

## Communication through questions: A corpus-based study of questions posed by lecturers

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**Abstract.** Few previous studies have focused on the analysis of the use of questions in academic university lectures delivered in English. However, the issue of the forms and role of questions in Montenegrin lectures has received no research attention. The current study explores the forms and functions of questions posed by lecturers in Montenegrin academic lectures. The analysis is based on a specially created corpus of Montenegrin lectures in the field of linguistics and applies both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The questions most frequently found in these lectures have been classified into categories in terms of their function, followed by the detailed analysis of their most common formal realisations. The variation in frequency of the functional categories, as well as in their questioning forms, has been revealed. The findings provide new insights into certain types and role of questions.

**Keywords:** lectures; questions; questions posed by lecturers; corpus methodology.

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### 1. Introduction

In university settings, a lecture is defined as a category of prepared speeches (Savić, 1993, 47), a medium through which knowledge, facts and ideas in a subject discipline are conveyed to students. Not only is this type of a specialised communicative discourse concerned with transmission, but also it deals with the acquisition of knowledge on the part of students. It is seen as a “central ritual of the culture of learning” (Benson, 1994: 181), a significant academic genre often serving students the sole source of information (Flowerdew & Miller, 1996: 121). One of the ways in which information and facts are disseminated to students in lectures is through the use of questions.

Questions play a significant role in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge in a particular discipline. They “have always been an important interactional device used by teachers to activate and facilitate learning” (Cami-ciottoli, 2008: 1216). At all educational levels, questions are regarded as “key tools in communicative exchanges” (Sánchez García, 2010:16) “for engaging learners in instructional interactions, checking comprehension, and building understandings of complex concepts” (McCormick & Donato, 2000: 183). Taking into account that “all learning begins with questions” (Chuska, 1995: 7), and that questions play a crucial role in higher education as well, it seems necessary to explore questions in the lecture genre.

The research regarding questions in this academic genre to date mostly refers to the university lectures delivered in English, whereas such a topic has not yet been of interest to Montenegrin linguists. The former studies include those done by Thompson (1998), Bamford (2000, 2005a), Crawford Camiciottoli (2008), Schleaf (2009) and Chang (2012).

Thompson (1998) analysed the use of questions in a mixed corpus of scientific and linguistic lectures and presentations. She specifically investigated the content-oriented and audience-oriented questions British presenters and lecturers used to establish interaction. Bamford (2000, 2005a) examined the use of only one group of questions – question/answer sequences posed and answered by lecturers. She explored a corpus of eleven lectures given by Eng-

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lish native speakers in the subfield of economics. Crawford Camiciotoli (2008) analysed questions in lectures and written instructional materials, as well as how these two different communicative modes affected their use. However, she examined just three question forms – wh questions, yes/no questions and alternative questions. Schleef (2008) studied questions as a means of reflecting German and American style of lectures, among other linguistic resources he explored. Chang (2012) analysed questions in fifteen lectures taken from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), focusing on three academic divisions – social sciences, humanities and arts, and physical sciences.

The research presented above primarily refers to the analyses of the lectures delivered in English apart from Schleef's (2008), which also focused on the exploration of German lectures. Thompson (1998) can be said to be the only author who studied questions in the linguistics discipline. Other researchers investigated questions in the fields of economy, social sciences, humanities and arts, and physical sciences. Therefore, studies concerning the use of questions in linguistics are still to be conducted so as to provide insight into what types of questions professors ask in linguistic lectures and with which aim. Since the Montenegrin corpus of lectures has not been investigated so far, it seems necessary to present results with regard to the questions posed by lecturers in this language. To this end, the following research issues will be discussed:

1. What types of questions do Montenegrin lecturers pose and what is their frequency?
2. What function do such questions perform?
3. Are there any similarities and differences between the identified groups of questions in terms of their frequency and functions?

## **2. Data and methodology**

### **2.1. Corpus design**

An electronic corpus of Montenegrin spoken and written language, or a more specific one composed of academic genres, has not yet been created at the University of Montenegro. Having this in mind, for the purpose of the study, a corpus of academic lectures in linguistics was compiled. The first step in the data collection was the process of recording the lectures in undergraduate and graduate university level courses. The lectures of different professors who are native speakers of Montenegrin, all holding a doctorate in their fields and being assistant, associate, and full professors of linguistics, were audio-recorded. The lectures were delivered in various subfields of linguistics, such as phonetics, accentology, dialectology, orthography, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, methodology, sociolinguistics (see Table 1). The objective of the paper was not the analysis of lectures according to disciplinary variation but, within the context of linguistics, the examination of the forms and function of questions posed by professors in the lecture genre.

The second step of the data collection included the transcription of audio files, during which the most common transcription symbols in discourse analysis were used (included in the Appendix). The analysed material includes 12 lectures in linguistics or 86,766 words, the total length of the recordings being 12 hours, 43 minutes and 26 seconds.

Table 1. Montenegrin corpus details

Lecture codes	Course /Subject	No. of words	Lecture duration (h:min:s)
ML <sub>1</sub>	Savremeni crnogorski jezik (sintaksa proste i složene rečenice) 'Contemporary Montenegrin (the syntax of simple and complex sentences)'	6,674	48:52
ML <sub>2</sub>	<i>Uvod u lingvistiku II</i> 'Introduction to linguistics II'	9,757	56:43
ML <sub>3</sub>	Savremeni crnogorski jezik (sintaksa padeža) 'Contemporary Montenegrin (the syntax of cases)'	7,321	53:15
ML <sub>4</sub>	<i>Uvod u lingvistiku I</i> 'Introduction to linguistics I'	7,946	1:05:32
ML <sub>5</sub>	<i>Sociolingvistika</i> 'Sociolinguistics'	7,800	1:01:59
ML <sub>6</sub>	<i>Fonetika</i> 'Phonetics'	4,218	44
ML <sub>7</sub>	<i>Analiza diskursa</i> 'Discourse analysis'	2,220	40:46
ML <sub>8</sub>	<i>Osnovi metodike nastave jezika i književnosti</i> 'Methodology of teaching language and literature'	16,204	1:46:20
ML <sub>9</sub>	<i>Savremeni crnogorski jezik (standardizacija i pravopis)</i> 'Contemporary Montenegrin (standardisation and orthography)'	3,553	45:36
ML <sub>10</sub>	<i>Savremeni crnogorski jezik (pravopis sa kulturom izražavanja)</i> 'Contemporary Montenegrin (orthography with speech culture)'	3,535	46:03
ML <sub>11</sub>	<i>Savremeni crnogorski jezik (Akcentologija i uvod u dijalektologiju)</i> 'Contemporary Montenegrin (Accentology and introduction to dialectology)'	4,933	48:53
ML <sub>12</sub>	<i>Semantika</i> 'Semantics'	12,605	2:16:27
No. of words and duration in total		86,766	12:43:26

## 2.2. Data analysis

This is the first study exploring the questions posed by professors in Montenegrin linguistic lectures. Consequently, when it comes to the identification of certain forms of questions, taking into consideration that Montenegrin is a standardised variety of Serbo-Croatian, syntax and grammar books of the Serbo-Croatian linguists and grammarians Piper et al. (2005), Mrazović and Vukadinović (1990) were followed. All the examples of questions were searched for manually in the lecture corpus on the basis of the presence of lexico-grammatical signals pointing to a certain question form, for instance *what*, *who*, *why*, *isn't it*, and their syntactic position (Piper et al., 2005: 670, 671). The most commonly used question realisations include the following:

- (1) *wh* questions: **Zašto je to pravi objekat? 'Why is it the real object?'** (ML<sub>1</sub>)
- (2) *yes/no* questions: **Da li je to ista rečenica? 'Is that the same sentence?'** (ML<sub>12</sub>)
- (3) *tag* questions: **Etimologija. Ona proučava istorijat, jel' tako? Porijeklo i istorijski razvoj leksičkih jedinica. 'Etymology. It studies history, doesn't it? The origin and development of lexical units.'** (ML<sub>2</sub>)
- (4) *multiple* questions: **Kako ćemo ga naučiti da zaključuje, da analizira? Kako? (.) Kako ćete ih naučiti? 'How shall we teach them to conclude, to analyse? How? (.) How will you teach them?'** (ML<sub>8</sub>)
- (5) *directives*: **Recite mi jednu promjenljivu verzalnu skraćenicu. 'Tell me one changeable versal abbreviation.'** (ML<sub>9</sub>)

Apart from the forms given above, the analysis has shown that Montenegrin professors asked other questions not described by Piper et al. (2005) and Mrazović and Vukadinović (1990). These are:

- (6) *questions with a question word/phrase at the end*: **Dakle, leksikografi su, zapravo, pisci rječnika. Ali rječnika u kom smislu? 'So, lexicographers are, in fact, the writers of dictionaries. But dictionaries in which sense?'** (ML<sub>2</sub>)
- (7) *statement + a pause*: **Zato što u prethodnim (zp) skraćenicama izostavljeni dio počinje samoglasnikom, vokalom, a ovdje izostavljeni dio počinje (.) 'Because in the preceding (zp) abbreviations the omitted part begins with a vowel, but here the omitted part begins with (.)'** (ML<sub>9</sub>)

*Questions with a question word/phrase at the end and statement + a pause* constituted the explored question forms as they were frequently used in the corpus under study. In addition, the analysis excluded the questions related to the information on colloquia, exams, the absence of a professor on a certain day, or some other information, as they did not refer to the lecture content, but rather to extra-contextual issues.

After the question form extraction, the next step was to examine their functions. Thompson's classification of questions into *content-oriented* and *audience-oriented* (1998), later followed by Crawford Camiciotolli (2008) and Chang (2012), was first analysed to see if it was possible to be applied to our study. Thompson (1998) focused on the analysis of the corpus composed of both English academic lectures and research presentations, meaning that she explored not only the questions asked by lecturers, but also by research presenters. The audience was composed of students, as well as of those who listened to research presentations. Therefore, the division into *content-oriented* and *audience-oriented* questions seemed to be broad to have been used in our study. The corpus of the current research includes Montenegrin linguistic lectures whose audience is made up of students. As a result of the action a professor performs while asking a question, two functional groups of questions were established: *questions posed and answered by lecturers* and *questions initiating a student response*. In other words, the former refers to questions asked and simultaneously answered by lecturers, and the latter represents questions posed by professors with the aim to elicit students' responses. These two functional groups of questions are thoroughly analysed in the Results section from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Questions posed and answered by lecturers

The various question forms in the functional category of questions posed and answered by lecturers were registered in the analysis of the Montenegrin corpus. Table 2 shows the question forms, their raw occurrences, as well as their normalised frequency or a number of questions per 1,000 words.

Table 2. Types and frequency of questions posed and answered by lecturers

Questions posed and answered by lecturers	Frequency		
	No. of occurrences	(%)	Questions per 1,000 words of the corpus in total
Tag questions	240	55.3	2.76
Wh questions	111	25.5	1.28
Questions with a question word/phrase at the end	28	6.5	0.32
Yes/no questions	26	5.9	0.29
Multiple questions	15	3.5	0.17
Questions about question	6	1.4	0.07
Incomplete questions	5	1.2	0.06
Embedded questions	2	0.5	0.02
Alternative questions	1	0.2	0.01
In total	434	100	4.98

As noted in Table 2, across the Montenegrin lectures in linguistics, the most common questions forms found are *tag questions*, *wh questions*, *questions with a question word/phrase at the end*, *yes/no questions* and *multiple questions*, accounting for 96.7% of the questions examined. Other question forms display low frequency in the corpus, from 0.2% to 1.4% only, therefore, they will not be further discussed.

#### 3.1.1. Formal realisations and functions of the questions posed and answered by lecturers

##### 3.1.1.1. Tag questions

Table 2 demonstrates variations when it comes to the frequency of question forms. The most frequently used are *tag questions* constituting more than half of all the questions asked and answered by Montenegrin lecturers.

The analysis of the form of *tag questions* has revealed that in the explored Montenegrin material three different phrases signal these questions: *jel' tako*, *jel' da*, *je li* and its short form *jel'*. They are mainly put at the end of statements (e.g. 1), but they can also be found in the medial position (e.g. 2):

- (1) Dakle, pomenuli smo šta je leksema, znamo šta je leksema, a šta je onda leksikologija? Naravno, logično, **jel' tako?** (zp) Lingvistička oblast, odnosno, oblast jezika koja se bavi proučavanjem leksičkih jedinica i leksičkog sastava jezika. (ML<sub>2</sub>)  
 'So, we mentioned what a lexeme was, we know what the lexeme is, but then what is lexicology? Of course, it's logical, **isn't it?** (zp) A linguistic field, i.e. a language field dealing with the exploration of lexical units or lexical composition of a language.'
- (2) Šta znači ad acta? Označava nešto što je među spisima, nešto što je, **je li**, ostavljeno u arhivu. (ML<sub>9</sub>)  
 'What does ad acta mean? It means something that is among the files, something that has, **hasn't it**, been left in the archive.'

Further examination of tag questions has shown that they can perform different functions in the lecture context. Under the category of questions posed and answered by lecturers, tag questions do not elicit students' verbal reaction. On the contrary, a lecturer believes a piece of information asked by such a question is known to students. That way the lecturer points to something students are already familiar with, i.e. *shared knowledge*:

- (3) Dakle, vi znate kad smo crtali one krugove, kad je (.) psiholingvistika, sociolingvistika, lingvistika u pitanju i naravno, pojmove koje ćemo danas govoriti i pominjati, vi ste ih pominjali i o njima govorili u okviru leksikologije, ako ste imali kao predmet na osnovnim studijama, **jel' tako?** Tako da će veliki dio stvari koje danas budete čuli vama biti <poznat>. (ML<sub>4</sub>)  
 'So, you know when we were drawing those circles, when (.) psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, linguistics are in question, and of course, the terms that we will be talking about and will mention today, you mentioned and talked about within lexicology, if you had it as a subject at undergraduate studies, **didn't you?** So, a number of things you will listen to today will be <familiar> to you.'

The lecturer in Extract 3 reminds students of how they covered some terms within specific fields of linguistics so as to provide a familiar context for a new lecture topic. For this purpose, s/he uses a tag question and recontextualises the content already familiar to students to help them better comprehend new topics to be introduced and covered.

The further analysis of the functions of tag questions used in the Montenegrin lectures has revealed that they can be a part of evaluative utterances. Mrazović and Vukadinović (1990: 624) state that such questions represent a statement strengthened by a question. In the analysed examples from the corpus, tag questions intensify evaluation of the content expressed in the previous utterances. The following example illustrates this function:

- (4) I mi smo odgovorni ne samo za ono što djeca znaju iz oblasti <jezika>, nego vrlo često to kako mi radimo s djecom i kako ih mi učimo, u stvari ih određuje i iz drugih predmeta. Da li oni čitaju kako treba, da li razumiju to što su pročitali, da li to znaju da izgovore i ispričaju. **To je jako važno, jel'?** I negdje je to takođe dio naše odgovornosti. (ML<sub>8</sub>)  
 'We too are responsible not only for what children know from the field of <language>, but very often how we work with children and how we teach them, in fact, determines them from other subjects. Do they read properly, do they understand what they have read, do they know to utter and retell it? **That is very important, isn't it?** That is too part of our responsibility.'

The tag question signalled by the phrase *isn't it* has been used in the evaluative utterance in bold marked by the amplifier *very* and the evaluative adjective *important*. The question reinforces and intensifies the significance of the propositional content given in the previous statements.

### 3.1.1.2. Wh questions

As shown in Table 2, the following group of questions most frequently posed in the analysed material is the one of *wh questions*. Having identified them on the basis of a question word used at the beginning of an utterance, we approached the issue of why they are employed in lectures. What is interesting is that, in the functional category of questions posed and answered by lecturers, *wh questions* are used for the purposes different from those in everyday conversation. Let us take a look at Example 5.

- (5) **Šta je afiks?** To je znači dio koji se dodaje prije ili poslije, prefiks ili sufiks. (ML<sub>6</sub>)  
 'What's an affix? It is, in fact, the part added before or after, a prefix or suffix.'

In the given extract, a lecturer asks a *wh question* and s/he is also the one who answers the question put. The aim of the question posed is to introduce a new term – *affix* and the next utterance provides the definition of the term. In such situations, the lecturer holds the floor exclusively and performs both the asking and answering roles (Bamford, 2000: 161) in contrast to spontaneous conversation where the active involvement of at least two participants is necessary (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). Another difference between the *wh questions* put in spontaneous conversation and those in the lectures analysed is that the lecturer already possesses the information required by a question, as is seen in the example above. Therefore, upon putting questions, lecturers take over the role of audience, in this case students, and supply them with a necessary piece of information.

Wh questions posed and answered by lecturers can exercise the function of introducing new subtopics in lectures.

- (6) **Kakva je struktura rječnika jezika jednog jezika?** Dakle, sada se vraćamo na rječnik u smislu leksičkog fonda jednog jezika, ne više rječnik kao publikacija. (ML<sub>2</sub>)  
 ‘What is the structure of a dictionary of one language? So, now we are coming back to the dictionary in terms of the lexicon of one language, not to the dictionary as a publication.’

Extract 6 begins with a *wh question* which is used to initiate a new lecture subtopic – the structure of a dictionary of one language. In this function *wh question* marks a thematic transition from one lecture subtopic to another.

A further analysis of all the instances of *wh questions* collected from the material indicates that these can be used to carry out an explanatory function as well. These questions are mostly preceded by an exemplification act signalled by *recimo* ‘let’s say’ (see e.g. 7). After the exemplification act, in the given example, the professor puts a *wh question* to refer to the content so as to draw students’ attention to what is important and enable them to better understand and follow the lecture content. Again, as is the case with the functions of *wh questions* already discussed in previous extracts, the lecturer simultaneously plays both the asking and answering roles.

- (7) *Recimo*, (zp) reče on diveći se. Dakle, **kako je rekao?** Rekao je uz divljenje. (ML<sub>1</sub>)  
 ‘Let’s say, (zp) he said that admiring. So, **how did he say that?** He said that with admiration.’

### 3.1.1.3. Questions with a question word/phrase at the end

Not only can questioning statements begin with a question word/phrase, but they can also end in such a way. Having examined these forms, we have come up with a finding that they are employed to draw students’ attention to a specific piece of information the question refers to. They can be said to perform an explanatory function.

- (8) Osim ove upotrebe, može se javiti i u funkciji priloškoj. Rodio sam se *o* ponoći; posjetićemo vas *o* Novoj godini. **Prepoznajete koje značenje?** Vremensko. (ML<sub>3</sub>)  
 ‘Apart from this use, it can also have an adverbial function. I was born *at* midnight; we will visit you *at* New Year’s. **You recognize which meaning?** Temporal.’

In the example above the question in bold is marked by a question phrase *which meaning* used at the end of a statement. It is preceded by the examples regarding the use of the preposition *o* ‘at’. In that context, the lecturer poses a question without allowing students to take their turn and give an answer, but continues to answer the question put. Obviously, the question with a question phrase at the end has an explanatory function and aims at enhancing students’ understanding of an issue being elaborated.

### 3.1.1.4. Yes/no questions

According to the frequency results obtained and shown in Table 2, *yes/no questions* represent the fourth most commonly used formal realisation of questions put and answered by lecturers. *Yes/no questions* have been found to serve an explanatory function. In Example 9 the professor uses a *yes/no question* *Is that dimday?* to refer to the lecture content given in the previous utterances prior to answering it herself/himself. These are employed in order to aid students’ comprehension of the content being presented.

- (9) Dakle, svlačim sumrak. Sumrak je nije nešto što je konkretno (.) kao što svlačimo košulju, predmet koji se svlači. **Da li je sumrak to?** Nije. (ML<sub>4</sub>)  
 ‘So, I shed dimday. Dimday is not something that is concrete (.) like we take off a shirt, a subject that is taken off. **Is that dimday?** No.’

### 3.1.1.5. Multiple questions

A thorough analysis of all the instances of questions found has shown that *multiple questions* are also used as a formal realisation of the functional category of questions posed and answered by lecturers. As far as their form is concerned,

they consist of two or more questions relating to the same topic. Apart from their semantic similarity, the lexical one exists too and can be noticed in the repetition of particular lexical units, as well as the parallelism between their interrogative structures. In fact, the first question is repeated in similar forms which are seen as “reformulations of the first question” (Bamford, 2000: 167). Prior to further discussion on their functions, let us consider Extracts 10 and 11.

- (10) **Znači, šta se dešava ovdje? Šta bi bila u Crnoj Gori (.) ova <faza> posle standardizacije i varijantizacije?** Evo u Crnoj Gori, dakle, postojala je varijanta (.) crnogorska srpskohrvatskog. (ML<sub>5</sub>)  
 ‘So, what is happening here? What would this <phase> after standardisation and variantisation be in Montenegro (.)? Here in Montenegro, there was a Montenegrin variant (.) of Serbo-Croatian.’
- (11) **(zp) E sad, šta sve posmatramo u jednom književnom djelu, a možemo da razgovaramo sa djecom o tome da vidimo kako oni to znaju? Kakvo pisac to djelo stvara?** Evo najprije su tu književna djela. (ML<sub>8</sub>)  
 ‘(zp) Well now, what do we consider in a literary work we can talk to children about and see what they know? What kind of work does a writer create? First of all, these are literary works.’

Extract 10 is initiated by a *wh* question which has been formulated again and, thereby, specified. The two questions are linked semantically – they are related in terms of the topic of what is happening with the language in Montenegro. The lexical verb *to happen* is similar in its meaning to the verb *to be* used in the second utterance. The questions are also grammatically connected by having parallel *wh* structures. Extract 11 shows similar formal characteristics – parallelism on grammatical, lexical and semantic levels. As for their functions, the multiple questions in Extract 10 refer to the content of a lecture and contribute to its clarity, whereas those in Extract 11 have a structural role – they are related to the lecture content introducing a new lecture subtopic. Prior to posing the multiple questions, the professor uses a complex discourse marker *well now*, signalling a transition to a new subtopic, i.e. the lecturer is about to discuss the points regarding what should be considered in a literary work that students need to know. Thereby, multiple questions can also point to a structural transition from one subtopic to another.

### 3.2. Questions initiating a student response

Under the category of questions initiating a student response, various question forms were found in the Montenegrin material. Table 3 lists question realisations, frequency and the number of questions used per 1,000 words.

Table 3. Types and frequency of questions initiating a student response

Questions initiating a student response	Frequency		
	No. of occurrences	(%)	Questions per 1,000 words of the corpus in total
Wh questions	41	12.1	0.47
Yes/no questions	26	7.6	0.29
Multiple questions	37	10.8	0.43
Incomplete questions	10	2.9	0.12
Directives	127	37.4	1.46
Questions about question	3	0.8	0.04
Echo questions	7	2.1	0.08
Statement + a pause	56	16.5	0.65
Tag questions	8	2.4	0.09
Questions with a question word/phrase at the end	13	3.8	0.15
Alternative questions	12	3.5	0.14
In total	340	100	3.92

As shown in Table 3, the total frequency of questions initiating a students’ response accounts for 3.92 questions per 1,000 words. If we compare it to the normalised frequency of questions put and answered by lecturers which is 4.98, then we come to the finding that questions asked and answered by lecturers are used 1.27 times more often than questions initiating a students’ response (see Chart 1). This result emphasises the prevailing information-presenting function of the questions put and answered by lecturers and thus confirms Deroey & Taverniers’s view of lectures as ‘discourse with an informing function’ (2011: 5). However, the functional group of questions initiating a students’ response appears to be significant, as their overall frequency can point to lecture interactivity.

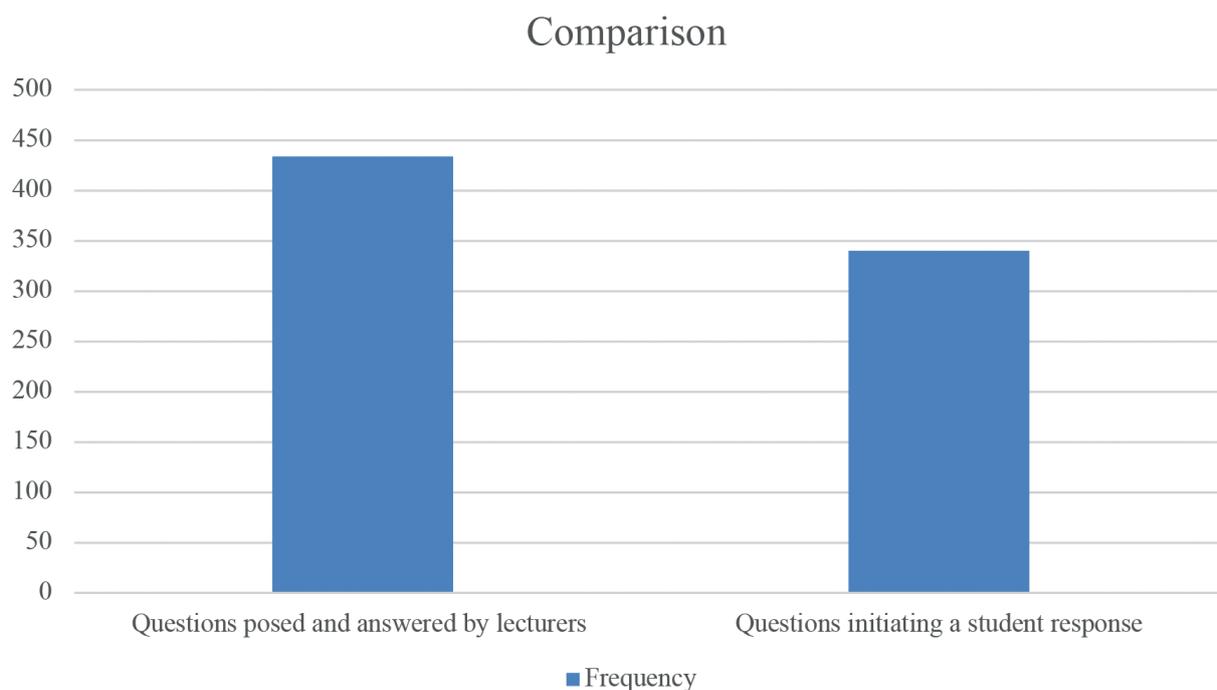


Chart 1. Frequency comparison of two functional categories of questions

Across the analysed Montenegrin material, *directives* (37.4%), *statement+a pause* (16.5%), *wh* (12.1%), *multiple* (10.8%) and *yes/no questions* (7.6%) were found to have been the most common formal realisations, which altogether account for 84.4% of the questions explored. Considering other question forms, they were used in the range 0.8-3.8% in the corpus examined. Therefore, the five most frequently used forms will be discussed in more details in the following section.

### 3.2.1. Formal realisations and functions of the questions initiating a student response

#### 3.2.1.1. Directives

In this functional category, the analysis of the Montenegrin lectures registers the highest frequency of *directives* (37.4%). Formally, they are represented by an imperative form of the communicative verbs, such as *odgovoriti* ‘answer’, *pitati* ‘ask’, *reći* ‘tell’, the cognitive group – *misliti* ‘think’, *zamisliti* ‘imagine’, as well as those showing activity, such as *dati* ‘give’ in the verb phrase *dati primjer* ‘give an example’. When it comes to their function, the illocutionary force of directives in most cases depends on the situational context (Quirk et al., 1985: 831). In the context of the examined lectures, directives seem to play the elicitation role.

(12) P: **Recite mi neku slivenu skraćenicu, pominjali smo ih.**

S3: JAT.

P: JAT, naravno. Skraćenica za Jugoslovenski aerotransport.

‘L: **Tell me a fused abbreviation, we’ve mentioned them.**

S3: JAT.

L: JAT, of course. The abbreviation for the Yugoslav aerotransport.’ (ML<sub>9</sub>)

Example 12 illustrates a professor’s use of the directive signalled by an imperative form of the verb *reći* in the second-person plural – *recite* ‘tell me’. The aim is to provoke students’ verbal reaction, which the lecturer manages to do, given that we have the answer provided by a student. The directive in question at the same time initiates and opens an exchange. Thereby, it functions as a means of including students in the discussion about lecture content. In contrast to directives used in everyday conversation, where they are employed to express a request, a command, a warning or an order (Mrazović and Vukadinović 1990, 614-618), in the lectures explored these forms invite students to take part in an exchange and, by providing an answer, contribute to it.

#### 3.2.1.2. Statement + a pause

The second most frequent group of formal realisations of the questions initiating a students’ response includes that of *statement + a pause*. In these instances, lecturers make statements which are followed by a shorter silent pause,

indicated by (.), as in e.g. 13, or a longer silent pause marked by (...), as given in e.g. 14. Such silent pauses serve as signals to students to take their turns in an exchange.

- (13) P: A među pismima dalje pravi se razlika između poslovnih, društvenih (...) zatim pisama formularskog tipa. (...) **Zatim tu su i magistarski radovi, diplomski radovi (.) razni zapisnici (...) pa i poruke pisane rukom (.) na zidovima, a to su (.)**  
 S2: grafiti.  
 P: Grafiti, naravno. (ML<sub>7</sub>)  
 'L: And among letters a difference between business, social (...) then the letters of formal type is still made. (...) **Then there are MA theses, diploma papers (.) various minutes (...) and even messages written by hand (.) on the walls, and they are (.)**  
 S2: graffiti.  
 L: Graffiti, of course.'
- (14) P: **Primjeri Po večeri je otišao u svoju sobu; Po dolasku s posla skuvala je ručak; Odmah po konstituisanju komisija je izabrala predsjednika (...) predstavljaju u stvari (zp), naravno, po večeri je otišao u svoju sobu (...)**  
 S3: posteriornost.  
 P: Jeste. Posteriornost. (ML<sub>3</sub>)  
 'L: **The examples After dinner he went to his room; After returning from her work, she made lunch; Immediately after its constitution a committee chose a president (...) represent in fact (zp), of course, after dinner he went to his room (...)**  
 S3: posteriority.  
 L: Yes. Posteriority.'

The given examples illustrate that statements followed by a pause play the questioning role. Silent pauses in both of them signal to students that it is their turn to speak, so they complete the statements given by lecturers. Upon completing them, the lecturers realise the follow-up moves, in which they confirm that students' answers are correct. These formal realisations were not found in the functional category of questions put and answered by lecturers as in them lecturers do not allow students to take turns and supply a necessary piece of information.

### 3.2.1.3. Wh questions

Not only were the *wh* questions found in the category of questions put and answered by lecturers, but the same formal realisation was identified within the group of the questions initiating a student response. Upon finding these instances, we approached the issue of their use in the lectures under investigation. The obtained results confirm that *wh* questions are 'information-seeking' (Tsui, 1992: 94), meaning they 'seek information on a specific point' (Quirk et al., 1985: 804). However, what is different with regard to these questions used in everyday conversation is that lecturers already possess the information asked by a question.

- (15) P: **I na kom slogu je u pomoći akcentat?**  
 S14: Na drugom.  
 P: Tačno. (ML<sub>11</sub>)  
 'L: **On which syllable is the accent in pomoći 'to help'?**  
 S14: On the second.  
 L: Correct.'

Compared to the first functional group of questions, where the lecturer is the one who puts and simultaneously answers the *wh* question, in this functional category the lecturer allows students to perform the answering role. In Extract 15 the lecturer asks on which syllable the accent in a given word is. After the lecturer's question, a student immediately provides an answer and by taking a turn the lecturer supplies a follow-up move. Therefore, it is obvious that s/he knows the answer to the question put. Using such questions, lecturers check whether students understand the content being discussed.

### 3.2.1.4. Multiple questions

The same as *wh* questions, *multiple questions* were identified in both functional categories – questions put and answered by lecturers and those initiating a student response. Formally, these questions are composed of two or more lexically, grammatically and semantically parallel *wh* questions. Extract 16 starts with a *wh* question which is then specified by another two questions having similar interrogative structures. As for lexical similarity, the verbs *baratati* 'use' and *znati* 'know' have similar meanings in this context. The questions are also linked semantically – they refer to the issue of how many words an individual knows or uses. In other words, the first question the lecturer puts is

repeated in similar forms known as “reformulations of the first question” (Bamford, 2000: 167). Hence, using them, lecturers contribute to the clarity of the lecture content. Compared with the multiple questions classified in the functional category of questions posed and answered by lecturers, where they are employed to enhance the clarity of the content being presented as well as to point to a structural transition from one subtopic to another, in the group of questions indicating a student response, apart from contributing to the clarity of the lecture content, multiple questions are used to provoke students’ verbal responses.

(16) P: **A šta je sa fondom riječi kojima pojedinci barataju, šta mislite? Koliko vi znate riječi, na primjer, svog jezika?**

S1: To je ono što sve koristimo.

P: Tako je. Tu je razlika između aktivne i pasivne leksike, to ćemo pomenuti. (ML<sub>2</sub>)

‘L: **And what about the number of words that individuals use, what do you think? How many words do you know, for example, of your language?**

S1: That includes all the words that we use.

L: That’s right. There is a difference between active and passive vocabulary, we will mention that.

### 3.2.1.5. Yes/no questions

Yes/no questions come fifth on the list of the most commonly employed questions in the Montenegrin lectures in linguistics (see Table 3). Piper et al. (2000: 673-675) state several ways of forming yes/no questions. In the Montenegrin corpus two registered ways are by placing the interrogative clitic *li* after the tensed verb (see e.g. 17), as well as by putting the fused interrogative particles *da li* at the beginning of a sentence (see e.g. 18). The mentioned authors also describe that the present tense of the auxiliary verb *biti* ‘to be’, placed at the beginning of a sentence and followed by the interrogative clitic *li*, is a signal of a yes/no question. However, in the corpus analysed, the interrogative clitic *li* can be omitted after the present tense of the auxiliary verb *biti* ‘to be’ (see e.g. 19). The analysis has also shown a possibility of not using the interrogative particle *da li* in front of the tensed main verb (see. e.g. 20).

(17) P: **Znate li neku takvu skraćenicu (.) koja se piše bez tačke i koja pripada ovoj grupi sažetih skraćenica?**

S4: Doktor.

P: Doktor, skraćenicu *dr* bez tačke. (ML<sub>9</sub>)

‘L: **Do you know such an abbreviation (.) that is written without a full stop and that belongs to the group of contracted abbreviations?**

S4: Doctor.

L: Doctor, the abbreviation *dr* without a full stop.’

(18) P: E sad mi sad mi odgovorite na jedno <pitanje> koje je temeljno kad su sinonimi u pitanju. **Da li je to pravi sinonim?**

Studenti: Nije nema

P: - e tako je. To je prava tako je, pravih sinonima nema. (ML<sub>4</sub>)

‘L: Well now, now give me an answer to a <question> which is crucial when talking about synonyms. **Is it a real synonym?**

Students: No there are no

L: - that’s right. That is a real that’s right, there are no real synonyms.

(19) P: **Jesam vam govorila o tome?** Testiranje.

S1: Da.

S2: Jeste. (ML<sub>8</sub>)

‘L: **Have I told you about this?** Testing.

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes, you have.’

(20) P: Druga je situacija sa sibilizacijom u riječima stranog porijekla. **Razumijete?**

Studenti: Razumijemo. (ML<sub>10</sub>)

‘L: It’s a different situation when it comes to sibilisation in words of foreign origin. **Do you understand?**

Students: Yes, we do.’

As noted in the given examples, yes/no questions introduce exchanges and initiate students responses. More precisely, they require a specific piece of information on the part of students, as is the case with Examples 17 and 18. Example 19 illustrates the use of a yes/no question as a means of checking whether a lecturer has covered particular aspects of the lecture. In Example 20, posing a yes/no question, a lecturer checks if students have understood the content which has been presented. Yes/no questions are also known as minimal choice questions (Piper et al., 2005: 673) as they offer a choice between two possibilities – the confirmation or negation of a yes/no question.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, the following research issues have been explored: which questions are used in Montenegrin university linguistic lectures, how frequent they are, what functions they serve and whether there are similarities and differences between the groups of questions found in terms of their frequency and functions. The identified questions were classified into two functional categories – *questions posed and answered by lecturers* and *questions initiating a student response*, pointing either to the lecture content or inviting students to participate in the discourse thus facilitating the lecture interactivity and comprehension on the part of students. By comparing the normalised frequency of these groups, the results have shown that in the Montenegrin corpus *questions posed and answered by lecturers* were 1.27 times more frequently used than *questions initiating a student response*. The finding leads to a conclusion that not only do the Montenegrin lecturers pay attention to the content of the lecture, but also to its interactivity and the involvement of students in discussion on the lecture content. Nonetheless, they seem to be a little more focused on presenting information to students than on interactivity expressed through questions. This conclusion is in line with the informing function of the lecture discourse recognised by Deroey & Taverniers (2011: 5) as one of the key functions by means of which subject information is disseminated to students.

Under the aforementioned categories, the analysis has revealed their various formal realisations and functions. In fact, the functional category is the one that influences the use of question forms employed within it. Thus, in the class of *questions posed and answered by lecturers*, *tag questions* were found to point to the information students are familiar with, i.e. shared knowledge, as well as to intensifying evaluation of the content already given in previous utterances. *Wh questions* were determined to exercise three functions – defining new concepts being presented, introducing new lecture subtopics and performing an explanatory function. *Yes/no questions* and questions with a question word/phrase at the end have an explanatory function and attract students' attention to a particular piece of information, whereas *multiple questions* contribute to the lecture clarity, and introduce a new lecture subtopic. These formal realisations are clearly directed to the lecture content – they define, explain, organise and evaluate the lecture discourse.

On the other hand, the functional category of *questions initiating a student response* influenced the use of the following most common formal realisations: *directives*, *statement + a pause*, *wh*, *multiple* and *yes/no questions*. They are primarily oriented towards the audience, i.e. students' participation in the discussion on the lecture content, enhancing the lecture interactivity and students' comprehension.

What is interesting to conclude here is that one form can be used in both functional classes of questions. This is the case with *wh*, *multiple* and *yes/no questions*. Compared to the *questions posed and answered by lecturers*, where their main focus is on the lecture content, in the group of *questions initiating a student response*, these questions evoke a student verbal reaction seeking a specific piece of information. Hence, one formal realisation of questions can serve different functional purposes in the context of university lectures.

In addition, the results of the study can point to another conclusion. Namely, the Serbo-Croatian grammarians and linguists (Piper et al., 2005; Klajn 2005; Mrazović and Vukadinović 1990) do not mention *questions with a question word/phrase at the end* among other question forms they describe. The analysis of the Montenegrin material suggests that they play a significant role in the functional category of *questions posed and answered by lecturers* – they have an explanatory function drawing students' attention to the specific information asked by a question. In the same vein, *statement + pause* was not recognised as a questioning formal realisation in the grammar and syntax books by the abovementioned grammarians and linguists. This form has been found in the group of questions initiating a student response. They perform a questioning role in the way that a short or long pause is a signal to students to take their turn in an exchange. The presence of those question realisations throws light on how a context, i.e. the one of university lectures, can affect the identification of question forms and their functions.

The functions of directives also appeared to be different from the ones mentioned in descriptive and normative grammar books. In the explored Montenegrin linguistic lectures, these formal realisations are used to provoke students' verbal response, and not to express a command, request, warning or order (Mrazović and Vukadinović, 1990: 614-618), as found in everyday conversation. Similarly, a new function of *wh* and *multiple questions* has to be pointed out here. They announce a new subtopic, marking a thematic transition from one lecture subtopic to another. New functions seem to be a consequence of the influence of the lecture genre on the question forms and their use. Nevertheless, in order to confirm this assumption, a contrastive study of questions asked by professors in linguistic lectures delivered in Montenegrin and other languages is to be conducted.

The findings of the study could be of use to international students who study Montenegrin as a foreign language at the Faculty of Philology of the state university or spend some time as a visiting student at the same faculty due to different international exchange and mobility programmes. They will be able to get an insight into what types of questions to expect to be posed by lecturers who are native Montenegrin speakers. On the other hand, the results are also important for foreign lecturers, who regularly come and teach at the Faculty of Philology, as they can become more aware of what kind of questions they ask compared to those of Montenegrin professors'. The results could also be useful to language practitioners who could design authentic listening materials based on this lecture corpus with the aim to facilitate the understanding of university lectures on linguistics.

This study has yielded the preliminary findings that can be used for further analyses of questions, especially a contrastive one, which may include Montenegrin and other corpora. Additional research with a larger corpus and other factors, such as disciplinary and linguistic culture, should be conducted for the purpose of making generalisations and revealing salient differences and similarities with the results shown in this study.

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## Appendix

Table 1. Transcription symbols used in the process of compiling the Montenegrin corpus

Symbol	Meaning
<>	slower relative to surrounding talk
><	speeded up relative to surrounding talk
-	abrupt cut off of sound
=	overlapping talk
?	rising intonation question
.	closing intonation
(.)	a short pause or gap
(...)	a longer pause or gap
(zɔ)	filled pause
☺	Laugh
_____	emphasised relative to surrounding talk
-	
(nejasno)	transcriber unable to hear a word
P	Professor
S	Student