Answers to polar questions (Jana Winkler)

My research is about polar questions, especially negative polar questions, and the answer strategies used to confirm or disconfirm a question's proposition. For example, English and Bislama employ different strategies when it comes to answering negative polar questions:

(1) **Bislama** (Crowley 2004: 149)

Bae yu kam long haos blong mifala?	Yes	*(bae mi kam long haos blong yufala).*
'Will you come to our place?	Yes	(I will come to your place).'

Bae yu no kam long lafet?		*(bae mi no kam long lafet).*
'Won't you come to the party?	**No**	(I won't come to the party).'

The Bislama example shows that a positive answer particle is used to confirm the proposition of a negative polar question, whereas in English the negative answer particle has to be used. These two different systems are called *truth-based* and *polarity-based*, respectively.

I am interested in the distribution of these two systems across the languages of the world and in the reasons behind that distribution, e.g. whether the choice of system is connected to other linguistic features. In addition to a critical review of the available literature (e.g. Holmberg 2016), I want to focus on three different aspects with regard to this topic. First, I am currently working on determining the answer systems of pidgin and creole languages to be able to compare them to the corresponding systems in their lexifier and substrate languages. Second, I have recently started to conduct a corpus study of English (using the BNC), to study variation in the types of answers given to polar questions – so the focus is not primarily on the type of answer system, but more on language internal variation and on the pragmatic reasons behind it. Third, I plan to provide a small, but typologically representative overview of the distribution of answer systems in the languages of the world.

Although I focus mostly on answers to (negative) polar questions, I am also interested in more general topics related to questions, answers, turn-taking, discourse structure, speech acts etc. and I am looking forward to discuss and exchange ideas!

References

Crowley, Terry. 2004. *Bislama reference grammar*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Holmberg, Anders. 2016. *The syntax of yes and no*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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