

# Polar Question Clauses in Croatian in a Diachronic and Areal-Typological Perspective

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper sets out to synchronically and diachronically investigate how polar questions are encoded in Croatian in its areal context. Questions are speech acts used for requesting information, one of the three principal language functions along with passing on information and commanding. According to these three functions, sentences can universally be divided into three basic types, which are formally distinct in some way in a great majority of the world's languages (Givón 2001: 288): declaratives are used to convey information, interrogatives to request information, and imperatives are used with the intent to get the collocutor to do something (cf. Velupillai 2012: 345-346). The relation between the form of the sentence and the function of the speech act is not at all unambiguous, nor are the boundaries between speech act types always clear, but it is nevertheless typologically grounded to speak of the mentioned three sentence types as the most commonly grammaticalised prototypical speech acts (Givón 2001: 288).

Interrogatives are further subdivided into polar interrogatives, which will be discussed in this paper, and content interrogatives. The difference is that polar interrogatives usually demand only the collocutor's evaluation of an utterance's truth value, i.e. an answer equivalent to "yes", "no" or conceivably one similar to "perhaps" or "probably", while content interrogatives require some other information marked with a question word as the answer. A polar and a content interrogative in English are exemplified in (1) and (2), respectively:

(1) *Is John reading a book?*

(2) *What is John reading?*

It should be noted right away that some linguists (see e.g. Mihaljević 1995: 19) insist on the terminological distinction between the *interrogative clause* and *question*, where the former term should be defined formally and the latter one functionally.

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A polar question can be used for affirming or negating either the entire utterance or a single element of the utterance, the said element expressed by a focused constituent in the latter case (Givón 2001: 231-232). Focus is understood here as a linguistic category indicating the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of expressions (Krifka and Musan 2012: 7). Depending on the language, this category can be encoded on a particular syntactic constituent by means of intonation, position in the clause, particles or affixes (see Givón 2001: 234) in order to emphasise the content of the constituent in relation to the alternatives. This paper will primarily deal with non-focused interrogatives, i.e. those that question the whole utterance. Besides that, languages regularly dispose of means to mark the speaker's expectation of an affirmative or a negative answer (Givón 2001: 292), but we shall exclude these from consideration in this paper and concentrate on polar questions without additional pragmatic nuances. We call such questions *neutral polar questions* in a strictly provisory way.

Polar questions are formally distinguished from declaratives in a majority of the world's languages, usually in such a way that the polar questions are additionally marked. Dryer's (2013a) exhaustive research on a sample of 955 languages shows that only one language in the sample, Mixtec from Mexico, makes no formal distinction between polar interrogatives and declaratives. It is also an exceptional rarity for the formal distinction to consist in declaratives containing additional declarative markers, which is attested in only four languages in the sample. Other interrogative construction types all include additional or special marking of interrogative sentences, i. e.: special sentence intonation, question particle, interrogative verb morphology and special interrogative word order. As Velupillai (2012: 352) points out, many languages actually use a combination of strategies, while Dryer presents only the combination of the question particle and verb morphology, and subsumes languages that use some other combination under a language type defined by one of the strategies. This policy unrealistically reduces the prevalence of interrogative intonation above all, which Dryer counts as an interrogative strategy only if that is the only way of marking a polar question a language has, and which Velupillai (2012: 352, 353) claims is "very common" and often combined with any of the other strategies. Besides that, it is certainly possible for a language to use the combination of a question particle and interrogative word order, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. According to Dryer's categories, the most

prevalent interrogative strategy is the question particle, attested in 585 or 61.26% languages in the sample, followed by interrogative intonation, which is the only way of encoding a polar question in 173 languages or 18.12% of the sample. However, Dryer himself remarks that languages in which interrogative intonation is the only polar question marker are underrepresented in the sample and are more numerous in reality than the sample would suggest. The next most frequent interrogative strategy is special verb morphology, noted in 164 or 17.17% languages. The remaining two strategies are notably rarer – the combination of the question particle and verb morphology occurs in 15 or 1.57% languages, and interrogative word order in 13 or 1.36% of the languages.

Languages that have the question particle differ in respect to its position in the clause. Dryer (2013b) shows that the question particle is cross-linguistically most often positioned either at the beginning or at the end of the clause, markedly less often at the second place and very rarely in any other position. SOV languages tend to place the question particle clause-finally, VSO languages tend towards initial question particles, while both first and last place are common for question particles in SVO languages (Dryer 2007: 109). It should be pointed out that the particle can be placed after the focused constituent in some languages, i.e. the questioned constituent, but most such languages have a neutral particle position indicating the whole utterance is questioned equally. Dryer's survey has considered the neutral position for such languages.

## **2. Theoretical background**

A key concept for this paper is *Sprachbund* or *linguistic area*, which is defined as a group of languages spoken in the same or neighbouring area sharing a number of common features that are not a consequence of common origin or language universals, but of contacts between the languages (cf. Campbell 2006: 454, Matasović 2001: 57). Belonging to a language area is not a binary category – on the contrary, one can speak of core and marginal members, depending on the number of characteristic features a language has. The classical example of a language area is the so-called Balkan Sprachbund, which is constituted by Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Torlakian Serbian, Modern Greek and Romanian. Shtokavian dialects, which make up the basis of standard Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, also have a smaller number of Balkan Sprachbund features, such as a periphrastic future tense formed with an

auxiliary that developed from an originally volitive modal verb (Thomason 2001: 109). However, these features are too few for them to be considered a real member.

Especially relevant for our investigation is the language area encompassing the majority of modern European languages, which is usually called *Standard Average European (SAE)* (Haspelmath 2001: 1492). SAE is defined by a number of features, many of which are rare cross-linguistically. Although the largest part of SAE languages belongs to the Indo-European language family, most of its features are certainly not inherited from Proto-Indo-European (Haspelmath 1998: 285).

Haspelmath (2001: 1505) determines a language's affiliation with SAE according to eleven features. He establishes that the core members are French and German with nine features, followed by Dutch, Albanian, Portuguese, Spanish, Sardinian and Italian with eight features, and English, Modern Greek and Romanian with seven. Members that are more peripheral are North Germanic languages and Czech with six features and other Balto-Slavic languages and Hungarian with five features. European languages that are left outside of SAE are Celtic languages, Breton having two features, Welsh one feature and Irish none, Basque with two features, and Turkish and Uralic languages other than Hungarian, which have none of the eleven features. It is evident from the presented facts, which Haspelmath accentuates, that some of the Balkan Sprachbund languages have a high number of SAE features as well. The same author (1998: 285) considers that SAE most likely came into being due to intensive contacts during the Migration Period straddling the transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages.

Matasović (2001: 63, 2002: 65) brings out the hypotheses that pragmatically motivated language features have a large areal diffuseness and lack diachronic stability, which means they are often borrowed into languages and change easily. Since the polar question strategy is directly linked to the speech act type and is thus very pragmatically motivated, assuming Matasović's claim, it can be hypothesised that it should be areally diffuse. It follows that it is therefore reasonable to expect a certain type of interrogative strategy to be prevalent throughout SAE, which is the hypothesis we tried to test.

Haspelmath (2001: 1501) indeed mentions verb fronting in polar questions as a "likely" SAE feature, but does not include it in the main eleven features that serve as criteria for a

language's belonging in the area nor does he describe its prevalence in greater detail. Dryer's (2013a) already cited study shows that languages which use only word order to mark polar questions are very rare in the world, and nine out of thirteen such languages in his sample are in Europe. Dryer's findings therefore speak in favour of the hypothesis that prevalence of verb fronting as an interrogative strategy in Europe should be ascribed to areality. However, he subsumes languages that have a question particle along with an interrogative word order under the question particle type and thus does not show the spread of verb fronting in polar questions throughout Europe entirely faithfully.

### **3. Aims**

The aims of this paper can be divided into two groups: those pertaining specifically to Croatian and those pertaining to SAE. The aims specific for Croatian are to describe polar question constructions in the modern language and to show their diachronic development. We tried to investigate whether that development reflects areal influences and how Croatian fits into its areal context.

On the level of SAE, the aim is to investigate which types of polar interrogative constructions are present on the continent and whether there is a dominant type. This was an attempt to test the hypothesis that a single interrogative construction type tends to be spread in a linguistic area on the example of SAE. Another aim was to investigate what were the directions of cross-linguistic influences within SAE and what kind of diachronic changes concerning polar question markers are attested.

For that reason, both modern and historical languages were included. In order to enable an areal contextualisation of Croatian, it was important to include languages that are geographically close and have been in contact with it. On the other hand, the intended diachronic description entails including as many Slavic languages as possible in order to give insight into what the starting point for the Croatian system could have been.

The study should contribute to a better understanding of areal influences Croatian has been subject to and of its position within the European linguistic area, as well as to the discussion on the features on SAE.

#### **4. Methodology**

On the one hand, the paper is based on studying reference grammars of a large number of European languages and determining the type of polar question marking for each one. Special attention was paid to three parameters: whether the verb is fronted in polar questions, whether there is a question particle and, if there is one, what its position in the clause is. Since the available grammars of some languages do not clearly convey this information – especially about verb fronting – we consulted other relevant descriptions of these languages as well. We did not focus our attention to interrogative intonation because it is often not mentioned in grammars and because this fact cannot be available for the historical languages.

Other than Croatian, 10 historical and 44 modern European languages have been included in the survey. Three of the historical languages are ancient: Ancient Greek, Latin and Gothic, and six of them are mediaeval: Old Irish, Old Norse, Old Church Slavonic, Old French, Old Italian and Old Spanish. The historical languages are relevant for our study so as to show what kind of interrogative constructions have the earliest attestation in Europe and which Indo-European branch gives the first attestation of certain construction types. The ancient languages are especially important for being attested before the most likely creation of SAE. In addition to that, all the languages named so far except Gothic have descendents in modern-day Europe, which should provide us with some insight into changes attested in the polar interrogative systems. The tenth historical language is 18<sup>th</sup> century Venetian, which is included because contact with Croatian is assumed. Out of the contemporary languages, 38 are members of the Indo-European family: Modern Greek, Albanian, twelve Balto-Slavic languages including two Baltic and ten Slavic ones, eleven Germanic, nine Romance and four Celtic languages. Modern Greek, Romance, the North Germanic languages and Bulgarian and Macedonian have their ancestors among the included historical languages and should thus offer insight into the diachrony of polar interrogatives. Modern Greek, Albanian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and Romanian are members of the Balkan Sprachbund and should show if there is an interrogative construction type typical for that Sprachbund and if it has influenced Croatian. Furthermore, Italian and German have had long-term contact with Croatian. The remaining languages are four Uralic ones, one Turkic and the genetically isolated Basque, which are important for our study as representatives of non-Indo-European families. These include Hungarian and Turkish, which have had long-term contact with Croatian.

	Indo-European	Uralic	Turkic	isolates
ancient	3	-	-	-
	Greek: 1 Germanic: 1 Italic: 1			
mediaeval and early modern	7	-	-	-
	Balto-Slavic: 1 Germanic: 1 Romance: 4 Celtic: 1			
modern	38	4	1	1
	Greek: 1 Albanian: 1 Balto-Slavic: 12 Germanic: 11 Romance: 9 Celtic: 4	Finno-Ugric, Ugric: 1 Finno-Ugric, Finno- Samic: 3	Southern: 1	Basque

Table 1. Overview of the language sample by period and genetical affiliation

On the other hand, in order that Croatian could be described outside the contemporary standard language, data from modern reference grammars have been supplemented with those supplied by a diachronic dictionary and web corpora and those elicited in a survey.

For the purpose of presenting the historical development of particular interrogative constructions, we used the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences' diachronic dictionary *Rječnik hrvastkoga ili srpskoga* (JAZU Dictionary) and searched through their attestations in historical corpora, *Hrvatska jezična riznica* (*Riznica*) and the subcorpus of Marko Marulić's works within the Croatian National Corpus (HNK). *Riznica* includes various text types such as literary, publicistic, journalistic and textbook texts from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the modern age, with those predating the modern standard being especially important for our needs.

With the aim to describe the contemporary non-standard language, we explored the Croatian Web Corpus (hrWaC), which is composed of texts from the .hr net domain. Since it includes material from forums, blogs and other online sources, it should give a good representation of

the modern colloquial language. However, it should be kept in mind that the colloquiality of these texts is restricted by their written modality.

Furthermore, we carried out a survey among 53 native speakers via an online form, in which the participants had to form polar questions from the given declarative sentences, and then evaluate the acceptability of selected interrogative sentences from hrWaC on a scale from 1 (completely unacceptable) to 5 (completely acceptable). The participants were also asked about their age and education, as well as about the town they grew up in and the town they live in, so that preference towards specific constructions could be linked to certain dialects. Especially important for us is the information on the town the participant grew up in, because we assume this town had the strongest influence on the idiolect of most speakers. We are aware that identifying geographical space with dialects is problematic, especially for larger urban environments, but we nevertheless consider that this approach can reveal some tendencies.

The declarative sentences that were to be changed to polar questions were selected so that they cover all verb forms used in the colloquial language that can occur in interrogative clauses – the present, perfect, future I and conditional I.

present	<i>To je u redu. Možeš mi pomoći. Ivica čita knjigu. Sviđa ti se ova pjesma. Gladni ste.</i>
perfect	<i>Marica je dobila peticu iz matematike. Već smo gledali taj film. Oni su to napravili.</i>
future I	<i>Sutra ćemo ići na kupanje. Posudit ćeš mi knjigu.</i>
conditional I	<i>Htjela bi sladoled. Bilo bi vam drago da se to ostvari.</i>

Table 2. Overview of declarative clauses given for conversion into polar interrogatives after the verb form of their predicate



As for the sentences drawn from hrWaC that were given for evaluation, we strived to encompass non-standard interrogative constructions and variations in morphosyntactic features of the predicate that we had assumed could influence the acceptability of particular strategies. It was especially important for us to include constructions that we assumed would not be acceptable to all speakers (e.g. *Halo, jel sam dobila stan Jurakić?*, *Jel si slobodan sutra?*) so that it could be shown how wide-spread they are.

Participants' age ranges between 20 and 47 years, but 86.79% of them are aged between 23 and 25, so the survey reflects younger people's language. As for their educational structure, 86.80% participants have higher education (49.06% equivalent to diploma, master's degree or higher, and 37.74% equivalent to bachelor's degree), and 11.32% have secondary education. Therefore, our participants have above average education and do not constitute a representative sample according to that feature. They do not form a representative sample according to the region of origin or native dialect either. The largest group are participants who grew up in Dubrovnik with 32.08%, followed by participants who grew up in Zagreb or its surroundings with 28.3%. Some participants are from Zagorje, Istria, Slavonia and Dalmatia (excluding Dubrovnik) each.

20—24 years	25—30 years	>30 years
47 (88.68 %)	5 (9.43 %)	1 (1.89 %)

Tablica 3. Distribution of participants by age

secondary	higher	high
6 (11.32 %)	27 (50.94 %)	20 (37.74 %)

Table 4. Distribution of participants by level of education

It should be pointed out that our survey was not conceived as a sociolinguistic or dialectological study. Its aim was only to roughly investigate how prevalent certain interrogative constructions are, whether they are restricted by morphosyntactic context and whether there are differences between the various parts of Croatia.

## 5. Croatian

Every interrogative sentence in Croatian is marked with special rising intonation, and further polar question strategies are particles *li*, *zar*, *da li*, *je li* and verb fronting. As stated earlier, intonation will not be dealt with in this paper.

### 5.1. Particle *li* and verb fronting

Along with intonation, the principal way of forming a polar question in the standard language is moving the finite verb to the sentence beginning, which is followed by the enclitic question particle *li* (cf. Barić *et al.* 1997: 447, Katičić 2002: 378, Silić and Pranjković 2007: 253), for example:

- (3) *Ide li Marica u školu?*  
go.PRS.3SG Q Mary.NOM.SG.F in school.ACC.SG.F  
“Is Mary going to school?”

Since it follows that the enclitic *li* in polar questions is always directly preceded by a verb, it is feasible to ask if *li* could be interpreted as a verb suffix, and this interrogative strategy as interrogative verb morphology according to Dryer’s (2013a) typology. Our answer is negative, for two reasons. The first one is that the particle *li* can be used in content questions and exclamatory sentences other than in polar questions, where it does not necessarily follow a verb and where it serves as an intensifier (see Silić and Pranjković 2007: 253), for example:

- (4) *Gdje li je Ivica?*  
where *li* be.PRS.3SG John.NOM.SG.M  
„Just where is John?“
- (5) *Lijepog li dana!*  
beautiful.GEN.SG.M *li* day.GEN.SG.M  
„What a beautiful day!“

The other reason is that the ellipsis of the clitic *li* is possible with verbs in coordination:

- (6) a) *Pleše li i pjeva li Ivica?*  
 dance.PRS.3SG Q and sing.PRS.3SG Q John.NOM.SG.M
- b) *Pleše li i pjeva Ivica?*  
 dance.PRS.3SG Q and sing.PRS.3SG John.NOM.SG.M  
 „Is John dancing and singing?“

A search through hrWaC shows that such structures are not frequent, but are attested, for example:

- (7) *Slušate li i čitate privatno Cohena?*  
 listen.PRS.2PL Q and read.PRS.2PL privately Cohen.ACC.SG.M  
 „Do you listen to and read Cohen in your free time?“

On the other hand, ellipsis of inflectional affixes is not at all possible in Croatian:

- (8) a) *Marica hoda i pjeva*  
 Mary.NOM.SG.F walk.PRS.3SG and sing.PRS.3SG
- b) \*\* *Marica hoda i pjev.*  
 Mary.NOM.SG.F walk.PRS.3SG and sing  
 „Mary is walking and singing“.

The JAZU Dictionary (1910: 30) states that the particle *li* is of Proto-Slavic origin, first attested in Croatian in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and that it is an enclitic placed after the first phonological word in the clause. It is claimed that a finite verb form “usually” precedes the particle in polar questions, but exceptions from the older language are listed as well:

- (9) *Vratiti li ćeš se?*  
 return.INF Q AUX.FUT.2SG REFL

„Will you come back?“

(miscellany from Dubrovnik, 1520)

Authors of the dictionary consider polar questions with *li* with a non-fronted finite verb to often express „amazement, surprise, doubt or discontent“, and we would add that the word standing before *li* is in principle focused. We also found attestations for such constructions with the particle *li* in the Marulić subcorpus within HNK:

(10) *Ovo li je moja netjakinja [...]?*  
this Q be.PRS.3SG my.NOM.SG.F niece.NOM.SG.F  
„Is this my niece?“ (Mirakuli, Senj, 1508)

(11) *Mnogi li se plode,*  
many.NOM.PL.M Q REFL breed.PRS.3PL  
*mnoga li njih jakost?*  
great.NOM.SG.F Q 3PL.GEN strength.NOM.SG.F  
„Do they breed many, is their strength great?“

In such usage, *li* is not necessarily placed immediately after the first phonological word in a clause, although examples of this can usually be linked to the poetic metre:

(12) *Majko, u ovoj plačnoj sjeni*  
mother.VOC.SG.F in this.LOC.SG.F tearful.LOC.SG.F shadow.LOC.SG.F  
*i ti li me, jaoh, ostavi?*  
and 2SG.NOM Q 1SG.ACCwoe leave.AOR.2SG  
„Mother, have you as well, woe, left me in this tearful shadow?“ (Ivan Gundulić, 17<sup>th</sup> century)

Constructions like these are attested in the Croatian literature at least until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century:

- (13) *ti li bi nas ostavio,*  
 2SG.NOM Q AUX.COND.2SG 1PL.ACC leave.PTCP.M.SG  
*ti li bi zaboravio nas pri*  
 2SG.NOM Q AUX.COND.2SG forget.PTCP.M.SG 1PL.ACC at  
*naj većoj tjeskoći?*  
 SUP great.LOC.SG.F misfortune.LOC.SG.F  
 „Would you leave us, would you forget us in the greatest misfortune?“ (Ivan  
 Marija Matijašević, 1783)

At this point, we consider it necessary to reflect on so-called quasi-interrogative clauses with the particle *li* that express wonder. Pranjković (2012: 38) claims that such clauses can even in modern Croatian contain a non-verbal constituent in front of *li*, this constituent being marked by a “very strong emphatic sentence stress”, or in our terminology – that constituent is focused. The author gives the following constructed example for that:

- (14) *Ti li si ta zvjerka!?*  
 2SG.NOM Q be.PRS.2SG that.NOM.SG.F beast.NOM.SG.F  
 “You are that beast!?”

Although such a construction is very marginally acceptable if at all according to our native speaker intuition, we can establish that it is acceptable at least to some speakers of modern Croatian and assume that there are differences with respect to age and dialect.

It is not clear whether examples (9)–(13) should be interpreted as real interrogative clauses asking for confirmation of the content expressed by the focused constituent or as so-called quasi-interrogatives such as (14), expressing wonder over the said content. From what we were able to deduce from the context, at least in example (11) the construction is indeed used for requesting information:

- (15) *"Tko su", reče, "ovoj ki po varsih hode*

*bljudući            prohode?            Ki            gradi?            Ka            hitrost?*  
*Mnogi li se plode, mnoga li njih jakost?"*

“‘Who are’, he said, ‘these who walk over the peaks guarding the passes? Which cities? Which speed? Do they breed many, is their strength great?’” (Marko Marulić, 16<sup>th</sup> century)

We are therefore inclined to draw the conclusion that interrogative clauses with a focused initial constituent and the particle *li* could be used for requesting confirmation of the content expressed by that constituent in old Croatian. We assume that this structure has lost that function with time, but has retained the function of expressing wonder. On the other hand, based on the evidence studied, we infer that neutral polar interrogatives exhibit verb fronting already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and probably from an even earlier date.

Polar questions construed with a fronted finite verb and the particle *li* are well attested in hrWaC. Such sentences were regularly graded with the highest grades of acceptability, which give a mean of 4.4. Excluding sentences containing the verb form *je*, which all participants changed to a polar question using this strategy, 38 out of 53 participants construed a question this way at least once, for example:

- (16)    *Bi                            li            htjela            sladoled?*  
 AUX.COND.2SG Q            want.PTCP.F.SG ice-cream.ACC.SG.M  
 “‘Would you like ice-cream?’”

## 5.2. Particle *zar*

Another question particle present in standard Croatian is *zar*, which expresses amazement and expectation of a negative answer. The particle *zar* can be proclitic or accented, is positioned at the beginning of a clause and causes no verb movement (cf. Barić *et al.* 1997: 448, Katičić 2002: 149, Silić and Pranjković 2007: 254). The JAZU Dictionary states that the particle is a Turkish loanword attested from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since it is not a strategy for forming a neutral polar question, we shall not discuss this particle further.

### 5.3. Particle *da li*

There is also the composed particle *da li*, which is not accepted in standard Croatian<sup>2</sup>. The particle *da li* is stressed and is positioned at the beginning of a polar question, causing no verb movement (cf. Barić *et al.* 1997: 447, Katičić 2002: 378, Silić and Pranjković 2007: 254).

We decided to take subordinate interrogative clauses into consideration for this particle, because *da* otherwise functions as a universal subordinator and thus we consider it justified to hypothesise that the question particle *da li* could have originated from subordinate clauses. Elements that introduce subordinate interrogative clauses and cannot be used in direct interrogative clauses are well-attested in other languages, e.g. English *whether* and *if*, and the development of a question particle from such an element is also attested.<sup>3</sup> At this point, we should address the claims that subordinate interrogative clauses are introduced by a zero subordinator, which have been presented by AntoniĆ (2011) for Serbian, Bulić (2013) for Bosnian and Gligorić (2018) for Croatian. According to this interpretation, the particle in polar and the interrogative pronoun or adverb in content interrogative clauses serve exclusively as an interrogative marker and not as a subordinator. One of the arguments AntoniĆ (2011: 271–272) uses for this standpoint is the fact that the particle *da li* and the interrogative pronouns and adverbs in subordinate interrogative clauses are always stressed, while the subordinator *da* and the same pronouns and adverbs used as relativisators are not stressed. However, seeing that it is not known since when the subordinator *da* is exclusively a clitic, we nevertheless consider it hypothetically feasible that stressed *da li* occurred in subordinate interrogative clauses before it did in direct interrogatives.

In all Croatian literature prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the authors of the JAZU Dictionary (1884–1886: 241) recognised one neutral polar question with *da li*, that being in a subordinate interrogative clause:

- (17) *Jere ne pomisle da li bog svaka vi.*  
because NEG think.PRS.3PL Q? God every.ACC.SG.M know.PRS.3.SG

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<sup>2</sup> cf. e.g. Hudeček & Vukojević 2007, where it is claimed that it belongs to the “colloquial functional style of the standard language”

<sup>3</sup> See §6.1.1 for examples.

„Because they do not think if God knows everybody.“ (Marko Marulić, 16<sup>th</sup> century)

We found no such interrogative clause with *da li* in the older literature in Riznica. First attestations of *da li* as a neutral question particle date from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and the same is true for examples given in the JAZU Dictionary after the aforementioned Marulić's sentence. The question particle *da li* is quite frequent since then and it occurs approximately equally in both direct questions and subordinate interrogative clauses:

(18) *A da li mu se može to i zaměriti?*  
 and Q 3SG.M.DAT REFL can.PRS.3SG that and reproach.INF  
 „And can he be reproached for that?“ (Antun Nemčić, 1845)

(19) *sad kći upita mater,*  
 now daughter.NOM.SG.F ask.PRS.3SG mother.ACC.SG.F  
*da li joj haljina dobro stoji [...]*  
 Q 3SG.F.DAT dress.NOM.SG.F well fit.PRS.3SG  
 „Now the daughter asks the mother if the dress fits her well.“ (Miroslav Kraljević, 1863)

*Da li* as a neutral question particle is quite frequent in hrWaC, and it also occurs in the apocopated form *dal*:

(20) *Da li Iran financira međunarodni terorizam?*  
 Q Iran.NOM.SG.M fund.PRS.3SG international.ACC.SG.M terrorism.ACC.SG.M  
 „Does Iran fund international terrorism?“

(21) *Dal se boriš protiv samovolje moderatora?*  
 Q REFL fight.PRS.2SG against self-will.GEN.SG.F moderator.GEN.PL.M  
 „Are you fighting against the self-willed moderators?“



We checked the relative frequency of *da li* and *dal* in direct questions and in subordinate interrogative clauses in random samples of 150 hits from the corpus. Non-apocopated *da li* is approximately equally frequent in both subordinate clauses and direct questions – the subordinate clause is only slightly more frequent with a frequency of 54.47%. Apocopated *dal*, on the other hand, proved to be noticeably more frequent in subordinated clauses – 69.67% attestations in the sample are in such constructions:

- (22) *Kad sam išla probat i vidjet*  
 when AUX.PST.1SG go.PTCP.PST.F.SGtry.INF and see.INF  
*dal bi i on skočio -*  
 Q AUX.COND.3SG and 3SG.M.NOM jump.PTCP.M.SG  
*iznenadio me svojim pokušajem.*  
 surprise.PTCP.PST.M.SG 1SG.ACCREFL.POSS.INS.SG.M try.INS.SG.M  
 „When I went to try and see if he would jump too – he surprised me with his attempt.“

In older language, *da li* is attested as a question particle marking a question with wonder and expectation of a negative answer. The JAZU Dictionary lists many examples for such use from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and some until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

- (23) *Da li može zaboravit žena djetićka?*  
 Q can.PRS.3SG forget.INF woman.NOM.SG .F child.ACC.SG.M  
 „Can a woman really forget her child?“ (Nikša Ranjina, 16<sup>th</sup> century)

Finally, the sequence *da li* in older literature also occurs as an adversative or concessive conjunction.<sup>4</sup> Such use is confirmed by the JAZU Dictionary, and it is attested in the works of Brne Karnarutić in Riznica as well.

<sup>4</sup> See Štrkalj Despot (2012) for the adversative conjunction *da* in old Croatian texts.

Based on the presented data, we cannot confirm the starting hypothesis that *da li* as a question particle originates from subordinate interrogative clauses, where it came to be by adding the question particle *li* to the universal subordinator *da*. Furthermore, since there is no continuity in use and since we do not find Marulić's example given by the JAZU Dictionary convincing, it is not at all certain whether *da li* with a neutral interrogative meaning is a continuation of the particle *da li* expressing wonder from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Hardly any participants in our survey used the particle *da li* or *dal* to form polar questions from declarative sentences – out of 53, only three of them did so. Direct questions from the corpus construed with *da li* or *dal* were graded with a mean acceptability score of 2.87 out of 5. Every value from 1 to 5 is well-represented, and there are no apparent patterns with regard to the speakers' origin. Dependent interrogative clauses with the particle *da li*, on the other hand, proved to be considerably more acceptable to our participants. Their mean acceptability score is 3.75, and 36 participants graded them with 4 or 5, while 9 participants graded them with 1 or 2.

#### 5.4. Particle *je li*

The question particle *je li* is mentioned by reference grammars as non-standard and colloquial (cf. Barić *et al.* 1997: 448, Katičić 2002: 148-149). This particle is stressed and positioned at the beginning of a polar question with no verb fronting, and it often occurs in the apocopated form *je l'*, *jel*.

It appears to have emerged from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular imperfective present of the auxiliary or the copula *biti* and the particle *li* in the usual interrogative construction, which were probably reanalysed as a question particle together and extended to clauses that do not contain the verb form *je*. It is also conceivable that its source is the tag question or filler *je li*,<sup>5</sup> which can be interpreted as shortened from *je li tako* ("is that so"). However, since tag questions are more often placed after an utterance (cf. Mihaljević 1995: 23), this explanation would leave it unclear why *je li* as a question particle is attested only at the beginning of a sentence.

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<sup>5</sup> See Metslang *et al.* (2017: 496, 513) for examples of question particles developing from tag questions in other languages.

The literature does not mention what verb forms the question particle *je li* can be used with, while we assume based on our native speaker intuition that it is not equally frequent or acceptable with all verb forms. Barić *et al.* and Katičić give only examples with the present tense:

- (24) *Je li se umivaš?*  
 Q REFL wash face.PRS.2SG  
 „Are you washing your face?“

The JAZU Dictionary (1910: 606) states that *je li* as a question particle is attested from the 18<sup>th</sup> century “in the northern regions”. It does not mention which verb forms the particle can occur with either, but all the given examples show only simplex verb forms – one of them contains an aorist form and all the others have only present forms:

- (25) *Iz one ljubavi je li se kaješ za sve grihe svoje?*  
 from that.GEN.SG.F love.GEN.SG.F Q REFL  
 regret.PRS.2SG for all.ACC.PL.M sin.ACC.PL.M REFL.POSS.ACC.PL.M  
 „Do you regret all your sins from that love?“ (Antun Kanižlić, 18<sup>th</sup> century)

In some examples, the question particle *je li* occurs in clauses with the verb form *je*:

- (26) *Je li je on klinčac, kot sam ja rožica?*  
 Q be.PRS.3SG 3SG.M.NOM bonnet.NOM.SG.M  
 as be.PRS.1SG 1SG.NOM rose.DIM.NOM.SG.F  
 „Is he a bonnet, as I am a rose?“ (folk song)

The earliest occurrence of *je li* as a question particle in Riznica is in 1863 in the Slavonian writer Miroslav Kraljević, but it introduces a subordinate interrogative clause there. The particle is sporadically attested in direct polar questions in literary works throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- (27) *Je li je donije vjetar s jugovinom [...] ?*  
 Q 3SG.F.ACC bring.AOR.3SG wind.NOM.SG.M with sirocco.INS.SG.F  
 „Did the wind bring it with sirocco weather?“ (Janko Polić Kamov, 1907)

It is also attested in clauses with enclitic forms of the auxiliaries and the copula, and such attestations are usually in dialogues in Kajkavian:

- (28) *Je li je to gospodi spodobno?*  
 Q be.PRS.3SG that.NOM.SG.N gentlemen.DAT.SG.F agreeable.NOM.SG.N  
 „Is that agreeable to the gentlemen?“

- (29) *Je li je Vaša Milost pokušala postići, da se s protivnicima pomiri?*  
 Q AUX.PST.3SG your.NOM.SG.F grace.NOM.SG.F try.PTCP.PST.F.SG  
 achieve.INF that REFL with opponent.INS.PL.M reconcile.PRS.3SG  
 „Has Your Grace tried to achieve to make peace with your opponents?“ (Isidor Kršnjavi, 1926)

The particle *je li*, especially the apocopated form *jel*, is very frequent in hrWaC. It is well attested both with main verbs and with enclitic forms of auxiliaries and the copula, for example:

- (30) *Kumice jel si ti možda iz Koprivnice?*  
 kumica.VOC.SG.FQ be.PRS.2SG 2SG.NOM maybe  
 from Koprivnica.GEN.SG.F

„Kumica, are you perhaps from Koprivnica?“

(31)	<i>Jel</i>	<i>si</i>		<i>ikad</i>	<i>čul</i>		<i>da</i>	<i>sam</i>	
	Q	AUX.PST.2SG	ever	hear.PTCP.PST.M.SG		that	AUX.PST.1SG		
	<i>ja</i>		<i>javno ili</i>	<i>privatno</i>		<i>govoril</i>		<i>protiv</i>	
	1SG.NOM		publicly or	privately		speak.PTCP.PST.M.SG		against	
	<i>kluba</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>igrača?</i>						
	club.GEN.SG.M	and	player.GEN.PL.M						

„Have you ever heard me publicly or privately speak against the club and the players?“

The results of our elicitation indicate that the degree of grammaticalisation of *je l(i)* as a question particle is different across dialects.

There were 21 participants who used *je li* or *jel* in at least one sentence which has a present lexical verb form as the predicate. Such sentences from the corpus were graded with a mean acceptability score of 3.87, and 31 participants gave them a score of 4 or higher on average.

In sentences with the verb form *je*, whether it is a copula or an auxiliary form, no participants used the structure *je l(i) je*. As for other present forms of the verb *biti*, functioning either as the copula or an auxiliary, only one participant who grew up in Koprivnica formed a question with this particle, with the form *el*. Questions with the enclitic present forms of the verb *biti* and the question particle *je l(i)* all received an acceptability score lower than 3. Their mean scores range between 2.08 and 2.87, with no noticeable difference with respect to form or the copula versus auxiliary function. Higher scores were usually given by participants who grew up in Zagreb or its surroundings, Slavonia, and Podravina, while the low scores were given by those who grew up in Dubrovnik, Dalmatia, and Istria.

As for future tense clauses, only a participant from Koprivnica used the question particle *je l(i)*, ie. the variant *el*, in both such sentences. Future tense clauses from the corpus are ranked with a mean acceptability score of 2.68. Higher scores usually came from participants who grew up in Zagreb or its surroundings and Istria, while participants who grew up in Dubrovnik or Dalmatia mostly gave them the lowest possible scores.

Finally, 14 participants used *je/* in at least one clause with the conditional mood, all of them having grown up in Zagreb or its surroundings, Zagorje, Slavonia, or Podravina. Such sentences from the corpus were graded with a mean acceptability score of 3. Highest scores were usually given by participants from Zagreb and its surroundings, Zagorje, and Slavonia, while participants from Dubrovnik and Dalmatia mostly gave them low scores.

On the basis of these results, we can conclude that *je l(i)* is still being grammaticalised into a general question particle, and that the degree of its grammaticalisation is different across dialects. The question particle *je l(i)* in clauses with a lexical verb present form is prevalent in all parts of Croatia. In conditional mood clauses, it seems to be spread out mainly in the northern regions, which includes Zagreb with its surroundings, Zagorje, Podravina, and at least some parts of Slavonia, although not necessarily exclusively in those regions. The particle is least extended to clauses with enclitic forms of the auxiliaries or the copula, and it seems to have advanced furthest there in some Kajkavian dialects, excluding the urban Zagreb dialect. Although our survey can by no means be considered a real dialectological study, the results do suggest that *je li* as a question particle is extended to most syntactic contexts in a relatively compact area in the north. That innovation seems to have been spreading across dialect borders, as it affects both Kajkavian and Štokavian areas, and could therefore be interpreted as a micro-level confirmation of the hypothesis that pragmatically motivated features are easily spread across space.

### 5.5. Exclusive verb fronting

Authors of the JAZU Dictionary mention under the entry *li* (1910: 30) that the particle is often left out, „especially in the northern regions“. There were 27 of our participants from all over Croatia who formed a question by verb fronting without a particle at least once. In 22 participants this is limited to stressed present tense forms of the auxiliaries *biti* and *htjeti* and the verb *biti* in its copular function:

- (32) *Jesu oni to napravili?*  
 AUX.PST.3PL 3PL.M.NOM that.ACC.SG.N do.PTCP.PST.M.PL  
 „Did they do that?“

The remaining five participants, who grew up in Istria or in Zagreb and the surrounding area, also used the clitic forms of the verbs *biti* and *htjeti* and the forms of the auxiliary *biti* in the conditional:

- (33) *Su oni to storili?*  
 AUX.PST.3PL 3PL.M.NOM that.ACC.SG.N do.PTCP.PST.M.PL  
 „Did they do that?“

This construction was not included in our acceptability evaluation.

### 5.6. Clitic fronting

Clauses containing a clitic personal pronoun form demonstrate that six out of the aforementioned 27 participants actually did not necessarily front the verb, but the clitic:

- (34) *Mi moreš pomoć?*  
 1SG.DATcan.PRS.2SG help.INF  
 „Can you help me?“

- (35) *Ti se pježa ova pjesma?*  
 2SG.DATREFL please.PRS.3SG this.NOM.SG.F song.NOM.SG.F  
 „Do you like this song?“

Participants who employed this construction are mostly the same ones who fronted the clitic forms of the verbs *biti* and *htjeti*. The only exception is a participant from Pula, who fronted clitic pronoun forms, but not clitic verb forms.

This construction was not included in our acceptability evaluation.

### 5.7. Interrogative pronoun

Finally, some participants from Čakavian and Kajkavian areas, eight of them, formed polar questions with the interrogative pronoun functioning as a question particle:

(36) *Kaj smo već gledali taj film?*  
 what/Q AUX.PST.1PL already watch.PTCP.PST.M.PL that.ACC.SG.M film.ACC.SG.M

„Have we already seen that movie?”

Use of the pronoun *što* as a question particle expressing the expectation of a negative answer, with a meaning very similar to that of the particle *zar*, is confirmed for Štokavian by the JAZU Dictionary (1959—1962: 808—909) and Pranjković (2013: 242—243). However, the fact that a considerable number of Čakavian and Kajkavian participants used the pronoun as a question particle although the survey in no way implied the question should be formed as if the answer is already expected, while no Štokavian participant did so, points to the conclusion that the interrogative pronoun can be used as a neutral question particle in their dialects. This phenomenon should undoubtedly be investigated further for more reliable conclusions.

The interrogative pronoun functioning as a particle was not included in our acceptability evaluation because we did not predict it as a neutral polar question marker.

### 5.8. Overview

Results of the survey on polar question markers are summarised in Table 5:

	<i>li</i>	<i>da li</i>	<i>je li</i> + lexical verb PRS	<i>je li</i> + AUX or copula	only AUX or copula fronting	interrogative pronoun
participants used	71.7 %	5.66 %	39.62 %	26.42 %	33.96 %	15.09 %
acceptability (1-5)	4.4	2.87	3.87	2.61	-	-

Table 5. Polar question constructions in Croatian with regard to the share of participants who used them and their mean acceptability score

The results indicate that the oldest construction, particle *li* with finite verb fronting, is still the most prevalent one. However, it should be kept in mind that a shortcoming of this survey type is that participants consciously think about the construction they are going to use and are prone to choose more prestigious and standard forms instead of those that may be more frequent in their spontaneous speech. Other than that, it is interesting to point out that participants on average give a slightly lower acceptability score to the construction with the



particle *je li* and an auxiliary or the copula than to the construction with the particle *da li*, although the former one was used by considerably more participants. This can be linked with the fact that *da li* is after all more acceptable in a higher register, which probably affects the speakers' attitude on the acceptability of particular constructions. It has also been shown, according to our interpretation, that some Čakavian and Kajkavian dialects have probably grammaticalised the interrogative pronoun into a neutral question particle.

Finally, the presented information on the first attestation and syntactic behaviour of the neutral question particles in Croatian is shown in Table 6:

	attested from	position in the clause	verb fronting
<i>li</i>	15 <sup>th</sup> century (probably Proto-Slavic)	second place	yes
<i>da li</i>	?16 <sup>th</sup> / 19 <sup>th</sup> century	first place	no
<i>je li</i>	18 <sup>th</sup> century	first place	no
<i>ča/kaj</i>	?	first place	no

Table 6. Question particles in Croatian, time of their first attestation and their syntactic behaviour

## 6. Other European languages

Ways of encoding polar questions in selected old and contemporary European languages will be presented in this chapter. Dryer's (2013a) study is taken as a starting point. It includes a good deal of European languages and shows that the most frequent interrogative strategy in Europe, as in the rest of the world, is the question particle. It is followed by the cross-linguistically very rare interrogative word order, while rarer strategies are sole interrogative intonation and interrogative verb morphology. As already said in the Introduction, Dryer's study is adapted to a large sample of languages from all over the world and does not reveal all the details about specific languages that we are interested in, such as if polar questions are formed by verb fronting and the question particle simultaneously. Besides, his study does not include data from historical languages, which are relevant for us so that we could argue about the source of a feature and the direction of interlinguistic influences.

## 6.1. Data from Other European Languages and Analysis

The ways of encoding polar questions will be concisely presented and analysed here by strategy type, starting from the ancient languages if they have relevant attestations. The full dataset is given in Table 7, §6.1.7.

### 6.1.1. Question particle

All the analysed ancient European languages have a question particle, as well as Old Irish and Old Church Slavonic. Modern Greek and all Romance languages have lost the neutral question particle attested in their ancestor languages, which supports the thesis about the diachronic instability of this pragmatic feature. Lack of a question particle could be considered as an areal feature of Western and Central Europe, since it is absent in most Romance and Germanic languages, as well as Czech. Romance and Germanic languages have rarely developed a new question particle. Exceptions include Sicilian, which has grammaticalised the interrogative pronoun into a particle:

- (37) **Chi**    *sì*                    *surdu?*  
Q        be.PRS.2SG        deaf.M.SG  
“Are you deaf?”                    (Privitera 1998: 41)

Other exceptions are German, Low German and Yiddish, where the interrogative subordinator can also be used in matrix polar interrogative clauses as the less frequent alternative. In Yiddish, this is the element *ci*, borrowed from Slavic *či* (Polish *czy*, Ukrainian *чи*):

- (38) **Ci**    *farštejt*                    *er*                    *španiš?*  
Q        understand.PRS.3SG    3SG.M.NOM            Spanish  
“Does he understand Spanish?”    (Jacobs 2005: 229)

Most languages in the sample with a question particle position it clause-initially, for example in Lithuanian:

- (39) **Ar** *tu* *ateisi* *vakare?*  
 Q 2SG.NOM come.FUT.2SG evening.LOK.SG  
 “Are you going to come in the evening?” (Ambrasas *et al.* 2006: 712)

Clause-final position is attested only in Turkish and Estonian, although the question particle is cross-linguistically most often placed clause-finally in SOV languages and about as often as clause-initially in SVO languages. In Turkish, the particle can occupy another position in the clause if a non-final constituent is focused, while neither Turkish nor Estonian have any of Haspelmath’s eleven SAE features. Among the languages studied, even the SOV Latin has second- and initial-position particles. Gothic, Old Church Slavonic, Finnish and Saami place an enclitic particle at the clause-second position, just as Bulgarian, Macedonian, Croatian and Russian do with the particle *li*. This probably presents an archaism in the latter four languages with respect to other Slavic languages. Another exception among the analysed languages is Basque, which has particles that are placed immediately before or after the finite verb, while the position of the verb is not fixed:

- (40) *Esangoal* **zeniguke** *zerbait* *azkenik?*  
 say.FUTQ **2PL.AUX** something.ABS finally  
 “Are you going to finally say something?” (Hualde and Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 468)
- (41) *Ez* **de=a** *lur* *huntako* *legea?*  
 NEG **be.3SG=Q** earth this.GEN law.ABS  
 “Is that not the law of this world?” (*ibid.* 467)

The exceptionality of Basque is not unexpected, seeing that it is not considered an SAE language.

Considering the presented data, clause-initial question particle could be considered a European areal feature.

### 6.1.2. Verb Movement

Verb fronting as a polar question marker is not attested in Ancient Greek, Latin or Old Church Slavonic, while it is regular in Gothic and Old Norse, as well as all modern Germanic languages. Here is an example from Old Norse:

- (42) *ok gekk þú þó ekki haltr?*  
and **go.PST.2SG** 2SG.NOM though NEG lame.M.NOM.SG  
„Were you not limping, though?“ (Faarlund 2004: 226)

It can therefore be concluded that this feature should be ascribed to Proto-Germanic and that Germanic was the first among the European languages to develop this feature. It seems that interrogative verb fronting had developed in mediaeval Romance languages as well. Regarding the hypothesis that verb fronting is a SAE feature, this corresponds with the likely time of creation of the said linguistic area and possible Germanic influence. However, Italian has lost that feature, and the verb fronting is not mandatory in Spanish either, only usual if the object is shorter than the subject or non-present (Butt and Benjamin 1989: 467-468). On the other hand, French and north-eastern Italian idioms, as well as Czech and Slovene, have retained verb fronting as an interrogative marker. The languages mentioned have all had long-lasting and intensive contacts with Germanic languages, which is why linking their development and retainment of verb fronting as an interrogative strategy to Germanic influences is well-founded. It should be noted that the Celtic languages included in the study have VSO as the canonical declarative word order, so verb fronting as an interrogative marker is not even possible.

Bulgarian, Macedonian and Russian do not have verb fronting in polar questions as a strict rule, but that is nevertheless the neutral word order if no constituent in the interrogative clause is focused, e.g. in Russian:

- (43) *Прочитала ли Анна книгу?*  
**read.PST.F.SG Q** Anna.NOM.SG book.ACC.SG  
„Has Anna read the book?“ (Halloway King 1994: 92)

- (44) *Давно ли он умер?*  
 long ago Q 3M.SG.NOM die.PST.M.SG  
 „Was it long ago he died?“ (Wade 2011: 509)

Since these languages have not had close contacts with Germanic, there is no reason to assume external influences as the source of this feature. It can be explained from the starting point that the clause-initial position and the particle *li* in these languages express focus, and that the verb is understood as the head of the clause. Under these assumptions, it can be concluded that the clause-initial verb signifies focus on the entire interrogative clause. We consider referring to focus, which we understand as indicating the existence of alternatives (Krifka and Musan 2012: 7), to be very reasonable with polar questions because their basic meaning puts the two possible truth values of an utterance in opposition. Finnish and Sami, which are not members of SAE, have the same type of polar interrogative construction, and the data from Turkish – in which the question particle signifies questioning of the whole utterance when attached to the verb, and assigns focus on a specific element when attached to another constituent – also speak in favour of such an interpretation:

- (45) *Hasan gelecek=mi?*  
 Hasan come.FUT=Q  
 „Is Hasan going to come?“ (Čaušević 2007: 18)
- (46) *Hasan=mi gelecek?*  
 Hasan=Q come.FUT (*ibid.*)  
 „Is it Hasan who is going to come?“

Although very rarely, moving the verb to the end of the clause can also be connected with interrogativity in some languages in the sample. These are German and Low German, where the original polar interrogative subordinator *ob* can be used as a question particle in matrix clauses, while the finite verb is placed clause-finally as in a subordinate clause, e.g.:

- (47) **Ob** *Peter heute kommt?*  
**Q** Peter today come.PRS.3SG  
 „Is Peter coming today?“ (Helbig and Buscha 1996: 612)

Besides that, Metslang *et al.* (2011: 152) mention that moving the verb to the end of the clause can be used as a polar question marker in Estonian, but is not mandatory or the most frequent construction.

### 6.1.3. Question Particle and Verb Fronting

The combination of a question particle and verb fronting is rather rare. It is attested in Occitan:

- (48) **Es=ti** *vòstra man que me toca?*  
**be.PRS.3SG=Q** your.F.SG hand REL 1SG.ACtouch.PRS.3SG  
 “Is it your hand that is touching me?“ (Alibèrt 1976: 335)

This construction type could also include German and Low German *ob* and verb movement to the clause-final position and Old Norse and Yiddish clauses with *hvárt* and *ci*, respectively, where the verb must immediately follow the particle, as in the following Old Norse example:

- (49) **Hvárt grætr** *þú nú, Skarpheðinn?*  
**Q cry.PRS.2SG** 2SG.NOM now Skarpheðinn.NOM.SG  
 “Are you crying now, Skarpheðinn?“ (Faarlund 2004: 226)

### 6.1.4. Clitic Pronoun Forms

With the verb-subject inversion as the starting point, French and older Venetian grammaticalised enclitic forms of personal pronouns attached to the verb as polar question markers. For example, in polar interrogatives in 18<sup>th</sup> century Venetian, an enclitic personal pronoun form (*la* in the given example) agreeing with the subject in person, gender and number is added to the verb:

- (50) Vor=**la** che ghe parla da amiga?  
 want=**3SG.F** that 3SG.F.DAT speak.PRS.SBJV.1SG as friend  
 “Do you want me to speak to you as a friend?” (Polo 2007: 226)

Polo (2007) does not support the description transmitted above with an example showing that a clitic pronoun is suffixed to the verb even if the subject is expressed with a separate NP, but the author’s example from the modern-day Aldeno dialect can serve as an illustration – the clitic pronoun *al* agreeing with the subject (*Toni*) in person, gender and number is added to the verb as an interrogative marker:

- (51) *Vegni=**al** Toni?*  
 come.PRS.3SG=**3SG.M** Toni  
 „Is Toni coming?” (Polo 2007: 232)

One of the ways of encoding a polar question in French is also affixing a personal pronoun form agreeing with the subject NP in person, number and gender to the verb:

- (52) *Marie habitait=**elle** à Paris?*  
 Marie live.IPF.3SG=**3SG.F** in Paris  
 “Did Marie live in Paris?” (Price 2013: 462)

Elements added to the verb to express interrogativity that agree in grammatical categories with the subject could be considered a step towards the development of interrogative affixes. Since that interrogative strategy is very rare in Europe and considering the hypothesised areal diffuseness, it is not unexpected that Venetian has lost that particular interrogative strategy, while it is being pushed out by other interrogative strategies in colloquial French.

#### 6.1.5. Synthesis

The most frequent ways of encoding a polar question not marked by surprise, doubt, expectation of a negative answer or some other additional meaning are shown in Table 7:

language	question particle	question particle position	verb fronting	genetic affiliation	source
Ancient Greek	<i>ἦ, ἄρα</i>	first place	-	IE, Hellenic	Smyth (1920: 598)
Latin	<i>-ne</i>	second place	-	IE, Italic	Pinkster (2015: 323)
Gothic	<i>-u</i>	second place	+	IE, Germ, E	Eythorsson (1995: 104)
Old Irish	<i>in</i>	first place	-	IE, Celt	Mac Eoin (1993: 123)
Old Norse	-		+	IE, Germ, N	Faarlund (2004: 226)
	<i>hvárt</i>	first place	- (2 <sup>nd</sup> place +)		
Old Church Slavic	<i>li</i>	second place	-	IE, BSl, Sl	Večerka (1989: 43-44)
Old French	-		+	IE, It, Rom.	Einhorn (1974: 130)
Old Italian	-		+	IE, It., Rom.	Munaro (2010: 1147)
Old Spanish	-		+?	IE, It, Rom.	Zauner (1921: 112)
18 <sup>th</sup> century Venetian	-		+ (with a pronominal subject) / -	IE, It, Rom.	Polo (2007: 226-227)
Modern Greek	-		-/+	IE, Hellenic	Arvaniti et al. (2006: 670)



Albanian	<i>a</i>	first place	-	IE, Albanian	Newmark <i>et al.</i> (1999: 319)
Macedonian	<i>ли</i>	second place	+/-	IE, BSI, SI	Friedman (1993: 286-287), Rudin <i>et al.</i> (1999: 48)
	<i>дали</i>	first place	-		
Bulgarian	<i>ли</i>	second place	+/-	IE, BSI, SI	Antova <i>et al.</i> (2002: 208), Rudin <i>et al.</i> (1999: 48)
	<i>дали</i>	first place	-		
Slovene	-		+	IE, BSI, S.	Toporišič (2000: 516)
	<i>ali, a</i>	first place	-		
Ukrainian	<i>чи</i>	first place	-	IE, BSI, SI	Pugh and Press (1999: 284-285)
Russian	<i>ли</i>	second place	+/-	IE, BSI, SI	Halloway King (1994: 92)
Czech	-		+	IE, BSI, SI	Naughton (2006: 213)
Slovak	-		-	IE, BSI, SI	Mistrík (1988: 132)
Polish	<i>czy</i>	first place	-	IE, BSI, SI	Swan (2002: 401)
Upper Sorbian	-		+	IE, BSI, SI	Stone (1993: 656)
	<i>hač</i>	first place	-		
Lower Sorbian	-		+	IE, BSI, SI	Stone (1993: 656)
	<i>lěc</i>	first place	-		

Lithuanian	<i>ar</i>	first place	-	IE, BSl, Ba	Ambrasas <i>et al.</i> (2006: 712-713)
Latvian	<i>vai</i>	first place	-	IE, BSl, Ba	Mathiassen (1997: 226)
German	-		+	IE, Germ, W	Helbig and Buscha (1996: 611)
Yiddish	-		+	IE, Germ, W	Jacobs (2005: 228-229)
	<i>ci</i>	first place	- (2 <sup>nd</sup> place +)		
Low German	-		+	IE, Germ, W	Lindow <i>et al.</i> (1998: 251-252)
	<i>ob</i>	first place	-		
Dutch	-		+	IE, Germ, W	van den Toorn (2008: 58-59)
Frisian	-		+	IE, Germ, W	Tiersma (1999: 105-106)
English	-		+ (auxiliaries, modals or <i>be</i> )	IE, Germ, W	
Icelandic	-		+	IE, Germ, N	Thráinsson (2007: 146-147)
Faroese	-		+	IE, Germ, N	Lockwood (1977: 154)
Danish	-		+	IE, Germ., N	Lundskær-Nielsen and

					Holmes (2010: 579)
Norwegian	-		+	IE, Germ, N	Faarlund <i>et al.</i> (1997: 925)
Swedish	-		+	IE, Germ, N	Teleman <i>et al.</i> (1999: 731)
Romanian	-		-	IE, It, Rom.	Mallinson (1989: 409)
Italian	-		-	IE, It, Rom.	Maiden and Robustelli (2013: 147)
Sardinian	-		-	IE, It, Rom.	Jones (1993: 24- 25)
Sicilian	<i>chi</i>		-	IE, It, Rom.	Privitera (1998: 41)
French	-		+ (with a pronominal subject) / -	IE, It, Rom.	Price (2013: 462-463)
	<i>est-ce que</i>	first place	-		
Occitan	-		+	IE, It, Rom.	Wheeler (1997: 272)
	<i>-ti</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> place/postverbal	+		
Catalan	-		-	IE, It, Rom.	Wheeler <i>et al.</i> (1999: 486)
Spanish	-		+/-	IE, It, Rom.	Butt and Benjamin

					(1989: 467-468)
Portuguese	-		-	IE, It, Rom.	Azevedo (2005: 104-105)
Irish	<i>an</i>	first place	-	IE, Celt	Mac Eoin (1993: 139)
Scottish Gaelic	<i>an</i>	first place	-	IE, Celt	Gillies (1993: 212)
Welsh	-		-	IE, Celt	Watkins (1993: 337)
	<i>a</i>	first place			
Breton	<i>ha(g), daoust (ha(g) (-eñ))</i>	first place	-	IE, Cel.	Stephens (1993: 403)
	-		-		
Hungarian	-		-	Uralic, Ugro-Finnic, Ugric	Kenesei <i>et al.</i> (1998: 2)
Finnish	<i>-ko</i>	second place	+/-	Uralic, Ugro-Finnic, Finno-Samic	Sulkala and Karjalainen (2012: 8-9)
Sami	<i>-go</i>	second place	+/-	Uralic, Ugro-Finnic, Finno-Samic	Sammallahti (1998: 84)
Estonian	<i>kas, ega</i>	first place	-		

	<i>või/vä</i>	final place	-	Uralic, Ugro- Finnic, Finno- Samic	Metslang <i>et al.</i> (2011: 151)
Turkish	<i>-mi</i>	final place	-	Turkic, S	Čaušević (2007: 18)
Basque	-		-/+	isolated	Hualde and Ortiz de Urbina (2003: 467)
	<i>a</i>	postverbal	-/+		
	<i>al</i>	preverbal	-/+		

Table 4. Overview of polar question strategies in European languages

The analysed data speak in favour of accepting the initial hypothesis that SAE exhibits areal patterns in ways of encoding polar questions. However, there is no absolutely dominant construction type, but at least two types: clause-initial position of the question particle and verb fronting.

## 6.2. Implications for Croatian

It has been shown that the combination of a question particle and verb fronting such as found in Croatian polar interrogatives with *li* is rather rare in European languages. Among the languages included here, it has a parallel in Occitan and some Germanic languages in which originally subordinate interrogative clausal structures have also developed an independent use.

Considering the attestations in older Croatian literature (see §5.1, examples (9)–(13)) and the data from modern Bulgarian, Macedonian and Russian, we draw the conclusion that Croatian most likely used to coincide with these three languages in that the initial position in a polar interrogative was occupied either by a focused constituent or by the finite verb form if there is no focus. The development towards the present-day rule about the finite verb at the start of a polar question (see §5.1, example (3)) could be explained by at least two reasons. Firstly, we consider it justified to assume that polar questions with no focus, i.e. such with an initial verb, were more frequent in use than those with a focused constituent. The rise of the exceptionless initial-verb rule can therefore be interpreted as a generalisation of the most

frequent syntactic structure to all polar interrogative clauses with the particle *li*. Secondly, it is also well-founded to connect the development of mandatory verb fronting with German and Venetian influences, since Croatian was in intense contact with those languages. However, the interpretation of this change depends in a high degree on more general patterns of expressing syntactic focus in Croatian, which is not sufficiently described in the literature. We could certainly get a much better picture about the presented change in polar interrogatives if we could answer the question whether it is a part of a wider change concerning focus marking, which could, for example, include the emergence of restrictions in the relative order of the focused constituent and the verb.

In the light of the conclusion that the initial position of the question particle is a European areal feature, the fact that all the younger question particles in Croatian, such as *da li* and *je li*, are placed clause-initially could be linked to areal influences. The particle *da li* probably also reflects the influence of the Balkan Sprachbund, considering that it exists with the same form in Bulgarian and Macedonian and is not inherited from Proto-Slavic.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

This paper firstly offers a description of polar question constructions in Croatian and an overview of their diachronic development. The second-position enclitic particle *li* is the oldest prevalent way of encoding polar questions. Verb fronting in such questions is mandatory in the contemporary standard language, while in the past, other constituents used to be allowed in the initial position if they were focused. More recent question particles are the clause-initial *da li* and *je li*, with *je li* still undergoing grammaticalisation. Further younger interrogative constructions are verb fronting with no particle and, in some dialects, interrogative pronoun grammaticalised as a question particle.

Secondly, ways of encoding polar questions in selected old and modern European languages were presented. This was done under the assumption that this pragmatically motivated linguistic feature is areally diffuse, and with the aim to determine how Croatian fits in its areal context. On a more general level, an attempt was made to test the hypothesis that there is a dominant polar question construction type in the European linguistic area. It has been demonstrated that verb fronting in polar questions probably originates in Germanic and that it has spread over to some neighbouring non-Germanic languages. Considering the data

from Bulgarian, Macedonian and Russian, the conclusion was drawn that the rise of the mandatory verb fronting rule with the clitic *li* in Croatian can be explained by a synergy of intralinguistic mechanisms and German and Venetian influence. Furthermore, it has been made apparent that there is a tendency towards clause-initial question particles in Europe and that the rise of younger question particles *da li* and *je li* in Croatian can be situated in that context. The analysed data speak in favour of the initial hypothesis on the existence of areal patterns pertaining to polar question markers. However, instead of a single absolutely dominant construction type, there are at least two features that can be considered areal: initial position of the question particle and finite verb fronting.

This paper was an attempt to show that there are patterns in polar question encoding in the European linguistic area that are not a consequence of mutual genetic origins, and that they are reflected in Croatian as well. It would be interesting, without a doubt, to further investigate changes in Croatian syntax and their possible causes and areal implications. This pertains in particular to research on focus encoding, which would enable a better contextualisation of the change in the structure of interrogative clauses with the particle *li*.

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## Abbreviations

### Abbreviations used in glosses

ABS	absolutive	INS	instrumental	PTCP	participle
ACC	accusative	LOC	locative	Q	question particle
AOR	aorist	M	masculine	REL	relativisator
AUX	auxiliary verb	N	neuter	REFL	reflexive
COND	conditional	NEG	negation	SBJV	subjunctive
DIM	diminutive	NOM	nominative	SG	singular
F	feminine	PL	plural	SUP	superlative
FUT	future	POSS	possessive	VOC	vocative
GEN	genitive	PRS	present		
INF	infinitive	PST	past tense		

### Other abbreviations

Ba.	Baltic	S	subject
BSl.	Balto-Slavic	SAE	Standard Average European
Celt.	Celtic	Sl.	Slavic
E	east	V	verb
Germ.	Germanic	W	west
hrWaC	Croatian Web Corpus		
IE	Indo-European		
It.	Italic		
N	northern		
NP	noun phrase		
O	object		
Rom.	Romance		

## **Abstract**

This paper offers a description of polar question strategies in Croatian based on linguistic literature, corpus data and elicitation, and presents their diachronic development. Under assumption that pragmatically motivated features such as polar question markers are areally diffuse, Croatian is put in the context of European languages, and interrogative strategies in selected ancient and modern languages are presented. It is shown that there are certain areal tendencies, which are reflected in Croatian as well and that the development of certain interrogative constructions in Croatian can be interpreted in accordance with them.

**Keywords:** polar question, question particle, Croatian, European linguistic area, areal-typological linguistics

## **Sažetak**

U ovom se radu na temelju literature, korpusa i elicitacije opisuju načini kodiranja polarnih pitanja u hrvatskom jeziku i prikazuje se njihov dijakronijski razvoj. Pod pretpostavkom da je pragmatički motivirano obilježje poput načina kodiranja polarnoga pitanja arealno difuzno, hrvatski se stavlja u kontekst jezika Europe te se predstavljaju upitne konstrukcije u odabranim starim i suvremenim jezicima. Zaključuje se da postoje određene arealne tendencije, koje se odražavaju i na hrvatski te se razvoj pojedinih upitnih konstrukcija u hrvatskom može tumačiti u skladu s njima.

**Ključne riječi:** polarno pitanje, upitna čestica, hrvatski, europska jezična area, arealno-tipološka lingvistika