



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; 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 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*-infinities with an existential intepretation (as in *kto* = 'someone', ≠ 'who'; Tretyakova 2020)
- Bottom line: *razve*-clauses are interrogatives
- Likely source of incompatibility with *li* (hence non-embeddability) and *wh*-questions: clash with alternatives generated by those types of questions (cf. Biezma et al. 2022 on the distribution of 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:		Contextual: neutral	Contextual: <i>p</i>	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. a. Neutral contextual : I want to check before ordering. b. Positive contextual : You order beetroot hummus. c. Negative contextual : You avoid all beet mezzes.	Epistemic: <i>p</i> Epistemic: $\neg p$	# (5a) # (7a)	# (5b) ✓(7b)	# (5c) # (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 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 avugste 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 Alpax estj volki? Mne ✓kazalosj / #kazhetsja, chto net. / Ja ✓nadeusj / #dumaju, chto net.
RAZVE in Alps be.3SG.PRES wolf.PL.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.'

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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 mozjno 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)

- (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.

- (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.

- (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.

- (15) *You say that Masha got sick. She was negative yesterday.*

Razve u nejo polozhitel'njij 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 are ordinary polar interrogatives with 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) $[[[Q [\text{RAZVE } p]]] = [[[\text{RAZVE } p]]] = \{ \lambda w. p \text{ in } w \}$ (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 $\{ w' \mid w' \text{ compatible with what Sp believes in } w \text{ at } t' \}$. [note past tense in the follow-up in (10)]
- (ii) Defined if (presupposition):
 $\exists q$ 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 $\{ p \mid p \text{ is known to Sp and Ad in } w \text{ at } t \}$. [omitting the presuppositions of the question operator itself]
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)
 $[[[Q [\text{RAZVE } \text{you are a tree}]]]] = [[[\text{RAZVE } \text{you are a tree}]]] = \{ \lambda w. \text{Addressee is a tree in } w \}$
(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 mozno 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 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