

## Beyond truth. The view from response markers.

Martina Wiltschko  
ICREA, UPF

Until recently, Polar response markers (*yes* and *no*) have not received much attention within formal approaches towards grammar: neither their semantic nor syntactic properties have been studied, presumably because at first sight they seem completely uninteresting. With the rise of the interest in the formal properties of the syntax-pragmatics interface, this has changed and there are now formal treatments of such response markers available acknowledging their complex behaviour across languages (cf. Kramer and Rawlins 2009, Krifka 2013, Haegeman and Weir 2015, Roelofson and Farkas (2015) Holmberg 2016, Li et al. 2016, i.a.). However, all current treatments focus on the use of response markers as answers to polar questions and (to a lesser degree) as responses to assertions. Hence most analyses focus on the relation between polar response markers and the valuation of polarity. In response to a polar question a response marker states which of the two alternative propositions (p or not p) introduced in the preceding question is true (1) or in the case of responses to assertions, whether or not the preceding assertion is true (2).

- (1) I: Do you speak Catalan?  
R: Yes!/No!
- (2) I: He speaks Catalan.  
R: Yes!/No!

However, response markers have a much wider distribution: they can be used in response to all kinds of speech acts, e.g. wh-questions (3) and exclamatives (4) as well as non-linguistic events (5).

- (3) Katie: Why would he do something like that?  
Brooke: **Yes**, I know. That is the question.
- (4) Anita: She found it at Victor's.  
Chelsea: Oh, my God!  
Anita: **No**, relax. It's Victor's problem.
- (5) At a soccer game. A's favorite team scores a goal and it is clear that because of this goal they will win the world cup.  
R: **Yessssssss**

In neither of these cases, the polar response marker is used to value polarity as there is no polarity to value.

In this talk, I develop an analysis that seeks to account for the full range of functions of response markers. The analysis is couched within the *Interactional Spine Hypothesis* (Wiltschko in prep.) according to which the propositional structure (responsible for the configuration of truth-conditional meaning) is dominated by a layer of structure responsible for configuring interactional meaning. I argue that the core meaning of response markers is simply to express positive or negative attitude. This is what surfaces when the response marker is used without the spine, as in exclamations such as (5). I further argue, following Wiltschko 2014, that the multi-functionality of any unit of language is syntactically derived: depending on their place of association with the spine, a given unit of language is interpreted differently, correlating with the spinal function of the association site. If response markers are associated with C, they serve to value polarity; if they are associated with a position I identify as a speaker-oriented GroundP, they serve to signal whether

or not the preceding move is in the speaker's ground signalling (dis-)agreement; if they are associated with an addressee-oriented GroundP, they serve to signal whether the speaker acknowledges that the preceding move is in the addressee's ground; and if they are associated with the topmost layer, which I identify as ResponseP, they simply serve to signal that the current speaker is or is not responding to the preceding move. The latter functions are sometimes referred to as backchannelling functions. The syntactic analysis I propose is schematized in (6) for positive response markers.

(6) Deriving the multi-functionality of response markers

