

Subject: Experimental and corpus study of polar questions and answer particles in English and French

*Est-ce que Paul sera là ? Oui. /Non.*

*Is Paul going to be here? Yes. /Non.*

Polar questions and answers are frequent most if not all languages. They have been a research interest in semantics and pragmatics for many years, yet there is no consensus on the semantic denotations of polar questions and answer particles, on the bias profiles of different forms and polarity of polar questions, on the role of prosody in the meaning polar questions, on their mental representations, or on the cross-linguistic universals/differences.

In this project, you will

1. Investigate the bias profiles of French and English polar questions using corpus and experimental methods. Speakers of polar questions often carry an epistemic or evidential bias, and the bias profiles for different types of polar questions are likely different. By analysing corpus data, you will generalize bias profiles for each form and polarity. The generalization will then be tested in an experiment.
2. Investigate the comprehension and production of the French particle “si” in children and adults: is the use of “si” licenced by an explicit linguistic negative antecedent, or an implicit negative bias of the interlocutor? When is the use of “si” acquired by Children. In this project you will investigate these questions using a behavioural study.

To apply, you must be interested in semantics and pragmatics. Language requirement: you must be a native speaker of French and have a good command of English.