

# ENGLISH DECLARATIVE YES/NO QUESTIONS AS SEEN THROUGH THEIR CZECH COUNTERPARTS

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## 1. Introduction

The present paper approaches English declarative questions from a contrastive point of view, using a parallel corpus of Czech and English. The focus, however, is on English, the Czech translation being used as a means of identifying or illuminating certain features of the English constructions.

In English, declarative *yes/no* questions are always biased: the bias may be epistemic or deontic, but the type of bias is not inherent in the construction as such. In Czech, where there is no systematic difference in word order between interrogative sentences and declarative ones, other lexical and grammatical markers of bias are used. These can either draw our attention to parallel marking in English or indicate the type of bias where no explicit marking is present in English.

Another way of pointing out the bias in English declarative questions consists in approaching them as one of several means used to convey the same function. Taking Czech questions with the markers mentioned above as a starting point, we can see that their English counterparts are typically highly context-bound and often associated with one's convictions and volition.

## 2. The material and method

The study<sup>1</sup> is based on material drawn from a parallel Czech – English corpus. We hope, therefore, that it will also illustrate some ways in which multilingual corpora can be employed in contrastive research.

The parallel corpus still being under construction, a pilot bidirectional sub-corpus of aligned translations available at the moment was used for the present study (Figure 1, cf. also Johansson, 2007: 11).

<sup>1</sup> The study is a part of the research project *Czech National Corpus and Corpora of Other Languages* MSM 0021620823, InterCorp, <http://ucnk.ff.cuni.cz>, <http://www.korpus.cz/intercorp>. The concordancer used was ParaConc (Barlow, M. <http://www.athel.com/para.html>).

The arrows in Figure 1 indicate the individual steps of the analysis. First, we proceeded from the English original texts to their Czech translations, searching for declarative questions and their Czech counterparts. To reduce the influence of idiosyncratic features of both the source and translated texts the number of questions excerpted from each text was limited to sixty at most. The total number of declarative questions analysed is 230. Secondly, recurrent correspondence patterns, including potential markers of discourse functions of the declarative questions, were identified. At this step parallel (formal) marking in both languages comes to the fore. However, “one of the most fascinating aspects of multilingual corpora is that they can make **meaning** visible through translation” (Johansson, 2007: 28, emphasis is ours). The next step, therefore, seeks to follow the meaning patterns as suggested by the markers. The typical Czech markers (conjunctions, particles, pronominal subjects, cf. below) were used as query terms in Czech original texts.<sup>2</sup> Proceeding from Czech to English, we obtained 261 pairs of sentences which contained the Czech markers (Figure 2). The English members of the pairs which share a Czech marker of a particular discourse function can be considered functionally equivalent.<sup>3</sup> This approach

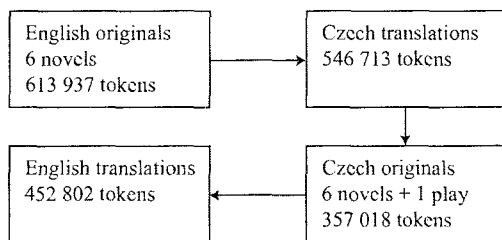


Figure 1: The parallel corpus used for the present study (cf. also the Sources below)

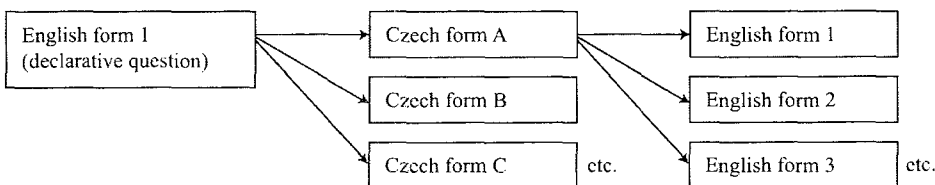


Figure 2: Looking for patterns of meaning in the parallel corpus: the Czech counterparts (A, B, C etc.) of English declarative questions represent formally different means of rendering the meaning of the declarative question in Czech. Proceeding from each of these Czech forms to its English translations, we can group together various English constructions (1, 2, 3 etc.) which can be assumed to be functionally equivalent due to sharing the same Czech form as their counterpart.

<sup>2</sup> The use of Czech originals as source texts at this step seems necessary in order to avoid translation effects, i.e. “differences between choices in original and translated texts in the same language” (Johansson, 2007: 32, cf. also Baker, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> While English constructions whose Czech translation counterparts share the same markers of discourse function can generally be considered functionally equivalent, manual checking is always an inevitable step in the analysis.

thus makes it possible to highlight functional patterns in English by grouping together English constructions which, although formally varied, share the same Czech counterpart.

### 3. The form, function and bias in declarative questions

Although frequently used, the term 'declarative question' is, in fact, misleading. The constructions should rather be described as syntactic declaratives with rising intonation, which typically have the force of a *yes/no* (polar) question. Declarative questions will be considered interrogative sentences since "the relative importance of the ... devices of interrogation is not the same, (*wh*-words and) intonation being superordinate to word order in that they can override its effect." (Dušková, 1999: 131) As pointed out by Gunlogson (2001: 1), "intuitively, the rise imparts the force of a question to what would otherwise be a statement. But the story cannot be that simple. It turns out that rising declarative questions are subject to contextual restrictions that do not apply to their interrogative counterparts."

The primary illocutionary force of interrogatives is a question. Generally, "a polar question has as answers a pair of polar opposites, positive and negative." (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 868; henceforth *CamGEL*) English declarative questions, however, are considered to be "always quite strongly biased" (*CamGEL*: 881). According to *CamGEL* "the expected answer is here the statement with the same propositional content as the question ... In asking a declarative question I am typically seeking confirmation of a proposition that I am inclined, with varying degrees of strength, to believe." (*ibid.*)

The type of bias that English declarative questions may display is tied to their secondary illocutionary force. The epistemic bias (i.e. "the speaker thinking, expecting, or knowing that one answer is the right one" (*CamGEL*: 880)) is linked with the question force of the interrogative, the deontic bias (i.e. "the speaker judging that one answer ought to be the right one" (*ibid.*)) occurs where the interrogative acquires the force of a directive.

"The inference that a question is biased towards a particular answer may be based simply on the context, together with assumptions about the speaker's intentions" or "bias may be reflected in the prosodic properties of the question." (*CamGEL*: 881). We shall focus on grammatical and lexical marking of bias here. In English, the declarative form of the question serves as an indicator of conduciveness. In Czech, where word order is not a distinctive feature of the interrogative sentence type, other types of marking have to be used.

### 4. Markers occurring both in English and in Czech

Where parallel grammatical and lexical marking is present in both languages, it stands out as more prominent due to the contrastive approach. The Czech counterparts may also serve to point out the function of the marker.

Both in English and in Czech, the contextual boundness of declarative questions is reflected in their being often introduced by additive (*and / a*) or contrastive conjunctions and conjuncts (*but / ale, ovšem*), which function here as discourse markers. In ex. 1 *and* not only links Ben's turn to the previous one but also serves to prompt his interlocutors to continue in the indicated direction.

1. "...after the movies, we'd sometimes go for tea." "**And** that's when you saw John Mallins?" Ben asks, bringing them back to the matter at hand. (JFP)  
 "... po kině jsme si většinou chodily posedět někam na čaj." "**A** tenkrát jste uviděly Johna Mallinse?" zeptal se Ben a vrátil se tak zpátky k tomu, co je sem přivedlo.
2. "They're swollen," she explained. "Blood collects in the testicles after an injury like yours." "**But** they're okay?" "They're okay. This is a temporary condition." (SBC)  
 "Máte je nateklá," objasnila mu. "Po takovém zranění jako máte vy, se krev městná ve varlatech." "**Ale** budu je mít v pořádku?" "Máte je v pořádku. Tohle je přechodný stav."
3. "**But** you don't use them?" said Mr. Ollivander sharply. "Oh, no, sir," said Hagrid quickly. (JRH)  
 "**Ovšem** nepoužíváte je?" zeptal se pan Ollivander ostře. "To ne, pane," řekl Hagrid kvapně.

In exx 2 and 3 the speaker expresses strong hopes or recommendation, respectively, contrasting with what may be assumed on the basis of co(n)textual evidence. The bias is epistemic or deontic, respectively. With the deontic bias the declarative question assumes the illocutionary force of a directive. In both cases the polarity of the question corresponds with that of the proposition, i.e. a hope that the positive applies in ex. 2, and a recommendation that the negative polarity should apply in ex. 3. Accordingly, the answer confirms the expectation. Irrespective of the type of bias the declarative question is positively or negatively conducive, depending on the polarity of the sentence. This is what links the questions with the corresponding declarative sentences.<sup>4</sup>

The initial conjunctions or conjuncts were more frequent in Czech,<sup>5</sup> indicating that the declarative form of the question in English may itself suggest contextual boundness, there arising no need to indicate this explicitly (ex. 4).

4. "His parents divorced when he was very young, and he moved with his father to England when he was four years old." "*He never came back to visit his mother?*" "No." Amanda nods. (JFP)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gunlogson's (2001: 2) generalization: "Declaratives, rising and falling, are not neutral; they convey a bias lacking in the use of syntactic interrogatives". This bias seems to be manifested also in their relation to polarity.

<sup>5</sup> The same tendency manifests itself in the translation from Czech to English: 40 per cent Czech polar questions with initial *ale / a* had English counterparts with no initial connector (out of these, 18 per cent were declarative questions).

“Jeho rodiče se rozvedli, když byl malý. Přestěhoval se s otcem do Anglie, když mu byly čtyři roky.” “*A nikdy nejezdil na návštěvu za matkou?*” “Ne.”  
Amanda přikývla.

Considering the ties to the preceding context, the ‘echoing’ function of the declarative questions has to be mentioned.<sup>6</sup> The explicit ‘echo’ declarative question (ex. 5) may be seen as a special expression of a more general characteristic of declarative questions. Gunlogson (2001: 2) points out that declarative questions “may be used to question presuppositions and inferences taken to be logical consequences of the addressee’s public position, whether or not such inference finds its basis in a preceding utterance.” In ex. 6 the inferential character of the question is explicitly marked both in English and in Czech by initial *so / takže, tedy*: what is questioned is not what has been said but what the speaker has inferred. The declarative question displays positive epistemic bias, the speaker hoping that the positive answer applies.

5. “I don’t see a problem.” “*You don’t?*” (JFP)  
“Nevídím v tom žádný problém.” “*Ne?*”
6. “You fell forward and landed hard on your cheek. Your chin was busted open, but it didn’t require stitches. You’re bruised and swollen, but no bones were broken.” “*So I’ll be as handsome as ever?*” (SBC)  
“Padl jste dopředu a tvrdě přistál na líci. Bradu jste měl rozseknutou, ale zašit to nepotřebovalo. Jste potlučený a oteklý, ale nemáte nic zlomeného.” “*Takže budu stejně pěkný jako předtím?*”

If there is not sufficient evidence of the addressee’s position (commitment), the declarative question often explicitly enquires about what they *mean, think, imagine, say*, etc.<sup>7</sup> The Czech counterparts may contain elements of volition or intention – *chcete říct*, i.e. ‘do you intend to say’ (ex. 7). The epistemic bias may be reinforced lexically by confidence markers, e.g. *no doubt, surely / přece*, with lower degrees of certainty expressed, e.g., by *I suppose / nejspíš*.

7. “I don’t know anything about Hayley Mallins at all.” “*You’re saying you didn’t know your brother was married?*” (JFP)  
“Nevím o žádné Hayley Mallinsové.” “*Chcete říct, že nevíte, koho si váš bratr vzal?*”

<sup>6</sup> As demonstrated in *CamGEL* (887), echo questions “belong to the class of indirect speech acts”, expressing the speakers’ doubt as to whether they heard or understood the previous turn correctly.

<sup>7</sup> Approximately a quarter of the sentences examined questioned the addressee’s intentions, will, thoughts or predictions. The speakers were found to refer frequently not only to what the addressees thought or meant by what they had said but also to how they evaluate the situation – typically using an evaluative copular predication, e.g., “He invited us to a high school basketball game ‘to watch my kid brother play,’ he said.” She laughed softly. “Wick fouled out.” – “*He’s an aggressive competitor?*” (SBC) “Pozval nás na basketbalový zápas střední školy – ‘abyste viděli mého mladšího bráčku hrát’, říkal.” Tiše se zasmála. “Wicka vyloučili.” – “*Je to agresivní soupeř?*”

8. “As I say, even if You-Know-Who has gone –” “*My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name?* All this ‘You-Know-Who’ nonsense –” (JRH)  
 “Jak vám říkám, i pokud je Vy-víte-kdo opravdu pryč –” “*Milá paní profesorko, tak rozumná osoba jako vy přece dokáže vyslovit jeho jméno?* Všechny ty nesmysly s Vy-víte-kým –”

As illustrated by exx 9 and 10, declarative questions can take the form of a complex sentence whose superordinate clause expresses the degree of epistemic bias with the scope of the question being narrowed to the dependent clause. The formally superordinate clause *I suppose* is loosely attached to the dependent clause as an epistemic tag (as shown also by the Czech epistemic adverbial counterpart).

9. “You’ll be g-getting all your equipment, *I suppose?*” (JRH)  
 “*N-nejspíš* jste si p-přišel koupit vybavení, že?”  
 10. His relief must have showed in his face, because Filch said, “*I suppose you think you’ll be enjoying yourself with that oaf?*” (JRH)  
 Filch musel poznat z jeho tváře, jak se mu ulevilo, poněvadž řekl: “*Nejspíš si myslíš, jaká tě s tím buranem čeká zábava, vid’?*”

## 5. Absence of marking

The above markers were attested in both languages, albeit with different frequency. In other examples there was no overt lexical marking of the bias in either language apart from the declarative form of the question itself in English (ex. 11).

11. “I wouldn’t want to be in their shoes when Oren discovers I’m gone.” “*He doesn’t know?*” “He might by now.” “*He’ll be upset?*” “Volcanic.” (SBC)  
 “Nechtěl bych být na jejich místě, až Oren zjistí, že jsem pryč.” “*Neví to?*”  
 “Ted’ už by mohl.” “*Bude se zlobit?*” “Bude soptit.”

## 6. Marking in Czech

A third group of sentence pairs comprises otherwise unmarked English declarative questions whose Czech counterparts display some bias marking. Two types of particles may serve as bias markers here. Generally, the function of particles is to indicate the speaker’s attitude with respect to the content, the addressee or the organization of the text. Depending on the context, the particle may, however, acquire different meanings. The particle *to* in initial position is typically employed as an evaluative device, an emphasizer (*Mluvnice češtiny* 2: 235). In the counterparts of English declarative questions it is used to mark inference based on the co(n)text, which the speaker is reluctant to believe (ex. 12).

12. “Is that all you can think of to talk about, Oren? The price of shrimp? *You drove all the way down here for that?*” (SBC)  
“O ničem jiném se bavit nebudeme, Orene? O tom, kolik stojí garnáty? *To jsi jel celou tu dálku sem kvůli tomu?*”

Another particle – *cožpak / což / copak* – serves a similar function. Moreover, it involves an element of appeal on the addressee (*Mluvnice češtiny 2*: 231). This particle, however, occurred twice only in our material, being more frequent in the counterparts of negative interrogative polar questions (cf. below and Malá 2008).

13. “... first stop for us is Gringotts. Wizards’ bank. ...” “*Wizards have banks?*” (JRH)  
“... Nejdřív ze všeho musíme ke Gringottovejm – to je kouzelnická banka. ...”  
“*Copak kouzelníci mají banky?*”

In the Czech sentence the categories of person and number of the predicate verb are expressed by inflectional suffixes, rendering the pronominal subject redundant. Its presence is therefore always marked.<sup>8</sup> It seems significant that the initial pronominal subject occurred in 52 Czech counterparts of the English declarative questions (i.e. 22.6 per cent).<sup>9</sup>

These questions always involve an additional element of surprise or disbelief. The speaker is forced by the situation to re-evaluate his or her expectation (ex. 14).

14. “I’m not with the Crown Attorney’s office.” “*You’re not a lawyer?*” “I am a lawyer,” Amanda corrects, silently debating how much information to divulge. “Just not with the Crown Attorney’s office.” (JFP)  
“Nejsem z kanceláře oblastního návladního.” “*Vy nejste právníčka?*” “Jsem právníčka,” opravila ji Amanda a v duchu zvažovala, kolik informací má v tuto chvíli prozradit. “Jenom nejsem z kanceláře prokurátora.”

Negative declarative questions resemble negative polar interrogatives in this respect. However, the function of forced re-assessment is not conditioned by the negative polarity: positive declarative questions display the same behaviour (ex. 15).

<sup>8</sup> When the predicate verb is morphologically marked as the first or second person, the overt expression of the subject by a noun phrase (that can only be headed by the personal pronouns *já, ty, my, vy*) “is secondary and is always motivated by various factors, which often co-occur” (G REPL & KARLIK, 1998: 226). These factors involve cases where the subject cannot be recovered from the sentence, e.g. due to ellipsis in the predicate, or where the pronominal subject is made overt to meet the needs of functional sentence perspective (rhematic subjects, contrastive subjects, cleft constructions). The second person overt pronominal subject is also used in “questions expressing surprise” (“*podivové otázky*”, *ibid.*, 227, 463), where it alternates with initial particles *to* and *copak*. The realisation of the subject by a third person pronoun is also considered marked and context-dependent (*ibid.*, 228).

<sup>9</sup> In 49 of these clauses the subject was realized by a personal pronoun which is redundant due to the verbal suffix. In 3 the subject was a demonstrative pronoun.

15. "Oh, my God," Corinne Nash exclaims. ... "You're Amanda, aren't you?" It takes Amanda a second to recover her voice. "*You know me?*" "Of course I know you. Please, come in." (JFP)  
 "Bože můj!" vykřikla Corinne Nashová. ... "Ty jsi Amanda, že ano?" Amandě trvalo ještě chvíli, než našla svůj hlas. "*Vy mě znáte?*" "Ovšemže tě znám. Prosím, pojd' dál!"

## 7. Proceeding from Czech to English

Czech sentences which contain the above-mentioned markers can also be paralleled in translation by English constructions other than declarative questions. What the various counterparts share is the communicative function indicated by the marker. They can, therefore, provide some additional clues as to how declarative questions are used. In this section we shall proceed from the Czech original sentences with lexical markers, particles *to*, *copak* / *cožpak* / *což*, and initial pronominal subjects to their English translations.<sup>10</sup>

16. Ty věříš v boha? ... *Ale on asi není, vid'*? Copak by se na to mohl dívat? (IOR)  
 Do you believe in God? ... *But there probably isn't any such God, is there?*  
 How could he go on looking at it all if there was?

In ex. 16, marked in Czech due to the initial pronominal subject *on* ('he'), the contextual ties are explicitly indicated by conjunctions.<sup>11</sup> In both languages tags are used to convey a request for verification (the degree of epistemic bias is indicated by adverbials *probably* / *asi*), which points out one of the functions of declarative questions, viz. prompting the addressee to react, give an explanation, provide support for their claims etc.

The inferential character of declarative questions may be reinforced explicitly by a superordinate clause with the verb *mean* in English (with a personal or impersonal subject), as illustrated by some of the English equivalents of the Czech questions with pronominal subjects or initial *to* (exx 17, 18).<sup>12</sup> As the Czech simple questions suggest, what is syntactically framed as a superordinate clause in English falls outside the actual scope of the question, serving rather as a parenthetical marker.

17. "*A on se snad s tímhle režimem smířil?*" "Ne, vůbec ne." (MKL)  
 "*Does that mean he's made his peace with the regime?*" "No, not in the least."

<sup>10</sup> The Czech-English data comprise polar questions with initial particles *to*, *což* / *cožpak* / *copak*, connectors *ale*, *a*, *tak* / *takže* / *tedy*, and initial personal pronoun subjects.

<sup>11</sup> The connectors *ale*, *a* are classified by *Mluvnice češtiny 2* (228–238) as particles homonymous with conjunctions. The authors point out their text-organizing and appeal functions.

<sup>12</sup> There were nine correspondences of this type. Cf. also the initial conjunction *a* in Czech and the epistemic adverbial *snad*, none of them occurring in the translation of ex. 17.



18. “A primář?” ptal se Tomáš. “*Ty se s ním nevidáš?*” ptal se S. “Ne,” řekl Tomáš. (MKL)  
 “How’s the chief?” asked Tomas. “*You mean you don’t see him?*” asked S.  
 “No,” said Tomas.

The contextual dependence is further manifested in the English elliptical counterparts of the Czech sentences with pronominal subjects (ex. 19).

19. Zvedla v hraném údivu obočí: “*Ty jsi přišel sem?*” (MKL)  
 “What?” she exclaimed, raising her eyebrows in mock surprise. “*You? Here?*”

As far as the role of the Czech particles is concerned, *to* serves here primarily as an indicator of epistemic bias based on inference. Accordingly, various degrees of certainty may be expressed in the corresponding English interrogative questions (making the question conducive in a way similar to the declarative question form, ex. 20). Particles *copak / což / cožpak* are infrequent in the Czech counterparts of declarative questions<sup>13</sup> since they typically add another feature to the inferential character of the question, viz. that of disagreement. This is overtly manifested in those pairs where Czech sentences with this particle are paralleled by English exclamative sentences with opposite polarity (ex. 21, cf. also ex. 16 above).

20. *To se tak drželi celou noc? Připadalo mu to těžko uvěřitelné.* (MKL)  
*Could they have been hand in hand all night? It was hard to believe.*
21. *Nejhůř bylo doma. Pavlíku sem, Pavlíku tam! To máma. Copak jsem pořád malé dítě?* (IOR)  
 It was worst of all at home. Paulie this and Paulie that. That was his mother all over. *For Heaven’s sake, I’m not a child any more!*

## 8. Conclusion

Declarative questions are always highly context-bound and conducive. The declarative form itself, however, cannot be indicative of the type and degree of bias. Using the Czech counterparts of English declarative questions we hope to have shown some of the explicit markers operating in both languages (conjuncts and conjunctions, lexical reinforcement of bias by epistemic adverbials). On the other hand, starting from the markers present exclusively in the Czech counterparts of declarative questions (particles, pronominal subject), it was possible to group English declarative sentences together with other English constructions which perform the same communicative functions (question tags, elliptical questions, exclamative sentences, syntactically complex sentences whose epistemic superordinate clauses lie outside the scope of the

<sup>13</sup> This can also be demonstrated by the English correspondences of the Czech original questions with *což / cožpak / copak*: out of the 71 questions with the particle, only one was translated by a declarative question; the prevalent counterparts were interrogative polar questions – negative (25) or positive (23).

question). Declarative questions were thus seen to operate typically as statements based on inference, accompanied by an invitation for verification, often associated with an element of surprise, doubt or disagreement. The bias is usually epistemic; nevertheless, the deontic function of advice may also be found.

We hope to have demonstrated that parallel translation corpora may be used not only in a contrastive way, but also as a tool which makes it possible to focus on one of the languages only, exploring the means used to perform a particular discourse function.

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### **Anglické zjišťovací otázky s neinvertovaným slovosledem z hlediska jejich českých protějšků**

#### **Resumé**

Anglické zjišťovací otázky s neinvertovaným slovosledem nejsou z hlediska očekávané odpovědi nikdy neutrální. Zatímco v angličtině je tato „předpojatost“ signalizována už příznakovou formou otázky, v češtině se vyjadřuje jinými prostředky. V paralelních překladových textech lze pomocí českých protějšků anglických otázek s formou věty oznamovací poukázat na obdobné gramatické a lexikální prostředky signalizace diskursní funkce v angličtině nebo tam, kde v angličtině takové explicitní prostředky chybí, identifikovat danou funkci.

Článek, který se opírá o paralelní překladové texty projektu InterCorp, ilustruje také další způsob využití tohoto korpusu. Vyjdeme-li z prostředků, které jsme identifikovali v českých překladech anglických tázacích vět s formou věty oznamovací jako markery diskursních funkcí (iniciální pronominální podmět, částice, konektory, lexikální markery), a postupujeme-li opačným směrem, z češtiny do angličtiny, nacházíme anglické konstrukce (tázací dovětky, eliptické otázky, souvětí, jejichž věty hlavní fungují jako epistemické modifikátory), které vyjadřují tytéž funkce jako otázky s neinvertovaným slovosledem. Ukazuje se, že anglické zjišťovací otázky se slovosledem věty oznamovací jsou kontextově vázané, mluví v nich interpretuje, co vyvodil z předchozího kontextu a apeluje na posluchače, aby jeho závěry potvrdil. Obvykle je přítomen prvek překvapení, nesouhlasu nebo pochyb (epistemická modalita). Tyto otázky mohou nabývat také funkce rady nebo doporučení (deontická modalita).

Použitá metoda je kontrastivní v tom smyslu, že jsou porovnávány prostředky vyjadřování určité funkce ve dvou jazycích. Čeština je ale použita jen jako „prostředník“, díky němuž můžeme v angličtině pozorovat různé prostředky, které slouží k vyjádření dané diskursní funkce.