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## On the status of “attestation adverbials” in bipolar questions

**Abstract:** The author addresses the properties of the special category of expressions established by Danielewiczowa (2012) and labeled by her “attestation adverbials”. A possible example of the category: *He is definitely crazy*. The question which the author tries to answer reads: how do expressions of that category fare in bipolar questions?

His answer is as follows. On the one hand, primarily, such questions are deviant, on a par with questions embracing hypotheticals like *probably*, cf. \* *Has A probably murdered B?* / \* *Is he definitely crazy?*

On the other hand, secondarily, such questions are acceptable as metonymical utterances where a demand to receive an objective assertion is combined with a presupposition that someone had claimed not only that ‘such is the case [he is crazy]’, but also (by using the adverbial *definitely*), that her evaluation was unquestionable, cf. *Is he, as Smith said, definitely crazy?*

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In her book *W głąb specjalizacji znaczeń. Przysłówkowe metapredykaty atestacyjne* (2012), with her English summary: *Probing into specialisation of meanings. Adverbial attestation metapredicates*, Magdalena Danielewiczowa has described a very special, fairly important, category of adverbials whose

distinct way of functioning had not been seen before. In my present paper, I shall call the category I have just referred to “attestation metapredicative adverbials”, with the abridgement AMA.

Their peculiarity consists in the fact that they introduce neither additional information usually called “characteristics of manner” nor comments related to the basic content of a given utterance *as a whole*. They qualify **a predicate** (also in its nominalized form) to which they are immediately attached as valid in its current relation to the epistemic object which is being referred to. The qualification of the predicate consists in the speaker’s both paying attention and calling his or her addressees’ attention to certain features pertaining to the circumstances of the *current application of the predicate*.

Here are some examples of AMA. An article may be said to be not just antisemitic, but *manifestly* antisemitic (Polish *jawnie antysemitcki*); some opinion may be qualified as not just wrong, but *definitely* wrong (Polish *zdecydowanie błędny*); someone may be described as not just having smashed someone else, but *literally* having smashed him or her (Polish *dosłownie zmiądzzył*).

In my very short presentation I will address one partial problem in the analysis of the properties of AMA.

The question I shall try to answer can be formulated as follows:

can AMA expressions become ingredients in so called “direct *yes-no* questions”, or, to use another term, in “bipolar questions”?

I must add that what I have in mind are exclusively “formal” *yes-no* questions, i.e. questions arising, in Polish, as products of the operation where the marker *czy* is used; the corresponding English operations include phrases with *do*, cf. *Did he do that?* or are based on inversion, cf. *Was he present there?* I leave aside purely intonational questions such as *He saw her?* Their functioning requires a separate analysis. In particular, one must respect the fact that the access of AMA expressions to the scope of such purely intonational questions is unproblematic, cf. an example of questioning someone’s previous utterance *He was definitely wrong?* Furthermore, my account will not extend to so called complementation questions (or what we may describe as “equivalence-seeking questions”, cf. *Where is my suitcase?*).

Danielewiczowa has characterized the AMA category in much detail.

Perhaps one of the most conspicuous features of the relevant expressions is their *phrasally unstressed* character whenever they are not isolated in such special self-contained utterances where either the phrasal stress is imposed on them automatically, as it were, by coercion, due to their exhausting the whole space of a separate utterance, or else where they become objects of a metatextual correction.

Here are some examples:

- (1) Peter was definitely **wr|ong**. / \* Peter was **d|efinitely** wrong.
- (2) – Was Peter wrong? – + **D|efinitely**.
- (3) Peter was **d|efinitely**, not: **defin|itely wrong**.

Now, there are two important patterns of either eliciting so called *sentential* adverbials (to which our AMA expressions do not belong) as ingredients of bipolar questions or treating them as illicit within those questions.

The positive pattern implements adverbials which we may call “verificational”. Their representative examples include such verbs as *actually*, *really*, *in fact*. The negative pattern covers such adverbials as *most certainly*, *presumably*, *perhaps*, *of course* which I call “epistemic syncretically egocentric expressions”, ESE, for short.

The fact that this distinction is valid can easily be shown by pointing to such incontrovertible examples as:

- (4) + Was he really glad to see her?
- (5) \* Was he probably glad to see her?

Verificational adverbials, such as *really*, may be said to represent a kind of accretion with regard to predicative expressions. This manifests itself in the fact that they make their appearance as preposed supplements to predicative expressions even in non-factive or counterfactive contexts, cf.:

- (7) It seems to me that he really did that.
- (8) Perhaps he actually wanted to kill her.
- (9) I was dreaming that I in fact owned a palace.

All of this reflects the fundamental fact that predicative expressions *as such* are meant to transmit nothing lesser than purported *knowledge that something concerning someone or something is the case*.

The reason why expressions representing the opposing category ESE, as exemplified by example (5), are incompatible with formal *yes – no* questions is obvious. The cognitive *netto* effect of expressions from the category ESE, which we may also call “hypothesizing”, boils down, in the last resort, to presentation of tautological alternatives. Such a tautological alternative constitutes a frame *within which* a bipolar question is functioning – as an instrument of voicing the need of a solution in favour of one of the members of the alternative. Whenever one is inclined to accept a definite member of a tautological alternative, as is the case with hypothetical utterances, one is not in a position *both* to *state* one’s inclination of the indicated kind and to *question* that inclination *in one and the same utterance*. It must be remembered that *yes – no* questions are concerned exclusively with *objective* states of affairs and with the elimination of all the competitors of what is true. As McDowell pointedly stated, by opposing the traditional erroneous doctrine of a declarative utterance aiming at the transmission of the speaker’s *mental state*, as a matter of fact an inquirer does not ask his or her addressee to offer him or her the addressee’s account of *his* or *her* own, i.e. the addressee’s, judgments, assumptions or beliefs (unless, that is, the question *explicitly* refers to *those very* kinds of topic), but asks for an appropriate piece of *knowledge*.

A corollary of what I have said is the fact that any reversal of the linear order as given in examples like *Perhaps he’s really ill*. results in a heavy deviance, cf. \* *He’s really perhaps ill*.

Let us revert to our main question: How does the category AMA fare where what is at stake is the possibility of placing its members in the scope of bipolar questions?

My point of departure in tackling this issue is as follows.

Literal utterances co-constituted by “attestation adverbials” do not state, by *their* use, i.e. the use of the relevant sentences which includes the use of those adverbials, **merely presence or absence of the respective objectivized situations**, i.e. facts. Their specificity consists in the fact that they give vein to ***the speaker’s autometacharacterization of his / her own predicative description of the respective object or state of affairs***.

To slightly enrich our material basis of utterances with “attestation adverbials”, I shall cite sentences with such inherently *unstressed* expressions as *literally* or *manifestly* or *amazingly* – in attributions like *He was literally immersed in reminiscences of the yesterday events.*, or *She was manifestly angry with his critical remarks.*, or *Steve admired John’s amazingly wideranging skills in practical matters.*

The characteristic of “attestation adverbials” formulated and illustrated above is in a clear contrast with the nature of the expression *czy*. Once again: *czy* is an operator which forms a bipolar inquiry that is concerned with *an absolutely objective state of affairs* as extirpating *any* state of affairs that might be incompatible with it.

As a result, *yes / no* questions based on sentences that embrace “attestation adverbials” do appear to be **primarily deviant**, in a way which is, basically, identical with the incompatibility of members of ESE with *yes – no* questions. Cf.:

- (10) ? Was he *completely* ignorant of what was going on?
- (11) ? Was this article *unequivocally* antisemitic?

The similarity between such examples and examples of the illicit use of ESE expressions such as example (5) is, to my mind, quite clear.

Suffice it to realize that one cannot speak of someone’s *being completely overwhelmed by a certain course of events* in its contradictory opposition to the same person’s “*not being completely overwhelmed by a certain course of events*”. For what would be the difference? Whoever is said to be *completely overwhelmed by a certain course of events* just **is** (purportedly) *overwhelmed by that course of events*, and whoever might be said *not* to be *completely overwhelmed by a certain course of events* just **is not** (purportedly) *overwhelmed by that course of events*. We are bound to apply here the notion of omniscience, or Nagel’s “view from nowhere”.

The most fundamental linguistic fact in the area of phenomena now under consideration is the following circumstance: claims of someone’s **knowledge** that something corresponding to the predicate together with its attestation appendix are incontrovertibly deviant, cf.:

- (12) \* Charles knows that Steve is literally the son of a bitch.

Such an utterance is a mixture of the claim of someone's no doubt possible phraseological knowledge that 'S. is the son of a bitch' and the claim of *someone's enunciation* mirroring the author's qualification of the predicate just used by him or her as properly undergoing "attestation" in the shape of *literally*. Such a combination is not an admissible object of knowledge. What is possible is merely the following conjunctive state of affairs:

- (13) Charles knows that Steve is the son of a bitch and that someone said / was prepared to say [about the same person]: Steve is literally the son of a bitch.

The sentence *Charles knows that Steve is literally the son of a bitch.* does **not** map **that particular conjunctive** state of affairs. The two indicated independent states of affairs of course may, as any arbitrary two states of affairs, come up in a conjunction, even primarily as constituents of someone's knowledge. Still, our sentence (12) with asterisk is merely a certain internally heterogeneous verbal chunk. It does not correspond to knowledge of a regular conjunction, whether a conjunction as it has been described above or any other conjunction. The rendering of knowledge of such a regular conjunction requires producing another kind of utterance, an utterance of the form indicated above, viz. *Charles knows that Steve is the son of a bitch and that someone said / was prepared to say* [about the same person]: *Steve is literally the son of a bitch.*

Note that all of this is in accord with the deviance inherent in example (5), with its egocentric-syncretic-epistemic ingredient. To say: \* *Charles knows that Peter was probably glad to see her.* is to say something incoherent (as opposed to the following absolutely correct utterance: *Charles knows that there is a probability that Peter was glad to see her.*)

**Still, there is a difference between utterances like (1), I mean the utterance with asterisk, on the one hand, and those like (10)–(11), on the other hand.**

It would be silly to prescind certain possibilities that allow us to make a meaningful use of utterances like (10)–(11).

At this point, I shall call your attention to one example of a bipolar question where an AMA expression occurs, but where, in addition, an insertion of someone’s *cited* statement where an AMA expression has been used takes place:

- (14) Was this article, as it has been claimed, an unequivocally antisemitic declaration?

What we have to do with in (14) is merely an inquiry concerning the *content* of someone’s *saying that the article in question was an antisemitic declaration*, while that very saying is parenthetically mentioned in the same utterance. Presence of such a saying has been recognized by the inquirer as real from the very beginning, even though without any indication of whose utterance has taken place or which utterance it was.

My claim is that (11) may have the status of a product of a regular metonymical abbreviation of (13), which, **as a matter of principle**, is far from bearing a stigma of any kind of real linguistic deviance.

This allows us to admit that there is a certain restricted ambivalence with respect to the problem of bipolar questions allowing or disallowing for “attestation adverbials” being embedded in them.

My proposal concerning the resulting quandary is as follows. Interrogatives like (10)–(11) *may* function as *covert* inquiries about presence of the appropriate metapredicative qualification tacitly assigned to *an identified or unidentified author who belongs to the background of the current situation* where the question is being asked.

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My present insight into a small fragment of language I was coping with makes me think of a twofold methodological caveat which deserves being permanently kept in mind, as well as being constantly reminded of.

First, never forget that matters of semantics and matters of pragmatics have to be properly distinguished and kept apart; confusion in this regard is anathema.

Second, never forget that the thicket of speech in its entirety, due to the deepest nature of language, cannot be captured in its ultimate form by applying simplistic syntactic or semantic schemata.

## Literature

DANIELEWICZOWA M., 2012. *W głąb specjalizacji znaczeń. Przysłówkowe metapredykaty atestacyjne*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

### Poznámka k povaze „attestation adverbials” v bipolárných otázkách\*

Autor se zabývá zvláštní třídou výrazů, která byla zjištěná Danielevičovou (2012) jakožto „attestation adverbials”. Možný příklad této třídy: *On je určitě blbec*. Autor si klade otázku: jak se chovají takové výrazy v bipolárných otázkách?

Výrok je sledující. Za *a*, primárně, takové otázky jsou nenormativní, stejně jako věty s hypotetickými výrazy typu *zřejmě*, sr. \* *Zdali A zřejmě zavraždil B?* / \* *Zdali on je určitě blbec?*

Za *b*, sekundárně, takové otázky jsou oprávněny jako metonymické útvary spojující objektivní určení s narážkou, že se někdo vyjádřil k příslušné alternativě nejen objevují, že ‘je tomu *takto* [on je blbec]’, nýbrž taky (pomocí adverbíala *určitě*), že její zhodnocení je nesporné, sr. *Zdali on je, jako řekl Honda, určitě blbec?*

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\* The article was prepared for *Slovo a slovesnost*. Hence the summary in Czech.