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**Be careful what you wish for...**  
**Bouletic bias in German questions**

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In everyday life we use subtle ways to communicate our attitude towards what we are saying or towards the answers we are expecting. One example is to indirectly utter our desires by asking questions with a *bouletic bias* (Sudo, 2013; van Rooy & Šafářová, 2003, cf. ‘Is this seat taken?’ vs. ‘Is this seat free?’).

I will present qualitative and quantitative data from studies investigating a) how a positive (desiring *yes* as an answer) or negative bouletic bias (desiring *no* as an answer) affects the prosodic realization of positive polar questions such as (1), b) the effect of these different prosodic realizations on listener’s perception of biased vs. neutral questions, and c) the meaning and purpose speakers assign to biased questions.

- (1) Machst du heute Auflauf?  
‘Are you making a casserole?’

The production data showed that speakers use various prosodic aspects to convey bouletic bias in such string-identical polar questions: positive bias is frequently produced with a low rise (L\* L-H%) or a rise-fall-rise (L+H\* L-H%), negative bias with a slower speech rate and a final high plateau (H\* H-%) and neutral polar questions with a high final rise (L\* H-^H%). Results of two perception studies (a decision task and a rating study using *semantic scales*, Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) confirmed the relevance of the identified cues for the perception of bias and corroborated that different prosodic forms signal distinct functions: Nuclear tunes associated with neutral questions were, for instance, judged as more *open* than tunes associated with biased questions. Participants furthermore detected the polarity of the bias conveyed by the respective nuclear tune (more frequent mention of *expecting agreement* in L+H\* L-H% vs. *expecting rejection* in H\* H-%). Statements obtained in a guided interrogation provided direct insights into the meaning and purpose speakers ascribe to questions with a bouletic bias, revealing that the main motivation for using biased questions is to maintain politeness and to give the addressee freedom of choice.

**References:** • Osgood, C. E., Suci, G. J., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1957). *The Measurement of Meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. • Sudo, Y. (2013). Biased polar questions in English and Japanese. In D. Gutzmann & H.-M. Gärtner (Eds.), *Beyond expressives: Explorations in use-conditional meaning* (pp. 275-296). Leiden: Brill. • van Rooy, R., & Šafářová, M. (2003). *On Polar Questions*. In R. B. Young & Y. Zhou (Eds.), *Proceedings of SALT 13* (pp. 292–309). Linguistic Society of America.