



Conversational dynamics of Russian questions with *razve*

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Agenda: Russian polar question particle *razve* and a novel type of bias

- ▶ *Razve*: left-periphery particle used in polar questions (not discussed: its potentially unrelated use in exceptives)
- ▶ Previous descriptions: a sense of incredulity/disbelief (Bulygina & Shmelev 1987; Repp & Geist forth.; Shvedova et al. 1980)

What *razve* does: epistemic conflict and attempt at conflict resolution

(1) *Bear, having decided to be a tree, waves and sings, and tells Squirrel he's swaying his branches.* (Sergey Kozlov, *That kind of tree*)

Ty **razve** derevo? — udivilasj Belka. [...] — A pochemu ty begaesh po vsej poljane?
 you **RAZVE** tree.NOM wonder.SG.F.PST squirrel.NOM.SG but why you run.2SG.PRES on all.DAT.SG.F clearing.DAT.SG
Razve ty kogda-nibudj videl, chtoby derevja begali?
RAZVE you ever see.SG.M.PST COMP tree.NOM.PL run.PL.PST
 '“You are a tree?”, Squirrel wondered. “But why are running all around the clearing? Have you ever seen trees run?”'

- ▶ Squirell had prior belief that Bear is not a tree ($\neg p$) and that trees don't run ($\neg q$)
- ▶ Bear's words and actions present evidence contradicting those beliefs ($p \wedge q$)
- ▶ Accepting this new information will result in inconsistent beliefs ($(p \wedge \neg p) \wedge (q \wedge \neg q)$)
- ▶ Squirell asks a genuine question to resolve the conflict

- ▶ Central claim: *razve* conveys a special type of question bias associated with belief revision potential
- ▶ This novel type of bias is not discussed in, or captured by, previous accounts of biased questions

Background on polar interrogatives (Bryzgunova, 1983; King, 1994; Rudnitskaja, 2000; Schwabe, 2004)

① 'Unmarked' questions

- ▶ Obligatory rising intonation
- ▶ Declarative word order
- ▶ License expressions declaratives don't
- ▶ Only matrix level

② Questions with the second-position focus clitic *li*

- ▶ *Li*'s host: focus of the question, main predicate by default
- ▶ Optional in matrix questions, perceived as more formal
- ▶ Obligatory in all embedded polar questions
- ▶ Only polar questions: incompatible with *wh*-pronouns

Neutral context: Question on a job application form / during a job interview

(2) ✓Vy govorite po-russki? ↑ / Govorite li vy po-russki? ↑ (3) #**Razve** vy govorite po-russki? ↑
 you.POL speak.2PL.PRES Russian / speak.2PL.PRES Q you.PL Russian **RAZVE** you.PL speak.2PL.PRES Russian
 'Do you speak Russian?' ≈ 'Do you really speak Russian?'

- ▶ Syntactic distribution of *razve*-clauses (NB: *razve* mostly clause-initial, but not always, cf. (1))
 - ▶ Only matrix level: banned as embedded questions (both responsive and rogative predicates)
 - ▶ Only polar interrogatives without *li*: incompatible with *wh*-pronouns as a *wh*-question
 - ▶ Only interrogatives: infelicitous as declaratives, evidenced by intonation
- ▶ Licensing behavior: same as polar interrogatives, with or without *li*
 - ▶ License *nibudj*-indefinites (1), which are banned in ordinary declaratives (Yanovich, 2005)
 - ▶ License bare *wh*-indefinites with an existential intepretation (as in *kto* = 'someone', ≠ 'who'; Tretjakova 2020)
- ▶ Bottom line: *razve*-clauses are interrogatives
- ▶ Likely source of incompatibility with *li*, embedded and *wh*-questions: their anti-singleton constraint clashes with the singleton requirement of *razve* (cf. Bhatt & Dayal 2020; Biezma et al. 2022 on Hindi/Urdu *kya*)

Razve and the extant typology of question bias

- ▶ Question bias: preference for one of the answers to a polar question (Goodhue 2022; Romero 2020 a.o.)
- ▶ Common ways to parameterize bias (see especially Domaneschi et al. 2017)
 - ▶ Epistemic bias: speaker's belief about p prior to conversation (Romero & Han, 2004)
 - ▶ Contextual bias: mutual evidence about p during conversation (Büring & Gunlogson, 2000; Sudo, 2013)
- ▶ How *razve* fits into this taxonomy: (cf. similar findings in Repp & Geist forth. on *razve*+negation)
 - ▶ Obligatory expression of negative epistemic bias and positive contextual bias
 - ▶ Looks akin to English *really* (Romero & Han, 2004), Italian *mica* (Frana & Rawlins, 2019), German *etwa* (Xu, 2017)

3*3 classification of bias (only looking at positive questions)

Target sentence:	Contextual: neutral	Contextual: p	Contextual: $\neg p$
(4) Razve ty ljubish svjoklu? RAZVE you love.2SG.PRES beet.ACC ≈ 'Do you like beets?'	Epistemic: neutral # (5a)	# (5b)	# (5c)
(5) Neutral epistemic : I meet you for the first time, we go out for lunch.	Epistemic: p # (5a)	# (5b)	# (5c)
a. Neutral contextual : I want to check before ordering.	Epistemic: $\neg p$ # (7a)	✓(7b)	# (7c)
(6) Positive epistemic : I'm sure you like beets. Conditions a,b,c same as in (5).			
(7) Negative epistemic : I'm sure you hate beets. Conditions a,b,c same as in (5).			

- ▶ Common ways to analyze bias (see especially Goodhue 2022)
 - ▶ Common ground management devices (Frana & Rawlins, 2019; Repp, 2013; Romero & Han, 2004)
 - ▶ Discourse commitments operators (Gunlogson, 2003; Farkas and Røelofsen, 2017; Malamud and Stephenson, 2015; Xu, 2017)
 - ▶ Repp & Geist (forth.): *razve* ≈ *really*, based on superficially similar behavior as in (5)–(7)
- ▶ How *razve* does not fit: (pace Repp & Geist forth.)
 - ▶ *Razve* does not convey disbelief in a salient proposition (unlike English *really* or Italian *mica*)
 - ▶ *Razve* conveys speaker's uncertainty, not (weak) commitment (unlike English tag questions)
 - ▶ Repp & Geist (forth.): incorrect predictions for (8) and (9) (cf. Bill & Koev forth. on bias strength in English)

Razve ≠ conversational denial / signal of disbelief

(8) *My spouse says that he brought strawberries from the market.*
Razve v avguste escho estj klubnika?
RAZVE in august.PREP still be.PRES strawberry.NOM
 'Do they still have strawberries in August?'
 ≠ 'DO they have strawberries in August?'
 ≠ 'Do they really have strawberries in August?'
 ≠ 'Aren't last strawberries in June?'

(9) *I overhear a friend speaking Turkish at a store.*
Razve ty govorisch po-turecki?
RAZVE you speak.2SG.PRES Turkish
 'Do you speak Turkish?'
 ≠ 'CAN you speak Turkish?'
 ≠ 'Do you really speak Turkish?'
 ≠ 'Don't you not speak Turkish?'

Razve ≠ weak commitment

(10) *Presented with infrared pictures of wolves on the slopes of a nearby mountain, I express my attitude towards the situation.*
Razve v Aljpx estj volki? Mne ✓kazalosj / #kazhetsja, chto net. / Ja ✓nadejusj / #dumaju, chto net.
RAZVE in Alps be.3SG.PRES wolf.PL.DAT seem.PST seem.PRES COMP NEG.be I hope.1SG.PRES think.1SG.PRES COMP NEG.be
 'Are there wolves in the Alps? It seemed to me /#seems to me there aren't. / I hope/#think there aren't.'

Proposal

- ▶ Core intuition: *razve* signals that the speaker is in a situation with belief-revision potential
- ▶ Current approaches to question bias: not fine-grained enough to capture this behavior
- ▶ Another novel constraint: reasoning-based restrictions on *razve*
 - ▶ Public evidence that supports an abductive inference (much like epistemic *must*; Mandelkern 2019; Winans 2016)
 - ▶ Abductive inference: reasoning from an effect to the best explanation (NB: ≠ cause) (Douven, 2021)
 - ▶ Abductive expressions: evidentials, modals, conditionals (Cumming & Winans, 2021; Krawczyk, 2012; Winans, 2016)
 - ▶ First discussion of such sensitivity for question particles/question bias

Kinds of evidence

- ▶ Evidence must be mutually available (common for markers of contextual bias, but not expressions of evidence at large)
- (11) ✓**Mutual information**: *I think smoking is banned indoors, but another guest lights a cigarette.*
 #**Private information**: *I think smoking is banned indoors, but another guest lights a cigarette (you were at the counter and didn't see).*
Razve zdesj mozhno kuriti?
RAZVE here can.PRED smoke.INF
 'Can one smoke here?'
- ▶ Evidence must support a mutual abductive inference (notion of explanation broader than causation, as in (15); cf. Kment 2014)
 - ▶ Inference must be shared: (12) and (15), but not (13)
 - ▶ No anti-abductive inferences, even when mutual (14)
- (12) *I am over at your house in the village.*
I see a mouse.
Razve u vas net kota?
RAZVE by you.DAT be.NEG cat.GEN.SG
 'Do you not have a cat?'
Background assumption (likely mutual), effect-to-cause:
 Absence of cats is the best explanation for presence of mice.
Bias: I believe every village house to have a cat.
- (13) *I am over at your house in the village.*
I ask where your cat is. You tell me you don't have one.
 #**Razve** u vas net myshej?
 #**RAZVE** by you.DAT be.NEG mouse.GEN.PL
 'Do you not have mice?'
Background assumption (unlikely mutual), effect-to-cause:
 Absence of mice is the best explanation for absence of cats.
Bias: I believe every village house to have mice.
- (14) *Venice banned passengers of cruise ships from disembarking on weekdays. It's Monday and I see a huge ship stopping.*
 #**Razve** segodnja snova budut tolpy ljudej?
 #**RAZVE** today again be.3SG.PL crowd.PL people.GEN
 'Will there will be crowds again today?'
Background assumption, cause-to-effect: Ships cause crowds.
Bias: I expect no crowds today.
- (15) *You say that Masha got sick. She was negative yesterday.*
Razve u nejo polozhitel'nij test?
RAZVE by she.DAT positive test
 'Does she has a positive test?'
Background assumption: Masha's having tested positive is the best explanation for your statement. [not causality]
Bias: I expect Masha to still be negative.

- ▶ *Razve*-clauses: polar interrogatives with a singleton constraint ($(\llbracket p \rrbracket) = 1$) and two epistemic inferences
- ① The bias inference: a not-at-issue comment on the at-issue contribution
 - ▶ Negation in negative bias not active semantically (In Russian: *razve* does not license negative *ni*-indefinites)
 - ▶ Easily captured multi-dimensionally: expressive/parenthetical meaning (cf. Gutzmann & Castroviejo Miró 2011)
 - ▶ *Razve*: no need to postulate conversational operators like FALSUM/VERUM, as they make wrong predictions about discourse effects for e.g. (8) and (9) (see also Goodhue 2022 for general criticism)
- ② The evidential inference: constrains the input context (cf. 11, 12); treated as a presupposition

How it works: RAZVE as a propositional operator

- (16) $\llbracket [Q [RAZVE p]] \rrbracket = \llbracket [RAZVE p] \rrbracket = \{ \lambda w. p \text{ in } w \}$ (treating the denotation of a question as a singleton set; Biezma & Rawlins 2012)
- (i) Can be appropriately used if (use-conditional meaning):
 $\exists t'. t' < t \wedge DOX_{(Sp, w, t')} \subseteq \neg p$. [note past tense in the follow-up in (10)]
 where t is the time of utterance and $DOX_{(Sp, w, t)}$ is speaker's belief worlds $\{ w' \mid w' \text{ compatible with what Sp believes in } w \text{ at } t' \}$.
- (ii) Defined if (presupposition): [omitting the singleton constraint and presuppositions of the question operator itself]
 $\exists q$ such that $Pr(K_{(Sp+Ad, w, t)} \cup q) | p > Pr(K_{(Sp+Ad, w, t)} \cup q) | \neg p$ and $\neg \exists r$ such that $Pr(K_{(Sp+Ad, w, t)} \cup q) | r \geq Pr(K_{(Sp+Ad, w, t)} \cup q) | p$,
 where Pr is a probability measure and $K_{(Sp+Ad, w, t)}$ is joint knowledge $\{ p \mid p \text{ is known to Sp and Ad in } w \text{ at } t \}$.
 In words: there is a salient observation q such that p is a good-fit explanation for q and there is no other equally good alternative explanation for q . [omitting possible normalcy/stereotypicality requirements.]
 (formalization for abduction adopted from Krawczyk 2012, see Bjørndahl & Snider 2015; Cumming & Winans 2021 for other options)
- (17) Derivation for (1) *Ty razve derevo?* 'Are you a tree?' (you RAZVE tree.NOM)
 $\llbracket [Q [RAZVE \text{ you are a tree}]] \rrbracket = \llbracket [RAZVE \text{ you are a tree}]] \rrbracket = \{ \lambda w. \text{Addressee is a tree in } w \}$
- (i) Can be appropriately used if: $\exists t'. t' < t \wedge DOX_{(Sp, w, t')} \subseteq \neg p$, where p is 'that Addressee is a tree in w '
- (ii) Defined if: $[Pr(K \cup q) | p > Pr(K \cup q) | \neg p] \wedge \neg \exists r [Pr(K \cup q) | r \geq Pr(K \cup q) | p]$, where q is 'that Addressee is swaying branches in w '

- ▶ Together the inferences often create uncertainty: all options are live (cf. especially the follow-up with 'hope' in 10)
- ▶ Lack of *razve*-declaratives explained: (cf. Biezma et al. 2022 on *kya*)
 - ▶ Assertion, even hedged, requires at least weak commitment/belief; incompatible with uncertainty
 - ▶ Information-seeking questions require lack of knowledge on Sp's part; compatible with uncertainty

Razve-questions as rhetorical questions

- ▶ In contexts with strong speaker's conviction, *razve*-questions can be rhetorical (common with normative claims)
- ① Evidence for p is strong but Sp does not want to give up $\neg p$ (18)
- ② Sp wants to challenge a salient idea that p (19)
- ▶ Rhetoricity not encoded by *razve*: basic semantics sufficient (it is possible that RhQs also differ prosodically)
- ▶ Conditions for possible belief revision are met, but in a rhetorical use, Sp actively refuses to reconsider
- ▶ In each case Sp wants to make a point, a general condition on rhetorical questions (Biezma & Rawlins, 2017)

Rhetorical uses

(18) *To yet another young person in a war zone:*
Razve mozhno detej na vojnu posylatj.
RAZVE can.PRED kids.PL to war.ACC send.INF
 'How can you even send kids to war?'
 (Vasily Grossman, *Life and Fate*)

(19) *Amid pleas to somehow counteract the Red Terror during the Stalin years.*
Razve moj golos ostanovit rasstrelj? [...] kto menja poslušhaet.
RAZVE my voice.NOM.SG stop.3SG.PRES shooting.ACC.PL who I.ACC listen.3SG.PRES
 'Can my voice stop mass shootings? Who will even listen.'
 (Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Memoirs*)

Outlook

- ▶ *Razve*-questions: belief revision potential, not agenda of disbelief (unlike other markers of negative bias)
- ▶ *Razve*: bias in a sense of speaker's attitude, not unbalanced-partition semantics
- ▶ Core contribution: Sp faces an epistemic conflict between prior belief and current abductive inference
 - ▶ Information-seeking interpretation: Sp uncertain, willing to revise beliefs, wants an answer
 - ▶ Rhetorical interpretation: Sp certain, unwilling to revise beliefs, wants to make a point
- ▶ Overall: a new type of non-canonical question, sensitivity to reasoning
- ▶ Belief revision ≠ violated expectations: *razve* is not an expression of surprise/mirativity
 - ▶ *Razve* requires peripheral belief about p : made salient in presence of conflicting evidence
 - ▶ Expectations come with *active opinionatedness*: *razve* allows it (e.g. 12, 15), but does not require

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