Actions fulfilled by ‘conductive’ yes-no questions in Estonian institutional dialogues

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Abstract: Our poster presents the results of a conversation analytic study of actions fulfilled by ‘conductive’ yes-no questions (CQ) in Estonian institutional conversation the main goal of which is to get some information (phone number, address etc). Our data comes from the Corpus of Spoken Estonian.

CQ have a built-in bias towards one answer rather than other (nice kitchen isn’t it?).

Our analysis shows that there exists a clear difference in the form of CQ and ‘neutral’ yes/no-questions (NQ) in Estonian interaction. NQ are formed almost always by constructions with finite verb and using question words (mostly kas ‘whether’). 60% of CQ are formed by constructions without finite verb and without question words. If question word is used, then 2/3 of cases contains jah ‘yes’; kas is very rare. Different actions are formulated by different form variants of CQ.

NQ are used almost always in a ‘main line’ of the dialogue and not in side sequences. CQ are used mainly in side sequences. Our analysis shows that main actions accomplished by CQ are as follows:

- initiation of repair in the next turn after the trouble source by (partial) repetition of the trouble source or candidate offering. The contexts here are non-hearing, non-understanding, repairs or overlaps in preceding turns, unexpectedness of information or proposal given/made by the partner, a vague or a hesitant partner's wish;

- delayed repair at the end of a topic by (partial) repetition of the trouble source which is situated at the beginning of the topic. The contexts here are non-remembering, uncertainty in suggestion or information given by the partner, agreements for future activities, information given by the partner in his/her own initiative;

- initiation of insertion sequence by the answerer to narrow or concretize too broad or too general question;

- additional question about some aspect of the topic to test asker’s knowledge, inferences or hypotheses.