

The anaphoricity of confirmational particles

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Confirmational particles (ConfPs), commonly used to answer polar questions (e.g. *yes* in English), are typically argued to convey a full proposition introduced in the previous discourse (cf. Wiltschko 2021). Yet, their exact syntactic and semantic status is hotly debated. One family of approaches argues that they always combine with a proposition, provided by the answered question, and thus often elided (e.g. *Did John buy a car? – Yes, ~~he did~~.*) (Holmberg 2015). Krifka (2013, 2024), on the other hand, views them as anaphoric elements that pick up propositional discourse referents introduced by preceding sentences, with the explication of the proposition itself serving as appositive. Wiltschko & Heim (2016); Wiltschko (2017, 2021) show that ConfPs are multifunctional, as they can perform additional functions beyond answering, e.g. confirming that the proposition is already part of the speaker’s, hearer’s or common knowledge or attitude.

We focus on three ConfPs in Serbo-Croatian (SC) *da*, *ako* and *neka* – displaying both multifunctionality and fine semantic differentiation. Their multifunctionality consists in their being used also as CP-layer elements in both subordinate and main clauses, and their fine differentiation in their partially exclusive distribution across contexts. With Krifka (2013), we analyze ConfPs in terms of anaphoric reference to propositions, but also to situations (cf. Schwarz 2009), and possibly also an ordering source in the sense of Kratzer (1981, 2012). The situation and the proposition are the topic situation (TS) and the proposition of the Question Under Discussion, QUD. We derive these items’ clause-introducing uses from the same syntax/semantics.

Da is the least restricted of the three, both as a ConfP and in clause-introduction. Its most typical use as a ConfP (the right-most occurrence in (1)) is as the positive answer to a polar question (roughly matching English *yes*, also in other functions in Wiltschko 2021). At the root level, it combines with a question particle to introduce *yes-no* questions (the left-most *da* in (1)). In clausal subordination, *da* is the most versatile subordinator in SC, introducing clausal complements of various sizes (e.g. the middle *da* in (1), Arsenijević 2023), but also counterfactuals, purpose clauses and concessives (Arsenijević 2021).

- (1) **Da** li **da** kupim haljinu? – **Da**.
COMP Q COMP buy.1SG dress.ACC – yes
‘Should I buy the dress? – Yes.’

We propose the semantics in (2) for *da*: it is a function that takes one propositional and one situational argument, and applies the proposition *p* to the situation *s*.

- (2) $da := \lambda p \lambda s. p(s)$

Its different multifunctional facets depend on its syntactic position and environment. In the ConfP use, its two arguments are pronominal anaphoric, i.e. *da* takes a specific TS (here represented as pro_s) and a specific topical proposition (pro_p), both of which are introduced by QUD. We host ConfP *da* in FinP (alternatively, PolP), with the situation argument as its specifier and the propositional argument as its complement, as in (3). This combines Krifka (2013)’s view that ConfP anaphorically picks up propositions and Schwarz (2009)’s, that ConfP specifies that the proposition is true in the TS.

- (3) [_{ForceP} [assert] [_{FinP} [_{XP} [pro_s] [*da*]] [_{TP} [pro_p]]]

In its use as a *yes-no* question particle, *da* also has an anaphoric situation *pro* in the specifier (possibly with a lower copy), yet it takes a proposition explicated by a clause. As a subordinator

too, *da* takes a clause as its proposition argument and a pronominal TS in the specifier, however the latter is in this case bound by the matrix TS (see Arsenijević 2020, 2023; Milosavljević & Milosavljević 2024).

Ako and *neka* can serve both as conditional subordinators (4) and as ConfP (5-6), with additional nuances outlined below. The most typical function of *neka* is in constructions with the present tense, as illustrated in (7), where it receives an imperative interpretation.

- (4) **Ako / neka** je najgledaniji na svetu, ja neću gledati taj film.
 if / let COP most-watched on world I will.NEG watch that film.ACC
 ‘[If it is] / [Let it be] the world’s most-watched film, I won’t watch it.’

- (5) Prespavala sam ceo dan. – **Ako. / Neka.**
 sleep.PTCP AUX whole day – if / let
 ‘I slept the whole day – Fine.’

- (6) Da opeglaam veš? – **Ako. / Neka.**
 COMP iron.1SG clothes – if / let
 ‘Should I iron the clothes? – Yes. / Yes/No.’

- (7) **Neka** Pera opegla veš! / **Neka** je 2 i 2 5.
 let P irons clothes / let is 2 and 2 5
 ‘Let Pera iron the clothes!’ ‘Let 2 plus 2 be 5.’

As specified in (8) and (9), *ako* and *neka* are functions that take three arguments: a proposition (*p*), a situation (*s*), and an ordering source (*g*), specifying that *p* holds of *s* and is a member of *g*. In their syntactic embedding as ConfPs, *g* is bound by the speaker. Additionally, *neka* marks that the alignment of *s* with *g* conflicts with the presupposition (*neka* = *actually* + *ako*). This additional component allows *neka* to pick different situation antecedents. In (6), the QUD is {I should iron the clothes, I should not iron the clothes}. Here *ako* simply picks the situation in the expressed, positive disjunct, as more topical, and applies the *it’s fine, do it* interpretation to it. With *neka*, the first option is the same, but it is conditioned on the presupposition holding that the interlocutor’s ironing of the clothes does not align with the speaker’s attitude. If the presupposition happens to be the opposite, this interpretation fails, and the next topical situation from the stack is picked: that from the negative disjunct in QUD, in which the clothes are not ironed. As it indeed conflicts with the presupposition, a felicitous interpretation obtains, which is in both cases: *actually, it’s fine, leave it*.

$$(8) \quad \text{ako} := \lambda p \lambda s \lambda g. p(s) \wedge \forall s' [g(s') \Rightarrow p(s')]$$

$$(9) \quad \text{neka} := \frac{\lambda p \lambda s \lambda g. p(s) \wedge \forall s' [g(s') \Rightarrow p(s')]}{\forall s' [g(s') \Rightarrow \neg p(s')]}$$

On this account, the imperative use as in (7) accommodates the presupposition that the topic situation is not aligned with the speaker’s attitude, and asserts the opposite. It also predicts that unlike *ako*, *neka* can only have the high construct interpretations (which per Haegeman 2006 embed the left-periphery projections). Embedded in a *yes-no* question, due to its presupposition-cancelling component, it can only have a metalinguistic interpretation, as in (10). In conditional clauses, *g* is typically epistemic, and the shared meaning is: those situations satisfying the matrix proposition align with the speaker’s knowledge for which the embedded proposition holds. For the same reason as above, in such contexts, *neka* may only have the premise-based reading, as in (4), whereas *ako* is the unmarked conditional subjunction.

- (10) Jel **ako**/**#neka** da opeglam veš?
 Q if/**#let** COMP iron clothes
 ‘Should I iron the clothes?’

We provide the syntactic analysis for clause-introducing uses of *ako* and *neka* and discuss the different uses of all three items in more detail with a quantitative empirical support.

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