

# Intonation, *yes* and *no*

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**Abstract** English polar particles *yes* and *no* are interchangeable in response to negative sentences, that is, either one can be used to convey both positive and negative responses. We provide a critical discussion of recent research into this phenomenon (Kramer & Rawlins 2009; Krifka 2013; Roelofsen & Farkas 2015; Holmberg 2016), which leads to three questions: Does the intonation produced on *yes* and *no* depend on whether the response is positive or negative, and can intonation affect the interpretation of bare polar particle responses? Which particles do speakers prefer to use when? Are preference patterns sensitive to the polarity of preceding sentences in the context? In a series of experiments, we demonstrate that the contradiction contour (Lieberman & Sag 1974) is an intonation that is commonly produced on positive responses to negative sentences, and that it affects hearers' interpretations of bare particle responses. Beyond intonation, our experimental results add new evidence regarding speakers' preferences for using *yes* and *no* in response to negative polar questions and rising declaratives. Finally, our results suggest that preference patterns are not sensitive to the polarity of context sentences.

**Keywords:** polar particles; *yes*; *no*; intonation; prosody; contradiction contour; questions

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