# "Negation" and CHECK moves in the Shetland dialect of Scots
Elyse Jamieson, University of Edinburgh

**Background:** Biased questions (BQs) and tag questions (TQs) are often taken to be closely related – generally, with TQs as VP-elided versions of BQs (e.g. van Rooij & Šafářova 2003, Asher & Reese 2007, Sailor 2011, Krifka 2015). Similarly, inverted exclamatives and polar rhetorical questions (RQs) are often understood with one as a variant of the other (e.g. Zanuttini & Portner 2004, Delfitto & Fiorin 2014). In English, all of these constructions are signalled with negation; particularly high –*n't* (see Domaneschi et al. 2017 on BQs).

Unlike standard English, Scots varieties maintain syntactically low negation in all constructions with interrogative syntax (Brown & Millar 1980).

1. Can she no come? / *Canna she come?
2. She can come, can she no? / *She can come, canna she?

However, across Scots varieties, particles have been innovated that can be used in various subsets of the "non-canonical questions" mentioned above – suggesting that perhaps a more closely knit theoretical relationship between all four constructions is required. I will present novel data giving an overview of the distribution of –*n* in the Shetland dialect of Scots, which I will analyse as a CHECK marker. I will give a syntactic and semantic analysis for this marker, in which the speaker *checks* that *p* is already part of the addressee's discourse commitments. I close with discussion of a possible diachronic change, involving the relationship between –*n* and FALSUM (Romero 2015).

**Basic data:** Shetland dialect –*n* [ən] combines with the auxiliary in its root form, e.g. [kɪn] *can* → [kɪnən] *can'n* (compare negative [kanə]); [du] *do* → [duən] *do'n* (compare negative [dʌnə]). The only mention of –*n* in the literature states that it is possible in "interrogatives" (Robertson & Graham 1952), while the Dictionary of the Scots Language suggests that –*n* originated to avoid vowel hiatus. However, the distribution is more limited than these accounts suggest. –*n* is not permitted in true negative interrogatives; nor is it permitted in any *wh*-questions. It is permitted in confirmational BQs (where there is no counterevidence challenging *p*) (3), TQs on positive anchors (4), polar RQs (5), and exclamatives (6).

| 3. | *Someone walks into the party; you are pretty sure his name is Tom. Your friend says to you: "oh, I can't remember his name!" You say:* Is'n it Tom? | 5. | *Your friend tells you they have just been to a café. Later, they suggest you go there together today, but you don't really like it. You say:* Did'n you just go there?! Can we go somewhere else? |
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| 4. | She can come, can'n she? | 6. | Wis'n it a beautiful day! |

It can also appear in a TQ on a negative anchor when combined with a lower negation.

| 7. | She canna come, can'n she no? | 8. | *She canna come, can'n she? |
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**Syntactic analysis:** I will present the results of acceptability judgment tasks testing the hypothesis that –*n* is being lost from contexts like (3) and moving towards use only in contexts like (4-6). I thus argue that it cannot be analysed as a specific form of FALSUM (Romero 2015) negation, and instead analyse it as a Call on Addressee (Beyssade & Marandin 2006) marker, which requests that the addressee *check* that the proposition *p* is already in their discourse commitments. –*n* is located in the left periphery, in the head of the ResponseP projection posited by Wiltschko & Heim (2016), with the auxiliary raising to combine with the particle due to Lasnik's (1981) Stranded Affix Hypothesis. In a TQ, the VP is subsequently elided at PF due to Merchant's (2001) eGIVENNESS condition (Sailor 2011).

9. $[_{RespP}$ will$_i$n $[_{CP}$ $[_C$ t$_i$ $[_{TP}$ that$_j$ $[_T$ t$_i$ $[_{vP}$ t$_j$ be good$]]]]]]$
10. *She can come* $[_{RespP}$ can$_i$n $[_{CP}$ $[_C$ t$_i$ $[_{TP}$ she$_j$ $[_T$ t$_i$ ~~$[_{vP}$ t$_j$ come]~~$]]]]]$
11. *She canna come* $[_{RespP}$ can$_i$n $[_{CP}$ $[_C$ t$_i$ $[_{TP}$ she$_j$ $[_T$ t$_i$ $[_{NegP}$ $[_{Neg}$ no ~~$[_{vP}$ t$_j$ come]~~$]]]]]]]$

Syntactically, this is backed up by examples like (7), where the lower negation must be in the proposition in order to be checked – without the negation, the speaker would be requesting a check of *p*, a proposition with the opposite polarity to the tag question anchor.

**Semantic analysis:** Semantically, I take –*n* to operate entirely at the CG management level (Potts 2005, Romero 2015). As none of the constructions in which –*n* operates actually

require the addressee to consider ¬*p*, I take it the at-issue content of a construction with –*n* to be simply *p* – as it would be in an assertion, with the speaker actively taking responsibility for the addition of *p* to CG. The additional CG management contribution of –*n* as a CHECK marker is that the Speaker (x) is sure that *p* is in the Addressee's (y) discourse commitments.

at-issue: p

CG-management: $\lambda p_{<s,t>}. \forall w \in Epi_x(w)[p \in DC_y]$

e.g. FOR-SURE-P-IS-IN-DC$_{Adr}$

These constructions are thus not *interrogatives*: no set of {p, ¬p} alternatives is introduced to the discourse; it is purely about the speaker *checking* their extant belief of *p* is shared with the addressee. Following Northrup (2014), by virtue of being in the discourse commitments of both participants, *p* is also in CG – however, this needs to be made explicit.

By answering *yes*, the addressee is agreeing that *p* is part of their discourse commitments, and makes this information public. By answering *no*, the addressee is rejecting *p*, and also rejecting the speaker's assumption that *p* is already part of their discourse commitments – this sort of rejection will require some level of explanation from the addressee. If the addressee chooses not to respond, as is possible with any of the constructions in (4-7), *p* is automatically added to CG – the addressee has not rejected *p*, or the belief attribution that the speaker has made. However, I argue that the need to respond is stronger in these situations than it is with a standard assertion without a CHECK move, as in a CHECK move, the speaker is expressing an assumption about the addressee's belief. While a speaker can attribute beliefs to an addressee based on the assumption of a shared evidence base, the addressee must still have the final say on what they believe.

The fact that the speaker is making an assumption about the addressee's belief is corroborated by facts from predicates of taste. I follow accounts of predicates of taste requiring a *judge* whose opinion is put forward in the predicate (e.g. Lasersohn 2005, Stephenson 2007). In assertions this is the speaker, but in questions, there is a speaker-hearer shift: *was it scary?* asks if the hearer judges the subject to be scary.

In a CHECK move on a predicate of taste (e.g. 12-13), the speaker believes, based on relevant evidence, that *p* is subjectively true. They also attribute this belief to the addressee. In a BQ (e.g. 14), the speaker's belief about the truth of *p* has not changed; neither has their evidence – what has changed is their ability to attribute this belief to the addressee.

12. Wis'n it scary!
13. It was scary, wis'n it.
14. Wis it no scary?

**Possible diachronic change:** Interestingly, in BQs and TQs, Shetland dialect –*n* can also appear with a lower *no* negation. This is not dependent on the evidential context: as with BQs and TQs in English, these constructions are acceptable in situations with neutral evidential contexts and in situations where there is negative counterevidence challenging *p*.

15. <u>Can'n</u> we <u>no</u> aa come in?                                   (Robertson & Graham 1952)
16. It must be three year since I left, <u>isn</u> it <u>no</u>?         (attested)

As in other Scots data where low negation is used in BQs, I take the lower *no* to be an instantiation of FALSUM (FOR-SURE-NOT-IN-CG) (Romero 2015). The question is thus how *no* and –*n* combine.

I tentatively posit an analysis where –*n* was originally a FALSUM marker, which was later strengthened by *no* in a Jespersen Cycle-type analysis of BQ negation. As –*n* weakened and *no* became the primary FALSUM marker, rather than being lost entirely, –*n* was reanalysed as a CHECK marker. Evidence of loss of –*n* in BQs supports this hypothesis.

SELECTED REFERENCES: **Beyssade**, C. & **Marandin**, J. (2006) "The speech act assignment problem revisited: Disentangling speaker's commitment from speaker's call on addressee" *CSSP 2005* • **Domaneschi**, F., **Romero**, M. & **Braun**, B. (2017) "Bias in polar questions: Evidence from English and German production experiments" *Glossa* 2 • **Lasersohn**, P. (2005) "Context dependence, disagreement and predicates of personal taste" *L&P* 28 • **Potts**, C. (2005) *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures* • **Romero**, M. (2015) "High negation in subjunctive conditionals and polar questions" *SuB 19* • **Wiltschko**, M. & **Heim**, J. (2016) "The syntax of confirmationals: A neo-performative analysis" in *Outside the Clause: Form and function of extra-clausal constituents*