

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 cơm b. nó không ăn cơm c. nó có ăn cơm
he eat rice he NO eat rice he YES eat rice
‘he eats rice’ ‘he doesn’t eat rice’ ‘he does eat rice’

- (2) nó có ăn cơm 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)

- (4)
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- Nam YES came NO
- = for which f , f a polarity, f (Nam came)

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

- (5)
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- Nam YES came ✓
only Nam YES came ✗
Nam YES certainly came ✓
Nam certainly YES came ✗
the people YES came ✓
all/some people YES came ✗

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. $[S_{YES} \text{ Nam YES came}] Q [S_{NO} \text{ Nam NO came}]$
- (8) a. S_{NO} is derived from S_{YES} by replacing YES with NO
b. everything in S_{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) $\# [S_{YES} \text{ chỉ Nam có đến }] Q [S_{NO} \text{ chỉ Nam không đến }]$
only Nam YES came only Nam NO came
 $S_{YES} = \text{only Nam came}, S_{NO} = \text{only Nam did not come}$
- (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) $[S_{YES} \text{ Nam có chắc chắn đến }] Q [S_{NO} \text{ Nam không chắc chắn đến }]$
Nam YES certainly came Nam NO certainly came
 $S_{YES} = \Box \text{Nam came}, S_{NO} = \neg \Box \text{Nam came}$
- (12) $\# [S_{YES} \text{ Nam chắc chắn có đến }] Q [S_{NO} \text{ Nam chắc chắn không đến }]$
Nam certainly YES came Nam certainly NO came
 $S_{YES} = \Box \text{Nam came}, S_{NO} = \Box \neg \text{Nam came}$
- (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) $\# [S_{YES} \text{ ai cũng có đến }] Q [S_{NO} \text{ ai cũng không đến }]$
everyone YES came everyone NO came
 $S_{YES} = \forall x. x \text{ came}, S_{NO} = \forall x. \neg x \text{ came}$
- (15) $\# [S_{YES} \text{ một người có đến }] Q [S_{NO} \text{ một người không đến }]$
someone YES came someone NO came
 $S_{YES} = \exists x. x \text{ came}, S_{NO} = \exists x. \neg x \text{ came}$
- (16) $[S_{YES} \text{ mọi người có đến }] Q [S_{NO} \text{ mọi người không đến }]$
the people YES came the people NO came
 $S_{YES} = \text{the people came}, S_{NO} = \text{the people didn't come}$

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_F come?
a. $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 [\text{only} [\text{John}_F \text{ came}]]] = \{\text{only } p, \neg \text{only } p\}$
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. $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 [\text{certainly} [\text{John will win}]]] = \{\Box p, \neg \Box p\}$
b. $\# \text{whether}_1 [\text{certainly} [t_1 [\text{John will win}]]] = \{\Box p, \Box \neg p\}$
- (19) did everyone come?
a. $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 [\text{everyone}_2 [t_2 \text{ came}]]] = \{\forall x. Px, \neg \forall x. Px\}$
b. $\# \text{whether}_1 [\text{everyone}_2 [t_1 [t_2 \text{ came}]]] = \{\forall x. Px, \forall x. \neg Px\}$
- (20) did someone come?
a. $\text{whether}_1 [t_1 [\text{someone}_2 [t_2 \text{ came}]]] = \{\exists x. Px, \neg \exists x. Px\}$
b. $\# \text{whether}_1 [\text{someone}_2 [t_1 [t_2 \text{ came}]]] = \{\exists x. Px, \exists x. \neg Px\}$

References & Acknowledgement

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