Regarding negative interrogatives in American English as argumentative structures[*]

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Abstract: This article investigates the use of negative interrogatives in American English and provides new support as to why they can be regarded as argumentative structures (Heritage, 2002). Questions are usually described pragmatically as enabling the speaker to seek information. However, when they are negatively formulated, they are analysed in the literature as allowing the speaker to express their point of view: "negative interrogatives are treated as accomplishing assertions of opinion rather than questioning" (Heritage, 2002). This paper builds on Heritage's claim by considering the whole discursive project of the speaker. The rhetorical trait of these structures will necessarily be dealt with. The corpus is comprised of negative interrogatives from the *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American Englis*h.[1] By analysing the responses that follow questions (Léon, 1997), we show that adding negation to the usual (i.e. positive) interrogative form turns the classical information-seeking question into an argumentative utterance which is part of a wider discursive project. Furthermore, our pragmatically-driven analysis of the data allows us to shed light on how the co-speaker works out the implicit items that are necessary to understand the full scope of the message.

Keywords: argumentation, negative interrogatives, point of view, pragmatics.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a new corpus-based analysis of the use of negative interrogatives in American English, thereby shining new light on the functions of these expressions in spoken discourse. We take up Heritage's (2002: 1428) claim that negative interrogatives "express a position or point of view" and explore how these expressions add to a speaker's argumentative stance in context.

Our analysis in this paper is guided by the following questions. To what extent do negative interrogatives differ from positive interrogatives, pragmatically-speaking? What factors motivate their use? Does the type of relationship – collaboration versus conflict (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1994) – between the speakers affect how often they occur? What do negative interrogatives enable the speaker to do? As far as questions are concerned, Quirk et al. (1985: 821) opposed inquiries or "real questions", to "directives" (i.e. invitations, suggestions and instructions). Should negative interrogatives be classified in the former category or in the latter one? In line with this question, this paper investigates to what extent the addition of the negative adverb *not* turns a positive question into an argumentative utterance.

The article is structured as follows: I provide a short description of the syntax of negative interrogatives in section 2 so that this type of construction is clearly comprehended by the reader. Section 3 situates the negative interrogative within the larger context of 'questions' in general and provides an overview of the other different sub-types of questions that have been reported in the literature. I then return to the topic of negative interrogatives by providing an overview of the latest research that has been conducted on the topic. Section 4 analyses the corpus occurrences used in the current study and, when possible, compares them with French occurrences of negative interrogatives (taken from various online sources). The paper ends with some concluding remarks in section 5.

The corpus used in this study is the *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English* (Du

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1 *SBC* website, last retrieved from http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/santa-barbara-corpus on July, 16th, 2014.

Bois et al. 2000-2005) (henceforth *SBC*). This corpus "represents a wide variety of people of different regional origins, ages, occupations, genders, and ethnic and social backgrounds",[2] and amounts to 60 conversations with an approximate total of 249,000 words. It also forms part of the *International Corpus of English* (*ICE*). The conversations examined mostly take place in a friendly atmosphere (among friends or family members), but special attention will be paid to the context to determine whether the relationship between speakers is collaborative or not.

After identifying the occurrences of these expressions, we classify them on the basis of their syntactic features. Specifically, this involves categorising them as open or closed questions, depending on whether or not they are introduced by a *wh*-element. We also examine the predicate within the larger framework of the conversation in order to understand the goal the speaker wishes to achieve. Furthermore, we also attend to any response that is given to the question by the co-speaker in order to understand how it was interpreted.

2.   Syntactic description of negative interrogatives

Negative interrogatives are complex structures that combine traits of both interrogation and negation, thus blending the speech acts. On the one hand, negative interrogatives are framed according to the interrogative schema of English, which places the operator before the subject (Quirk et al. 1972: 386) as follows: <AUX + S+ P + ?>, as in *Did you get my message?*. In addition to this, the auxiliary is in the negative form: the negative particle *not*, or enclitic *n't* in spoken English, is affixed to the auxiliary, resulting in the following structure: <AUX*n't* + S + P + ?> as in *Don't you wanna try on the men's clothes?*. Such questions are *closed* or *yes-no questions*: they are not introduced by interrogative pronouns (e.g. *who*) or adverbs (e.g. *why*) and only require a *yes-no* answer. They are defined as follows: *Yes-no* questions "are usually formed by placing the operator before the subject, and using question intonation" (Quirk et al. 1972: 387). Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 866) adopt a different perspective focusing on the answers they trigger: "Yes-no questions define a closed set of just two possible answers";[3] hence the terminology "*closed* interrogative".

When questions are introduced by interrogative pronouns or adverbs, they are *open* questions. Quirk et al. (1972: 394) described open questions like this: "Wh-questions are formed with the aid of one of the following simple interrogative words (or Q-words): who/whom/whose, what, which, when, where, how, why". In more recent work, Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 866) defined them relatively to the response they trigger: "Wh-questions define in principle an open set of answers"; hence the noun phrase "*open* questions": they require a more developed answer. The main and most interesting *wh*-element identified in our corpus is *why* as in *Why don't you call me at least a little bit later maybe?*.

3.   Background on questions

To be able to precisely define what negative interrogatives are and what they enable the speaker to do, we shall refer to the following linguistic concepts.

3.1.   *Positive questions*

With respect to discourse functions, Quirk et al. (1972) argued that "questions are primarily used to express lack of information on a specific point, and (usually) to request the listener to supply this information verbally" (1972: 386). This corresponds to what is generally referred to as "the information gap" between two speakers. In more recent work, Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 866) defined questions in the following manner:

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2   Du Bois et al. (2000-2005)
3   Huddleston & Pullum (2002) differentiate a response (any type of reply) from an answer, what would be a clear *yes* or *no* after such a question.

> The pragmatic concept of question is an illocutionary category. Prototypically, a question in this sense is an inquiry. To make a genuine inquiry is to ask a question to which one does not know the answer with the aim of obtaining the answer from the addressee.

Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 867) continue by saying: "What we are calling an inquiry is then the special, but most common, case where I ask you to provide this answer".

In the first quotation, the *genuine* character of the inquiry is highlighted, meaning that questions can also be *non-genuine*. This scope for ambiguity in utterance was highlighted by Quirk et al. (1972) who pointed out that syntactic classes or forms did not always correspond to discourse functions. For instance, *I wonder if you'd kindly open the window?* is "a statement in form but a command according to function" (Quirk et al. 1972: 387). This idea of mixed speech acts leads on quite logically to another type of question: the rhetorical question.

3.2. *Rhetorical questions*
Léon (1997: 36) identified the four main characteristics of rhetorical questions:

- 1) Il n'y a pas d'échange d'information, pas d'intention d'obtenir une réponse.
- 2) La question n'exige pas de réponse : elle est juste posée pour susciter   l'adhésion du locuteur ou lui rappeler des informations déjà connues.
- 3) La réponse est présentée comme évidente – un problème rhétorique dans l'Antiquité était un problème dont on avait déjà trouvé la solution.
- 4) La question rhétorique construit une réponse anti-orientée.

- *1) There is no exchange of information, no intention to receive an answer.*
- *2) The question calls for no specific answer: it is asked only to reach the interlocutor's agreement or to evoke known information.*
- *3) The answer is regarded as obvious – Aristotle described a rhetorical problem as one to which the solution has already been found.*
- *4) The rhetorical question calls for an answer which is anti-orientated.*[4]

Quirk et al. (1972: 401) suggested the following: "A rhetorical question is a question which functions as a forceful statement. More precisely, a *positive* rhetorical question is like a *negative* assertion, while a *negative* question is like a strong *positive* one". They illustrated their point with the example *Who cares*? which should be understood as a paraphrase of *Nobody cares.*

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2001: 108), drawing on Fontanier (1977 [1830]: 368), takes this same position: "Avec la négation, la question affirme, sans la négation, elle nie".[5] Likewise, Heritage (2002: 1429) has argued that "reversing the polarity of this negatively formulated question conveys an expectation for a positive response" to conclude with "These questions are strongly designed for 'yes' answers" (Heritage 2002: 1441). This highlights the mix of speech acts that characterise rhetorical questions, and, to some extent, biased questions.

3.3. *Biased questions*
A biased question is defined in the literature as "one where the speaker is predisposed to accept one particular answer as the right one. For example, *Doesn't she like it?* Her behaviour or her remarks suggest that she doesn't like it: I ask the question to confirm whether this is so" (Huddleston &

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4   My translation.
5   "Negatively-formulated, questions affirm; without negation, they negate" (my translation).

Pullum 2002: 879). For example, in *Haven't you read it yet?* the speaker is biased in favour of one answer over another (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 878). Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 883) ultimately conclude: "Questions with negative interrogatives form are always strongly biased. They typically allow a range of interpretations, and the epistemic bias can be towards either the negative or the positive answer". This clearly lays emphasis on the importance of taking the context into account.

3.4   Negative interrogatives

As far as negative interrogatives are concerned, we begin with Heritage's assertion that "negative interrogatives are treated as accomplishing assertions of opinion rather than questioning" (Heritage, 2002: 1428). Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 885) propose that negative interrogatives express a contrast between a state of affairs and a judgment on this state of affairs, "between what it is and what it should be" while adding that they also express "an indirect reproach or rebuke".

In general terms, the present article examines not only what a speaker does when they use a negative interrogative, but also what implicit messages they want to convey. More specifically, pragmatic considerations, such as identifying the implicit items that the interlocutor needs to pick up in the extra-linguistic environment in order to understand the full scope of the message, are paramount. Interpretation plays indeed an important part. Consequently, paying attention to the responses, if any, formulated by the interlocutor, gives valuable information, as Léon (1997: 9) points out: "la réponse analyse la question comme si elle comportait un biais".[6]

4.   Analysis of the data

I identified all the occurrences of negative interrogatives in the conversations that comprise Part 1 of the four component parts of *SBC*. All examples were classified as either open or closed questions. Furthermore, they were also coded as responding or not to the following three questions:

- Is the relationship between the participants close or distant in respectively informal or formal contexts? This is *axis 1* relating to the horizontal relationship in Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1994)'s theory. *Axis 2* is linked to relationships of power and hierarchy, i.e. vertical relationship, whereas *axis 3* pertains to a relation going from consensus to conflict (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1994: 71-88).
- Is the question rhetorical?
- Does the negative interrogative express a point of view (following Heritage 2002)? If so, how can this claim be paraphrased?[7]

4.1.   Yes-no questions or closed questions

In this section, I propose occurrences of naturally-occurring conversations within the form of closed questions, that is *yes-no* questions.

4.1.1.   Negative interrogatives with *be*

I identify occurrences that use the auxiliary *be* in the present tense. The first conversation is recorded in rural Hardin, Montana. Lynne is a student of equine science, and the main speaker in the extract. She is telling Lenore (a visitor and near stranger) about her studies. Doris, Lynne's mother, is doing housework, but joins the conversation near the end to discuss friends of their family. The transcriptions are restituted as they can be found on the *SBC* website. They can be viewed thanks to the CLAN software: the left column specifies the the moment of intervention, the middle column

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6   "The answer analyses the question as if it were a biased question" (my translation).
7   As a non-native speaker of English, all my hypotheses of reformulation have been verified by a native speaker.

specifies the speaker's name, and finally the right column specifies the content of the intervention:

(1)

1501.22 1501.82	DORIS:	Idaho=,
1501.82 1502.14		[and],
1502.08 1503.03	LYNNE:	[up] in the mountains,
1503.03 1503.54		[2In Idaho2].
1503.08 1503.59	DORIS:	[2XXX2]
1503.59 1505.83		… Um Macley,
1505.83 1506.08		and,
1506.08 1508.06	LYNNE:	… Arco?
1508.06 1509.96		**… Isn't that where !Deb .. kinda was?**
1509.96 1515.32		… But he's just really really really strange.

(SBC001, Actual Blacksmithing)

Lynne's utterances close the extract. The speakers are mother and daughter, their relationship is collaborative, with both speakers trying to recall where people are from. Lynne tries to find out where Deb's husband is from. The question *Isn't that where Deb kinda was?* is not answered by a co-speaker as Lynne holds the floor until the extract draws to a close. To verify Heritage's (2002) claim of expression of point of view, I will paraphrase the question with the predicate *think*, the generic verb used to express opinions, and use positive polarity in the predicate:

(1')   I think Arco is where Deb kinda was.

This sentence functions perfectly as an expression of opinion, thus providing initial support for Heritage's (2002) claim.

Conversation (2), entitled *Lambada*, takes place after dinner among four friends in San Francisco, California. The participants are in their late twenties or early thirties. Harold and Jamie are a married couple, Miles is a doctor, and Pete is a graduate student from Southern California:

(2)

78.70 79.35	HAROLD:	That's why b-,
79.35 81.50		.. little kids usually don't break their legs anyway.
81.50 83.30	PETE:	.. Cause they're [so X][2XXX2].
82.17 83.47	JAMIE:	[Cause they're made] [2of rubber2].
82.50 84.58	MILES:	[2But they have more2] cartilage than w-,
84.58 84.93		… [3you know3].
84.75 84.88	HAROLD:	[3Yeah3],
84.88 85.48		**aren't they real s-,**
85.48 87.18		**.. aren't their k- .. legs [pretty soft]?**
86.48 86.65	MILES:	[Yeah,
86.65 88.68		there's] less calcium % deposits <X in them X>.
88.68 89.78		… [2And2] also,
89.05 89.45	PETE:	[2Mm2].
89.78 90.88	MILES:	.. they're still growing.

(SBC002, Lambada)

At the beginning of the extract, the discourse is collaboratively constructed: each speaker gives their point of view to make the discussion move forward. This forward momentum in the discourse is achieved through various means such as the use of expressions of causality like *That's why/Cause* by two different speakers. The *yes-no* question *aren't they real s-,/.. aren't their k- .. legs [pretty soft]?* is answered by Miles saying *Yeah, there's less calcium deposit in them*. Again, this question can be reformulated as an expression of point of view:

(2')   I think kids' legs are pretty soft.

Here, the speaker Harold seems to be checking some knowledge which he has on children's anatomy. The conversation has another occurrence of a negative interrogative with *be*, to which we turn now:

(3)

144.17 145.12	HAROLD:	Better than nothing.
145.12 146.60	MILES:	[@@@@@]
145.76 149.08	PETE:	[@@@@@@@][2@@@(H)@@2]
147.38 148.44	JAMIE:	[2<VOX Oh= VOX>,
148.44 151.03		I cannot be2]I=ieve [3you said that.
149.78 151.18	PETE:	[3@(H)@@@
151.03 152.88	JAMIE:	What a jerk you are (Hx)3].
151.18 154.38	PETE:	@ @3] @ [4@4
153.23 153.88	MILES:	[4@@4]
154.38 155.70	JAMIE:	**Aren't you guys gonna stick up for me?**
155.70 157.01		**and beat up on him or something?**
157.01 158.16	MILES:	He's bigger than [I am].

(SBC002, Lambada)

Interestingly, in this second extract of *Lambada*, the context is hostile: Jamie feels lonely as all the co-speakers side with her husband who goes dancing for free, thanks to his status of "husband". Harold says at the beginning of the extract that this is *better than nothing*. Miles justifies his taking side with Harold by humorously saying that Jamie's husband is too big to be beaten up on. So the question *Aren't you guys gonna stick up for me? and beat up on him or something?* is answered, in some respects. A paraphrase as a statement with *think* fails to capture the sense of the original interrogative:

(3')   *I think you guys are gonna stick up for me and beat up on him or something.

A more appropriate reformulation would be:

(3")   <u>I'd appreciate </u>it if you guys stuck up for me and beat up on him or something.

We might account for this slight change in the reformulation by suggesting the expression of volition or intention is encoded by words like *want* or *be going to.* The use of such elements in negative interrogatives seems to trigger a deontic reading, i.e. a reformulation with *appreciate* instead.
   The next conversation, *Conceptual Pesticides*, was recorded in Southern California and concerns three friends preparing dinner together. Roy and Marilyn are a married couple, and Pete is

a friend visiting from out of town. All participants are in their early thirties. Two occurrences of *yes-no* questions occur in the extract:

(4)

440.87 441.37	MARILYN:	[4pay me4],
441.37 441.57		you know,
441.57 443.07		eighty dollars a day to run my [boat].
442.72 443.12	PETE:	[Right].
443.12 444.96	MARILYN:	… Catch fabulous salmon.
444.96 446.26		… [And they have it] canned.
445.21 445.76	PETE:	[Unhunh].
446.26 446.46	MARILYN:	.. You know,
446.46 447.01		they eat it,
447.01 448.11		… when they're up there,
448.11 449.56		.. and [I guess they] have some frozen,
448.23 448.58	PETE:	[Right].
449.56 450.46	MARILYN:	but they have it canned and,
450.46 450.91	PETE:	Unhunh.
450.91 452.44	MARILYN:	.. (TSK) <VOX put it in our stockings,
452.44 453.21		for Christ[mas VOX>].
452.88 453.38	PETE:	[Aw]=.
453.38 454.28	ROY:	**.. Isn't that great.**
454.28 457.39	MARILYN:	… It's … nice for them.
457.39 458.89		They have some recreation with it.
458.89 461.77	PETE:	… But no salmon in your stockings this year.

(SBC003, Conceptual Pesticides)

(5)

1033.77 1035.43	MARILYN:	… actually,
1035.43 1035.73		you know,
1035.73 1037.08		I'd love to do gray water,
1037.08 1037.58	PETE:	… [Mhm].
1037.18 1037.63	MARILYN:	[here],
1037.63 1037.83		.. but,
1037.83 1038.88	ROY:	… It's [illegal].
1038.20 1038.90	MARILYN:	[it's illegal].
1038.90 1039.30	PETE:	.. Really.
1039.30 1039.75		.. How rude.
1039.75 1041.00	MARILYN:	**… Isn't that [retarded]?**
1040.57 1041.32	ROY:	**[Isn't that weird]?**
1041.32 1042.06	PETE:	(THROAT)
1042.06 1043.52		… It is.
1043.52 1046.97		… They just built a .. a great big gray water processing center,
1046.97 1048.07		.. at the laundromat,
000000000 000000000	$	HE SAYS "LAUNDRY MAT"?
1048.07 1049.77		.. in the .. complex where I live.

(SBC003, Conceptual Pesticides)

These negative interrogatives are analysed together as they present similarities in their structures. In these extracts, we come back to the use of *be* in the structure <S + *be* + SC> with *great* and *retarded/weird* respectively. As far as answers are concerned, the first negative interrogative *Isn't that great* is not answered, whereas the second lot of negative interrogatives (i.e. Marilyn's question *Isn't that retarded?* And Roy's *Isn't that weird?*) is answered by Pete's *It is*. We cannot say however whether *it is* refers to *retarded* or *weird*.

All three negative interrogatives could be paraphrased as expressions of points of view relative to the fact that *doing gray water is illegal*:

(4')   I think that's great.[8]

(5a') I think that's retarded.

(5b') I think that's weird.

What is interesting and provides deeper support for our claim of expression of point of view is that all three adjectives used as subject complements are subjective adjectives, resulting from an operation of judgment. In so doing, the speaker attributes the quality *great/retarded/weird* to the syntactic subject *that*, referring to *doing gray water.*

This first type of occurrences works exactly in a similar manner in French. The following extract comes from a parliamentary session dated May 29th, 2007, in Canada:

(6)   N'est-ce pas cependant le propre d'un État fasciste de priver quelqu'un du droit de vote que lui confère la loi?[9]

   Isn't what defines a fascist state that it denies somebody their statutorily protected right to vote?

The point of view easily paraphrases into the following:

(6')   Je pense que priver quelqu'un du droit de vote que lui confère la loi est le propre d'un état fasciste.

   I think that what defines a fasist state is that it denies somebody their statutorily protected right to vote.

We could also read the following on the website of a French industry:

(7)   [Il semble que le stockage de données se fasse de plus en plus sous forme de mémoire et non de disque dur,] n'est-ce pas un peu risqu de proposer une machine pour ce domaine?[10]

   […] Isn't it risky to offer hardware in this field?

The paraphrase is operational again:

(7')   Je pense que c'est un peu risqu de proposer une machine pour ce domaine

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8   A point of view which is also Marylin's as she confirms *it's nice for them*.
9   Retrieved on November 25th, 2014, from http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=2979751&Language=F&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=1
10 Retrieved on November 22nd, 2014 from http://www.tornos.fr/dnld/deco-mag/tornos-deco-mag-39-fr.pdf.

I think it is risky to offer hardware in this field.

To conclude partially on the use of the negative interrogatives with *be* as its operator, the speakers seem to express their points of view when *be* is lexical and enables a quality to be attributed to the subject through the use of a subject complement. In such cases, the following paraphrase is always operational:

Isn't + S + SC + (?) => I think + S + is [positively-formulated P] + SC

In the linguistic environment, other items expressing point of view often corroborate the point made by the speaker using the negative interrogative. So, we cannot consider them classical information-seeking questions, just using a predicate in the negative form. The question is completely transformed by the change in polarity, from positive to negative. We shall now turn to negative interrogatives that use the operator *do*.

4.1.2. Negative interrogatives with *do*
In the following conversations, the negative interrogatives are first used in the present tense, resulting in the following structure: *<Don't + you/they + P + ?>*.
      The first example is an extract from SBC002, *Lambada*:

(8)

186.47 189.83	HAROLD:	… We were at this dumb store,
189.83 191.83		and the clerk .. kept trying to keep us interested,
191.83 192.03	PETE:	[Hm,
191.93 193.36	HAROLD:	[<@ while she was] buy=ing @>.
192.03 192.46	PETE:	that's right].
193.36 194.56	MILES:	… [2@2]
193.96 195.46	PETE:	**[2<X Don't2] you wanna X> try on the men's clothes?**
195.46 196.36		[3XX=3].
195.65 196.93	JAMIE:	[3I'm the one who3] suggested that,
196.93 197.99		so you wouldn't be so bored.
197.99 198.29		[(H)]
198.14 198.34	PETE:	[Well I-] --
198.34 199.64	JAMIE:	So they tried on the men's clothes,
199.64 201.34		<PAR and they had a very small selection of men's clothes PAR>,

(SBC002, Lambada)

The negative interrogative is *Don't you wanna try on the men's clothes?* with *you* being the syntactic subject of the verbs *wanna try*. In this utterance, the speaker, Pete, is imitating a shop assistant inviting a shopper to try clothes on. Jamie rectifies this proposition by saying that she is actually the one who suggested that Harold try clothes on: *I'm the one who suggested that so that you wouldn't be bored*. This negative interrogative echoes what is usually said in a shop. The expression of point of view previously proposed in 4.1.1. does not seem fit: *I think you wanna try on the men's clothes.*

      What sounds more appropriate is the value of suggestion. Indeed, Jamie seems to "invite", drawing on Quirk et al.'s (1985) proposal of "directives, i.e. invitations, suggestions or instructions" (1985: 821), Harold to try men's clothes on.
      In (9) below, the negative interrogative *Don't they teach you to go, one two three, one two*

three, one two three, like that? has *they* as the syntactic subject of the verb *teach:*

(9)

969.98 970.33	MILES:	[You know,
970.33 971.93		the ballroom] people [2don't do it that way2].
971.03 971.73	PETE:	[2XX XX2]
971.93 973.03	MILES:	.. But [3that's what I want to learn3].
971.98 972.31	JAMIE:	**[3Don't- --**
972.31 972.98		**Don't they teach3],**
972.98 973.90		**(H) don't they teach you to go,**
973.90 974.68		**one two three=,**
974.68 975.23		**one two three=,**
975.23 975.82		**.. one two three=,**
975.82 976.39		**like that?**
976.39 979.04		... (H) Or do they go like really fast like that.
979.04 979.82	MILES:	Well !Sue !Swing,
979.82 981.36		I mean when she was teaching was definitely more sedate,
981.36 982.59		and the same thing with [!Jeff] and !Vivian.

(SBC002, Lambada)

What the speaker (Jamie) seems to be doing by using the negative interrogative is to express how surprised she is. Indeed, anyone who has some knowledge or experience of dancing, little as this may be, learns to dance through rhythm lessons, usually referred to by the list of numbers 1, 2, 3 as they are spoken out loud during dancing lessons. In so doing, Jamie instantly evokes her knowledge of dancing lessons as she compares what she knows about dancing to the experience told by Miles about what he refers to as *the ballroom people*. So, pragmatically speaking, Jamie expresses her surprise triggered by the discrepancy between what she knows about dancing lessons and what Miles tells her about them. That could be reformulated as *I'm surprised by the fact that they don't teach you to go 'one, two, three'...* Syntactically, in this paraphrase, a major difference from the other occurrences examined so far lies in the fact that the verb has negative polarity behind the paraphrase *I'm surprised that...* This can easily be accounted for in the light of the reformulations of the previous part of this study as *Jamie **would have thought** that they teach you to go one, two, three, one, two, three, like that*. This corresponds to *her* representation of a dancing lesson.

This is a case in point for Huddleston & Pullum's (2002: 885) claim that there is a contrast between the reported state of affairs and a judgment on this state of affairs "between what it is and what it should be". Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 885) suggest that negative interrogatives could express "an indirect reproach or rebuke". This may not be the primary motivation in the current example: it seems to be her surprise that Jamie wants to convey. To some extent however, Jamie could also be expressing an indirect reproach as she thinks rhythm *should* be part of the basics of dancing lessons. Like (3"), a deontic reading could be privileged again.

As far as the co-speakers are concerned – and this is what we do when we are talked to – without even thinking about it, they understand the full scope of her message, taking this dimension of contrast between what is and what it should be into account. Indeed, they instantly and unconsciously pick up the implicit message of what Jamie thinks about dancing lessons and how dancing lessons should be.

Keeping in mind this expression of surprise linked to the contrast between "the state of affairs" and the representation the speaker has of "these affairs", we shall now move on to an occurrence inflected in the past tense to see whether the analysis undertaken on the negative

interrogatives with lexical verbs in the present tense is also valid for the occurrences in the preterit.

(10)	1124.12 1125.62		.. Zeke the sheik .. is a local.
	1125.62 1126.17		… You know,
	1126.17 1127.67		the guy whose compost pile blew up?
	1127.67 1128.87	PETE:	… Oh no I don't know a[bout this].
	1128.37 1129.22	MARILYN:	**[Didn't you hear] about him?**
	1129.22 1129.59	PETE:	[2No2].
	1129.25 1129.50	MARILYN:	[2It --
	1129.50 1130.09		it2] caught fi- --
	1130.09 1130.79		<PAR Here finish these up PAR>.
	1130.79 1131.79		… It caught fire,

(SBC003, Conceptual Pesticides)

This is a further example from *Conceptual Pesticides*. In this extract, the negative interrogative is asked by Marilyn. It is in the past tense: *Didn't you hear about him?*. The question is answered by Pete in the negative: *No*.

Even if answering such a question tends to reduce – even annihilate – the rhetorical trait of the question, what seems to be done primarily by the speaker using a negative interrogative is, again, to express her feelings, i.e. her surprise at the fact that Pete had not heard about the man. By listening to the conversation, the co-speaker infers that the story must have been on everybody's lips in the town: this idea is amply conveyed by the use of the negative interrogative which contributed to that. In a similar fashion to the previous occurrence in (9), it could be reformulated as *I'm surprised by the fact that you didn't hear about him*,[11] with the verb *hear* remaining, as in the previous example, in negative polarity. To relate this analysis to examples (1) and (2) of this paper, we account for the fact that the negation remains in the reformulation by saying that the speaker, who is surprised in (9) and (10), needs to *check* the validity of the fact that surprises her so much. The use of the negative interrogative enables the speaker to achieve two things: first of all, to express their surprise, and secondly to clarify their understanding of a situation by inviting the co-speaker to confirm it – which Pete does by answering *No*.

After analysing these three examples, we can see that the negative interrogative in these passages is not an information-seeking question: it is always related to some background that the speaker has in mind and to some extent, to a larger project of argumentation. In (8), the question is clearly an invitation, which confirms Quirk et al.'s (1985: 821) proposal of "invitation, suggestion or instruction", whereas in (9) and (10), the questions contributed to expressing the speaker's surprise, a testimony of a discrepancy "between how things are and how they should be", according to the speaker.

So far, we have seen that the negative polarity of the verb in the question turns the question into an intervention which has a larger scope than it seems: an invitation, the expression of points of view or feelings, like surprise. From a syntactic perspective, it is noteworthy that in the first two cases, the negation does not appear in the reformulation whereas in the last example, it does occur in the paraphrase. As a consequence, we might wonder whether the scope of the negation operates at the same level in the negative interrogative. On the one hand, it literally turns the question into an argumentative form, with the expression of a point of view with positive polarity. On the other, it is still argumentative as it enables the speaker to express their feelings (surprise), but, in this case, the negation still operates on the verb as the speaker wants to check the validity of the surprising –

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11 What might account for Pete's not hearing about Zeke's compost pile story is the fact that Pete comes from out of town, as we can read in the short description given by the *SBC* website of SBC003.

negative – fact. This is not the primary interest of this paper but definitely a point to retain for further research.

In French, one frequently comes across negative interrogatives with a lexical verb, for instance *Ne croyez-vous pas que…?* as in *Ne croyez-vous pas que cette coupure menace à terme l'opportunité, donc l'existence, des aides nationales?*.[12] This is again a way for the speaker to subtly express their point of view. Both French and American English operate according to similar patterns in this respect.

4.1.3. Negative tag questions

In order to examine all kinds of closed questions, our analysis will now turn to two occurrences of negative tag-questions:

(11)

255.37 257.67	HAROLD:	**Well that would be nice to have a little jazz band next [4door4],**
257.37 257.89	PETE:	[4Right4].
257.67 258.17	HAROLD:	**wouldn't it.**
258.04 258.69	JAMIE:	[No=].
258.16 258.81	PETE:	[Mhm=].
258.81 262.01	HAROLD:	… Usually we just have r=eally loud salsa parties across the street.

(SBC002, Lambada)

The four friends are listening to jazz music coming from an old tape recorder plugged into speakers but surprisingly, Miles finds the sound is really good quality. The extract below precedes example (11):

(12)

231.54 232.88	MILES:	[3You must have3] good stereo.
232.88 233.98		Cause I feel like I'm hearing --

(SBC002, Lambada)

The usual construction of the tag question is respected in *Well that would be nice to have a little jazz band next door, wouldn't it.* This is a *reversed-polarity* tag. The auxiliary and the syntactic subject used in the assertion, respectively *would* and *it*, are repeated in the tag question to invite the co-speaker to express his point of view, with a strong orientation by the speaker towards the agreement of the co-speaker.[13] The co-speaker then either agrees or disagrees, which is the case in (11), where Jamie says an abrupt *No* as she already suffers from living in a noisy neighbourhood. Pete, however, agrees with the proposition as he answers *Right*.

To relate to the occurrences discussed earlier, it is clear that the tag-question invites the co-speaker to express their point of view. In the following extract, this is also the aim of the speaker's utterance:

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12 "Don't you think that this cut-off ultimately threatens the possibility, hence the very existence, of national aid?" (my translation). This is an extract from the debate which took place at the European Parliament session of November 15th, 2000, in Strasbourg, France. Retrieved on November 21st, 2014, from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?
pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20001115+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//FR&language=FR

13 The negative form seems to mark that the speaker would be surprised if the co-speaker did not agree with him.

16.52 19.09	MARILYN:	would [2you like to2] … string the bea=ns?
16.60 17.30	PETE:	[2What can I do2].
19.09 19.36		Sure.
19.36 19.36	ROY:	<<WHISTLE
19.36 20.84	PETE:	… Oh,
20.84 22.24		<X it smells like that stuff X>.
22.24 22.84	MARILYN:	… I know.
22.84 23.54		**.. It's kind of smelly,**
23.54 23.90		**isn't it.**
23.90 24.39	PETE:	Mhm.
24.39 26.27	ROY:	… WHISTLE>>
26.27 28.20	MARILYN:	<VOX But I got it at a reputable market VOX>.
28.20 30.61	ROY:	… Well let's see,
30.61 32.84		.. [a three-person salad] bow=[2=l2].

(SBC003, Conceptual Pesticides)

(13)

As explained earlier when this extract was first introduced (see section 4.1.1.), the friends are preparing dinner. Marilyn asks the negative tag question *It's kind of smelly, isn't it* to which Pete replies *Mhm*, thus providing a paraverbal response which conveys agreement.

These two supplementary examples provide support for the claim that negative interrogatives are different from classical positive interrogatives in that they allow the speakers to express their points of view, and *de facto*, to solicit their co-speakers' point of view. They show the same characteristics, i.e. they express the speaker's point of view with subjective adjectives (*nice, smelly*). The main difference lies in the fact that the point of view is immediately provided in the assertion preceding the tag-question.

After investigating all kinds of closed questions (with *be, do* and negative tag questions), we shall now turn to the open questions introduced by the wh-element *why*. This adverb has been selected for its argumentative interest; it is also the most common *wh*-element used in negative interrogatives.

4.2. Open questions
In example (14), this is Marilyn, again, who uses the negative interrogative:

	1219.87 1221.51	ROY:	[Shall I do] something civilized,
(14)	1219.99 1220.31	PETE:	[@@]
	1221.51 1222.48	ROY:	like [2clear the ta2]ble,
	1221.64 1222.23	MARILYN:	[2(COUGH) (COUGH)2]
	1222.48 1224.28	ROY:	or are we just gonna barbarian it out.
	1224.28 1224.73	MARILYN:	… No,
	1224.73 1225.53		**why don't you clear the table.**
	1225.53 1226.55		**Unless we want to eat outside.**
	1226.55 1227.56	ROY:	… It's dark,
	1227.56 1228.56		how will we see what we're eating.
	1228.56 1230.07	MARILYN:	… Candles.

(SBC003, Conceptual Pesticides)

The friends are all preparing dinner together and Roy offers to lend a hand: *Shall I do something civilized?* and then suggests *like clear the table … or are we just gonna barbarian it out.* As Marilyn coughs when Roy makes his suggestions, she cannot hear what he says. So she first answers the question *Are we just gonna barbarian it out?* with the negative adverb *No* and then asks the negative question *Why don't you clear the table, unless we want to eat outside.* Roy answers the question saying that it is too dark outside.

What does Marilyn do, pragmatically-speaking, when she uses the negative interrogative? She kindly invites Roy to clear the table. Drawing on Quirk et al. (1985: 821) this is clearly a directive, or "invitation, suggestion or instruction" which sounds less aggressive than a positive interrogative like *Could you please clear the table?*. An appropriate paraphrase could be *It would be nice if you could clear the table*, which uses a predicate with positive polarity. The choice of this question seems to correspond to some logic: they are about to have dinner, and the table is full of cooking utensils, so it would be helpful if Roy could clear the table.

The examples in (15)[14] is a family conversation recorded in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The primary participants are three sisters all in their twenties. The girls have a close relationship and the context is informal. They talk about their teaching experiences. Sharon is the main speaker: she is explaining to her sisters the difficult situations she has gone through at school with children coming from deprived areas. Several times a week she has to pay for the lunches of poor children with her own money as the children's parents either forget to bring food or forget to fill in the forms to get help from the city council. Sharon keeps telling a young girl, Annalisa, that she needs to bring back the form if she wants to have her free lunch, but Sharon never receives the document, day after day, which irritates her greatly:

(15)

330.31 330.61	SHARON:	[3So=,
330.61 331.11		%= you know2],
331.11 332.46		I find this out a week later=.
332.46 333.71		… I kept bugging !Annalisa,
333.71 334.06		t- you know,
334.06 335.46		did you bring the form in=,
335.46 336.56		did you fill it all out,
336.56 337.61		**why don't you get another one,**
337.61 340.31		… (TSK) (H) and I search my desk,
340.31 341.01		and it's not there,
341.01 342.94		and I keep calling the office and sending notes,

(SBC004, Raging Bureaucracy)

The passage is in reported speech. We can read the direct questions that Sharon asked Annalisa: *did you bring the form in, did you fill it all out* and, more interestingly, *why don't you get another one?*. We do not know if the questions were answered by the young girl but we can see that the negative interrogative clearly invites the co-speaker to accomplish an activity, as it happens *get another one* [*form*]. Again, logic seems to condition the use of the negative interrogative. As spectators (listeners or readers of this conversation), just as her co-speakers did, we infer that Sharon was possibly thinking:

- Annalisa's parents have no money, <u>so</u> they need these free meals. It is in their interest to fill in the form.

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14 We have not referred to this conversation yet, as it only has open questions.

- Annalisa hasn't brought the form yet, <u>so</u> her parents must have lost it.
- <u>If</u> they have lost the form, *she could get another one.*

Reconstituting the train of thoughts above with the help of native speakers, I have underlined the markers of logic that spontaneously appeared through the reconstitution, linking the ideas from the very first step of the process (Annalisa's parents have no money) to the final predicate of the negative interrogative *get another one [form]*. The reformulation used above could be used here too: *it would be nice/helpful if you could get another form.* The accumulation of questions shows how annoyed the speaker is, as she knows this poor family could get help but does not make the most to benefit from it. So these first two examples show some similarities, despite the different linguistic environments in which they occur.

(16)

318.12 319.12	BRAD:	[(H) Can we] talk I- --
319.12 319.52		uh=,
319.52 320.62		.. I bet !Pat's @gonna --
320.62 322.57		she's gonna start walking back to the office.
322.57 322.99	PHIL:	[Yeah.
322.90 324.25	BRAD:	[(H) I dropped her at the bookkeeper].
323.35 325.01	PHIL:	**.. W- .. w- .. why don't you] call me,**
325.01 326.31		**at least a little bit later [2maybe,**
325.96 326.42	BRAD:	[2Yeah2].
326.31 326.92	PHIL:	and2] we can [3<X go X> do that3].
326.61 327.31	BRAD:	[3Can I3] do that,
327.31 328.01		(H) Cause I --
328.06 328.56		.. she'll be --
328.56 330.28	PHIL:	[(Hx) !Ji- .. !Jim and I are gonna] have lunch,
328.56 328.82	BRAD:	[Uh --
328.82 329.87		.. I don't want to get her uh] --
330.28 331.22	PHIL:	I don't know if you have plans or not.

(SBC010, Letter of Concerns)

The conversation above is a business conversation recorded in New Mexico. Brad and Phil are board members of a local arts society. Phil wants to talk business, while Brad keeps trying to leave to pick up his wife, who is waiting for him at a bookstore.

The two men are close enough to share some activities (arts), however, "they talk business" as is mentioned in the description given on the website. So, this context is different from the previous ones where friends or family members were discussing non-business related matters.

Brad would like to leave to be able to pick up his wife on time, so he wants to shorten the conversation with Phil and put off any issue that is not particularly pressing. The negative interrogative he uses is *Why don't you call me at least a little bit later maybe*, which is answered by Phil, *Yeah*. Again, this is an invitation to accomplish an activity, namely *call somebody later*. The paraphrase used above seems to work too: *It would be nice if you could call me back later.* In a similar fashion to the previous examples, logic seems to be mother to the thoughts expressed by the negative interrogative. The reconstituted train of thought could be:

- Brad has no time: his wife is waiting for him
- With this in mind, he shouldn't waste time chatting with Phil about a matter which is not

urgent.

- He would rather talk to him later on the phone.

All these examples share some similarities: despite the different contexts, we can see that all the speakers want something to happen in the context they are in. To make the link with the previous section about closed questions, it is not really a point of view which is expressed here but rather a wish, as the reformulation *it would be nice if you could…* is operational for all three open questions. All of the reformulations that I have proposed use modal auxiliaries as operators, which suggests that the negative interrogatives examined express the speaker's point of view about the predicative relation.

(17)

739.44 740.30	ANGELA:	[2(H)2] will um,
740.30 741.93		… (TSK) make a mile.
742.03 744.50		… And then there's a=,
744.50 747.61		.. soft drink place up there that they all congregate.
747.61 747.95	SAM:	Oh.
747.95 748.34		@@
748.34 748.91	ANGELA:	And uh,
748.91 750.32	DORIS:	**… Why don't you join em.**
750.32 751.95	ANGELA:	… and they have pi=ns,
751.95 754.16		when they (H) cover fifty miles,
754.16 755.05		or whatever [you know,
754.88 755.17	DORIS:	[Yeah],

(SBC011, This Retirement Bit)

This is a conversation between three friends before they have lunch. It was recorded in Tucson, Arizona. All three participants are retired women: Samantha (Sam) is 72, Doris is 83, and Angela is 90. The atmosphere is very friendly as the women exchange anecdotes about on their daily activities and give each other advice. The negative interrogative *Why don't you join em.* is asked by Doris to Sam. It is not answered as Angela continues explaining the organisation of the walking club. Like the previous examples, this is an invitation to accomplish the activity *join them*. The type of reformulation that I proposed above seems to fit here also: that is *It would be nice if you could join them*. It also fits the linguistic environment very well as all three women tend to give one another as much advice as possible. Modal auxiliaries naturally come up in the reformulation again.

    In light of the analyses of examples (11)-(14), negative interrogatives under the form of open questions seem to behave in the same way, whether on a syntactic (polarity of the predicate in the reformulation) or pragmatic (invitation to accomplish an activity) level. These forms create negative interrogatives using the bare form of a lexical verb *tell* in the question *Why not tell us where that is*, which is uttered by Doris in the same conversation:

(18)

791.77 794.60	DORIS:	.. (H) Instead of having to parade all around [6looking for it,
793.98 795.07	ANGELA:	[6@@@@@6]
794.60 795.36	DORIS:	.. they're6] around,
795.36 796.76		**why not tell us where [7that is7].**
796.26 796.73	ANGELA:	[7Well yeah7],
796.73 797.97		well [8they can explain,

(SBC011, This Retirement Bit)

The same analysis (reformulation with modality) could be put forward to the current example, *why not tell us where that is*, with the sole difference being that, in this type of question, which uses a non-finite form of the verb, there is no lexicalized syntactic subject explicitly mentioned. As such, it needs to be inferred from the surrounding linguistic context (e.g. for the current example this would be *It would be nice if they could tell us where that is*), whereas it was explicit in the previous occurrences. We account for the fact that the presence of the syntactic subject is required in some examples by the need to avoid ambiguity: when no subject is explicitly mentioned, then the co-speaker could misinterpret who the subject of the predicate is.

As far as open questions introduced by *why* are concerned, the French language operates slightly differently since the interrogative adverb is more frequently followed by the infinitive form of the verb <*Pourquoi ne pas* + V> as in *Pourquoi ne pas dépenser l'argent dans des approches durables pour résoudre ce genre de problèmes?*[15] even though the finite form can be seen in *Pourquoi ne fais-tu pas cela comme ça?* or the less formal, spoken French *Pourquoi tu ne fais pas cela comme ça?* without the subject-verb inversion.

Finally, no relevant occurrences inflected in the past tense have been identified, so no comparison is possible between occurrences of the two tenses. The few examples I came across were not exploitable as the sentences were all aborted before mentioning the predicate, which therefore placed too great a constraint on any potential analysis.

5. Conclusion

The overall aim of this paper was not only to test several linguists' proposals about negative interrogatives in the light of the *SBC* but also provide new evidence and support for the claim that negative interrogatives do not complete information-seeking tasks. Thus they cannot be considered inquiries. Instead, we regard them as argumentative utterances.

In analysing the negative interrogatives in the form of closed or *yes-no* questions, we noted that they enabled the speaker to express:

- their point of view (1, 2, 4, 5). The latter was explicit in the assertions preceding the tag questions in (11)-(13). All the adjectives used with *be* were subjective adjectives, resulting from an operation of judgment.
- their wish (3)
- or their surprise (8)-(10) in keeping with the contrast between the speaker's expectations and the "state of affairs". Negative interrogatives can thus contribute to checking the validity of a surprising fact.

It was always important to consider the interpersonal relationship between the speakers. As such, the occurrences (14-18) in the form of open questions showed how negative interrogatives were directives, or invitations to some activity or other. The negative interrogative is more subtle than an imperative, which comes across as more aggressive. Hence, propositions encoded as negative interrogatives may be used to induce acceptance of the speaker's wish by their interlocutor. The reformulations spontaneously given by native speakers contained modal auxiliaries, which gives deeper support to our proposal that these questions express a speaker's point of view.

Discourse analysis tells us that the contexts in which negative interrogatives occur are all collaboratively constructed between speaker and co-speaker (Lauerbach 2007), since the speakers express their point of view which *de facto* triggers their co-speakers' point of view also. The latter have to work out the implicit items that are necessary to understand the full scope of the message. This corresponds to the "train of thoughts" which we reconstituted. Keeping in mind this

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15 "Why not spend the money on sustainable ways to solve this kind of problems?" (my translation).

background, we realise that negative interrogatives are highly relevant linguistic tools (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) which not only necessitate consideration of the surrounding linguistic context (i.e. previous utterances), but also extra-linguistic variables referred to in this study as the expectations of the co-speakers and, in more general terms, of a given linguistic community (e.g. its uses and habits). We argue that such pragmatic considerations constitute the key element behind the use of negative interrogatives. The need to reactivate implicit items from context underscores the role of the co-speaker in the process of discourse construction.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1994) has claimed that messages are co-constructed mainly referring to the cooperation principle, referring to Descombes' (1981) "L'obligation qu'énonce le principe de coopération n'est autre que le lien social de la parole".[16] Douay (2000: 36) has gone as far as saying that the co-speaker is a co-author: "L'interlocuteur n'est plus seulement celui à qui s'adresse la parole, il est le coauteur de la parole, celui sans qui la parole ne signifierait rien".[17] I cannot agree more with both of them. I wish to conclude with a passage from Douay's translation of Sir. A. H. Gardiner's *Theory of Speech and Language* (1932): "Aucun emploi de la langue, quel qu'il soit, n'est affranchi des entraves de l'interprétation [et] l'interprétation nécessite un interprète qui est l''auditeur' de la théorie linguistique"[18] (1989: 105-106).

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16 "The obligation that the cooperation principle implies is nothing but the social link that speech entails" (my translation).

17 "The interlocutor is no longer the one who is spoken to, he/she is the co-author of the speech act, the one without whom speaking would mean nothing" (my translation).

18 Sir A. H. Gardiner's (1932: 113-114) original text reads as follows: "Deeper thought will show that no use of language whatsoever is emancipated from the shackles of interpretation, that interpretation demands an interpreter who is the 'listener' of linguistic theory."

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