

### Speaker beliefs, biased questions and reportative evidentials: A look at Finnish and English

The distribution of evidentials in non-canonical contexts is not yet well-understood. In many languages, evidentials in questions exhibit interrogative flip (e.g. Faller 2002, Speas & Tenny 2003), where the evidential anchor (evidence holder) shifts from Speaker (Sp) to Addressee. But some languages have no flip: evidentials remain Sp-anchored (San Roque et al. 2017, Bhadra 2020). I provide data from Finnish (Finno-Ugric/Uralic) showing that, contrary to first impressions, reportative evidentials *are* allowed in questions, but only under certain circumstances, and there is no interrogative flip. Broadly speaking, this work provides evidence for *a link between evidentiality and question bias*, building on and extending Bhadra (2020) on rising declaratives in Bangla and Telugu. I use Finnish data to show that the seemingly puzzling distribution of reportative evidentials in YNQs (with full interrogative syntax and an overt Q operator) can be explained once we consider Sp's expectations about negative/positive answers. Based on Finnish, and preliminary English data, I argue that the distribution of *reportative expressions* is sensitive to differences in Sp beliefs about possible answers, in ways that stem from the communicative dynamics.

**The reportative evidential in matrix declaratives.** The Finnish reportative evidential *kuulemma* (1) indicates the speaker Sp heard *p* from someone (in a prior linguistic communicative event), so there exists a prior Sp who is discourse-committed to *p* (e.g. Kuiri 1984, Kittilä et al. 2018, Kaiser 2022, see also Pancheva & Rudin 2019). *Kuulemma* has been claimed to be neutral with respect to Sp's commitments (they may/may not believe *p*, Kuiri 1984, Kaiser 2022; see also Faller 2019 on Absence of Commitment).

- (1) Liisa asuu nykyään **kuulemma** Tampereella.  
 Liisa.NOM lives currently *kuulemma* Tampere-ADESS  
 '(I heard that) Liisa currently lives in Tampere.'

**The puzzle.** In regular y/n questions (YNQs), the reportative evidential is very odd (ex.2a), but, surprisingly, in negative yes/no questions (N-YNQs, 2b-c), it is fine. In (2b-c), the reportative is speaker-anchored: the speaker (Sp), not the addressee, is the evidence-holder: There is no interrogative flip.

- (2a) Y/N question with reportative *kuulemma* ([-kO] is the question particle in Finnish)  
 #? Asuuko Liisa nykyään **kuulemma** Tampereella?  
 Live-Q Liisa.NOM currently *kuulemma* Tampere-ADESS  
 'Does Liisa currently *kuulemma* live in Tampere?'
- (2b) Y/N question with negation, *kuulemma*  
 Eikö Liisa nykyään **kuulemma** asu Tampereella?  
 NEG-Q Liisa currently *kuulemma* live Tampere-ADESS  
 'Doesn't Liisa currently *kuulemma* live in Tampere?'
- (2c) Y/N question with negation, *kuulemma* (naturally-occurring www example)  
 Eikö itkulla ja naurulla ole **kuulemma** sama tarkoitus: jännityksen tms. laukaisu?  
 NEG-Q crying and laughter have *kuulemma* same purpose: tension or-similar release?  
 'Don't crying and laughter *kuulemma* have the same purpose: releasing tension (or similar)?'

**Why is the reportative odd in regular YNQs but fine in N-YNQs?** I argue that the asymmetry can be derived from the semantics of N-YNQs, combined with Finnish-specific properties, and can offer new insights into *the doxastic consequences of prior speech acts* more broadly: **First**, note that regular YNQs can be interpreted as having *nonveridical equilibrium* (Giannakidou 2013): *p* &  $\neg p$  are equally likely. But the equilibrium is easily disturbed. For example, N-YNQs typically lack this equilibrium: In English, preposed (high) negation in YNQs (3a) is associated with positive bias (Büring & Gunlogson 2000, Han 1998, Ladd 1981): Sp thinks the positive answer is likely to be true (*p* is more likely than  $\neg p$ ). But non-preposed (low) negation (3b) does not necessarily trigger this implicature (Romero & Han 2004).

- (3a) **Isn't** Ana coming to the party? [positive] (3b) Is Ana **not** coming to the party? [neutral]

**Second**, Finnish negation is *verbal* (agrees with the subject in person and number) and like all finite verbs in y/n questions, it raises to initial position. Thus, there is no high/low negation; only one position is possible. Consequently, a Finnish YNQ is ambiguous between (3a) & (3b): It can in principle (context permitting) receive a positive bias *or* a neutral reading. Thus, Finnish N-YNQs can (but need not) trigger the implicature that Sp thinks the positive answer is likely to be true (*p* is more likely than  $\neg p$ ).

I propose that these two things, combined, explain why the Finnish reportative is odd in regular YNQs but fine in positively-biased N-YNQs. This approach also claims that a prior speech event can have *doxastic consequences*. In particular, I build on Kaiser (2022)’s observation that *kuulemma* requires a prior communicative event (existence of a prior Sp discourse-committed to *p*). So, for the current Sp to use *kuulemma p*, they must have heard *p* from someone else (see Pancheva & Rudin 2019 on reportatives generally). I argue that this prior communicative event *impacts the speaker’s belief state*:

Specifically, I suggest that, assuming the Maxim of Quality, the current Sp gives some doxastic weight to the prior Sp’s assertion that *p*. Thus, **a reportative in a regular YNQ** (ex.2a) yields a *conflict* because (a) the reportative makes reference to there being a prior Sp who is discourse-committed to *p* (crucially, I claim this makes *p* more likely than  $\neg p$ , in the current Sp’s belief state) but (b) regular YNQs are typically used in situations of nonveridical equilibrium (*p* and  $\neg p$  are equally likely). In contrast, **a reportative in a positively-biased N-YNQ** (ex.2b) yields *no conflict*, as (a) the existence of a prior Sp committed to *p* (makes *p* more likely than  $\neg p$ ) aligns with (b) positive-biased N-YNQs triggering an implicature that *p* is more likely than  $\neg p$ . Thus, I argue that the distribution of reportatives in questions is sensitive to fine-grained differences in speaker beliefs about the likelihood of possible answers.

**Prediction:** My approach predicts that the clitic [-kin] and its negative variant [-kAAN] should match the distribution of *kuulemma*. These clitics, when on the verb in N-YNQs, indicate Sp expectations: With [-kin] (4a), Sp believes *p* and expects a positive answer (*p* is more likely than  $\neg p$ ). With [-kAAN] (4b), Sp believes *p* but expects a negative answer ( $\neg p$  is more likely than *p*) (e.g. Vilkuna 1984).

(4a) Eikö hän ole<sup>kin</sup> suloinen? [resembles high negation in English]

NEG-Q he/she is-KIN cute?

‘Isn’t he/she cute?’ (rough paraphrase: Don’t you also think that he/she is cute?)

(4b) Eikö hän ole<sup>kaan</sup> suloinen? NEG-Q he/she is-KAAN cute?

‘Isn’t he/she cute?’ (rough paraphrase: I had thought he/she is cute, but you don’t agree?)

Under my account, *kuulemma* in N-YNQs is predicted to be *compatible* with [-kin] (*alignment*: *p* is more likely than  $\neg p$ ) but *incompatible* with [-kAAN] (*conflict*: *p* is more likely than  $\neg p$  vs.  $\neg p$  is more likely than *p*). This prediction is borne out: *Kuulemma* is fine with [-kin] (5a,b) but bad with [-kAAN] (5c).

(5a) Eikö Liisa nykyään <sup>kuulemma</sup> asu<sup>kin</sup> Tampereella?

NEG-Q Liisa currently *kuulemma* live-KIN Tampere-ADESS

‘Doesn’t Liisa currently *kuulemma* live in Tampere?’

(5b) Eikös näppis <sup>kuulemma</sup> ole<sup>kin</sup> just kans joku mahdoton tautipesä? (www example)

NEG-Q keyboard *kuulemma* is-KIN just also some impossible germ-nest

‘Isn’t a keyboard *kuulemma* also a terrible germ hot spot?’

(5c) Eikö Liisa nykyään (#?kuulemma) asu<sup>kaan</sup> Tampereella?

NEG-Q Liisa currently (#?kuulemma) live-KAAN Tampere-ADESS

‘Doesn’t Liisa currently (#?kuulemma) live in Tampere?’ ((5c) would be fine without *kuulemma*)

**Broader predictions.** If my proposal that reportative evidentials in questions track speaker beliefs about possible answers is on the right track, we should see the same pattern in other languages. E.g., high-neg YNQs in English should allow reportative adverbs more easily/more often than low-neg YNQs. Indeed, corpus data strongly support this prediction (much higher counts in the left, high-neg, column):

Table 1. Frequency of reportative adverbials in English YNQs with high vs. low negation (Google)		
High negation	Low negation, <i>adverb</i> below <i>neg</i>	Low negation, <i>adverb</i> above <i>neg</i>
“isn’t she <i>allegedly</i> ” about 13,700 results	“is she <i>not allegedly</i> ” 0 results	“is she <i>allegedly not</i> ” about 2 results
“isn’t she <i>supposedly</i> ” about 20,000 results	“is she <i>not supposedly</i> ” about 4 results	“is she <i>supposedly not</i> ” about 8 results
“isn’t she <i>reportedly</i> ” about 6 results	“is she <i>not reportedly</i> ” 0 results	“is she <i>reportedly not</i> ” 0 results

**In sum,** I argue that the distribution of evidentials in questions is sensitive to question bias and speakers’ beliefs about answer likelihood. I will also discuss reportatives in wh-questions, as well as dubitatives.