
Prosodic reflexes of speech act and polarity in German and Dutch response particles: Feature bundling for (un)marked discourses

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Response particles like German *ja* and *nein* may express that the proposition introduced by an antecedent is true or false – thus carrying out the speech act of affirmation vs. rejection –, and they may express that the polarity of the response is positive or negative, which may be done in both types of speech acts. The speech act function and the polarity-indicating function come apart after negative antecedents (NegA): the statement *Tim didn't cough* in principle may be affirmed with *ja* or *nein* (*ja* ® affirmation, *nein* ® negative polarity), so that ambiguity arises. Languages and speakers differ in their preferences for *ja/nein* signaling speech act vs. polarity. Written acceptability studies have shown that most German (G) speakers rate affirmations of NegA using speech-act-signaling *ja* as more acceptable, whereas most Dutch (D) speakers judge polarity-signaling *nee* as more acceptable. Still, in both languages, the non-preferred particle is fairly or (for some speakers) equally acceptable to affirm a NegA. Rejection is unambiguously signalled by dedicated particles in G and D (*doch, jawel*). The ambiguity issue in affirmations raises the question what particle(s) speakers use in production, and if they use different prosodic and voice quality means to mark the different functions. We present findings from an oral production study investigating the choice and realization of response particles after PosA and NegA in G and D. 48 G and 32 D participants took part in scripted dialogues and produced a response of their choice. We found that particle choice matched the acceptability ratings of earlier studies, including inter-individual variation. The analysis of the acoustics of the particles revealed significant bundles of phonetic features. For *nein/nee* in rejections vs. affirmations, tonal measures in G/D are lower, and they align with longer particle duration, but only D speakers modify voice quality (HNR). For *ja* in affirmations of NegA vs. PosA, tonal measures are lower in G/D, and they align in duration of the silence after the particle. Voice quality is modified only by G speakers (CPP). In our talk, we discuss the results in terms of discourse markedness. Rejections are more marked than affirmations, and the observed longer duration and higher HNR in D rejections might reflect negative attitude due to the face-threatening act. Negative sentences are more marked than positive sentences, so the higher CPP in G *ja*-affirmations of NegA might signal the negative polarity of the answer.

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