The Discursive Functions of *Zar*-Questions in Macedonian and Serbian

Eleni Bužarovska
Ss Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, North Macedonia

Liljana Mitkovska
FON University Skopje, North Macedonia

Abstract This paper explores polar questions introduced by the particle *zar* in standard Macedonian and Serbian. The pragmatic-discourse properties of *zar*-questions, despite being a distinct type, remain understudied. The paper aims to establish the functional distribution and the pragmatic properties of these questions by analyzing examples from literary prose. The identified three discourse types exhibit striking similarity in both languages, which suggests a convergent functional development of *zar*. It also shows that *zar* functions as a modal operator of assertiveness rather than a typical interrogative particle.

Keywords Biased questions. Rhetorical questions. Assertiveness. Particle. Language contact.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 *Zar* in the Literature . – 3 Theoretical Observations. – 4 research Procedure. – 5 Results of the Analysis. – 5.1 Rhetorical Questions. – 5.2 Assertive Questions. – 5.3. Biased *Zar*-Questions. – 5.4. *Zar* in Marginal Functions. – 6 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

This paper presents the findings of our investigation of questions headed by *zar* in Serbian and *zar* or *zarem* in Macedonian referred to as *zar*-questions.[1] Since both Macedonian variants are functionally identical in all contexts they are subsumed under the same label. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the use of *zar* in affirmative and negated sentences, respectively.

(1)   a. Zar vekje pristigna vozot? (M)[2]
        b. Zar je već stigao voz? (S)
        'Has the train really arrived?'

(2)   a. Zar ušte ne pristigna vozot? (M)
        b. Zar još nije stigao voz? (S)
        'Hasn't the train arrived yet?'

Zar is defined in Serbian and Macedonian grammars as an interrogative particle implying an opposite polarity in yes/no or polar questions (Minova-Gjurkova 1994, 15; Piper et al. 2022, 228). Polar questions seek to affirm or negate the truth of the proposition they encode as in (3). This type of question is characterized by a rising intonation and may include interrogative particles such as the initial *dali* (M) / *da li* (S) or the enclitic focus particle *li*.

(3)   a. Pristigna (li) vozot? (M)
        b. Je li voz stigao? (S)
        'Has the train arrived?'

The presence of bias is also detected in affirmative polar questions with emphatic intonation as in *Vozot **pristigna**?!* 'The train has **arrived**?!'. In such questions the "emphatic intonation alone produces negative bias" (Reese 2007, 131), rendering it synonymous with its affirmative *zar*-version (1). Both questions express doubt regarding the train's arrival.

Consdering the above properties of *zar*-questions, we argue that they constitute a distinct type of *yes/no*-question, classified in Serbian grammars as "leading" (*navodeća*) because they "suggest what response is expected" (Piper et al. 2022, 500). These authors note

---

[1]   Sentence-final uses of *zar*: *Kje odime site, zar ne*? (M) *Svi ćemo ići, zar ne*? (S) 'We are all going, aren't we?' are beyond the scope of the paper.

[2]   The parenthesis next to each example indicates the name of the language: (M) for Macedonian, (S) for Serbian.

that both negated and affirmative *zar*-questions "imply assertion of the opposite."

Drawing upon Topolinjska (2009), we define *zar*-questions as presuppositional or biased, as they presuppose either a negative or positive response. Our objectives include establishing the discourse functions of *zar*-questions in contemporary Serbian and Macedonian language and examining the factors influencing their distribution. The analysis aims to uncover the extent of convergent application of *zar* in both languages. To achieve these goals, we analysed over 400 examples of *zar*-questions extracted from contemporary Macedonian and Serbian prose literature.

We aim to demonstrate that *zar* in biased polar questions serves modal and expressive functions. The former arises from the conflict between the speaker's prior belief and contextual evidence. *Zar* alters the proposition's polarity: in affirmative *zar*-questions, the speaker believes the proposition p is not true, while in negated versions, the speaker believes that p is true. For instance, in (1), the speaker assumes the proposition encoded in the non-negated *zar*-question is untrue despite evidence to the contrary (e.g., the train sitting on the platform long before the departure time). The speaker anticipates a negative response as they still believe the train has not arrived.

Considering the semantic-pragmatic contribution of *zar* to polar questions, we argue that *zar* is more than a mere interrogative particle. Beyond its modal nature, it carries affective overtones contributing to the functional diversity of biased polar questions in discourse. Thus, the emotionally charged *zar*-question in (4) indends to criticize the addressee.

(4) Zar ne ti e sram? (M)
    Zar te nije sramota? (S)
    'Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

The paper is organized in six sections: the next two sections offer a brief overview of the treatment of *zar* in the literature and the theoretical prerequisites employed in the research. This is followed by a description of the research procedure. The fifth section presents and discusses the results of the analysis. Finally, a brief overview of the conclusions is provided.

2   *Zar* in the literature

As previously mentioned, *zar* is considered an interrogative particle expressing negative expectation, surprise (Piper et.al 2022, 228), disbelief, and emphasis (Minova-Gjurkova 1994, 152). Vlajić-Popović (2016) argues that the definitions of *zar* listed in Serbian dictionaries

over the last three centuries can be classified in two main functions: interrogative-exclamative and modal (when *zar* has no fixed sentence position). Macedonian dictionaries attribute similar properties to *zar/ em* but also note its dialectal function as a causal subordinator ("conjunction"), meaning 'because.'

On the syntactic plane, *zar* exhibits limited mobility; it typically occupies the initial position before a focused sentence element and bears the sentence stress. For example: *Zar **utre** kje odiš so nego*? or *Zar **so nego** kje odiš utre*? (M) 'Are you going with him tomorrow?' Moreover, *zar* can be used in an elliptical question containing only the focused element, as in *Zar so **nego**?* 'With **him**?' or *Zar **utre**?* 'Tomorrow?' (Minova-Gjurkova 1994,152).

Zar is a Turkish loan from *zahir* that has two meanings depending on its syntactic position: 'obviously', 'apparently' in the initial and 'probably' in the final-sentence position (Vlajić-Popović 2016, 73). It is interesting that the original *zahir* was not used in interrogative function which was developed in the recipient Balkan Slavic languages.[3]

Vlajić-Popović (2016, 75-6) argues that the particle was borrowed into BCMS languages in the 17th century and underwent simplifying pholonologal changes (*zaher > zajer > zaer > zar*) whose final product was *zar* in 18th century texts. This reanalysis was accompanied by the syntactic movement of *zar* from final, through middle to initial sentence position. The author documents these changes with examples from Serbian works from 19th century. *Zar* started out as an epistemic adverb in the final position with the meaning of 'probably', but in the middle position it could be interpreted both as 'probably' and 'certainly' (*Ti si moja žena, tako je zar Bog osudio* 'You are my wife, that is obviously how the Lord decided).[4] The syntactic mobility of *valjda*, with which it was synonymous, might have prompted the movement of *zar* to the initial position (*Zar valjda da smo svi jednaki* 'Probably/obviously we are all the same').[5] Subsequently, under the pressure of intonation, it acquired the function of an interrogative-exclamative particle (*Zar ima dva sata kako sme došli*? 'Has it been really two hours since we came?').[6]

However, some Bulgarian sources cited in Vlajić-Popović (2016) suggest the Turkish *zira* (dialectal *zere*) 'because, since' may have been a possible source. Although Vlajić-Popović has not found mention of a causative use of *zar* in Serbian dictionaries, she provides an example where *zar* may be interpreted as an "elliptical" *pošto* 'because': *Zar [pošto su] izgrdili me i nagrdili a ti mene da se stišam.*

---

3 Its use is becoming obsolete in modern Turkish.

4 Vlajić-Popović (2016, 76)

5 Vlajić-Popović 2016, 77)

6 Vlajić-Popović (2016, 79)

'Since they scolded and offended me, but you are telling me to calm down.'[7]

On the other hand, Friedman and Joseph (forthcoming) note that *zar* in dialectal Bulgarian comes from Turkish *zira* in the meaning 'yes, right'. It seems that *zar* has subsumed the meanings of the loans *zira* and *zahir*, but the routes of their development remain unclear. Vlajić-Popović (2016, 80) offers another hypothesis about the origin of *zar* based on hybridization: the Turkish *zahir* merged with the older Slavic interrogative particle **zaž(e)* on the Štokavian dialectal territory in seventeenth century.

Unfortunately, the absence of historical data on the development of *zar* in Macedonian prevents us from drawing definitive conclusions. It is documented that certain dialects utilized a causative *zer*, similarly to the dialectal Bulgarian *zer*. For instance, in Vojdan Černodrinski's play, published in 1900, the final *zer* functions as an affirmative particle, conveying the meaning of 'certainly' (*Kje barame, zer! Vigjame oti vo ovaa odaja e nemat*. 'We'll certainly look for her! We saw that she is not in this room'), whereas the initial *zer* creates causal and contrastive implicatures similarly to 'otherwise' (*Da miete arno toj tiganot, zere žimi vera, koskite kje vi kršam*. 'Clean the pan well, or/because really swear to God, I'll break your bones'). In the same period, in folk stories by Marko Cepenkov, *zer* exhibits ambiguity, encompassing modal, causative, and expressive interpretations. It is reasonable to assume that this semantic complexity facilitated its grammaticalization into an epistemic particle.

From a typological perspective, only a few Slavic languages seem to possess a specialized lexical unit with functions similar to *zar*. *Zar* is common in all Balkan Slavic languages (BCMS) except for Bulgarian where *nima* is used (Tisheva 2018).[8] The nearest functional equivalents of *zar* in other Slavic languages are the Russian *razve* and *neuželi* (Levontina 2014), or polysemous particles such as *copak* in Czech, *czyz/chyba* in Polish, and *hiba* in Ukrainian. It is claimed *zar*, a conversationally-rooted Turkism, can be regarded as an ERIC loan[9] with a potential status of a Balkanism (Vlajić-Popović 2016). These loans represent discourse-related language elements that were borrowed in regular face-to-face interactions in intense and sustained language contact in the Balkans (Friedman, Joseph forthcoming).

---

[7] Vlajić-Popović (2016, 80)

[8] In some Bulgarian dialects *zer* is also used.

[9] ERIC abberviation stands for Essentially Rooted In Conversation (Friedman, Joseph forthcoming).

3   Theoretical Observations

Zar-questions, like other biased questions, exhibit a high level of context dependence, relying on the presence of common ground among interlocutors. As defined by Goodhue (2018, 43), common ground refers to shared information accepted as true by all participants in a conversation. Common ground encompasses two forms of knowledge: general, encyclopedic knowledge about the world and interpersonal knowledge that the speaker possesses about the interlocutor and the situational context (Berio et al. 2017).

It is crucial for the understanding of *zar*-questions to recognize that they, like other biased questions, possess a binary semantic structure comprising assertive and inquisitive components (Reese 2007, 79). Bias arises from the epistemic conflict: the speaker holds a prior belief that *p*, expecting a positive response to the *zar*-question, but is confronted with contextual evidence contradicting the truth of *p* (Büring, Gunlogson 2000; Goodhue 2018).

The conflict is more pronounced when the speaker is reluctant to accept evidence challenging their initial belief. Used in dialogic discourse, *zar*-questions typically respond to the preceding statement or current situation that diverges from the speaker's expectations.[10] Therefore, they typically occur in contradiction contexts (Büring, Gunlogson 2000; Romero, Han 2004). This was confirmed in our research on Macedonian translational equivalents of English biased high negation questions (Mitkovska, Bužarovska 2024) and in Todorović's presentation (2022) on Serbian *zar*-questions.[11]

Due to a binary semantic structure, *zar*-questions, similarly to other biased questions, operate as disguised assertions (Reese 2007, 8), or equivalently function as assertions with an opposite polarity. Such questions lack informativeness as the implied answer is evident and known to the interlocutors (Rhode 2006, 135), forming part of their shared knowledge. However, it's crucial to note that not all *zar*-questions are rhetorical. When the inquisitive component prevails over the assertive, we obtain a biased polar question. For instance, the question *Zar ne e toplo*? 'Isn't it warm?' (M) necessitates a response, preferably positive.

Building upon the theoretical insights outlined above, we propose the following hypotheses:

---

10   For example, the question (1) *Zar vekje pristigna vozot*? (M) 'Has the train already arrived?' is only felicitous if the speaker previously thought that the train had not arrived but learns of the train's arrival. The *zar*-question signals that the speaker has become aware that their belief does not correspond to the new reality.

11   The author claims that negated *zar*-questions are most felicitous in situations of strong situational counterevidence, while affirmative *zar*-questions usually occur in neutral situational contexts.

a. *Zar*-questions do not constitute a uniform discourse type because their illocutionary force remains ambiguous between a question and an assertion. The degree of assertiveness regarding the truth of the proposition emphasizes either the assertive or inquisitive element in their binary semantic structure. Consequently, we expect a scalar distribution of *zar*-questions ranging between assertions and questions.

b. Given the close language contacts between Serbian and Macedonian, we expect to identify similar discourse types of *zar*-questions in the two examined languages.

4 Research Procedure

To determine the functional distribution of *zar*-questions in the standard language, we analyzed over 400 examples extracted from 15 Macedonian and 8 Serbian literary works (novels and plays) spanning the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. The examples were fed into two databases: Macedonian 207 and Serbian 210 *zar*-questions. The following works were examined: *Kaleš Angja*, S. Popov (SP); *Lozje*, B. Koneski (BK); *Selected works*, V. Maleski (VM); *Headstrong*, S. Janevski (SJ), *A Branch in the Wind*, K. Čašule (KČ); *The White Plain*, S. Drakul (SD); *Weed*, P. Andreevski (PA), *The Salonika Bombers*, J. Boškovski (JB); *Fools*, M. Jovanovski (MJ), and several works by younger authors: R. Bužarovska (RB), K. Maleska (KM) and B. Crvenkovska (BC). Serbian examples were found in: *Koštana*, B. Stanković (BS); *Autobiography,* B. Nušić (BN); *The Bridge on the Drina*, I. Andrić (IA); *A Novel about London,* M. Crnianski (MC); *Barking at the Stars*, M. Vitezović (MV); *Rabies*, B. Pekić, (BP); *Monkey Writing*, S. Basara (SB) and the stories from the *Anthology of Serbian Short Story* (SA) written after the second decade of the 20th century. The disparity between the number of pages in the examined works and the number of extracted *zar*-questions indicates their infrequent use in the written language. In fact, they are a feature of oral communication, as confirmed by their greater prevalence in works containing dialogues.[12]

Each example was analyzed using various parameters, including the communicative goal of the question within a broader context, assertiveness, the illocutionary function of the question, and affective meaning. The examples in each database were categorized into three groups: rhetorical questions, assertive questions, and biased *zar*-questions. The final stage of the analysis involved comparing the distribution of *zar*-questions in the two languages. The three discourse types of *zar*-questions are defined as follows:

---

[12] The choice of *zarem* or *zar* in Macedonian seems to depend on the preferences of the author. Some authors use both forms interchangeably.

a. Rhetorical Questions (RQs): These involve indirect assertions expressing the speaker's confidence in the truth of a previous belief. Conflicting evidence is emphatically rejected.

b. Assertive Questions (AQs): These are also indirect assertions lacking affective meaning and, in some cases, lack interrogative intonation.

c. Biased Questions (BQs): These are biased polar questions that seek confirmation of the speaker's doubt regarding the truth of their previous belief.

We acknowledge some methodological limitations in this research which are first due to the absence of a corpus of oral speech, so the analysis was based on examples from literary works. Second, certain subjectivity in distinguishing between rhetorical questions and assertive questions may not have been entirely avoided as their interpretation depends on a wider context and tone.

5 Results of the Analysis

Table 1 presents the quantified results of the distribution of the *zar*-question in our sample.

Table 1 Frequency of occurrence of zar-question types in the sample

Type of *zar*-question	SERBIAN ZAR	Nr 210	MACEDONIAN ZAR/EM	Nr 207
	N	%	N	%
Rhetorical (RQ)	84	40	101	49
Assertive (AQ)	49	23	61	29
Biased (BQ)	77	37	45	22
Total	210	100	207	100

Results reveal that RQs dominate in both samples, but they are more numerous in Macedonian (40% in Serbian vs. 49% in Macedonian). The other two types also manifest variable distribution: AQs are more frequent in Macedonian (29%) than in Serbian (23%), but BQs prevail in Serbian (37%) in contrast to Macedonian (22%). However, these results should be considered as indicators of tendencies in the distribution of *zar*-questions, as the investigation relied on examples from selected literary works. Moreover, the frequency and the discourse function of *zar*-questions in these works depend whether the author's style is conversational and whether the narrative develops through dialogic discourse. It is important to note that we have identified three discourse types in both languages with a similar distribution (except for the ratio of AQs and BQs in each language). Importantly, not all *zar*-questions neatly fit into the defined three discourse

types; the boundaries between them are fuzzy, especially between the two types of indirect assertions: RQs and AQs. Intermediate uses were detected in both samples, particularly in monologues.

5.1 Rhetorical Questions

The prevalence of rhetorical questions in the sample, considerably outnumbering other question types, underscores their versatility and communicative effectiveness. These *zar*-questions serve as rhetorical devices that challenge the addressee's preceding contribution by conveying criticism, rebuke, reproach, indignation, or disapproval. No response to rhetorical question is expected, as they typically aim to persuade the addressee to reconsider their beliefs or behavior (Frank 1990, 726), often employing semantically incompatible lexicon and stylistic expressivity. However, it has been argued (e.g., Rhode 2006, 142) that rhetorical questions do not generate surprise due to the obviousness of the answer. This observation was confirmed in our research, where surprise effects were mostly characteristic of biased *zar*-questions.

In pragmatic theories grounded in the concept of 'face,' rhetorical questions are considered mitigating devices in face-threatening speech acts (Brown, Levinson 1978, 228-230). The speaker opts for an interrogative form to soften an offensive statement (cf. Celle 2018). Some authors, however, argue that a rhetorical question reinforces the assertion, thereby moderating criticism (Frank 1990, 738). Its interrogative form "masks" the directness of the assertion while simultaneously making it more convincing and expressive (Frank 1990, 727).

To examine the illocutionary function of the rhetorical questions in the sample, we applied Špago's classification (Špago 2020), distinguishing three subtypes: aggressive, ironic, and neutral. The first two types are considered hostile speech acts. The most numerous in the sample are aggressive rhetorical questions, expressing emphatic non-acceptance of a new situation (e.g., addressee's behavior) because it contradicts the views and/or moral norms of the speaker. Such emotionally charged verbal attacks on the addressee are found in various speech acts: reproach, insult, criticism, disapproval, objection. They may contain strong language to express anger and irritation (5). The rhetorical questions below possess a great deal of aggression, often marked with an exclamation mark (6).

(5) Čakali nenasitni, zarem ne vi beše dosta? (M, DS)[13]
 'You greedy hyenas, didn't you have enough?'

---

[13] The first letter in the parenthesis indicates the language of the example, while the other two represent the initials of the source writer. Although all the examples

(6) Zar ga ne poznaeš, budalo! (S, DM)
     'Don't you recognize him, stupid!'

The speaker's indignation typically arises from dissatisfaction with the interlocutor's behavior (7-8). The majority of these *zar*-questions occur in speech acts expressing reproach and criticism.

(7) Zarem i od nas kje prodolžiš da kradeš? (M, SD)
     'Will you continue to steal from us?'

(8) Zar se tako ponašaju šampioni? (S, MV)
     'Is this behavior fit for a champion?'

Criticism can also be directed at a third person not participating in the conversation.

(9) Zar ne gleda deka doagjaat po nas? (M, BC)
     'Doesn't he see that they are coming after us?'

Certain rhetorical questions seek to exert influence by appealing to the addressee's comprehension of the speaker's position. Despite containing disapproval, these questions are not intended as offensive speech acts.

(10) Zarem ne go sfakjaš toa? (M, DS)
      'Don't you realize that?'

(11) Isuse Hriste, Andrea, zar ne razumeš? (S, BP)
      'Jesus Christ, Andrea, don't you understand?'

Rhetorical questions conveying irony or sarcasm are relatively scarce in the sample. Characterized as stylistic strategies expressing the opposite of what is explicitly stated, they are distinguishable in terms of communicative intent: sarcasm involves mockery and insult (Bowes, Katz 2011, 216). Various forms of sarcasm are linked to the ways in which the contrast between literal and implied meanings is presented (Celle 2018). Sarcasm is frequently associated with the use of offensive expressions and hyperbole (12, 13), which exaggerate the actual situation and thereby intensify the contrast.

---

are extracted within a broader context, we provide only the *zar*-question due to space limitations.

(12) Zarem tvojot semokjen razum ne e vo sostojba da ja objasni taa prosta zagat-
ka? (M, DS)
'Can't your powerful intellect explain that simple riddle?'

(13) Zar što ja govorim, to pas laje i vetar nosi? A? (S, BS)
'Is everything I say is like barking carried by the wind?'

Neutral rhetorical questions often occur in monologic discourse,
where the speaker communicates a sense of non-acceptance or res-
ervation towards the emerging situation.

(14) Zar nikogaš nema da si poveruvam samiot sebesi? (M, KČ)
'Will I never believe myself?'

(15) A zar ja ne beh mlad? (S, BS)
'Wasn't I young too?'

A series of neutral rhetorical questions was identified within mon-
ologic sequences, primarily intended for self-criticism. In the ini-
tial monologue (16), the speaker refuses to accept the somber re-
ality following an earthquake, contemplating whether they should
have shared the fate of others. In the rhetorical questions of the sub-
sequent monologue (17), the speaker reproaches themselves for the
anticipated future fate of a beloved person.

(16) Zar navistina sum živ? Zar navistina sega sum sam? Zar treba da bidam ziv sve-
dok na sudbinata na edno golemo semejstvo? (M, BI)
'Am I really alive? Am I really alone now? Should I be a living witness to the fate
of a large family?'

(17) Gde su oni? Kud idu, — kud vodi tu ženu? Zar će, odevena u tralje, hodati po Lon-
donu? Zar će samo svoju lešinu da joj pokaže, da bi se i ona ubila? (S, MC)
'Where are they? Where are they going, — where is he leading this woman? Will
she walk around London dressed in rags? Is he just going to show her his corpse
so that she'll kill herself too?'

5.2   Assertive questions

In Macedonian, AQs are more prevalent (29%) than in Serbian (23%),
potentially influenced by the narrative style of certain authors. It is
noteworthy that distinguishing AQs from RQs is challenging since
both involve indirect assertions.
Almost all Macedonian and some Serbian examples categorized
in this group lack emphasis and marked intonation, as evidenced by
the absence of a question mark. Furthermore, the implied answer

is often more imposed by the speaker than evident to both interlocutors (Špago 2020, 70). The distinction from the previous class becomes apparent when comparing two questions with similar content: a rhetorical question (18) and an indirect assertion (19). They appear to differ in the strength of the epistemic conflict, which is more pronounced in the former due to its interrogative intonation.

(18) Zarem nema kraj na ovie raspnuvanja? (M, VM)
       'Is there no end to these torments?'

(19) Zar ima kraj na ova umiranje. (M, GA)
       'Is there an end to this dying?'

In contrast to RQs, AQs do not aim to manipulate the speaker's behavior, even when expressing disagreement and disapproval (20, 21). The speaker presents a counterargument without strongly imposing on the addressee. The lack of interrogative intonation in such *zar*-questions suggests that the inquisitive component is minimized, resulting in increased assertiveness. On the other hand, some instances are characterized by emphatic intonation (marked with an exclamation mark), which aligns them more closely with rhetorical questions.

(20) Zar so tie gnasi da se sfatime! Nikako! (M, JS)
       'Should we become family with these lowlifes? Never!'

(21) Zar ja ne znajem šta ide! (S, BS)
       'Don't I know what is coming?'

In non-contradiction contexts, *zar*-questions function as an appeal for the addressee to share speaker's belief. A positive response is expected, as the truth of the proposition is not up for debate. In Macedonian, *neli*-questions are often employed in such contexts, particularly when expressing admiration (22). In more neutral settings, a *zar*-question appears to support the speaker's preceding contribution without necessarily seeking the interlocutor's agreement (23).

(22) Zar to nije lepo? (S, MC)[14]
       'Isn't it nice?'

(23) Doveli hiljade Poljaka, pa zar to nije prevara? (S, MC)
       'They have brought thousands of Poles, isn't it a scam?'

---

14 The Macedonian translation equivalent is *Neli e ubavo?*

Confidence in the truth of the proposition is prominent in the following examples, where the speaker presents a counterargument against a potential change (24) or issues sharp criticism directed at the interlocutor's activities (25).

(24) Zar na starost da se mažam, imam sinovi, kjerki, vnuci. (M, JS)
'Oh, do you really think that should I get married in my old age: I have sons, daughters, grandchildren.'

(25) Zar vam nije naređeno da dućane držite otvorene! (S, IA)
'Weren't you ordered to keep your shops open!'

The high assertiveness level of assertive questions (AQs) makes them effective in reinforcing the speaker's preceding claim. In such uses *zar* carries a causal inference.

(26) Kje najdete i drugi, zar malku kučinja ima niz selovo. (M, PA)
'You will find others... there are many dogs in this village, aren't there.'

(27) Neću dozvoliti da o nama snime film. Zar da nas prikaziju po dvoranama u kojima se druge ljube? (S, MV)
'I won't let a film made about us. They would certainly show us in theaters where others kiss.'

In some *zar*-questions, *zar* seems to function as a discourse particle that strengthens the force of the assertion. If the question's polarity changes, *zar* can be replaced by the intensifying particle *pa* 'well'. Of course, each variant preserves its subtle pragmatic differences.

(28) Zar drugite imaat poinakvo detstvo. (M, BI)
'Others don't have a different childhood, do they.'

(29) Oh, dušo moja, zar je meni u ovome trenutku do šnicle. (S, BN)
'My dear, I am not in the mood for steak right now, am I.'

Some assertive questions employed for persuasion closely resemble rhetorical questions. In (30), the speaker consoles a mother grappling with the tragic loss of her child through a series of *zar*-questions.

(30) Nemoj mori Veliko… zar i ti treba da se otepaš, zar sakaš siraci da gi ostaviš, … zar ušte eden grob sakaš da ovoriš. (M, PA)
'Don't Velika, dear, … do you want to die, do you want to leave them orphans…, do you want to open another grave.'

5.3 Biased *Zar*-Questions

Biased *zar*-questions are distinguished from the previous two discourse types by the prevalence of the inquisitive component in their semantic structure. Faced with new contextual evidence, the speaker begins to doubt the truth of their previous belief and requires a response from the addressee (positive or negative) to confirm their initial presupposition. The new reality, such as the interlocutor's unexpected appearance (31), the absence of the expected object (32), surprising information (33), is not vehemently rejected. These questions often convey disbelief and bewilderment as speaker expectations are not met.

(31) – Gligore, zar toa si ti? - izvikna Arso. – Oho, brat moj! (M, GA)
      '– Gligor, is that really you? - Arso shouted. – Yea, my brother!'

(32) – Zarem Gjero ne ti donese kafe od pečalba? – Ne. (M, JS)
      '– Didn't Gero bring you some coffee from abroad? – No.'

(33) – Zar si došao samo zbog toga? – Morao sam, jedino ti možeš da shvatiš… (S, AS)
      '– Did you really come just for that? – I had to, only you can understand…'

The inquisitive nature of these questions is underscored by the presence of doubt. In certain *zar*-questions, this doubt is lexically manifested by the epistemic adverb 'possibly.'

(34) Zar e možno da se vljubil? (M, BC)
      'Is it possible that he fell in love?'

(35) Zar nije možda imao i neki drugi uzrok? Na primer, žalost za otadžbinom. (S, MC)
      'Couldn't he have had some other reason? For example, yearning for the motherland.'

In cases where the answer is apparent, some AQs expressing surprise may serve as veiled criticism or encouragement.

(36) Zar i ti pcueš? (M, BI)
      'Do you swear too?'

(37) Zar se nećeš javiti? (S, BP)
      'Aren't you going to answer?'

Surprise is expressed in a few examples that resemble emphatic rhetorical questions. They were categorized as BQs since they prompt (and receive) a response.

(38) – Zarem kje umreme za voda?… – Nikoj ne misli na toa… (M, SJ)
'Will we die for water? – Nobody thinks about that…'

(39) – A zar i ti patiš, pobogu, Ananije? – Patim. (S, AS)
'Do you, for Christ's sake, suffer too, Ananie? – Yes, I do.'

Some examples exhibit increased assertiveness, leaning towards an AQ interpretation.

(40) Pa, zar se nismo složili da ovde nema nikakve države? (S, SA)
'Haven't we agreed that here we do not have a real state?'

(41) Zar ti dosega navistina ne seti deka sum pijan? (M, KČ)
'Really, haven't you yet noticed that I am drunk?'

5.4 *Zar* in Marginal Functions

Besides the three identified types of *zar*-questions in both languages, we have encountered instances of *zar* in non-contradiction contexts in Serbian works from the first half of the 20th century, which were not included in the sample. In these particular examples *zar* serves as a discourse marker of assertiveness, isofunctinal with the Macedonian *neli*.[15]

(42) Otišla, bogami efendija, ima dva dana […] Zapazili, **zar**, gdje se vrzete oko kuce, a mnogo vas je, pa vele da sakrijemo djevojku. (S, SA)[16]
'She left, Efendi, two das ago… They noticed you, didn't they, while you were hanging around the house, and you were a big bunch, so they said let's hide the girl.'

The final non-interrogative *zar* has fallen out of use in Macedonian and Serbian. We found only one Serbian example (43) but several *zer* in Macedonian (44) in works written in the 20-ies of the last century. It can be best translated as 'really', a modal particle that strengthens the assertiveness of the preceding statement.

(43) U sredini crkvi sam, u sredini gladi sam, odlazi od mene, ostavi me, našto **zar**. (S, SA)[17]
'I am in the middle of the church, in the middle of hunger, leave me, really.'

(44) Ovoj čoek bre? – Ete, ovoj e, **zer**.[18]
'This man, hey? – 'Yes, that's him, really.'

---

15 See Mitkovska, Bužarovska (forthcoming) about *neli* as a discourse marker.

16 I. Andrić, *Đerzelez in Sarajevo* (1920).

17 R. Petrović, *The Impossible Ploughman* (1921).

18 V. Černodrinski. *Makedonska krvava svadba* (1928).

In sum, the previous discussion shows that *zar*-questions in Macedonian and Serbian are used in similar discourse functions. However, *zar* in Serbian has a wider distribution as it occurs in non-contradiction contexts to affirm something obvious (see 22), a function usually performed by *neli* in Macedonian.

6   Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that *zar*-questions in Macedonian and Serbian share nearly identical discourse-pragmatic functions. We have identified three discourse types of *zar*-questions: rhetorical, assertive, and biased. Biased questions exhibit a more inquisitive nature compared to the assertiveness of rhetorical and assertive questions. The nuanced pragmatic differences between these two types stem from the degree of epistemic conflict. The most widespread type, rhetorical, typically conveys emotionally charged denials or contradictions hence serving as effective persuasion strategies. These questions hinge on a srong epistemic conflict between the prior belief and the new situation. Emphasizing both facets of this conflict generates emphatic effects. Conversely, assertive questions foreground a non-emphatic commitment to the previous belief, leading to a lower degree of epistemic conflict reflected in lower affectivity. Both rhetorical and assertive *zar*-questions differ from their inquisitive counterparts characterized by a low degree of assertiveness. As expected, the three discourse types form a functional continuum based on the degree of assertiveness: biased questions border on assertive ones, which, in turn, transition into rhetorical questions. In some AQs, *zar* functions similarly to a pragmatic marker, reinforcing the veracity of the assertion.

The similar functional distribution of *zar*-questions in the two languages suggests a convergent evolution, likely influenced by language contact. In the first half of the 20th century, the Serbian *zar* and the dialectal Macedonian *zer* were not firmly established sentence-initially in interrogative use. However, in all the examined Macedonian works, *zar* (not *zer*) is consistently used. It is reasonable to assume that language contact may have driven the spread of *zar* at the expense of *zer*. While *zar* may have historically undergone distinct developments in the two languages, interlanguage contact appears to have molded it into an epistemic marker that challenges the truth of the proposition encoded in the question. This contact has resulted in a striking similarity in the functional distribution of *zar*-questions in the two languages.

References

Berio, L. et al. (2017). "Immediate and General Common Ground". Brézillon, P. ; Turner, P, ; Penco, C. (eds). *Modelling and Using Context,* Heidelberg: Springer, 633-46. DOI:10.1007/978–3–319–57837–8_51.

Brown, P.; Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bowes, A.; Katz, A. (2011). "When sarcasm stings". *Discourse Processes*, 48(4), 215-36. DOI:10.1080/0163853X.2010.532757.

Büring, D; Gunlogson, C. (2000). *Aren't Positive and Negative Polar Questions the same?* [Manuscript]. UCSC; UCLA. https://semanticsarchive.net/Archive/mYwOGNhO/polar_questions.pdf.

Celle, A. (2018). "Questions as indirect speech acts in surprise contexts". Ayoun, D.; Celle, A.; Lansari, L. (eds), *Tense, Aspect, Modality, Evidentiality, Crosslinguistic Perspectives*, 211-36. Amsterdam: Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.197.10cel.

Frank, J. (1990). "You call that a rhetorical question? Forms and functions of rhetorical questions in conversation". *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(5), 723-38. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378–2166(90)90003–V.

Friedman, V.A.; Joseph, B.D. (forthcoming). *The Balkan Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goodhue, D. (2018). *On Asking and Answering Biased Polar Questions*. [PhD Dissertation]. Montreal: McGill University.

Levontina, I. (2014). "Diskursivnye slova v voprositel'nyh predlozheniyah". *Die Welt der Slaven: Internationale Halbjahresschrift für Slavistik,* 59(2), 201-18. München: Sagner.

Minova-Gjurkova, L. (1994). *Sintaksa na maksedonskiot jazik*. Skopje: Rading.

Mitkovska, L.; Bužarovska, E. (2024). "Negated Biased Questions in English and Their Equivalents in Macedonian". Stopar, A.; Fabijanić, I. (eds), *Exploring English by Means of Contrast*. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana Press, 139-64. https://doi.org/10.4312/9789612972677.

Mitkovska, L.; Bužarovska E. (2024). "Neli ne e samo prašalen zbor, neli?". *Zbornik na trudovi od VIII megjunarodna naučna konferencija "Makedonskiot jazik – izvor na naučni istražuvanja"*. Skopje: Institutot za makedonski jazik "Krste Misirkov", 233-44.

Piper, P.; Klajn, I.; Dragićević, R. (2022). *Normativna gramatika srpskog jezika.* Beograd: Matica srpska.

Reese, B. (2007). *Bias in Questions*. [PhD Dissertation]. Austin: University of Texas.

Rhode, H. (2006). "Rhetorical Questions as Redundant Interrogatives". *San Diego Linguistics Papers,* 2, 134-68.

Romero, M.; Han, C-H. (2004). "On Negative Yes/No Questions". *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 27(5), 609-58. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:LING.0000033850.15705.94.

Špago, Dž. (2020). "Rhetorical Questions as Aggressive, Friendly or Sarcastic/ironical Questions with Imposed Answers". *Explorations in English Language and Linguistics*, 8(1), 68-82. https://doi.org/10.2478/exell–2020–0014.

Tisheva, Y. (2013). *Pragmaticnhni aspekti na usnata rech*. Sofija: Sofijski universitet "Kliment Ohridski."

Todorović, N. (2022). "What Are(n't) we Asking with a Negative) Polar Question in Serbian?" Talk at FASL 31, McMaster University, June 24, 2022. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361532590.

Topolinjska, Z. (2009). *Polski-makedosnki: gramatička konfrontacija. Negacija*. MANU: Skopje.

Vlajić-Popović, J. (2016). "Rečca zar – preko sintakse i semnatike do etimologije". *Južnoslovenski filolog*, LXXII(1–2), 65-83. https://doi.org/10.2298/JFI1602065V.