'Negation' and CHECK moves in the Shetland dialect of Scots

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Introduction

- Shetland dialect has a particle, *–n*, which seems to be available in some constructions with interrogative syntax

(1) *Im'n I taald ye stories oot a number, til noo I*
am.N I told you stories out of number until now I
haena een left ta tell!
have.NEG one left to tell
"Haven't I told you so many stories?! So now I haven't got one left to tell." (Dagmar 1962:25)

- Investigate its syntactic and pragmatic distribution using acceptability judgments

- Give an analysis for *–n* as a CHECK move, which checks that *p* is already part of the addressee's beliefs

- Syntactically positioned in the left periphery (ResponseP)

Canonical questions

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Positive polar questions – Have you seen Titanic?

True negative questions – Have you not seen Titanic either?

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Non-canonical questions

Biased

Matrix biased questions:

Haven't you seen Titanic too?

Tag questions:

You've seen Titanic, haven't you?

(Ladd 1981, Büring & Gunlogson 2000, Romero & Han 2004, Sudo 2013)

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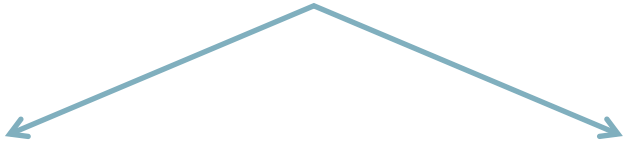


Biased

Matrix biased questions:

Haven't you seen Titanic too?

Tag questions:

You've seen Titanic, haven't you?

(Ladd 1981, Büring & Gunlogson 2000, Romero & Han 2004, Sudo 2013)

Rhetorical

Polar rhetorical questions:

Didn't I tell you it would be easy?

Exclamatives:

Isn't it wonderful!

(Han 2002, Zanuttini & Portner 2003, Delfitto & Fiorin 2014)

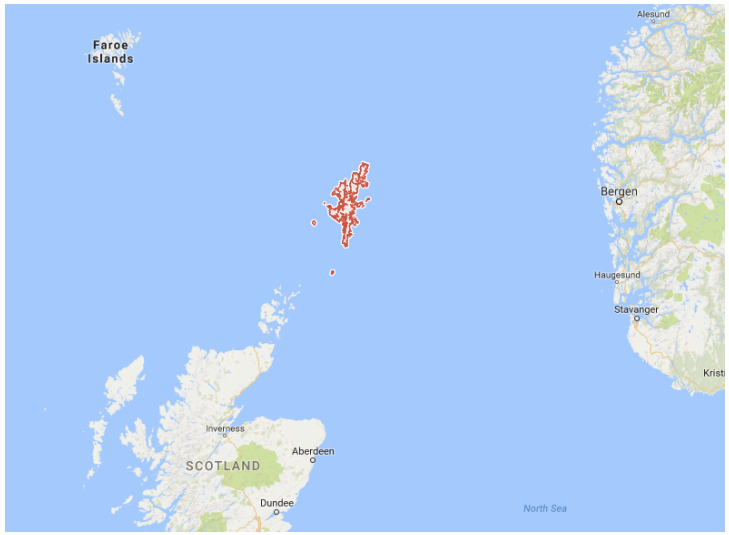
SHETLAND DIALECT

Negation in Shetland

- Standard negation markers:

–na and *no*

2. He is**na** coming.
3. He's **no** coming.



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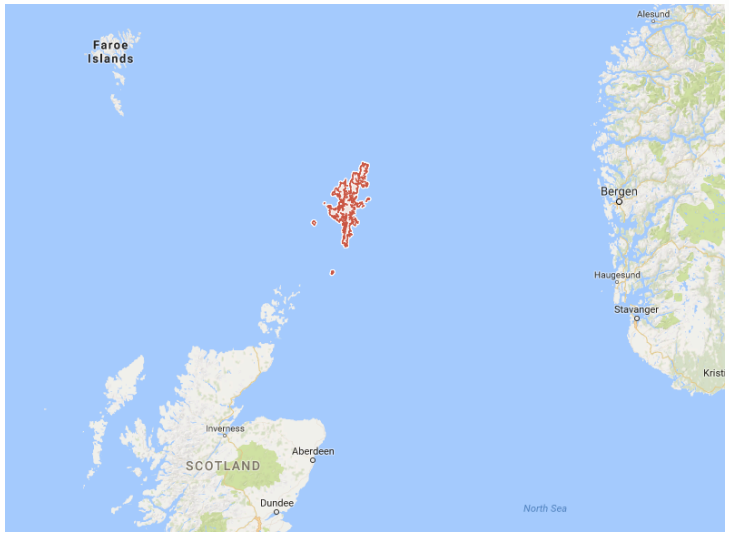

2. He is**na** coming.
3. He's **no** coming.

- *–na* unavailable in constructions with interrogative syntax

- Interrogative constructions are *verb-subject*-no.

4. Can you no come? / *Canna you come?
5. You can come, can you no? / *You can come, canna you?

Shetland *–n*

root		negative		*–n*	
could	[kud]	couldna	[kud.nə]	could'n	[ku.dən]
should	[ʃud]	shouldna	[ʃud.nə]	should'n	[ʃu.dən]

Shetland *–n*

root		negative		*–n*		*standard*	
could	[kud]	couldna	[kud.nə]	could'n	[ku.dən]	*couldn't*	[ku.dən?]
should	[ʃud]	shouldna	[ʃud.nə]	should'n	[ʃu.dən]	*shouldn't*	[ʃu.dən?]

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would	[wɪd]	widna	[wɪd.nə]	wid'n	[wɪ.dən]	*wouldn't*	[wu.dən?]
was	[wɪz]	wisna	[wɪz.nə]	wis'n	[wɪ.zən]	*wasn't*	[wa.zən?]

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would	[wɪd]	widna	[wɪd.nə]	wid'n	[wɪ.dən]	*wouldn't*	[wu.dən?]
was	[wɪz]	wisna	[wɪz.nə]	wis'n	[wɪ.zən]	*wasn't*	[wa.zən?]
can	[kɪn]	canna	[ka.nə]	can'n	[kɪ.nən]	*can't*	[kan?]
will	[wɪl]	winna	[wɪ.nə]	will'n	[wɪ.lən]	*won't*	[won?]
do	[du]	dunna	[dʌ.nə]	do'n	[du.ən]	*don't*	[dɔn?]

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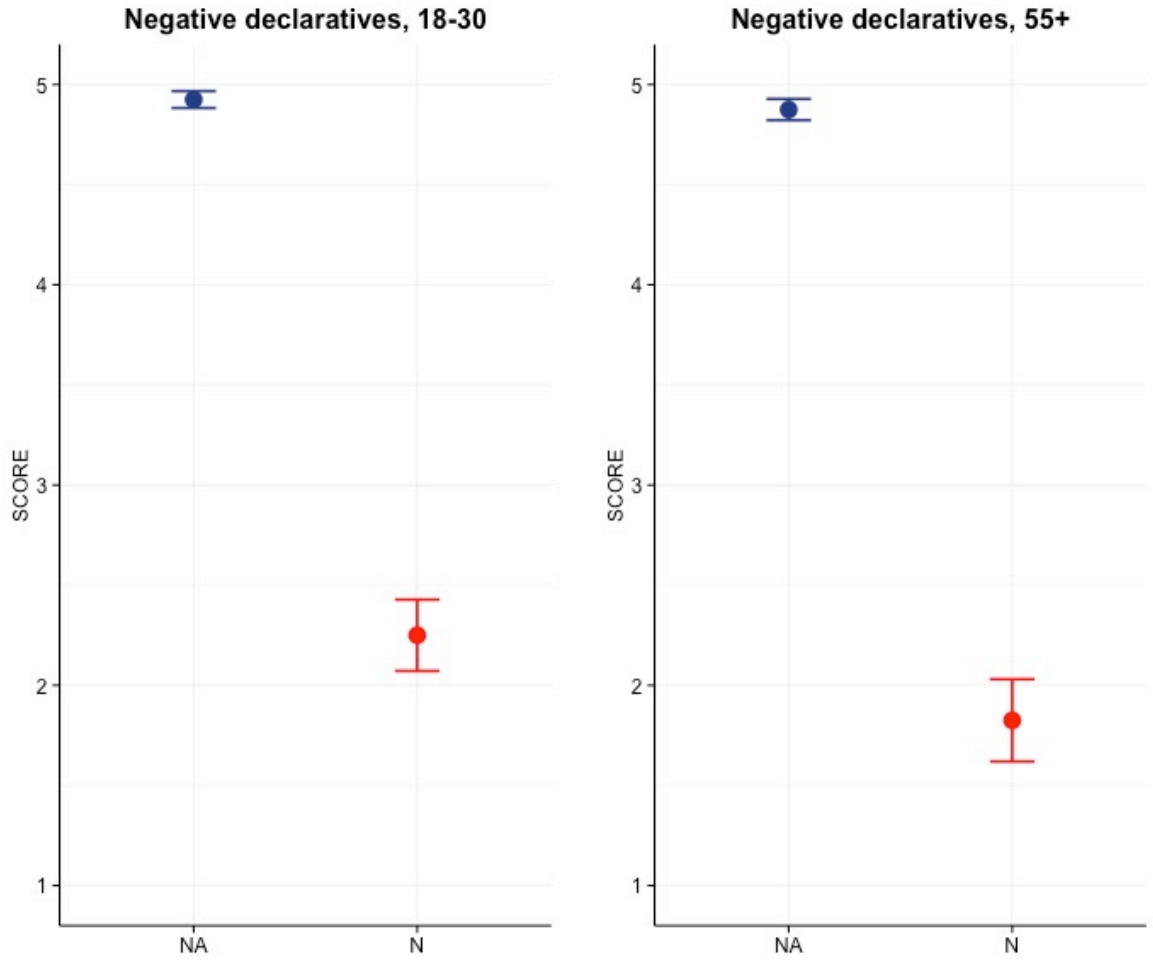
do	[du]	dunna	[dʌ.nə]	do'n	[du.ən]	*don't*	[dɔn?]

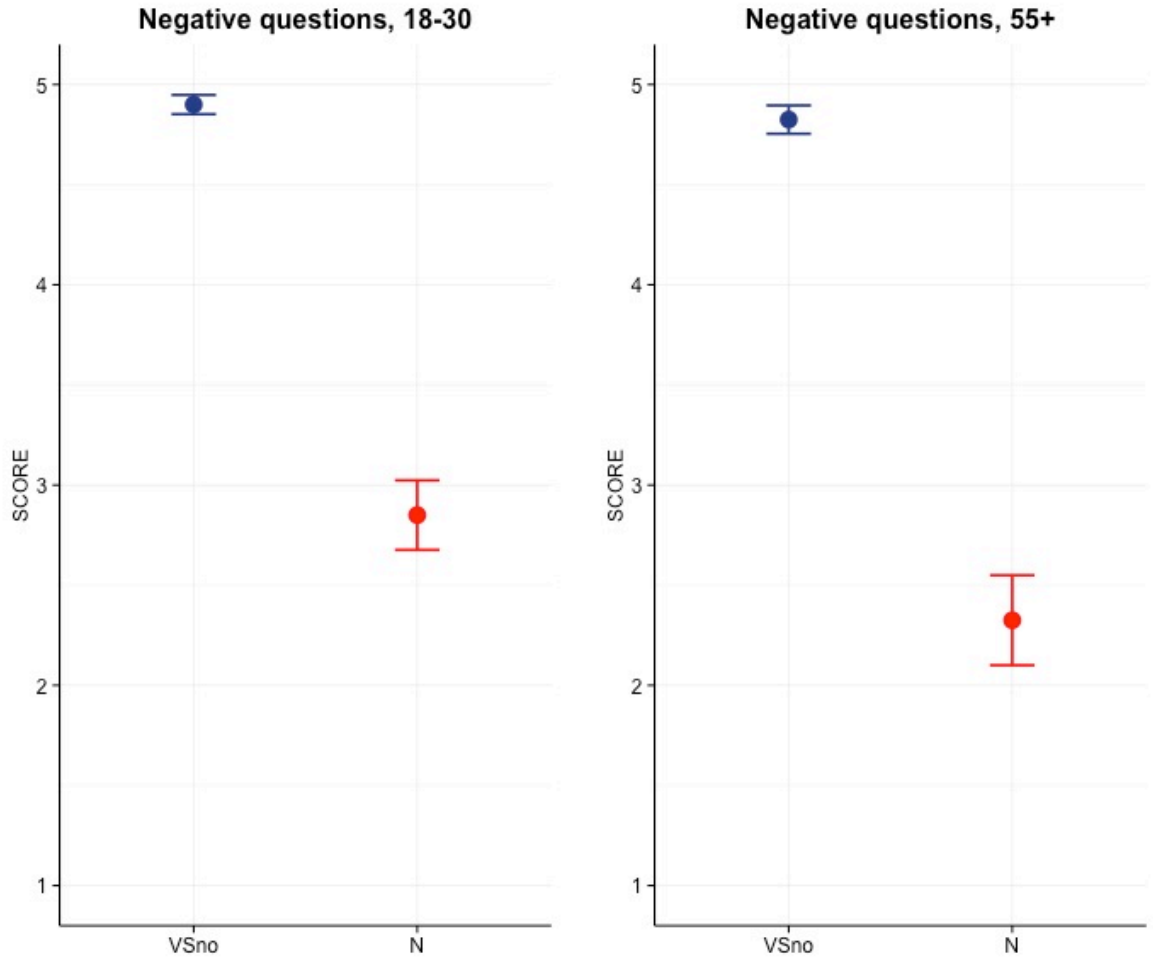
Interrogatives only?

She widna come. | She wid'n come.



True negative questions?

Do you no like it either? | Do'n you like it either?



DATA

Methodology

- 20 speakers from Shetland
  - 10 aged 18-30
  - 10 aged 55+
- Interview method
- Examples rated on a 1-5 scale

Smith & Durham (2011, 2012), Sundkvist (2011), Durham (2013), Jamieson (2016), Karam (2017)

Examples

BQ -- neutral evidential context

a) You are pretty sure that you have seen that I have a driving license [p]. We are going to help a friend to move house, and we're going to rent a van to do it [∅]. You say:

   Can'n you drive?

   Can you no drive?

Examples

BQ -- negative evidential context

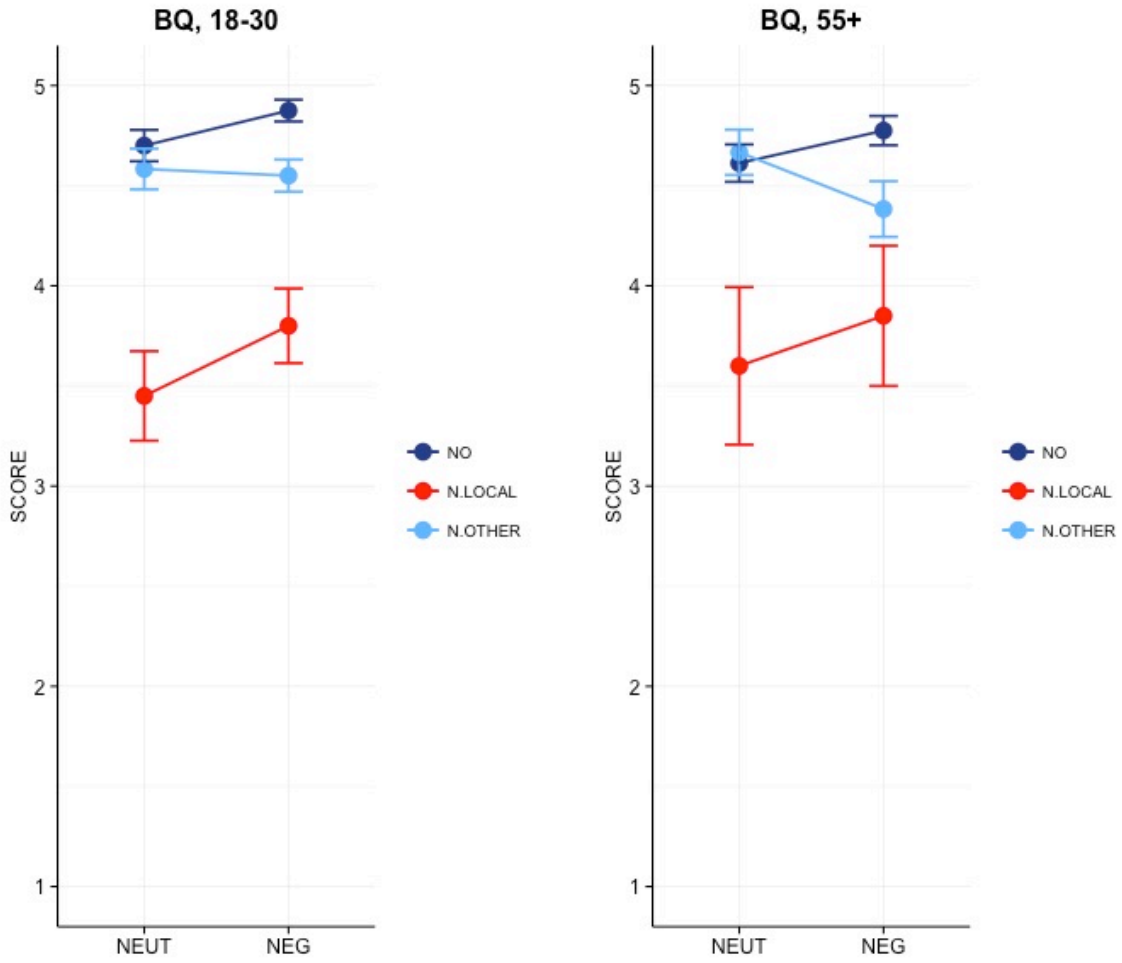
b) We have organised a retirement party for someone we work with. I was meant to buy a gift [p] but on the day of the party, when you ask me where the present is, I say 'what present?' [¬p]. You say:

Did you no buy the present?

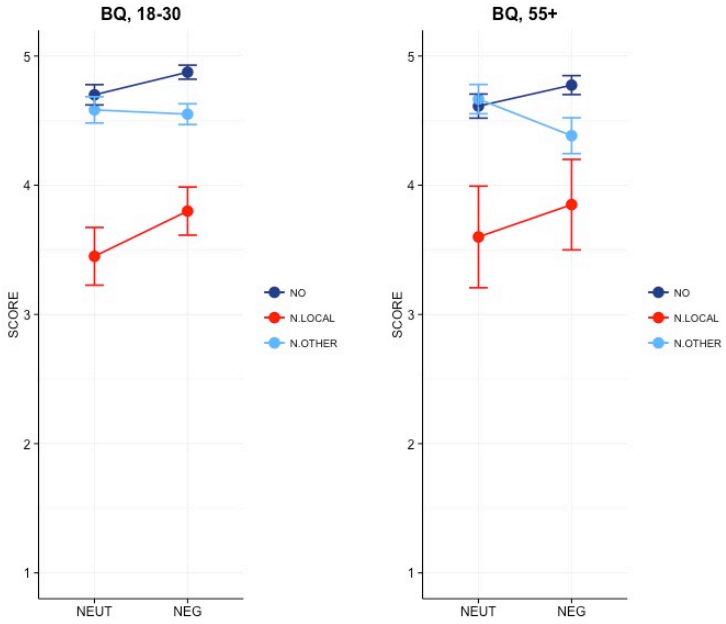
Did'n you buy the present?

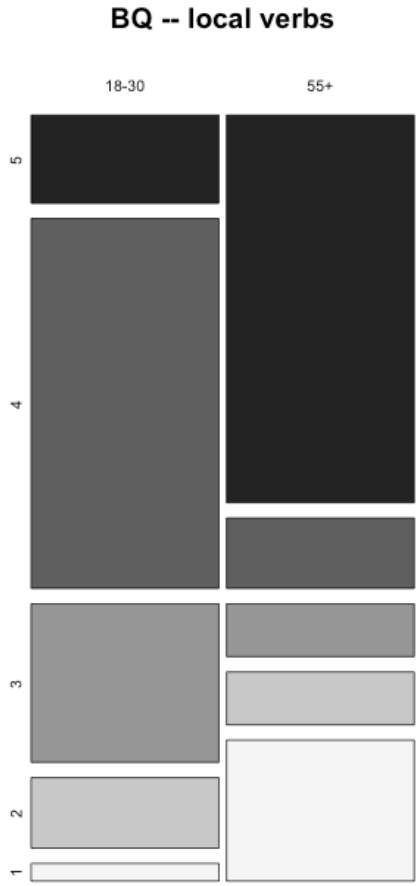
Results – matrix BQs

Can she no come? | Wid'n she come? | Can'n she come?



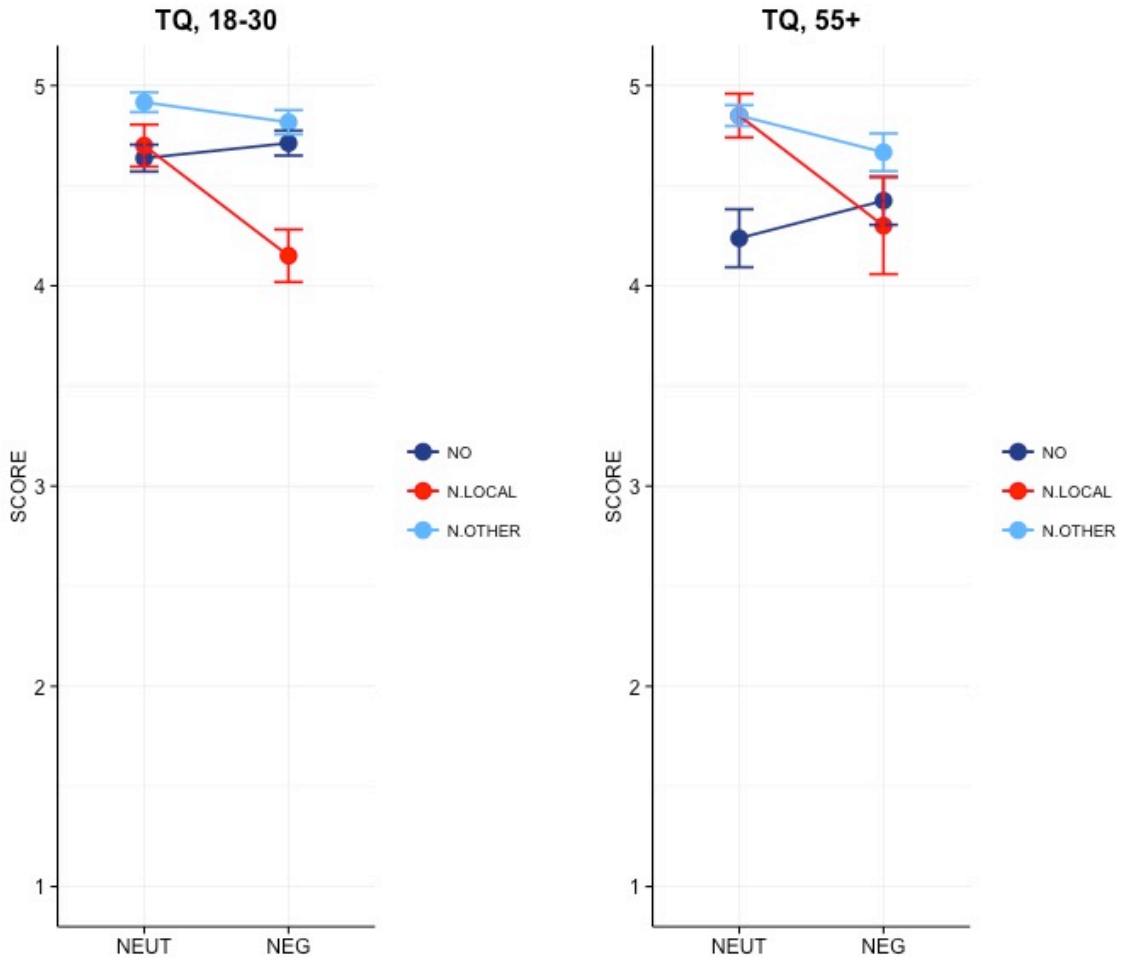
Can't in matrix BQs





Results – positive anchor TQs

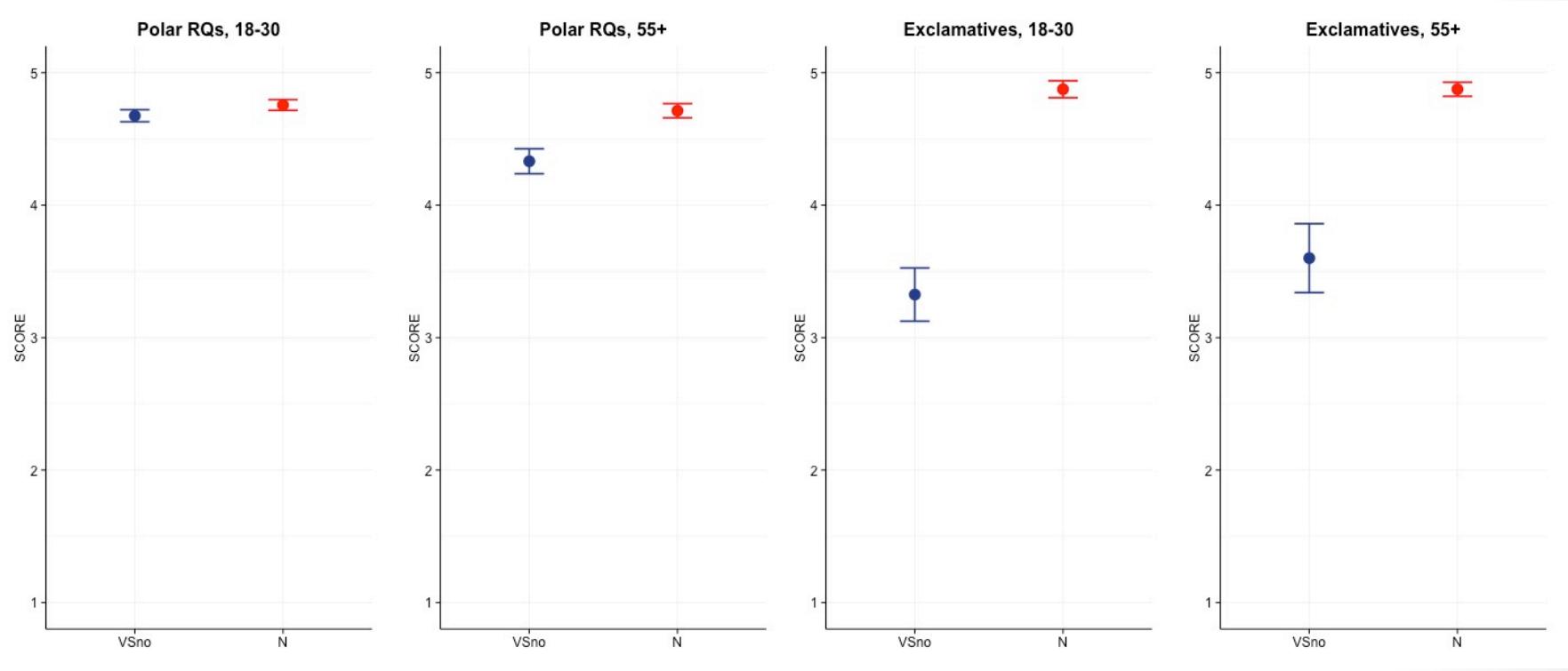
She can come, can she no? | She would come, wid'n she? | She can come, can'n she?



Results – RQs + exclamatives

Did I no tell you it would be easy?!
Did'n I tell you it would be easy?!

Wis it no a lovely day!
Wis'n it a lovely day!



Summary of *–n* distribution

	18-30	55+
NEG Q	x	x
BQ	x	?/✓
TQ (neg)	✓	✓
TQ (neut)	✓✓	✓✓
EXCL	✓✓	✓✓
POLAR RQ	✓	✓

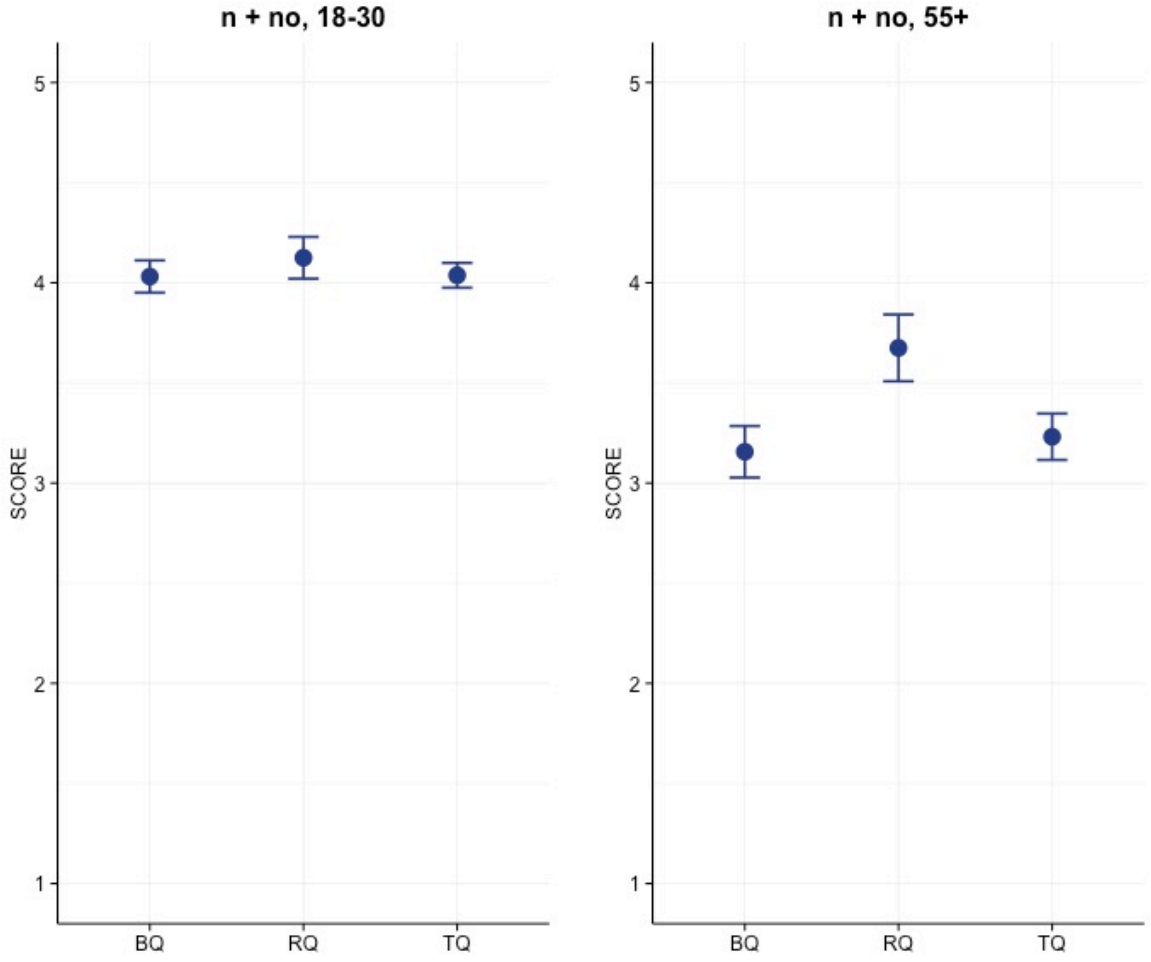
Further evidence of change

(6) ***Can'n*** *we* ***no*** *aa come in?*
can.N we NEG all come in
'Can't we all come in?' (Robertson & Graham 1952:10)

(7) ***Do'n*** *they* ***no*** *have a bakery in Waas?*
do.N they NEG have a bakery in Walls
'Don't they have a bakery in Walls?' (attested, 04/07/17)

(8) *It must be three year since I left there,* ***is'n*** *it* ***no****?*
it must be three years since I left there is.N it NEG
'It must be three years since I left there, isn't it?' (attested, 23/01/16)

Results - *–n + no*



ANALYSIS

–*n*: characteristics

- Tag questions, exclamatives, polar rhetorical questions

Shared characteristics:

- Speaker's epistemic belief = *p*
- Evidence = *p* or ∅

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Shared characteristics:

- Speaker's epistemic belief = *p*
- Evidence = *p* or ∅
- Speaker's perception of addressee's epistemic belief = *p*

(see also Gunlogson 2008)

Commitment revision

- In all three constructions, the speaker is able to take full responsibility for *p* in the discourse.

(9) **S:** He can come, can't he.
A: I don't know.
S: Well, he can.

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(10) **S:** And that cake! Wasn't it good!
A: I don't know.
S: Well, it was.

(11) **S:** Cheer up! Can't you still win the last one?!
A: I don't know.
S: Well, you said you could earlier.
Well, you can.
Well, I think you can.

Commitment revision in BQs

- The same principles do not apply to matrix biased questions.

(12) *S thinks their friend J will be coming to the party tonight. However, S then notices on Facebook that J has clicked attending on a different event that is taking place at the same time.*

S: Isn't she coming?

A: I don't know.

S: #Well, she is.
#I think she is.
I thought she was.

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A: I don't know.
S: #Well, she is.
#I think she is.
I thought she was.

(13) *S has got some spare tickets to a concert. S thinks their friend H already has a ticket, but wants to check with A.*
S: Hasn't he already got a ticket?
A: I don't know.
S: # Well, he has.
I think he has.
I thought he had.

–*n* as a CHECK move

- At-issue / not-at-issue distinction (Potts 2005)

at-issue: p

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- At-issue / not-at-issue distinction (Potts 2005)

at-issue: p

- Not-at-issue = CG management

CG-management:

$\lambda p . \forall w' \in Epi_{Spkr}(w)[\forall w'' \in Epi_{Adr}(w')][p \in w'']$

Syntactic analysis

- *–n* does not have any inherently negative meaning
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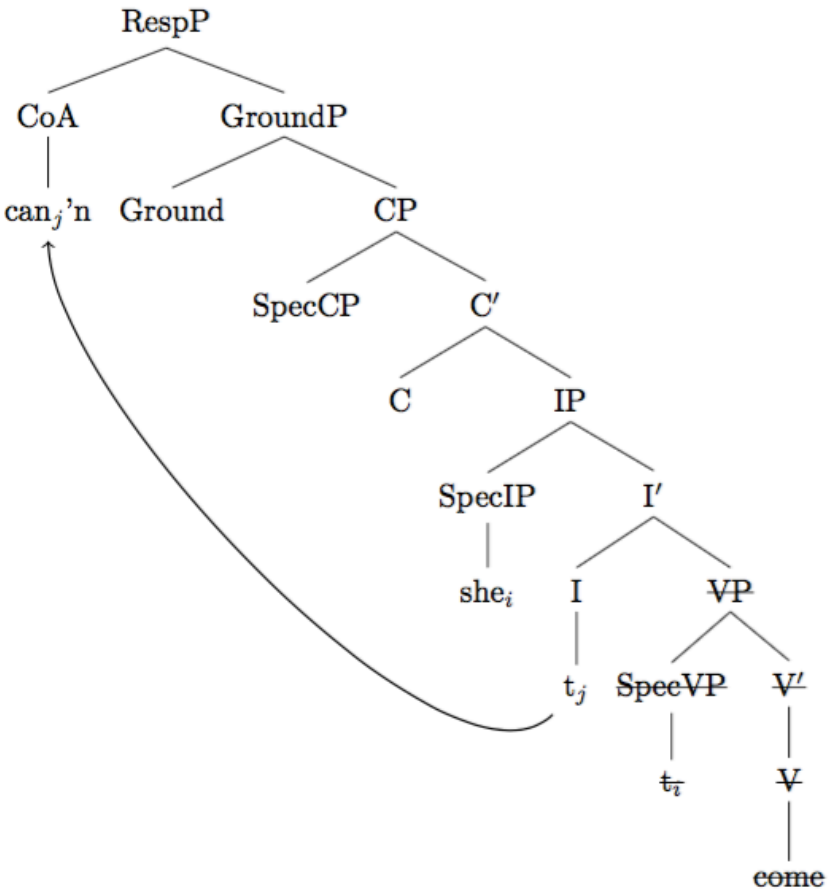
- *–n* does not have any inherently negative meaning
- Does not seem to be generated in NegP position
- Semantic role has connections to discourse particles, confirmational tags (e.g. *right, eh, huh*)
- Wiltschko & Heim (2016) – syntax for confirmationals

Syntax for *–n*



She can come, can'n she?

Negative anchors?

- If checking that *p* is part of A's beliefs – how does this interact with tag questions that have negative anchors?

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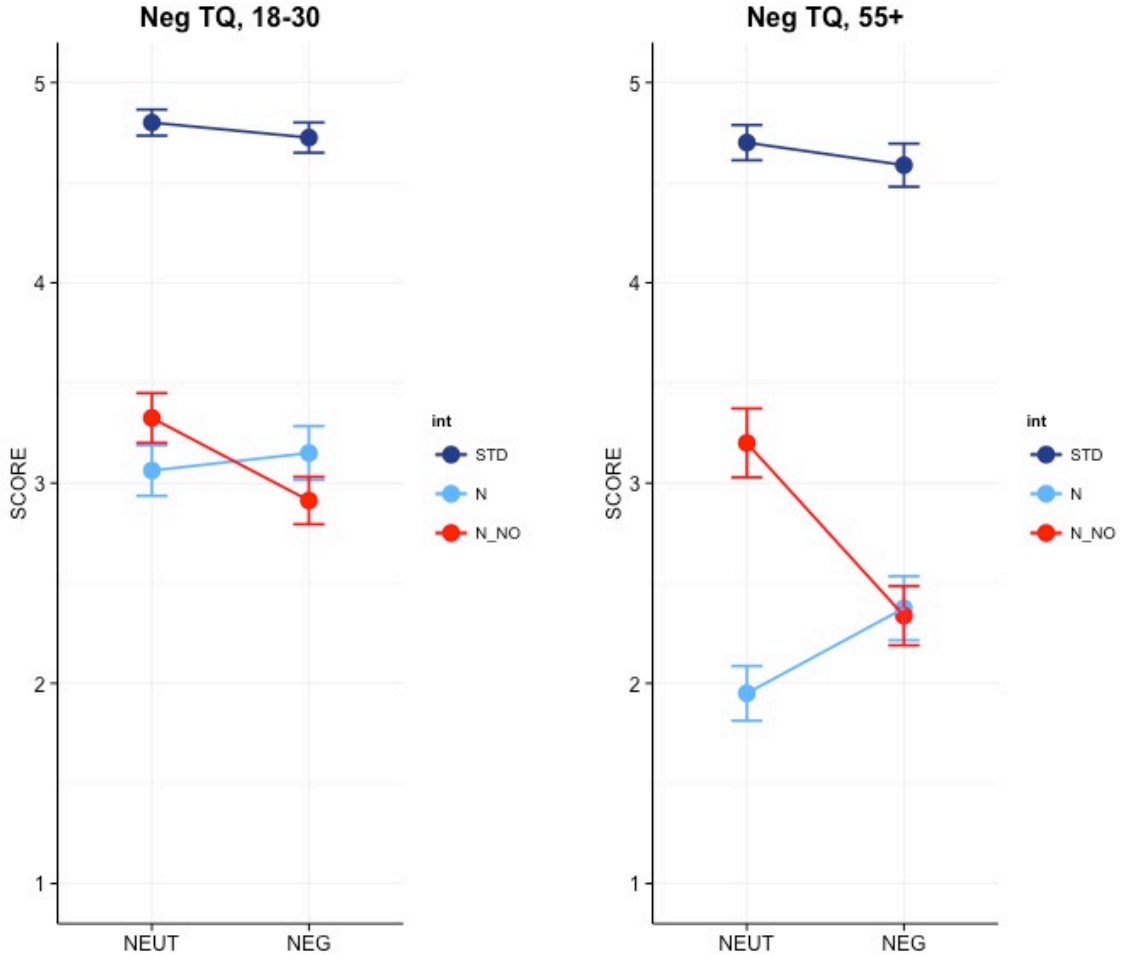
- Testing three types of construction, in both negative and neutral evidential contexts:

a) She canna come, can she?
b) She canna come, can'n she?
c) She canna come, can'n she no?

Results – negative anchor TQs

She canna come, can she? | She canna come, can'n she? | She canna come, can'n she no?



–n + no: VP-ellipsis

- Tag questions as VP-ellipsis constructions (Sailor 2011)

11. She can come, [$_{RespP}$can'n$_i$ [$_{TP}$ she$_j$ [$_T$ t$_i$ [$_{\sout{VP}}$ $\sout{\text{t}_j\ \text{come}}$]]]]

–n + no: VP-ellipsis

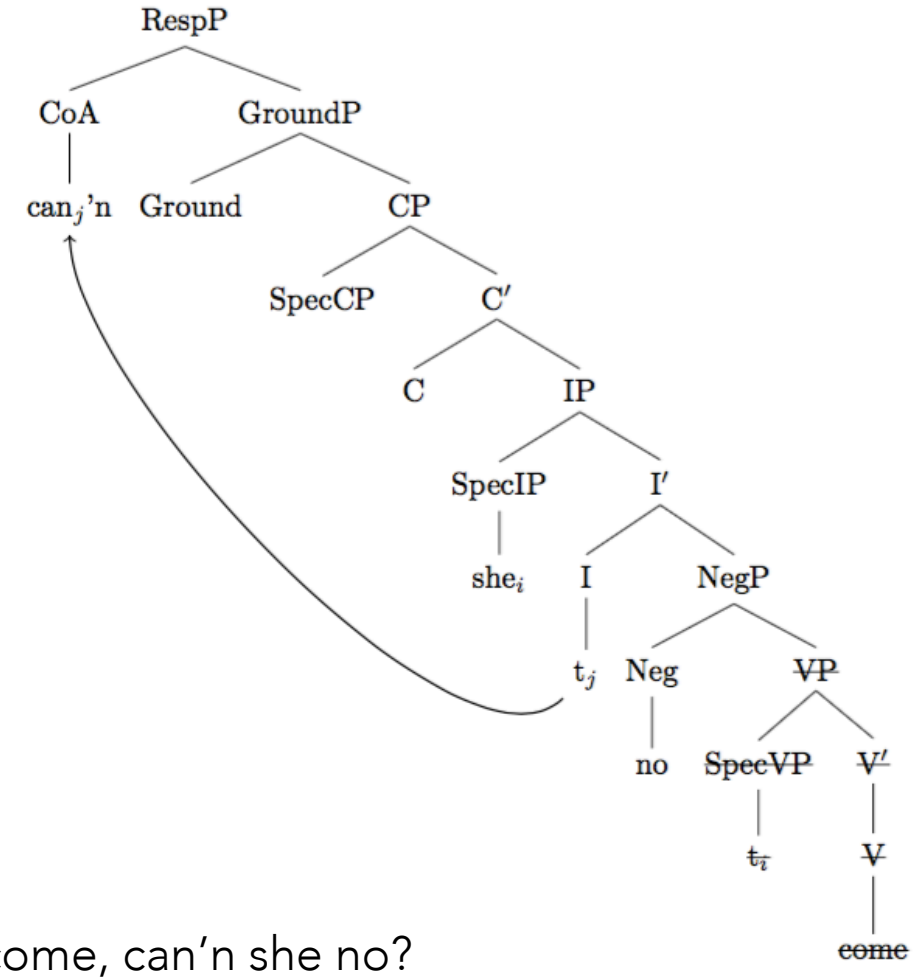
- Tag questions as VP-ellipsis constructions (Sailor 2011)

11. She can come, $[_{RespP}$can'n$_i$ $[_{TP}$ she$_j$ $[_T$ t$_i$ $[\sout{_{VP}\ t_j\ come}]]]]$

- When there is a negative anchor, speakers need to CHECK the *negative proposition*.

12. She canna come, $[_{RespP}$can'n$_i$ $[_{TP}$ she$_j$ $[_T$ t$_i$ $[_{NegP}$ no $\sout{_{VP}\ t_j\ come}]]]]]$

Syntax for *–n + no*



She canna come, can'n she no?

Conclusions

- I presented the results of grammaticality judgments from Shetland dialect exploring the distribution of *–n*, not previously discussed in the literature.
- *–n* appears to be undergoing change from a marker that can be used in non-canonical questions, to one with a more specific purpose.
- I analysed *–n* as a CHECK move, in which the speaker checks that *p* is already part of the addressee's beliefs, in ResponseP.
- More central role for addressee beliefs in speaker's choice of interrogative construction, building on Gunlogson (2008).

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