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Bias in constituent questions

Research on biased questions has focused on polar questions, and biased questions are taken to express the speaker's positive doxastic bias towards one alternative in the denotation of the question (Ladd (1981), Romero and Han (2004), Malamud and Stephenson (2015), Asher and Reese (2005), among many others). Assuming that constituent questions denote an undifferentiated set of alternatives, current theories of questions predict that biased constituent questions cannot exist since no particular alternative can be distinguished as the target of the bias (e.g. Farkas and Roelofsen (2017), Farkas (2020)). Our goal is to show that there are two cases where bias is compatible with the semantics of constituent questions: type-A-questions biased against all the positive answers; type-B-questions biased against a particular positive answer. Using Italian data, we introduce these two types of biased questions, both of which are solely marked by their intonational contours: the *negative bias contour* and the *echo-challenge contour*. Our proposal is that both these kinds of questions express a negative doxastic bias, but differ in whether they express a negative bias towards all the propositions in the denotation of the questions or towards a salient one. We will provide an analysis of these two types of questions that accounts for their properties (e.g. the incompatibility between polar questions and the negative bias contour). We will also compare type-A-questions with *wh-the-hell* questions and we will consider the possibility of extending our proposal to the latter type of questions.