

Marking something as unexpected:

Prosodically marked ‘no’ in German and Persian

Keywords: negation particle; newsmark; affective stance; prosody; expectation; affiliation; stance management; German; Persian

This conversation analytic study compares the use of negation particles in spoken German and Persian, namely *nein/nee* and *na*. While these particles have a range of functions in both languages (Ghaderi 2022; Imo 2017), their use in response to news remains understudied. We focus on *nein/nee* and *na* in two sequential contexts: (i) after prior disconfirmations (Extract (a)) and (ii) in response to either solicited or unsolicited informings (see Extracts (b) and (c), respectively).

In both contexts, *nein/nee* and *na* mark unexpectedness and open up an opportunity space for more, but they do so in different ways and with different outcomes. *Nein/nee-* and *na-*turns after disconfirming, often minimal responses to first-position confirmable turns mark the prior as unexpected (or even contrasting with the *nein/nee/na*-speaker’s expectations) and thus as expandable/accountable (cf. Ford 2001; Gubina/Betz 2021). *Nein/nee/na*-turns after informings (e.g., announcements that display a story teller’s negative emotional stance) differ not only in sequential position but also in prosodic realization. They can be either falling or rising, but all are characterized by marked prosody, i.e., lengthening, very low onset, smiling or breathy voice, or high overall pitch. Through position and turn design features, such *nein/nee-* and *na-*turns not only mark a prior turn as counter to (normative) expectations, but may also display the speaker’s affective stance and affiliate with the affective stance of the prior interactant.

By comparing the use of *nein/nee* and *na* in German and Persian in the two functions illustrated in Extracts (a) and (b/c), we will show (i) how *nein/nee-* and *na-*turns shape interactional trajectories after responsive actions and (ii) what role the particles play in managing news and stance-taking as well as epistemic and affective positioning. Apart from revealing similarities in the use of German and Persian negation particles, the results of our cross-linguistic comparison will demonstrate that even if different languages have similar practices for specific actions, the use of these practices is language- and culture-specific. This means that even similar practices in different languages have their own “collateral effects” (Sidnell/Enfield 2012), linguistic and prosodic characteristic features, and, at least sometimes, consequences for social actions accomplished in the specific language (e.g., Dingemanse et al. 2014; Evans/Levinson 2009; Floyd et al. 2020; Fox et al. 2009).

Our study uses the method of Conversation Analysis (Sidnell/Stivers 2013) and draws on more than 80 hours of audio and video recordings of spontaneous interactions (co-present, via video link, and on the telephone) in everyday and institutional contexts.

(a) FOLK_E_00084_SE_01_T_02_phone call_348

01 FR ja [aber (.) ich glaub_ne katze]
 yeah but I think a cat
 würde ne gans schon erLEgen;=ne,
 would slay a goose right
 02 (0.41)
 03 FR Oder?
 wouldn't it
 04 EG ja?=NEE.=glaub ich nich.
 would it no don't think so
 05 (0.46)
 06 => FR <<h>NEin?>
 07 (0.24)
 08 FR °h
 09 (0.24)
 10 EG voll RIEsig sind [die do]ch-
 they're totally huge though

(b) Phone_Ram_phone call_Fall03

01 RA dishab dir oomadin âre[:?
 you came late last night right?
 02 PA [di:shab? -âre::, dige (.)
 la:st night? -yeah::,PRTL(.)
 03 sâte: yazdah bood rahoftadim
 it was eleven o'clock when we left
 04 => RA na: bâbâ
 na: PTC
 05 PA vâ[lâ
 truthfully

(c) FOLK_E_00428_SE_01_T_01_phone

01 SQ und ähm sie (.) is einFACH- (.)
 and uhm she simply
 02 hat die kommode ABgeholt,
 picked up the chest of drawers
 03 SQ °hh aus der wohnung SCHRÄG
 from the apartment diagonally
 gegenüber von uns?
 across from us
 04 WJ oK[EY;]
 okay
 05 SQ °hh [und] des is DIE wohnung wo kevins
 and that's the apartment where kevin's
 ex frEundin jetzt [einzieht.]
 ex-girlfriend is now movin in
 06 => WJ [<<:->!NE:I:[N]!>]

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