

# AN ANALYSIS OF POLAR QUESTIONS IN VIETNAMESE

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## Surface profile of polar questions in Vietnamese

- Polar questions in Vietnamese consists of an affirmative sentence followed by the sentential negation

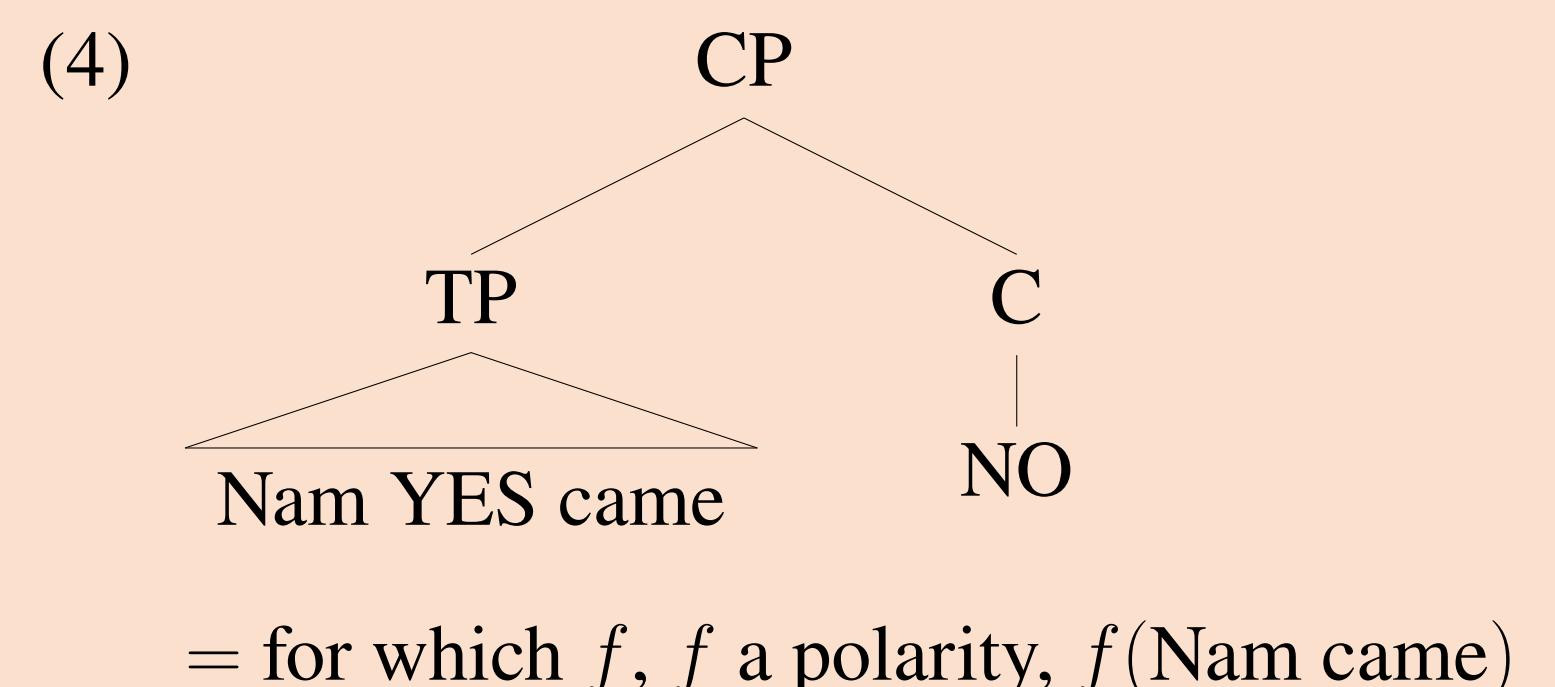
- (1) a. *nó ăn cám* he eat rice 'he eats rice'
- b. *nó không ăn cám* he NO eat rice 'he doesn't eat rice'
- c. *nó có ăn cám* he YES eat rice 'he does eat rice'

- (2) *nó có ăn cám không?* he YES eat rice NO 'does he eat rice?'

- (3) *he YES eat rice* NO  
affirmative sentence negation

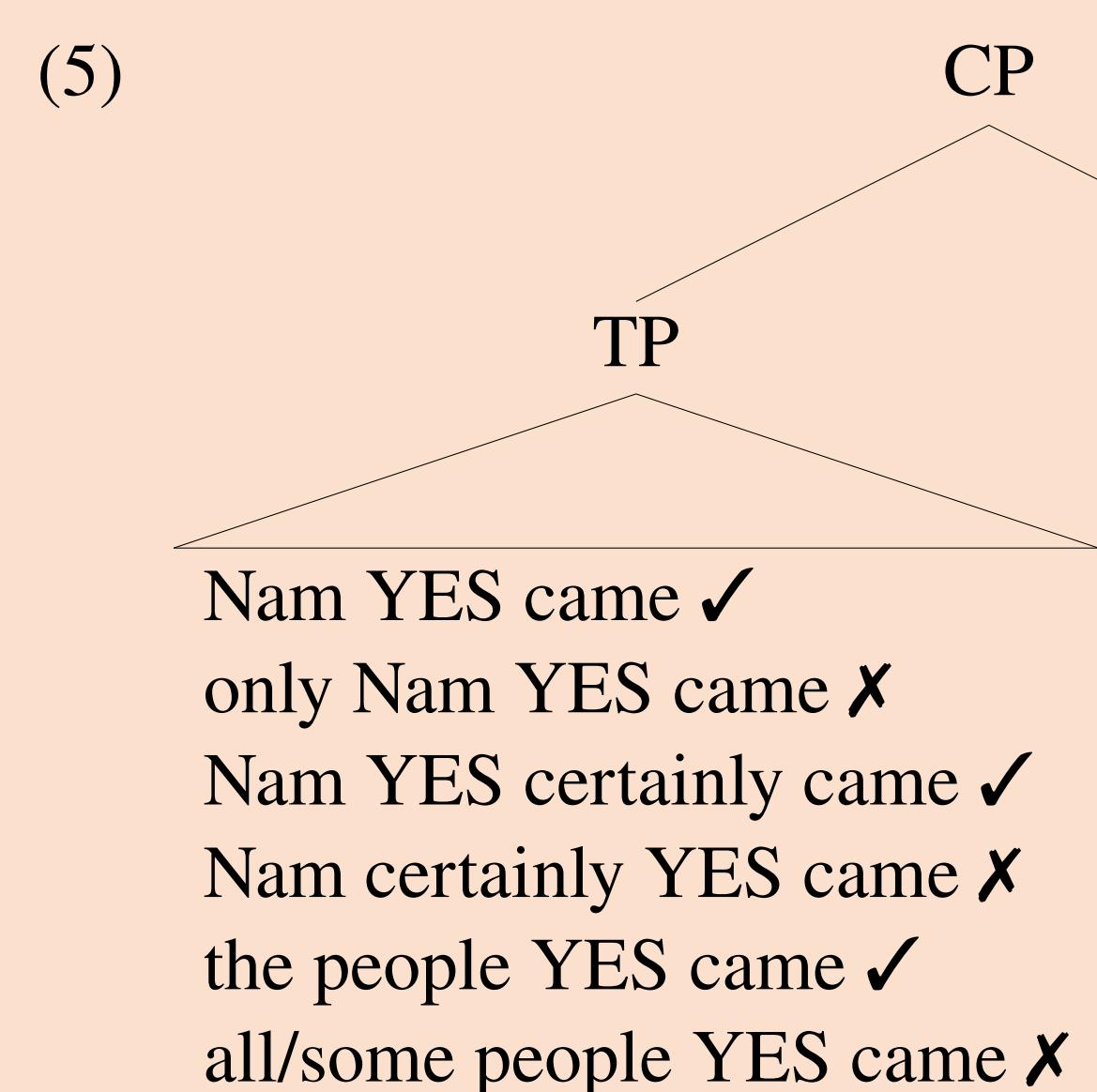
## Previous accounts

- Clause-final NO is **not** analyzed as negation but as a 'question particle' which basically means 'whether' (Trinh 2005, Duffield 2007, Phan 2024)



## Problem for previous accounts

- Clause-final NO seems to be mysteriously picky about its complement: affirmative sentences that are independently acceptable become deviant when followed by NO in polar questions



## Partition by Exhaustification

- Fox (2018, 2020) proposes the following felicity condition on questions

- (6) Partition by Exhaustification  
A question is only felicitous if its elements, once exhaustified, partition the context set

## Deletion analysis

- Polar questions are basically elliptical alternative questions

- (7) a. *Nam YES came NO*  
b.  $[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ Nam YES came}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ Nam NO came}]$
- (8) a.  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}}$  is derived from  $\text{S}_{\text{YES}}$  by replacing YES with NO  
b. everything in  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}}$  is deleted except NO  
c.  $\llbracket Q \rrbracket = \lambda p. \lambda q. \{p, q\}$

## Only

- Satisfaction of PbE requires **only** be semantically superfluous

- (9)  $\#[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ chỉ Nam có đến}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ chỉ Nam không đến}]$   
only Nam YES came only Nam NO came  
 $\text{S}_{\text{YES}} = \text{only Nam came}$ ,  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}} = \text{only Nam did not come}$

- (10) Context: either John won or Bill won
  - a. Did John win?
  - b. #Did only John win?

## Modal adverbs

- In the case of low **certainly**, satisfaction of PbE requires an opinionated context, which makes **certainly** infelicitous (von Fintel and Gillies, 2010)

- (11)  $[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ Nam có chắc chắn đến}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ Nam không chắc chắn đến}]$   
Nam YES certainly came Nam NO certainly came  
 $\text{S}_{\text{YES}} = \square \text{Nam came}$ ,  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}} = \neg \square \text{Nam came}$

- (12)  $\#[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ Nam chắc chắn có đến}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ Nam chắc chắn không đến}]$   
Nam certainly YES came Nam certainly NO came  
 $\text{S}_{\text{YES}} = \square \text{Nam came}$ ,  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}} = \square \neg \text{Nam came}$

- (13) Look out the window and tell me if it's (#certainly) raining

## Quantifiers

- Satisfaction of PbE requires the context to be homogeneous, resulting in a preference for definites over quantifiers

- (14)  $\#[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ ai cũng có đến}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ ai cũng không đến}]$   
everyone YES came everyone NO came  
 $\text{S}_{\text{YES}} = \forall x. x \text{ came}$ ,  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}} = \forall x. \neg x \text{ came}$

- (15)  $\#[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ một người có đến}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ một người không đến}]$   
someone YES came someone NO came  
 $\text{S}_{\text{YES}} = \exists x. x \text{ came}$ ,  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}} = \exists x. \neg x \text{ came}$

- (16)  $[\text{S}_{\text{YES}} \text{ mọi người có đến}] Q [\text{S}_{\text{NO}} \text{ mọi người không đến}]$   
the people YES came the people NO came  
 $\text{S}_{\text{YES}} = \text{the people came}$ ,  $\text{S}_{\text{NO}} = \text{the people didn't come}$

## English

- Because the trace of **whether** is silent, cases of deviant sentences in Vietnamese become cases of missing readings in English (Bennett 1977, Higginbotham 1993, Krifka 2001, Guerzoni 2004)

- (17) did only John<sub>F</sub> come?
  - a.  $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 \text{ [only [John}_F \text{ came]]}] = \{\text{only } p, \neg \text{only } p\}$
  - b.  $\# \text{whether}_1 \text{ [only [t}_1 \text{ [John}_F \text{ came]]]} = \{\text{only } p, \text{only } \neg p\}$

- (18) Will John certainly win?
  - a.  $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 \text{ [certainly [John will win]]}] = \{\square p, \neg \square p\}$
  - b.  $\# \text{whether}_1 \text{ [certainly [t}_1 \text{ [John will win]]]} = \{\square p, \square \neg p\}$

- (19) did everyone come?
  - a.  $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 \text{ [everyone}_2 [t}_2 \text{ came]]}] = \{\forall x. P_x, \neg \forall x. P_x\}$
  - b.  $\# \text{whether}_1 \text{ [everyone}_2 [t}_1 \text{ [t}_2 \text{ came]]]} = \{\forall x. P_x, \forall x. \neg P_x\}$

- (20) did someone come?
  - a.  $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 \text{ [someone}_2 [t}_2 \text{ came]]}] = \{\exists x. P_x, \neg \exists x. P_x\}$
  - b.  $\# \text{whether}_1 \text{ [someone}_2 [t}_1 \text{ [t}_2 \text{ came]]]} = \{\exists x. P_x, \exists x. \neg P_x\}$

## References & Acknowledgement

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