Negative Questions in Hindi:
Negative Questions in Asian Languages 1

MATHUR, Ramesh
UCIDA, Norihiko

The linguistic characteristic of using negative expressions and their responses differ from language to language. The socio-cultural susceptibilities of a human nexus are reflected in such exchanges, for example, Japanese people are most reluctant to reply "no" in consideration of the feelings of others. They seem to be more person-oriented than content-oriented.

Unaware of such socio-cultural differences, Japanese people sometimes use "yes" in English, where in response a "no" is expected and vice versa, when the question is a negative one. Interestingly, Indians use "yes" and "no", when they converse in English, just like the Japanese.

We have investigated herein the usage of negative questions in Hindi on the basis of the inventory of negative questions in Japanese. This study enables us to share the following observations:
1. Occurrences of negative questions:
   Japanese use negative question in five situations ("Original meaning" § 1, "Inverted question" (§ 3, § 4, § 5), "Nolition" (§ 7), "Hesitation" (§ 8, § 9, § 10, § 11) and "Unexpectedness" (§ 6). But Hindi speakers use them in "Original meaning", "Inverted question" and "Nolition" only.
2. "Yes" or "No" response:
   Negative questions in "Original meaning" are identical in Japanese, English and Hindi. Hindi speakers use both the Japanese and English ways to reply "yes/no" for negative questions under "Inverted questions" and "Nolition" with roughly the same frequency. The Japanese way of response in Hindi is softer and more considerate to the addressee, while the English way of response in Hindi is a direct expression of one's feeling or preference.

1 Introduction 7 Nolition
2 Original Meaning 8 Hesitation
3 Inverted Question 9 Request
4 Tag-Question 10 Proposal/Invitation
5 Forcing Positive Answer 11 Enquiry
6 Unexpectedness 12 Conclusion

Keywords: Japanese, English, social linguistics, negative question, yes or no
キーワード：日本語、英語、社会言語学、否定疑問、はい/いいえ
1 Introduction

We have adopted the method of studying the usage of Hindi negative questions on the basis of the inventory dealing with the functions of negative questions in Japanese, prepared by Uχida as his teaching material. The selection of the Japanese data as the checking list for this was not only because of the availability of Japanese material, but also because the Japanese people, as far as we could ascertain, use negative questions in the most variety of situations.

With the above material we started our joint work. We have tried here to bring the grammar of negative questions, dormant in Hindi speakers' minds, into open consciousness after a thorough analysis of the material.

Our method of study has the following inbuilt limitations:
1. The examples/samples of Hindi are based on the idiolect of Mathur. 1)
2. The checking list is based on the Uχida's data of Japanese usages of negative questions, instead of all the languages of the world.

In checking the usage of Hindi negative questions we have been helped by the examples of Hindi negative questions and answers given on pages 60-64 of the article by Mizokami (1977). Interested readers may refer to the article to check the validity of our work.

We are going to check the usage of negative questions from the following points of view:
1. whether negative questions are used in other languages as the Japanese do in a particular context.
2. what is the response to the negative questions, especially in terms of “yes” or “no”.

In the beginning, a list of words were drawn to make a short account of words denoting “yes” and “no” in Japanese and Hindi.

Japanese “yes” and words similar to it:

はい hai is the most common, definite and formal type of “yes” group and it is morally binding as “yes” in English. However, all the words in this group are used as a signal that one is hearing the speakers words. It can be clearly distinguished by intonation whether はい hai “yes” is a word of confirmation/consent or just a word of response.

ええ ee is an informal variant of はい hai.

うん un is an informal and weak “yes”.

Japanese “no” and words similar to it:

いいえ iie is the most common, definite and formal type of “no” group. If a reply beginning with 「いいえ」 iie hurts a person it is avoided.

いや ija is an informal variant of いいえ iie.

ううん uuN is the most informal type of “no” group and a milder expression than いいえ iie.

1) Mathur was born and brought up in Uttar Pradesh and got M.A. in Hindi from Agra University and Ph.D. in Comparative Philology from Calcutta University in 1964.
“yes” and “no” can be used in most responses for a question in English, but in Japanese, one can do without “yes” or “no” in many cases. Especially, “no” is often avoided and words like すみません sumimaseN “sorry”, ごめんなさいね gomeNnasaine, “I am sorry.”, etc., are used instead.

While English “yes” and “no” are guided by the sentence type (affirmative or negative) of the answer, Japanese はい “yes” and いいえ “no” mean respectively “You are right” or “I agree with you” and “You are wrong” or “I do not agree with you”. Therefore, English “yes” and “no” don’t always agree with Japanese はい “yes” and いいえ “no” respectively.

**Non-yes/no response to a speech in Japanese**

When someone is speaking the person hearing it gives signals that he is listening. Examples of such words are given below:

はい hai “Yes Sir” (most formal response used when the speaker occupies a socially and situationally higher position)

うん un “hum, hmm” (informal response to a speech used in conversation)

そう sou “Really?” (a response used when one receives a speaker’s message. In formal speech one must say: そうですか soudesuka “Is it so?”

**Hindi  acebā “yes” and words similar to it:**

हां, जी हां, जी “yes”

sacāmucā, bilkulā “you are right”

acebā, ठाकुर “OK”

zārubā, avaśya, avaśya hi “of course, certainly”

śayāda, sambhavā hai “maybe”

**Hindi  “no” and words similar to it:**

नहां, ना “no”

bilkulā nahi “not at all”

nāmumākinā, asambhavā “not possible”

**Hindi non-yes/no response to a speech in Hindi**

When someone is speaking the person hearing it gives signals that he is listening. Examples of such words are given below:

acebā 1. “hmm” 2. “is it?, etc.”

जी “Yes Sir” (formal response for a speech used when the speaker is a highly respectful person and hierarchically superior)

हु, हां “Hum, Hmm” (informal response to a speech used in conversation)

**Brackets used**

[ ]: Japanese or Hindi translated into English word-for-word.

“”: English translation of a Japanese or Hindi sentence.

< >: optional.

[ ]: added by the authors.

**Terminology**

positive answer: answer which contains no negative marker.

negative answer: answer which contains a negative marker.
agreeing answer: answer which expresses that one agrees to the proposition put forward by the question.

disagreeing answer: answer which does not agree to the proposition put forward by the question.

nolition: the antonym of volition.
nolitive: the antonym of volitive.

rhetorical negative question: In the Western tradition a rhetorical negative question means “a strong affirmative in the form of a negative question.” This definition does not apply to Japanese, which has a wider semantic range of negative questions. We therefore redefine this word so that it acquires a global validity: “an affirmative in the form of a negative question.” We have come across the following three kinds of rhetorical negative questions in our material:

inverted rhetorical negative question: ≠ rhetorical negative question in the Western tradition (§ 3-5).

nolitional rhetorical negative question: negative question in which the negative marker expresses apprehension (§ 7).

hesitative rhetorical negative question: negative question in which the negative marker expresses hesitation in asking favor, inviting a person, etc. (§ 8-11).

2 Original Meaning

The original intent of negative questions is to ask if the idea of a negative question is correct or not, and the speaker expects a negative answer. This is found, as far as we know, in every language in the world and is the origin of all the negative questions.

Is he not hungry? (2.1)

If the above sentence is changed into a non-negative affirmative sentence we get the following one:

He is not hungry. (2.2)

In English if (2.2) is found correct the answer is preceded by “no” or one of its group as the answer has the negative marker “not” (negative answer).

No, he is not hungry. (2.3)

In Japanese if (2.2) is found correct the answer is preceded by “yes” or one of its group as the content of the sentence is correct (agreeing answer).

うん、彼はおなかがすいていない。un, kareha onakaga suiteinai. [Yes, he is not hungry.] (2.4)

In English if (2.2) is not found correct the answer is preceded by “yes” or one of its group:

Yes, he is hungry. (2.5)

In Japanese if (2.2) is not found correct the answer is preceded by “no” or one of its group as the content of the sentence is not correct (disagreeing answer).

いや、彼はおなかがすいている。iya, kareha onakaga suiteiru. [No, he is hungry.]
In the “original meaning” English and Japanese show a sharp contrast. This causes misunderstanding also, when Japanese who are not well-versed in English speak English, as they import the Japanese habit into English.

One more reason causing misunderstanding in English is that in English the answer determines whether to use “yes” or “no”. Therefore, the questioner’s contention is not directly negated by a “no”. Consequentially, one has less hesitation in giving a negative answer than in Japanese. In Japanese the negative answer expresses one’s disagreement to the content of the question. The word “no” may thereby hurt the questioner. Japanese people seldom use いいえ iie “no” when it can hurt the questioner. This mindset is reflected in their English and results in ambiguity.

In this paragraph we check whether in Hindi, the use of “yes” or “no” is decided by the rule applied to English or by the rule applied to Japanese or by some other rule.

**Example 1**

Questions and answers in Hindi in the same context are given immediately below the corresponding Japanese sentences:

The son went to a cinema. He came back with a sullen face. Mother asked him:
どうしたの、映画が面白くなかったの？2) doušitano. eiga omoširokunakattano?
“What is the matter [with you]? Was the picture not good?” (2.7)
kyū hua? kyū pikcarā accb;i nahi tōi? (2.8)

Agreeing answers for this question in Japanese is given below:
うん、おもしろくなかった。un, omoširokunakatta. [Yes, it was not good.] “No it was not good” (2.9)

In Hindi both negative (2.11) and agreeing (2.10) answers can occur for the same question:

hā, accb;i nahi tōi. [Yes, it was not good.] (2.10)
nahi, accb;i nahi tōi. “No, it was not good.” (2.11)

(2.10) is an agreeing answer, the same response to the question as in Japanese (2.3), where “hā” shows agreement to the proposition that the cinema was not good. (2.11) is a negative answer, which shows the feeling of the speaker to the cinema directly and agrees with the English usage of “no.”

A disagreeing answer for the same question in Japanese is given below:

いや、おもしろかった。でも財布を無くしたの。iya omoširokattā. demo saifuwo nakušitano. [No, it was good, but I lost my purse.] “Yes, it was good, but I lost my purse.” (2.12)

In Hindi both positive (2.13) and disagreeing (2.14) answers can occur for the same question:

2) In contrast to negative questions denoting apprehension (§ 6) and those denoting hesitation (§ 7, 8, 9, 10) most of the questions do not end in the question marker -ka but in -no. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the difference between negative questions ending in -ka, -no and -noka. Readers may refer to 野田晴美 (NODA Harumi 1997) to understand the difference between -ka? and -no?
(hā, ) pikcarā tō acchī tī lēkinā mērā parsā kōō gayā. [Yes, the picture was good, but I lost my purse.] (2.13)

nāhi pikcarā tō acchī tī lēkinā mērā parsā kōō gayā. [No, the picture was good, but I lost my purse.] (2.14)

Even in Japanese a negative answer can occur for question (2.7) when the speaker directly expresses his disgust. It is not polite in Japanese to express one’s feeling in this way.

To avoid a rough impression, one can use the prolonged iya in Japanese:

イヤー、おもしろくなかった。iya... , moširokunakatta. “No... , it was not good” (2.15)

Example 2

This example is a variation of Example 1 in which the speaker is almost confident of his guess and confirms it with the question.

The son went to a cinema. He came back with a sullen face. Mother asked him:

どうしたの? 映画がおもしろくなかったのだろう? わかっていたよ。doušītano.
eigaga moširokunakattanodorou? wakatteitayo. “What is the matter with you? The picture was not good, was it? I knew it.” (2.16)

kyā huā {tumhē}? kyā pikcarā acchī nāhi tēi? myūhē mālūmā tēā. “What is the matter with you? The picture was not good, was it? I knew it.” (2.17)

The response to these questions are the same as (2.9) in Japanese and (2.10,2.11) in Hindi.

3 Inverted Question

Inverted questions, as far as we know, are found in every language in the world. These are called “rhetorical question” in the Western tradition. We, however, use this word in this article in a wider sense, as there are a few more kinds of rhetorical questions other than those familiar to the Western linguistic area.

The inverted question is a question with a negative marker that does not mean negative, but expresses the speaker’s strong expectation of getting a positive answer. This, as far as we know, is common to every language.

Example 1

A mother asked her husband to give dinner to their son at about seven and went out. On her coming back home at eight her son told her, “I am hungry.”

The mother, thinking that her husband had already given her son dinner, asked the son the following, expecting a positive answer:

ごはん食べなかった？どうしておなかがすいているの？gohān tabenakatta? doušite onakaga suiteiruno? “Have you not eaten food? Why are you hungry?” (with an accusing intonation) (3.1.)

Son: うん食べたよ、でも足りなかったの。un, tabetayo, demo tarinakattano. “Yes, I have, but it was not sufficient.” (3.2)
Son: いや、まだなの iya, madanano. “No, I have not.” (3.3)

The fundamental negative question (§ 1) and the inverted negative question can be distinguished by intonation and other suprasegmental features and also by non-verbal expressions. If the addressee understands that the negative marker is just rhetorical the real meaning of the speaker’s question is: “You have eaten dinner, haven’t you?” The answer in Japanese is based on the real meaning in Japanese, i.e., the negative marker is treated as an expletive element.

Possible questions and answers in Hindi in the same situation are as given below:

tumānē ḫānā nahī ḫāyā kyā? būtukhā kyā lagī hai? “Have you not eaten food? Why are you hungry?” (3.4)

〈hā,〉 ḫāyā tō hai, lēkīnā bahutā kamā ḫā. “Yes, I have, but it was too little.” (3.5)
nahī, nahī ḫāyā. “No, I have not.” (3.6)

Negative questions denoting hesitation and those denoting confirmation are clearly distinguished by suprasegmental features and non-verbal expressions.

4 Tag-Question

The method of study adopted for this paper is to start with Japanese negative questions and check those of other languages. However, we cannot disregard “tag-questions” which appear in English in situations where an inverted question appears in other languages including Japanese. Therefore, we have added this section to check what kind of questions appear in Hindi.

You are not Mr. Mori, are you? (4.1)
You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you? (4.2)

The tag-questions that come into the scope of our study would be those of the second type.

The meaning of sentence (4.2) depends on the intonation and other suprasegmental features. One can use the same sentence for confirmation of a known fact, confirmation for an almost doubtless fact, confirmation of one’s supposition, etc.

Example

An airport employee was searching for Mr. Mori in Kansai Airport. She somehow recognized Mr. Mori. She asked him:

Sentence (4.2) can be translated into Japanese in the above given context as given below:

森さまではないのですか? morisamadeha nainodesuka? [Are you not Mr. . Mori?] (with the confirming intonation) “You are Mr. . Mori, aren’t you?” (4.3)

森さまではいらっしゃいませんか? morisamadeha irasshaimaseNka? [Are you <not> Mr. . Mori?] (with the confirming intonation) “You are Mr. . Mori, aren’t you?” (4.4)

森さんですね? morisamadesune? “You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you?” (4.5)

森さんですね、そうでしょう? morisamadesune? soudeyou? “You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you?” (4.6)
森さまじゃあいらっしゃいませんか，そうでしょう？ *morisamadeha irašyaimaseNka, soudëyou?* [Are you not Mr. Mori, is it so?] (4.7)

Tag-questions are normally translated as (4.3) or (4.4). In the above-given situation the question with -no (4.3) is more common. (4.6) and (4.7) are word-by-word translation of tag-questions. These are natural Japanese sentences. But it is not the common way of translating tag-questions. そうでしょう soudëyou? is a heavier expression than English “aren’t you?” It could give the impression that unpleasant questions may follow after the addressee says “Yes, I am.”

Sentence (4.2) will be translated into Hindi in the same context as given below:

अपा मोरी तो नाही है? “Are you not Mr. Mori?” (4.8)
अपा मोरी है नाही? “You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you?” (4.9)

Sentence (4.9) is just a simple sentence. नाही of sentence (4.9) is synchronically a sentence-final particle, though it is possible that it was originally a negative marker. Sentence (4.9) is, semantically, the correct translation of a tag-question in English.

Questions with a tag like English tag-questions occur in Hindi also:

अपा मोरी है, है नाही? “You are Mr. mori, aren’t you?” (4.10)
कल अपा दिली गये तेे, गये तेे नाही? “You went to Delhi yesterday, didn’t you?” (4.11)

These sentences morphologically correspond to English tag-questions and they can be translated into English tag-questions. However, they give the impression that an accusation or unpleasant question may follow.

Possible answers for sentences (4.3), (4.4), (4.5), (4.6) and (4.7) in Japanese and (4.8), (4.9), (4.10) and (4.11) in Hindi are given below.

はい，そうです。*hai soudesu.* [Yes, you are right.] “Yes, I am.” (4.12)

हाँ, मैं मॉरी हूँ। “Yes, I am Mori.” (4.12’)

いいえ，違います。*iie, ōgaimasu.* [No, you are wrong.] “No, I am not.” (4.13)

नहीं， मैं मॉरी नहीं हूँ। “No, I am not Mori.” (4.13’)

The way of responding, as far as “yes” and “no” are concerned, is the same as that for simple inverted questions in both languages.

5 Forcing Positive Answer

In some situations a speaker asks a question although he and the addressee both know the fact but just wanting to get the verbal acknowledgement of the known fact from the addressee.

Example

A father, angry with his son’s behavior, asks the following question before scolding him:

Father: おまえはわしの息子でないのでか？*omaeha wašino musukode nainoka?* “Are you not my son?” (5.1)

In this question, the father demands a positive answer from his son.

Son: うん，そうだよ。*un soudayo.* “Yes, I am <your son>.” (5.2)
The following negative answer occurs only when the son wants to challenge his father:
[challengingly]: いや違うよ。iya, ëgaMû. “No, I am not [your son].” (5.3)
Question and answers in a similar situation in Hindi are given below:
tumâ mērē bētē nahî ho kyaâ? “Are you not my son?” (5.4)
haâ, haâ “Yes, [I] am.” (5.5)
[angrily] nahî, mai ॆāpākā bētâ nahî hû. “No, I am not [your son].” (5.6)
It is very difficult to distinguish negative questions for demanding positive answer
from the negative question under § 2 by segmental phonemes only. They can however be
easily distinguishable by suprasegmental features.

6 Unexpectedness

In Japanese a negative question with astonishment intonation is used to express
unexpectedness.

Example 1

Mr. Kato met with his old classmate Mr. Mori in the compound of Taj Mahal in
India. He immediately recognized Mr. Mori and told him:
ああ、森さんじゃないの！aa, morisâñjanaino! [Oh, are you not Mr. Mori!] “My
goodness, you are Mr. Mori, aren’t you!” (6.1)
Mr. Kato pronounced the above sentence neither with the confirmation intonation (§
2) nor hesitation intonation (§ 7,8), but with the astonishment intonation. The above
sentence with astonishment intonation denotes strong astonishment caused by an
unexpected incident.
ああ、森さんだねー！aa, morisândane! “You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you?” (6.2)
In the above sentence, which does not contain any negative marker, astonishment is
not expressed unless one pronounces the sentence with an actor-like skill in intonating.
The reason why the negative marker expresses astonishment can be explained by the
following formula:
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{You are not Mr. Mori, right? (§ 2)} \\
\text{You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you? (§ 3)}
\end{align*}
\]
Hindi does not resort to a negative marker to express astonishment. One of the
following sentences will appear in Hindi under the above-given situation: In this situation
the Japanese use a negative question.
môrārâyâ, ëpâ yahâ? “Morarji, what brought you here?” (6.3)
môrârâyâ, ëpâ yahâ kahâ? “Morarji, what brought you here?” (6.4)
In sentence (6.1) Mr. Kato is not expecting answer so long as Mr. Kato’s speech is
correctly understood. But if it was Mr. Kato’s mistake that he believed to have met with
Mr. Mori the answers will be in Japanese and Hindi as given below respectively:
いや、わたし森ではありません。iya, wataâi mori deha arimaseN. “No, I am not Mr.
Mori.” (6.5)
nahî, mai môri nahî hû. “No, I am not Mori.” (6.6)
Example 2

Mr. Kato was digging the ground to transplant a tree. He noticed something yellow in the mud. After a while he suddenly shouted:

ああ、金貨じゃないか！aa, kiNkaja naika! “Oh my goodness, this is a gold coin!” (6.7)

In the same context one of the following sentences will occur in Hindi:

arē, yahā tō sōnē kā sikkā hai! “Oh my goodness, this is a gold coin!” (6.8)

In place of negative sentence and intonation in Japanese, astonishment is expressed in the above sentence by the interjection, the particle tō and intonation.

7 Nolition

It is found across languages that one uses a negative marker in the subordinate clause that denotes apprehension. For instance, in French ne (a negative marker) appears in the subordinate clause that expresses the content of apprehension:

Je crains qu’il ne soit malade. “I fear that he is ill.” (7.1)

The negative marker occurs also in Japanese as well as in Hindi in the above-given context:

Example 1

わたしが父が収賄事件に関係しているのではないかと恐れている。watašiha čičiga šyuwuawijikeNni kaNkeśteirunodehanaikato osoreteiru. [I fear that my father may not be involved in the bribery case.] (7.1)

mujhē darā hai ki kahē mēre pētā ēgūsa ke māmāle sē sambandhūtā na hō. [I fear that my father may not be involved in the bribery case.] (7.1′)

自分が胃がんにかかっているのではないかと恐れている。jibunaGṇa īgāNni kakatteirunodehanaikato osoreteiru. [I fear whether I do not have stomach cancer.] “I am worried whether or not I have stomach cancer.” (7.2)

mujhē darā hai ki kahē mēre pētā mē kēnsarā na hō. [I fear that I may not have stomach cancer.] “I am worried that I might have stomach cancer.” (7.2′)

Such a negative marker is called an “expletive negative” in the traditional Western grammar. Such negatives occur in many other contexts than the above-given French sentence both in Western and Asian languages. Each of them reflects speaker’s wish that something unwanted should not happen. The word “expletive” cruelly neglects people’s wish to be or remain happy. Therefore, we use the word “nolition” instead of “expletive” as the section title.

A Negative marker also occurs for questions in Japanese and Hindi. Negative questions denoting fear or apprehension are given in the following examples:

Example 2

僕の腎臓癌ではないかしら。boku jiNzougaNdehanaikašira? [I wonder whether I may not have kidney cancer.] (7.3)

mujhē lagātā hai ki kahē gurādē mē kēnsarā na hō. “I wonder whether [or] not I may not
have kidney cancer.” (7.4)

おまえ熱があるのでないかしら？ omae netsuga arunodenaikaśira? ［I wonder whether you do not have fever?］(7.5)

kahī tumēz bukaārah na ho. ［I wonder whether you do not have fever?］(7.6)

おまえ熱があるのでない？ omae netsuga arunode nai? ［Don’t you have fever?］(7.7)

tumēz bukaārah tō nahi hai? ［Don’t you have fever?］(7.8)

彼は試験に落ちたのではないかしら。十日も前からうてに顔を見せない。 kareha šikeNni očitanodeha naikaśira? too koma maekara učini kaowo misenai. “I hope he has not failed in the examination. He has not turned up for ten days.” (7.9)

vahā pariksā mē pīelā na hō gayā hō, dasā dinā sē yahā āyā nahi. (7.10)

Possible responses to sentence (7.7) in Japanese and Hindi are given below:

いや、大丈夫です iya daijoubudesu. “No, I am all right.” (7.11)

nahi, mai tūkika ūa. “No, I am all right.” (7.11')

nahi, nahi hai. “No, I have no fever.” (7.12)

はい、昨日からちょっと熱があります。 hai, kinokura cyotto netsuga arimasu. “Yes, I have a little fever since yesterday.” (7.13)

hā, kalā sē tūkika bukaārah hai. “Yes, I have had a little fever since yesterday.” (7.14)

Negative questions are also for expressing apprehension that one may have committed a mistake.

Example 3

Rina, a housewife, prepared tea with milk and sugar for a visitor. She thought that she might have put in too much sugar. She asked her friend:

砂糖を入れすぎなかった？ satouwo iresuginakatta? ［Haven’t I put in too much sugar?］(7.14)

いや、ちょうどいいわ。 iya, choudoiwa. “No, its just the right amount.” (7.15)

はい、でも大丈夫。 hai, demo daijoubu. “Yes, but its OK.” (7.16)

Possible responses in Hindi in the same situation could be:

cinī kahī zyāda to nahi ho gai? ［Havn’t I put in perhaps too much sugar?］(7.17)

nahi, ēkā damā tūkikā hai. “No, its just the right amount.” (7.18)

hā, lēkinā tūkikā hai. “Yes, but its OK.” (7.19)

Example 4

Mother collided with her little son. She asks her son with apprehension:

痛くなかった？ itakunakatta? ［Did it not hurt you?］(7.20)

son: いや、何ともない。 iya, naNtomonai. “No, its OK.” (7.21)

son: うん、でも大丈夫。 uN, daijoubu. “Yes, but its OK.” (7.22)

In the same situation following question and answer will occur in Hindi:

cōtā tō nahi lagā? ［Did it not hurt you?］(7.23)

nahi, tūkikā hai. “No, its OK.” (7.24)

hā, lēkinā tūkikā hai. “Yes, but its OK.” (7.25)
Example 5

The following negative question is found in Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali story, ḍākā g̪aṛā “Post Office”:

Amal: ṛāṅkē ṝuḷe jābē nā? “You won’t forget me?” (7.14)
Sudha: nā, ṝuḷābō nā. “No, I’ll not forget you.” (7.15)

The negative marker in both Japanese and Hindi in the same circumstance:

僕を忘れない？ bokuwo wasurenai? “You won’t forget me?” (7.16)
はい、忘れません。 hai, wasuremasē. “Yes, I won’t forget you.” (7.17)
いいえ、忘れません。 ie, wasuremasē. “No I won’t forget you.” (7.18)

mukē b̄ulā tō nahī jāōgi? “You won’t forget me?” (7.19)
hā, nahī b̄ulāgī. “Yes, I’ll not forget you.” (7.20)
nahī, nahī b̄ulāgī. “No, I’ll not forget you.” (7.21)

In all these languages, the negative markers express the speakers’ wish of not being forgotten by the girl.

Response to the question that she will not forget him can be preceded by both “yes” and “no”. “yes” means “I will conform to your wish” and “no” means “I won’t and cannot forget you”. The latter shows a strong inclination of the girl towards Amal. It is because the addressee interprets sentence (7.16) as a request that the response with “yes” (7.17, 7.20) occurs.

8 Hesitation

When one asks a question in Japanese fearing that the answer will be negative one prefers a negative question because of hesitation or to avoid the embarrassment due to a negative answer.

Example 1

Mr. Kato comes across a person on the road, resembling Mr. Mori, but being unsure Mr. Kato hesitatingly asks but he is not sure that the man is Mr. Mori. Mr. Kato hesitatingly asks him whether he is Mr. Mori. In such a situation in Japan, a negative sentence is usually used to avoid asking a question directly. If the possibility of the person being Mr. Mori seems to be very low Mr. Kato may add a word like “perhaps.” Even if the possibility is high, “perhaps” could still be used in Japanese to avoid embarrassment.

もしかしたら、森さんじゃないかもしれませんでしょうか？ mošikaštara, morisaNjā iraśyaimasēNka? [Are you? perhaps not Mr. Mori?] (8.1)

The answer to this question in Japanese is given to the corresponding non-negative question as the negative marker here is only rhetorical:

はい、そうです。 hai sōdesu [Yes, it is so.] “Yes, I am.” (8.2)
いいえ、違います。 ie ėgaimasu. [N, it is not so.] “No, I am not.” (8.3)

Hindi does not use negative markers for expressing hesitation. The same question and answers are expressed in the following manner:

śāyādā āpā śrī mori hai? “Are you perhaps Mr. Mori.” (8.4)
kyā āpā śrī mōrī hai? “Are you Mr. Mori?” (8.5)

もしかしたら moškašītara “perhaps” corresponds to Hindi sāyadā. These words are optional. When Hindi does not use sāyadā the feeling of hesitation is expressed with intonation and other suprasegmental features.

〈ji〉 hā, maɪ mōrī hā. “Yes, I am Mori” (8.6)

〈ji〉 nahi, maɪ mōrī nahi hā. “No, I am not Mr. Mori” (8.6)

A negative question in Hindi would have an aggressive meaning (see 11.10) so that one should not use a negative question unless one wants to accuse or criticise Mr. Mori.

Example 2

People hesitate much when they ask questions like the following. Japanese people prefer negative questions:

わたし女優になれない？ wataši joyuuni narenai? [Can I not become an actress?] (8.7)

One could ask:

わたし女優になれる？ wataši joyuuni nareru? “Can I become an actress?” (8.8)

But such a question is too direct and creates embarrassment to the person addressed when he or she must give a negative answer. Such a direct question is possible only between close friends and mostly with a joking intonation. Japanese girls prefer:

わたし女優になれないかしら？ wataši joyuuni narenaikašira. [I wonder whether I can not become an actress?] (8.9)

with the questions ending in かしら kašira it is not clear whether it is addressed to herself or to the listener. Therefore, the question becomes more indirect and one can avoid embarrassment for the speaker as well as the listener.

The answers for questions (8.7) and (8.9) are the same as that to question (8.8) as the negative marker is only rhetorical. There are many ways of answering such questions. Some of possible answers are given below:

さあね、なれないとはかぎらないよ。 saane, narenaiho hakagiranaoy. “um, it is not impossible that you become an actress.” (8.10)

ほか、あなたが女優だって！ baka, anatagā joyuudatte! “Don’t be stupid. You, an actress?” (8.11)

The above question and answers could be rendered into Hindi without a negative marker as given below:

kyā maɪ abhinētri banā sakati hā? “Can I become an actress?” (8.9’)

aisā kucabā nahi hai ki tumā nahi banā sakati. “It is not impossible that you become an actress.” (8.10’)

pāgalā hō kyā? tumā aurā abhinētri! “Are you mad? You, an actress?” (8.11’)

“Yes” and “no” hardly appear in such questions as those given above. To get answers with “yes” and “no” I would give the following question, where the teacher has the duty of answering the question about the professional prospect of the disciple:

先生、わたし女優になれないでしょうか？ seNsei wataši joyuuni narenaiidey?ouka? [Master, can I not become an actress?] (8.12)
9 Request

When Japanese people ask for a favor they mostly use a negative sentence just like the English speakers who use the subjunctive mood to avoid a direct question. Non-negative questions can also be used for people close to oneself.

Example

One day Yuji was in need of a fountain pen. He did not have one, so he asked his classmate to lend him one:

君、万年筆を貸してください？ kimi, manenhittsu wo kaite kurena? [Can you not lend me your fountain pen?] “Could you please lend me your fountain pen?” (9.1

いや、いいよ un, iyo. “Yes, I can.” (9.2)

いや…, もう捨ててしまったんだ。 iya…, mou sute te shimattaNda. kowareteitanode. “No…, I cannot because I have thrown it away as it was no more good.” (9.3)

In more polite answer people use the word “sorry” instead of “no…” in Japanese. sumanainai. mou sute te kimattaNda. kowareteitanode. “Sorry, I cannot as I have thrown it away as it was no more good.” (9.4)

As the above answers show the answers are directed to the positive questions corresponding to the negative questions as the negative markers are just rhetorical.

As we have stated in the previous paragraph, there is no hesitative negative in Hindi. Therefore, negative markers do not appear in Hindi in the same context.

kyā tumā apānā jāunṭenāpēnā uḍārā dē sakūgē? “Can you please lend me your fountain pen?” (9.5)

hā, dē sakūgā. “Yes, I can.” (9.6)

… nahī…, kyōki vahā pēnā ṭūṣṭā gayā pūrā maīnē pīṭkā diya. “No…, I cannot as I have thrown it away as it was no more good.” (9.7)

māṣā karāṇā, nahī dē sakūgā kyōki vahā pēnā bēkāra ṭūṣṭā aurā maīnē pīṭkā diya. “Sorry, I cannot as I have thrown it away as it was no more good.” (9.8)

However, non-grammaticalized prototypes of such negative questions are found in many languages including Hindi. An example for such in Hindi is given below:


10 Proposal/Invitation

When Japanese people wish to invite a person or propose something, they like to use a negative sentence to express their hesitation to avoid any discomfort to the guest or the parties addressed:

Example for invitation

日曜日にうちへ夕食にいらっしゃいませんか？  
ničyoubinini učihe yuušyokuni  
irašjyaimasanke?  ［Wouldn’t you come to our house for dinner next Sunday?］  
“Would you like to come to our house for dinner next Sunday?”  
(10.1)

はい、ありがとうございます。  
hai, arigatou.  “Yes, thanks./Yes, with pleasure.”  
(10.2)

すみません、日曜日は差し支えがあって。  
sumimaseN, ničyoubiha sašitsuakage atte.  
“Sorry, I am engaged on next Sunday.”  
(10.3)

There is no custom to invite people with negative sentences in Hindi. It would give the impression in Hindi that one does not like the person to accept the invitation. In the above-given situation Hindi speakers would express themselves as given below:

क्या आप राताई रातिए शामको हार्ये ग्वार खानेपर आ सकेगे?  
kyā ápā raśvārē śāmako hārē gvarā kānēparā ā sakēge?  “Could you come to our house for dinner next Sunday?”  
(10.4)

हाल्लाजरिन, धानयवाद।  
hāl/lāzarūn, dhanayvādā.  “Yes/Of course, thank you.”  
(10.5) or

हाल्लाजरुरा, इक्सिवेज़।  
hāl/lāzarūra, ikxisē.  “Yes/Of course, with pleasure.”  
(10.6)

क्या हाईमार्फू जीयीगा, आगले रातिएरको माय व्यासा हू।  
kyā hāi/mārfū jījīyēgā, agālē raśvārēkō māi vyasta hū.  “Excuse me, I am busy on next Sunday.”  
(10.7)

Example for proposal

明日釣りに行きませんか？ asu tsurunī yukimaseNkah?  ［Shall we not go fishing tomorrow?］  
“Shall we go fishing tomorrow?”  
(10.8)

はい、いいですね。  
hai, ikidesune.  “Yes, it’s a good idea.”  
(10.9)

すみません、明日は差し支えがあって。  
sumimaseN, asuha sašitsuakage atte.  “Sorry, I am busy tomorrow”  
(10.10)

क्या काला माइकल पाकारणे काल्गे?  
kyā kalā maikēlī pakāranē kālgē?  “Shall we go fishing tomorrow?”  
(10.11)
hā, khūśī. “Yes, with pleasure.” (10.12)
/k'ēdā hai/māfā kējīyēgā, kālā mai vyastā hū “Excuse me, I am busy tomorrow.” (10.13)

As far as request and invitation are concerned, Japanese and Hindi show a sharp cultural contrast. For Japanese it is most important that one does not trouble the person addressed. Therefore, negative questions are preferred. They use negative questions even with the closest friends, though non-negative questions are also possible. In Hindi the love and earnestness are most important when inviting a person. Therefore, even invitations like the following are appreciated:

tīsā tārīxākē hamārē yahā gṛhāparāvēśā hōgā. āpā zarūrā āiyē. “We have a house-warming ceremony on the thirtieth. Please, do come.” (10.14)

agōlē raviśāra śāmākē āpā hamārē gūrārā khamēnē parā āiyēnā. “Please come to our house for dinner next Sunday evening.” (10.15)

To express hesitation when inviting a person Hindi speakers can use the subjunctive mood as in European languages:

yadī āpā kṛpā karāke hamārī sādī meśā pālē to accḍā hōtā. “It would be nice if you would be able to come to our marriage ceremony. (10.16)

When inviting a person who, due to social distance, cannot be expected to accept one’s invitation one can use a negative sentence before sentence (10.16):

āpā hamārī sādī meśā nahā ā pāyēgē. lēkinā yadī āpā kṛpā karākē ā pālē tō kitānā accḍā hōtā. “I think you would not be able to attend our marriage. But if you could how nice it would be!” (10.17)

11 Enquiry

Japanese people often use negative questions out of hesitation even when asking for information. The following conditions are factors for deciding whether to use a positive or a negative question:

1. if the possibility of getting a positive answer is not high.
2. if the question is not well-founded.
3. if one wishes to get a positive answer for one’s own interest.

Example 1

Mr. Kato is in search of a job. He must submit a non-objection letter from Mr. Mori, whom he does not know at all, along with his application letter. He does not understand why Mr. Mori should write the letter for him. However, he goes to his office and finds a door with Mori’s nameplate attached. He opens the door and asks a man sitting at a desk.

森さんですか？ morisāN desuka? “Are you Mr. Mori?” (direct question) (11.1)

森さんではありませんか？ morisāN deha arimaseNka? [Are you not Mr. Mori?]

(negative question) (11.2)

The man replies:

はい、そうです。 hai sou desu. “Yes, I am.” (immediate reaction, he may recognize
the person who asked the question within a moment) (11.3)

はい、森ですか。 hai, moridesuga… “Yes, I am Mori…” (... denotes the intonation appearing when the addressee has not identified the speaker yet.) (11.4)

いいえ、違います。 iie, ēgaimasu. “No, I am not.” (11.5)

Sentence (11.2) consists of the same segmental phonemes as the negative question for confirmation (5.3). But Japanese people easily distinguish them by suprasegmental features and non-verbal expressions.

Question and answers in Hindi in a similar situation are given below:

kyā āpā bahādurājī hai? “Are you Mr. Bahadur?” (11.6)

hā, maī bahādurā hā. “Yes, I am Bahadur.” (11.7)

hā, sahī hai. [Yes, you are right.] (11.8)

ji nahī, maī bahādurā nahī hā. “No, I am not Bahadur.” (11.9)

Negative questions are not used in Hindi at all in this situation. If they occur at all they are used as affirmative rhetorical questions that mean, for example: “You are Mr. Mori, aren’t you?” See § 3, § 4.

kyā āpā bahādurājī nahī hai? “Are you not Mr. Bahadur?” (11.10)

The above sentence has quite a different meaning from that in Japanese, which is a polite question. It is an inverted negative question, which implies that the speaker wants to start accusing him if he is Mr. Bahadur. Sentence 11.10 can be translated into Japanese as follows:

あなたバハドゥルさんと違うんですか? anata bahādurusaNtoēgauN desuka? (Is it not right that you are Mr. Bahadur?) (11.11)

The polite way of indirectly asking in Hindi whether the person is Mr. Bahadur, instead of (11.6), is the following sentence:

maī bahādurājī sē milānā cāḥātā hā. “I would like to see Mr Bahadur.” (11.12)

The same way of questioning is advisable in Japanese also:

森さんに会いしたいのですが。 morisāNni oaišitainodesuga. “I would like to see Mr. Mori.” (11.13)

森さんはいらっしゃらないでしょうか? morisāNha irašyaranai dez youka? (Is Mr. Mori there?) (11.14)

**Example 2**

The Japanese normally use negative questions when asking for information. A polite expression is used because the desired information is for the speaker’s benefit.

A Japanese student came to his teacher’s house as he urgently needed his teacher’s signet for his scholarship. His teacher’s wife opened the door. The student asked her with a negative question to express his hesitation:

先生いらっしゃいませんか? seNsei irašyaimasenka? [Is the teacher not at home?]

“Is the teacher at home?” (11.15)

The teacher’s wife answered:

はい、おります。どうぞお入りください。 hai, orimasu. douzo ohairkudasai. “Yes he is. please come in.” (11.16)
すみません、外出中なんですね…。sumimaseN, gaishyutsuyuunaNdesu. “Sorry, he is not at home …” (11.17)

いや、おりません。iya, orimaseN. “No, he is not.” is impolite and used only when the wife is displeased with the student. In Japanese there are many words corresponding to “no” in English. One may use a soft variety of “no” with a prolonging intonation without offending the student.

いやあ…、外出中なんです。iya…, gaiisyutsuyuunaNdesu. “Ummm, he is not at home …” (11.18)

Question and answers in Hindi in a similar situation are given below:

kyā gurūjī gārā parā hai? “Is the teacher at home?” (11.19)

hā hai. andarā āō. “Yes, he is. Come in.” (11.20)

kāēdā hai kē vē gārā parā nāhī hai.” “Sorry, he is not at home …” (11.21)

Just to share the disappointment of the student in advance, the wife uses the expression for regret kāēdā hai “I am sorry” as in Japanese.

nāhī, nāhī hai. “No, he is not [at home.]” (11.22)

The above response can be used just to inform the reality. But by using different tone and intonation the wife can express her mental state, e.g., irritation, anger, dislike, etc. vis-a-vis the student.

The negative question below would be aggressive in Hindi. It occurs when the student has had already an appointment with the teacher, but he is informed that the teacher is not at home:

kyā gurūjī gārā parā nāhī hai? “Is the teacher not at home?” (11.23)

12 Conclusion

12.1 Context Where Negative Questions Occur

(1) Original meaning:

The original meaning is universal. It occurs also in Hindi.

(2) Inverted questions:

Inverted questions are universal. They occur also in Hindi. Hindi has all the varieties of them including tag-question (§ 4), questions forcing a reply (§ 5).

(3) Unexpectedness:

Expressions of this category are not questions, but they are a mixture of affirmative and interrogative sentences. Hindi does not attest this type of expression (§ 6).

(4) Nolition:

Nolition is universal. It occurs also in Hindi.

(5) Hesitation:

The whole group of “hesitation” (§ 8), “request” (§ 9), “proposal” (§ 10), “invitation” (§ 10) and “enquiry” (§ 11) are contextual variants of one and the same type of negative questions. The underlying psychology of the above categories is “hesitation”. Hesitation has found expression in the negative marker in the Japanese language, which cannot resort
to the grammatical system of subjunctive mood as is done in Indo-European languages. The negative in the negative questions in this group is a kind of periphrasis to avoid direct questions. It is quite natural that we have not found any of negative questions of the “hesitation group” in Hindi because Hindi, which belongs to the Indo-European language family, has the subjunctive for expressing hesitation as European languages do.

The negative questions expressing hesitation is one of a dangerous traps for Japanese when they express themselves in English, Hindi or any other foreign language. This trap is especially treacherous because even Japanese who are fluent speakers of a foreign language can easily fall into this trap. For instance I have heard the following English:

“Don’t you mind if I smoke?” (12.1)

What he intended to say was “Would you mind if I smoke”. Sentence 12.1 would be interpreted as an inverted question (traditionally called “rhetorical question”) by English speakers and was not what he intended to say.

12.2 Response to Negative Questions

As far as Hindi is concerned only original meaning, inverted questions and negative questions expressing nolition come into consideration.

(1) Original meaning (§ 2):

In European languages the response is decided by the answer. If an answer is in affirmative it is preceded by “yes” or its group – positive answer. If the answer is a negative sentence it is preceded by “no” or its group – negative answer. In some languages, like German, French, etc., “doch” and “si” are used respectively instead of “yes”.

In Japanese when one expresses one’s approval to the proposition in the negative question of the original meaning the response is preceded by “yes” or its group – agreeing answer. If it is not approved it is preceded by “no” or its group – disagreeing answer.

In negative questions of the original meaning, therefore, where Japanese people say “yes” in Japanese, English speakers say “no” and where Japanese people say “no” English speakers say “yes”. Therefore, Japanese people who cannot speak English fluently often transfer Japanese system of response into English and cause misunderstandings. For example “Didn’t you see her?” – “Yes, I didn’t.”

Hindi speakers use both Japanese and Western systems. One would propose the hypothesis that the Hindi language has inherited the Western system and the Japanese system has been imported from Dravidian. However, we do not have enough material to support or refute this hypothesis because Dravidian languages also show a similar situation as Hindi.

It seems that adoption of positive/negative answer or agreeing/disagreeing answer reflects the social values of societies.

(i) In the Western society expression of one’s opinion is appreciated – the answer decides “yes or no.”

(ii.) In the Japanese society “harmony” is the most important value – the answer
should be for the questioner - "yes or no" is decided by the question.
(iii) Indian society occupies a place between the two.

(2) Inverted questions:
   For inverted questions there are following formulas:
   positive answer = agreeing answer
   negative answer = disagreeing answer
   Therefore, both Japanese and Hindi coincide with English.

(3) Nolition:
   For nolitive questions there are following formulas:
   positive answer = agreeing answer
   negative answer = disagreeing answer
   Therefore, both Japanese and Hindi coincide with English.
   However, for the sentences like 7.16 "You won't forget me?" one can respond with sentence 7.17 "Yes, I won't forget you." It is because sentence 7.16 is interpreted as a request.

(4) Hesitation:
   While the negative expressing hesitation is a highly developed system in Japanese, Hindi does not know this. Hence there is no answer to this type of question.

Uchida plans to do the same research for other Asian languages like Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chinese and other Indian languages also with a linguist whose mother tongue is one of the above languages and who has at least the basic knowledge of Japanese.

12.3 Chart

The system of negative questions in Hindi and Japanese can be summarized by the following chart. The items in thick frames denote those common to Hindi and Japanese and the items in thin frames are peculiar to Japanese.
References

Mizokami Tomio 溝上富夫 (1977): Hindīgū to Bengarugo no Gimon hyogen ni tsuite. 「ヒンディー語とベンガル語の疑問表現について」“Interrogative sentences in Hindi and Bengali”. *Ajia Afurika Bunpo Kenkyu* 6.『アジア・アフリカ文法研究 6』Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), pp.45-64.