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?" '

▸ Squirrel 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 ($[p \wedge \neg p] \wedge [q \wedge \neg q]$)
▸ Squirrel 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; Rudnitskaya, 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 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*-infinites with an existential intereptation (as in *kto* = 'someone', ≠ 'who'; Tretyakova 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

Target sentence:

(4) Razve ty ljubish   svjoklu?
    RAZVE you love.2SG.PRES beet.ACC
    ≈ 'Do you like beets?'

	Contextual: neutral	Contextual: p	Contextual: $\neg p$
Epistemic: neutral	# (5a)	# (5b)	# (5c)
Epistemic: p	# (5a)	# (5b)	# (5c)
Epistemic: $\neg p$	# (7a)	✓(7b)	# (7c)

(5) Neutral epistemic: I meet you for the first time, we go out for lunch.
  a. Neutral contextual: I want to check before ordering.
  b. Positive contextual: You order beetroot hummus.
  c. Negative contextual: You avoid all beet mezzes.

(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 Roelofsen, 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 Aljpax estj   volki? Mne ✓kazalosj / #kazhetsja, chto net.   / Ja ✓nadejusj / #dumaju,   chto net.
  RAZVE in Alps   be.3SG.PRES wolf.NOM I.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   kuritj?
  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 u 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 u 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 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   polozhiteljnyj 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) $\llbracket [Q [\text{RAZVE } p]] \rrbracket = \llbracket [\text{RAZVE } p] \rrbracket = \{ \lambda w. \ p \text{ in } w \}$ (treating the denotation of a question as a singleton set; Biezma & Rawlins 2012)
  (i) Can be appropriately used if (use–conditional meaning):
       $\exists t'. t' < t \wedge DOX_{(Sp,w,t')} \subseteq \neg p$,
       where t is the time of utterance and $DOX_{(Sp,w,t')}$ is speaker's belief worlds { w' | w' compatible with what Sp believes in w at t' }.   [note past tense in the follow–up in (10)]
  (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 | p is known to Sp and Ad in w 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 Bjorndahl & Snider 2015; Cumming & Winans 2021 for other options)

(17) Derivation for (1) *Ty razve derevo?* 'Are you a tree?' (you RAZVE tree.NOM)
  $\llbracket [Q [\text{RAZVE you are a tree}]] \rrbracket = \llbracket [\text{RAZVE you are a tree}] \rrbracket = \{ \lambda w. \text{ Addressee is a tree in } w \}$
  (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 semantically: basic semantics sufficient (though it is possible that RhQs 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   rasstrely?   […] kto   menja poslushaet.
  RAZVE my voice.NOM.SG stop3SG.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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