

Negation in Certain Rhetorical Questions in Japanese*

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Abstract: Rhetorical questions are widely believed to be not semantically ordinal questions but negative statements, owing to the work of Sadock (1974) and Han (2002) and others. Recently, Caponigro and Sprouse (2007) have claimed that rhetorical questions are in fact ordinary questions both semantically and syntactically, while they are pragmatically exceptional in that the answer is known both to the Speaker and the Addressee. This paper shows, contrary to Caponigro and Sprouse (2007), that Japanese has a type of question which is unambiguously understood as rhetorical and offers a syntactic analysis of such questions, based on the split CP hypothesis.

1. Introduction

Rhetorical questions are widely taken to be sentences which are questions on the surface but are actually negative statements. For instance, (1a) means (1b) under the rhetorical interpretation.

- (1) a. Did I tell you that writing a dissertation was easy? (positive rhetorical question)
b. I didn't tell you that writing a dissertation was easy. (negative assertion)
(Han 2002: 201)

This view of rhetorical questions was originally explored in Sadock (1974). Han (2002) suggested a way to ensure that rhetorical questions are semantically different from ordinary questions.

Recently, Caponigro and Sprouse (2007) (hereafter C&S) have challenged this widely held view, by observing that rhetorical questions do not have to be negative or statements. They argue that rhetorical questions are in fact ordinary questions both semantically and syntactically, with the difference being that the answer to the rhetorical questions is known both to the speaker and the addressee, which is a pragmatic notion.

In this paper, I would like to show that, contrary to C&S, Japanese has rhetorical questions which are always interpreted on a par with negative statements. I attempt to offer a syntactic account for their behavior, drawing on the split CP hypothesis suggested by Hiraiwa and Ishihara (2012), based on Rizzi (1997).

*This is a revised version of the paper that I read at the First Florida Linguistics Yearly Meeting, held at Eckerd College on March 22nd and 23rd, 2014. I would like to thank the audience there. I am especially grateful to Solveig Bosse, Hironobu Kasai, Eric Potsdam, and Alan Prince for their questions and suggestions.

2. Rhetorical Questions as Ordinary Questions

C&S argue that rhetorical questions are actually ordinary questions. Here I provide some of their important findings and their definition of these questions.

2.1. Rhetorical Questions Allow for Non-Negative Answers

C&S provide instances of rhetorical questions which allow for non-negative answers, as exemplified in (2).

- (2) Situation: Mina helped Luca when he was in trouble and both the Speaker and the Addressee are aware of that. Now Luca adores Mina for helping him.
The Speaker: It's understandable that Luca adores Mina. After all, who helped him when he was in trouble?
The Addressee or the Speaker: Mina / #Nobody
(C&S: 124)

2.2. Rhetorical Questions Allow for an Answer, While Statements Do Not

C&S present cases which suggest that rhetorical questions should not be treated on a par with statements. As in (3), rhetorical questions can be replied either by the Speaker or the Addressee.

- (3) QUESTION by the Speaker: Who cares about you?
ANSWER by the Speaker: Nobody.
by the Addressee: Nobody / Yeah, you're right.
(C&S: 123)

As (3) shows, rhetorical questions can be replied to by either the Speaker or the Addressee. However, statements do not allow answers, as shown in (4).

- (4) Negative statements never allow for an answer.
The Speaker: You should stop saying that Luca didn't like the party last night. After all, Luca was the only one that was still dancing at 3 am!
The Addressee or the Speaker: #Luca
(C&S: 124)

Thus, C&S claim that rhetorical questions should not be regarded as negative statements.

2.3. Caponigro & Sprouse's Definition of Ordinary Questions and Rhetorical Questions

C&S argue that rhetorical questions should be treated on a par with ordinary questions both semantically and syntactically. The only difference that separates these two types of questions is

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the availability of the answer, which is a pragmatic notion. Here are the definitions of rhetorical questions and ordinary questions suggested by C&S.

- (5) Definition of Ordinary Questions
An ordinary question is an interrogative clause whose answer is not known to the Speaker, but the Speaker thinks the Addressee may know it. An answer is required in order for the dialogue to be felicitous. Only the Addressee can answer.
(C&S: 129)
- (6) Definition of Rhetorical Questions
A rhetorical question is an interrogative clause whose answer is known to the Speaker and the Addressee, and they both also know that the other knows the answer as well. An answer is not required, but possible. Either the Speaker or the Addressee can answer.
(adapted from C&S: 129)

These are the main properties of rhetorical questions according to C&S.

3. *Masu Ka* Rhetorical Questions

In this section, I present examples from Japanese which pattern in the way that can be captured by C&S's analysis.

Yokoyama (2013) observes that questions ending with *masu ka* can be interpreted either as regular questions or rhetorical ones, depending on the type of intonation with which they end.

- (7) a. Dare-ga kono mise-de kaimono-o si-masu ka? ↑
 who-NOM this store-in shopping-ACC do-POLITE Q
 '*Who will shop in this store?*'
- b. Dare-ga kono mise-de kaimono-o si-masu ka? ↓
 who-NOM this store-in shopping-ACC do-POLITE Q
 '*Who will shop in this store?*' '*No one will shop in this store.*'
- (8) a. John-dake desu ne.
 John-only COP PRT
 '*Only John, right?*'
- b. Daremo.
 no.one
 '*No one.*'

4.3. Ittai 'the Hell'

This subsection provides examples which also cast doubt on treating *mono ka* rhetorical questions as ordinary questions. The examples involve the item *ittai* 'the hell' (Pesetsky 1987). *Ittai* is an adverb which is used in WH-questions when the speaker is emotionally affected, as in (11).

- (11) John-wa ittai kinoo honya-de nani-o kai-mas-ita ka?
 John-NOM the.hell yesterday bookstore-in what-ACC buy-POLITE-PAST Q
 'What the hell did John buy in the bookstore yesterday?'
 (Yanagida 1995:60)

Interestingly, this element is only used in interrogative contexts. Thus, the presence of *ittai* leads to deviance where WH-expressions are not employed as ordinary interrogative expressions, as in (12), which involves a WH-ever (concessive) construction (Nishigauchi 1990).

- (12) (*Ittai) Dare-ga kite-mo, boku-wa ureshii.
 the.hell who-NOM come-ever I-TOP happy
 'No matter who comes, I will be happy.'

In this respect, the two types of rhetorical questions behave differently.

Mono ka rhetorical questions do not behave on a par with regular questions.

- (13) a. (Ittai) Dare-ga ki-masu ka? ↓
 the.hell who-NOM come-POLITE Q
 'No one comes.'
 b. (*Ittai) Dare-ga kuru mono ka!
 the.hell who-NOM come C Q
 'No one comes.'

While *ittai* is allowed in *masu ka* rhetorical questions, which are actually ordinary questions, it is disallowed in *mono ka* rhetorical questions. Thus, it seems extremely difficult to consider *mono ka* rhetorical questions as ordinary questions, contrary to C&S's claim.

4.4. Negative Polarity Items

In this subsection, I discuss another aspect where *mono ka* rhetorical questions differ from regular questions, which has to do with negative polarity items (hereafter NPIs). As noted by McGloin (1976), NPIs are allowed in *mono ka* rhetorical questions, but not in ordinary questions. Here I employ *itido-mo* '(not) even once' and *dare mo* '(no) one'.

As shown in (14) and (15), such elements are only possible in negative sentences.

- (14) a. John-wa itido-mo ko-nai (no?).
 John-TOP once-even come-not C
 ‘John will not come even once. / Will John not come even once?’
- b. * John-wa itidomo kuru (no?).
 John-TOP once-even come C
- (15) a. Dare-mo ko-nai. (no?).
 who-MO come-not C
 ‘No one will come. / Will no one come?’
- b. * Dare-mo kuru (no?).
 who-MO come C

These items are compatible with *mono ka* rhetorical questions.

- (16) a. John-ga itidi-mo kuru mono ka!
 John-NOM once-even come C Q
 ‘John will not come even once’
- b. Dare-mo kuru mono ka!
 who-NOM come C Q
 ‘No one will come.’

These elements cannot be found in *masu ka* rhetorical questions, which are ordinary questions.

- (17) a. * John-ga itidi-mo ki-masu ka?
 John-NOM once-even come-POLITE Q
- b. * Dare-mo ki-masu ka?
 who-NOM come-POLITE Q
 ‘No one will come.’

Mono ka rhetorical questions are more like negative statements and quite different from ordinary questions.

5. On the Position of Negation in *Mono Ka* Rhetorical Questions

In the previous section, we saw that *mono ka* rhetorical questions are negative sentences, which means that they involve a negative element somewhere in their clausal structure. In this section, I examine the scope relation between negation and the subject phrases accompanied by the particle *dake* ‘only’ and show that the negative element in such questions is located above TP, in contrast to the negation in regular declarative sentences, which is lower than the subject position.

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It has been observed that subject *dake* phrases take wide scope over negation (Iwakura 1974, Homma 1989, Koizumi 1995, Saito 2009).

- (18) John-dake-ga ko-nai. (only>neg, *neg>only)
 John-only-NOM come-not
 ‘Only John will not come.’

In (18), the only available reading is the one where John is the only individual who will not come and it is not possible to interpret it to mean that it is not the case that only John will come. In other words, (18) does not mean that someone other than John will also come. This interpretation suggests that the subject position is higher than negation, as in (19).

- (19) [TP subject [NegP [VP ... V] Neg] T]

Mono ka rhetorical questions display the exact opposite pattern, which is illustrated in (20).

- (20) John-dake-ga kuru mono ka! (*only>neg, neg>only)
 John-only-NOM come not Q
 ‘Only John will not come!’

In (20), it is negation that takes wide scope. In other words, the possible reading is the one where it is not the case that only John will come, meaning that in addition to John, someone else will come as well. This suggests that negation in (20) is higher than the subject position, as in (21).

- (21) [[TP subject [VP V] T] neg]

The structure in (21) shows that negation is higher than TP but the structure of the domain above TP is not clear. In the next section, I would like to consider the structure of the CP domain of *mono ka* rhetorical questions.

6. The Structure of *Mono Ka* Rhetorical Questions

Here I would like to provide an analysis of the CP domain of *mono ka* rhetorical questions. I assume that the complementizer zone in Japanese can have multiple functional heads.

6.1. The Multi-Layered CP Structure

Hiraiwa and Ishihara (2012) assume that the CP domain in Japanese can involve several functional projections, as in (22).

- (22) Force (Topic) (Focus) Finite TP

Force is the highest projection in the CP domain and serves to distinguish clause types such as declarative, interrogative, relative, and others. Finite is the lowest projection in the domain and specifies finiteness of the clause.

Under this analysis, an ordinary WH-question ending with *no desu ka* like (23a) has a structure like (23b).

- (23) a. Dare-ga kuru no desu ka?
 who-NOM come FIN FOC Q
 ‘Who will come?’
- b. [Force [Focus [Finite [TP Dare-ga kuru] [Finite⁰ no]] [Focus⁰ desu]] [Force⁰ ka]]?
 who-NOM come FIN FOC Q

In (23b), *no* is analyzed as the Finite head, which specifies the clause as finite, *desu* as the Focus head, and *ka* as the Force head, manifesting interrogative force.

Assuming this analysis, let us consider what kind of structure *mono ka* rhetorical questions have. What is interesting in this connection is that in these questions, *mono* and *ka* can be intervened by *desu*, just like ordinary questions. Then, the structure of these rhetorical questions can be assumed to be quite similar to that of ordinary questions, as in (24).

- (24) a. Dare-ga kuru mono (desu) ka!
 who-NOM come FIN FOC Q
 ‘Who will come!’ ‘No one will come!’
- b. [ForceP [FocusP [FiniteP [TP Dare-ga kuru] [Finite⁰ mono]] [Focus⁰ desu]] [Force⁰ ka]]!

In (24b), *mono* heads the Finite projection, *desu* heads the Focus projection, and *ka* heads the Force projection. Since *desu* can be absent in the relevant questions, I assume that the Focus projection can be absent in the CP domain and concentrate on examining the properties of *mono*, the Finite head, and *ka*, the Force head.

6.2. *Mono* as the Finite Head with [+Neg]

We have seen that *mono ka* rhetorical questions contain a negative element in the CP domain. Assuming that the CP domain, in normal cases, has just two projections, namely, Force and Finite, one of them must be negative. There is evidence that negation lies in the Finite projection. In (22) it is assumed that the Topic projection is optionally present in a position higher than Finite and lower than Force. Let us consider what happens if the quantified subject in (20) is topicalized, as in (25).

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- (25) John-dake-wa kuru mono ka! (only>neg, *neg>only)
 John-only-TOP come not Q
 ‘Only John will not come!’

Unlike (20), (25) has the reading where the subject has wide scope over negation. Since the subject is topicalized in (25), it is placed in [Spec, Topic], which is higher than Finite but lower than Force. Therefore, as in (26), it is the Finite head that has the negative feature.

- (26) [ForceP [TopicP John-dake-wa [FiniteP [TP e kuru] [Finite[Neg]⁰ mono]] [Top⁰]] [Force⁰ ka]]!

In sum, we have seen here that the locus of negation in *mono ka* rhetorical questions is the Finite head *mono*.¹

6.3. Two Types of *Ka*

Obviously, there are two types of *ka*: One is used for ordinary questions and the other is for *mono ka* rhetorical questions. Here I present cases which suggest that they should be distinguished.

There is one point where the two types of *ka* differ concerning pronunciation. In ordinary questions, the Force head does not have to be pronounced, but the obligatorily rhetorical Force head has to be. This contrast is illustrated in (27).

- (27) a. Dare-ga kuru no (desu ka)?
 Who-NOM come FIN FOC Q
 ‘Who will come?’

¹ Alan Prince (p.c.) asks what *mono* is. It is observed in the study of Japanese grammar that *mono* has several functions. Tamaji (2007) suggests that *mono* functions like the English modal *should*. Another use is the exclamatory use. This use is suggested to be involved in *mono ka* rhetorical questions by Anno (2002). Thus, sentences that end with *mono da* rather than with the usual *no da* can be used to show the speaker’s feelings such as surprise. This leads to the question raised by Solveig Bosse: Could *mono ka* rhetorical questions be regarded as exclamatory sentences rather than questions? This is a very interesting question, but the answer seems negative. For one thing, while the sentence final particle *ka* must appear in *mono ka* rhetorical questions, it can be absent in most exclamatory sentences. In fact, it must be absent from certain *mono da* exclamatory sentences. The comparison of these two constructions is surely an intriguing topic, which I have to leave for future research.

- b. Dare-ga kuru mono *(desu ka)!²
 Who-NOM come FIN FOC Q

Masu ka questions, whether they are uttered for seeking information or for rhetorical purposes, allow the omission of *ka*, as in (28).

- (28) Dare-ga kono mise-de kaimono-o si-masu (ka)? ↑ / ↓
 who-NOM this store-in shopping-ACC do-POLITE Q
 ‘Who will shop in this store?’

Though it is not entirely clear why this contrast holds, it tells us that two types of *ka* need to be distinguished.

These two types of complementizers also need to be distinguished in a way that concerns selection. The kind of *ka* that introduces ordinary questions can readily be in an embedded context. That is to say, they can be selected by certain predicates.

- (29) Boku-wa [darega kuru (no da) ka] sitteiru.
 I-TOP who-NOM come FIN FOC Q know
 ‘I know who will come.’

When the indirect question is replaced by a *mono ka* rhetorical question, deviance results.

- (30) * Boku-wa [John-ga nidoto kuru mono ka] sittieiru
 I-TOP John-NOM again come FIN Q know

Deviance of (30) suggests that *mono ka* rhetorical questions are never selected. This in turn means that predicates distinguish these two types of force heads.^{3,4}

² As pointed out by Hironobu Kasai (p.c.), though *ka* needs to be pronounced here, *mono* can be omitted. I assume that there is a phonologically null version of *mono*. Another possibility would be to assume, as suggested in Goto (2012), that the licenser of NPIs is not *mono* but *ka*. In order for this idea to work, the Topic projection needs to be located higher than the Force projection, given (25). This positioning of Topic would require some modification of Rizzi’s view of the Force projection as the highest in the clausal structure. To avoid complications, I assume (31).

³ Hironobu Kasai (p.c.) correctly observes that *mono ka* rhetorical questions can be embedded if they are further embedded in a report projection headed by *to* (Saito 2010), which is in turn selected by verbs of saying and thinking. In such cases, what is selected is not *mono ka* rhetorical questions. What is important here is that the verb which selects an ordinary indirect question does not allow a *mono ka* rhetorical question as its complement.

⁴ Alan Prince (p.c.) informs me that the same distinction seems to be present in English. He observes that (i) is only understandable as a rhetorical question, never inviting an answer, and fails to occur as an indirect question, as in (ii).

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