Intensified Response Particles to Assertions and Polar Questions: The Case of Hebrew legamrey

Yael Greenberg - Bar Ilan University (yaelgree@gmail.com) and Lavi Wolf - The Hebrew University and Ben Gurion University (wolf.lavi@gmail.com)

NELLS 49 7.10.2017

A. The story in short

- **Response particles** cross-linguistically got much attention in the literature:
  - “A: John is not home. B: Yes (he is not).”
  - B: No (he is not).
- What about ‘intensified response’ particles?
  - “A: John is not home. B: Sure! Absolutely! (he isn’t).”

- These are very common, but did not get much attention:
  - No compositional analysis of such responses
  - No integration within general theories of response particles

**Goal**: Contribute to this issue by examining one ‘intensified Response’ particle; Hebrew *legamrey* (absolutely / absolutely)

**B. Challenge I**: Unifying two uses of *legamrey*

- **legamrey** is the default intensifying degree modifier in Hebrew (completely), modifying only upper-closed predicates.

  - **ha-agartal legamrey male** / yaker / nafal
  - “The vase (is) completely full / expensive / fell down”
  - “[legamrey] = AG.3p [d-masx(SzA)] A Gd(s)x. (cf. Kennedy & Nccoli 2005 on completely)

  - “The degree d the entity has on the scale associated with the gradable predicate Gi is at the maximal endpoint on the scale.”
  - “Only felicitous with upper-closed adjectives: since only they are associated with scales with maximal endpoints.

- **But legamrey can be used as a response particle **legamrey**

  - Crucially, it is felicitous even when responding to assertions / questions relative to non-gradable predicates ((3):

    - “A: ha-agartal male / yaker / nafal? (‘Is the vase (is) full / expensive / fell down?’
    - “B: legamrey. (‘Absolutely!’)

  - “I am completely sure that the vase is full / expensive / fell down.”

**The challenge**: Both uses of *legamrey* intensify / maximize.

- **How to capture that**? Can we model *legamrey* as a degree modifier too? But what gradable predicate does it modify?

**Proposal**: It modifies the gradable speech act operator *ASSERT*!

C. Background: The speech act operator *ASSERT* - independently analyzed as gradable (Greenberg & Wolf [G&W] 2018)

- G&W follow ideas about gradable epistemic modality (e.g. Talcin 2007, Lassiter 2015), and ideas in Pinon 2006 and Wolf 2015, and propose three moves:
  - **First move**: Supplement existing entries of ASSERT with a credence degree argument
  - **Second move**: Analyze Modal Adverbs as overt degree modifiers of ASSERT.
  - **Third move**: Take apparently unmodified assertions, to be modified by a covert *PROP*

**An illustration**

- Assume a Krifka 2014 style dynamic entry for ASSERT.

  - ![ASSERT](image)

- ![ASSERT(p|c)]](image) in *context c* where the CG is updated with Assert (*pi|c*).

  - ![ASSERT(p|c)]](image) in *context c*.

- ![ASSERT(p|c)]](image) in *context c*.

**D. Proposal**: *legamrey** as an anaphoric degree modifier of ASSERT, maximizing a credence degree

- **Legamrey** acts as a degree modifier ofgradable ASSERT (Greenberg & Wolf)

- the asserted proposition is anaphoric to a proposition asserted / questioned in a previous turn in the discourse (Krifka 2013)

- It (re)asserts this proposition with a maximal degree of credence (cf. definitely):

  - ![ASSERT(c|c)]](image) can pick the embedded proposition (cf. Krifka 2013)

  - ![ASSERT(c|c)]](image) which captures similarities and differences between it and (a) the more maximal credence assertion and (b) the original assertion.

- **E. Challenge II**: *legamrey* vs. *ken* (= ja) and *naxon* (= right)

  - **1. Intensified / ‘maximal credence’ interpretation**

    - With *legamrey* - which inherently returns an assertion and with *ken* which can be used to assert the antecedent proposition - both are natural reactions to polar questions.

    - With *naxon* - which repeats the whole assertion (of the negative proposition)

  - **3. Positive reactions to negative assertions**

    - With *legamrey* and *ken* - which can pick the embedded positive proposition (cf. Krifka 2013)

    - With *naxon* - which repeats the whole assertion speech act (of negative proposition)

  - **4. Felicity in responding to polar questions**

    - With *legamrey* - which inherently returns an assertion and with *ken* which can be used to assert the antecedent proposition - both are natural reactions to polar questions.

    - With *naxon* - which repeats the whole assertion speech act (of negative proposition)

  - **5. Felicity in conditional antecedents**

    - With *legamrey* - which end up with a speech act (ActP) - infelicitous in this position

    - With Ken we end up with a proposition - fine in this position

VI. Conclusion and directions for further research

**Conclusion**: We proposed a compositional analysis of the intensified response *legamrey* which captures similarities and differences between it and (a) the more standard degree modifier *legamrey* and (b) two other response particles in Hebrew.

**Directions**

- Other intensified response particles? Syntactic and intonational means to increase and decrease credence? What about differences between *legamrey* and similar particles, e.g. discourse totally (Beltrama 2018)?

- Other theories of response particles on ‘intensified responses’? E.g. a feature-based theory (Roelofsen & Farkas 2015) / An ellipsis-based theory (e.g. Kramer & Rawlins 2009, Holmberg 2016) / A ‘hybrid’ theory (Goodhue & Wagner 2018)