↑feminist and one may KYLLÄ also

sinutella minusta on hassua jos yleisradion toimittajat

'duzen' me-ELA is funny if COMPANY NAME-GEN reporters

address me informally I find it funny if reporter colleagues

teitittelevät toisiaan .hh televisio-ohjelmassa.

'siezen' each other .hh television-programme-INE

address each other formally in a tv-programme.'

Initiating the answer with the particle *kyllä*, the respondent aligns herself with the positive alternative of the yes/no question. However, as in Example (11), the particle *kyllä* seems here to go against some negative implicature in the context. In this case, it could be an implicature to the effect, 'it is not recommendable to be a feminist' - by now, a pretty clearly

conventionalized implication conveyed by a question of this kind. By presenting a full sentence of her own, the respondent is as if defining her status as a feminist with her own words. Note the rise of intonation (marked with an upward arrow) at the word *feministi* in the answer, possibly signifying that the answer is responding to a challenge⁷, and also projecting a continuation by the speaker.

A mere verb repeat (*ole-n* 'I am'), without the surrounding sentence, would have tied the interviewee to the negative implications conveyed by the question as put by a (rather aggressive) male journalist. By refusing to do so, she also frames her position for the ensuing interrogation projected by the question. The one second pause before the answer is significant here. It is interpretable as a sign of hesitation before taking a stand to a seemingly straightforward question which, however, is a loaded one – the kind that tends to receive the culturally preferable negative answer, or one to the effect, 'Yes, but not of the kind that you have in mind'.

There seem to be different interactional motivations for selecting a *kyllä*-prefaced answer instead of a mere verb repeat, or instead of a plain SV-formatted answer as a way of affirming. What many of them have in common is a negative bias that is either in the co-participant's or the speaker's own mind.

5. Discussion

Full sentence answers are quite obviously doing different kind of work than minimal answers: In addition to responding to the question, they address some other feature that is there in the context either made explicit by the questioner, or interpreted as being there by the answerer. Moreover, just as was the case with the minimal answers, the sequential position is playing a role in the choice of the sentential answer. As a final overall point I shall present some observations on the database regarding the sequential placement of the two kinds of sentential answers.

Questions that receive full sentences can be roughly grouped in three types. The most frequent type of questions in the database were genuine requests for information. The majority of *kyllä*-prefaced answers were given as responses to these information seeking questions. The second largest group was formed by questions that story recipients made in order to get a clarification of something in an ongoing narrative, thereby spurring the main speaker to continue or elaborate on the narration. To this type of question, there were no answers beginning with *kyllä*; this was a favourite position for the plain SV-type answer. Thirdly, to questions that open up a presequence, projecting a request, invitation or interrogation, *kyllä*-type answers were frequent, but they were used under slightly different conditions than verb repeats (discussed above in connection with examples 2-4).

Answers formulated with a SV-type utterance tended to turn up at places where the answerer had been the main speaker and was being encouraged to go on by the co-participant. Continuing one's own topic is an activity where a full sentence is to be expected instead of a mere verb repeat that is parasitically attached to a question by the co-participant. On the other hand, answers beginning with *kyllä* tended to occur in

⁷ The idea of the respondent fending off the challenge by her prosody, was brought to my attention by Robin Wooffitt.

presequences, or as responses to questions that were in some way backgrounded, and it was the questioner who continued the talk, not the participant who produced the answer.

To return to the plan mentioned at the outset, I have placed the alternatives discussed in this paper on the scale with the poles *yes* and *no*. The idea with the cline is that as we move on it towards the right we see that the answers are less dependent on the question and the presuppositions it may convey. In this paper, I have only been able to take up a few points from the cline; more work needs to be done to develop the rest of the points further.

**A cline between the two poles:
confirming - affirming - distancing - - - negating**

JOO	V-repeat	VS	KYLLÄ+SV	SV-		story	account	counter-Q	EI

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