

Vietnamese polar questions

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- 1 Questions and answers
- 2 An analysis of polar questions in Vietnamese
- 3 Predictions
 - The auxiliary system
 - Quantifiers
 - EVERY
 - SOME
 - MANY
 - Distribution of ONLY
 - Island sensitivity
 - Embeddability
- 4 Previous works and future research

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Questions

- To ask a question is to request the hearer to choose one proposition from a set of propositions (Searle, 1969)
- A question represents a set of propositions, namely those that count as its answers (cf. Hamblin, 1958; Karttunen, 1977; Groenendijk and Stokhof, 1984)

(1) $\llbracket \text{who likes John} \rrbracket =$
 $\{\text{Mary likes John, Sue likes John, Anne likes John, ...}\}$

Alternatives

- The set of answers to a question is a set of “alternatives” (Rooth, 1992)
- (2) Definition (Fox and Katzir, 2011)
- ψ is an alternative of ϕ iff ψ is derivable from ϕ by replacement of a constituent of ϕ with an expression of the same type

Focus

- We call the constituent of an alternative which distinguishes it from the other alternatives the “focused constituent” or “focus”

(3) Ai thích Nam?

- [Lan]_F thích Nam
- [Hoàng đế Nhật Bản]_F thích Nam
- [Người đàn bà tôi gặp hôm qua]_F thích Nam

- There is always the option of formulating the question by listing its answers using the disjunctive particle **hay**

(4) Lan thích Nam **hay** Hoàng đế Nhật Bản thích Nam?

Disjunctive questions

- **hay** maps two propositions p and q to the question $\{p, q\}$

$$(5) \quad \left[\begin{array}{c} \alpha \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ S_1 \quad \text{hay} \quad S_2 \end{array} \right] = \{S_1, S_2\}$$

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Description

- We take “polar questions” to be those exemplified by (6a) and (6b)

- (6) a. Nam **có** đọc sách **không**?
b. Nam **đã** đọc sách **chưa**?

Proposal

- Vietnamese polar questions are headed by a silent Q whose meaning is akin to **hay**

(7) a. Disjunctive questions

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \diagup \quad \diagdown \\ S_1 \quad \text{hay} \quad S_2 \end{array} \right] = \{S_1, S_2\}$$

b. Polar questions

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \diagup \quad \diagdown \\ S_1 \quad Q \quad S_2 \end{array} \right] = \{S_1, S_2\}, \text{ provided } S_1 = \neg S_2$$

Syntactic conditions imposed by *Q*

(8) Syntactic condition

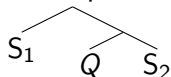
- a. S_1 and S_2 are alternatives
 - b. S_1 has positive polarity
- Syntax has access to alternative generation (cf. Horn, 1972; Katzir, 2007, 2008; Fox and Katzir, 2011; Trinh and Haida, 2015; Trinh, 2018)
 - Syntax has access to polarity (cf. Klima, 1964; Progovac, 1994; den Dikken, 2002; Szabolcsi, 2004)

Phonological conditions imposed by Q

- (9) Phonological condition
- a. Pronounce S_1 normally
 - b. Pronounce only the focus of S_2
 - c. Pronounce only one syllable of S_2
-
- Phonology has access to focus marking
 - Phonology has access to syllabic structure

Consequences of the conditions

(10) Polar questions



(11) Requirements

- a. S_2 is derivable from S_1 by replacing exactly one word in S_1
- b. S_2 is the negation of S_1

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Subj có VP không

(12) Nam có đọc sách không?

(13) Nam có đọc sách
~~Nam~~ không đọc sách

Subj đã VP chưa

(14) Nam đã đọc sách chưa?

(15) Nam đã đọc sách
~~Nam chưa đọc sách~~

*Subj được VP phải

(16) *Nam được đọc sách phải?

(17) Nam được đọc sách $= \Diamond p$
~~Nam~~ phải đọc sách $= \Box p$

Problem: $S_1 \neq \neg S_2$

*Subj có sẽ VP không

(18) *Nam có sẽ đọc sách không?

(19) Nam có sẽ đọc sách
 ~~Nam~~ không sẽ đọc sách

Problem: both S_1 and S_2 are syntactically ill-formed

(20) *Nam có sẽ đọc sách hay Nam không sẽ đọc sách

*Subj sẽ có VP không

(21) *Nam sẽ có đọc sách không?

(22) Nam sẽ có đọc sách
 ~~Nam~~ sẽ không ~~đọc sách~~

Problem: $S_1 \neq \neg S_2$

(23) a. $\llbracket S_1 \rrbracket = \forall d, d \text{ a future development, Nam reads books in } d$
 b. $\llbracket S_2 \rrbracket = \forall d, d \text{ a future development, } \neg \text{Nam reads books in } d$
 (cf. Thomason, 1970)

(24) $\forall x \neg Px$ is not the negation of $\forall x Px$

*Subj có đã VP không

(25) *Nam có đã đọc sách không?

(26) Nam có đã đọc sách
 ~~Nam~~ không đã ~~đọc~~ sách

Problem: S_1 and S_2 are ill-formed syntactically

(27) *Nam có đã đọc sách hay Nam không đã đọc sách

*Subj đã có VP không

(28) *Nam đã có đọc sách không?

(29) Nam đã có đọc sách
 ~~Nam~~ đã không ~~đọc sách~~

Problem: $S_1 \neq \neg S_2$

(30) a. $\llbracket S_1 \rrbracket = \exists t, t \text{ a relevant past time, Nam reads books at } t$
 b. $\llbracket S_2 \rrbracket = \exists t, t \text{ a relevant past time, } \neg \text{Nam reads books at } t$
 (cf. Partee, 1984)

(31) $\exists x \neg Px$ is not the negation of $\exists x Px$

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Scope of negation and position of *đều*

(32) tất cả mọi người đều đọc sách
 everyone deu read books
 $\forall x P_x$

- (33) a. tất cả mọi người đều không đọc sách
 everyone deu not read books
 $\forall x \neg P_x$
- b. tất cả mọi người không đều đọc sách
 everyone not deu read books
 $\neg \forall x P_x$

everyone có đều VP không

(34) tất cả mọi người có đều đọc sách không?

(35)	everyone có	đều đọc sách	$= \forall x P_x$
	everyone không	đều đọc sách	$= \neg \forall x P_x$

*everyone đều có VP không

(36) *tất cả mọi người đều có đọc sách không?

(37)	everyone đều có	đọc sách	$= \forall x P_x$
	everyone đều không	đọc sách	$= \forall x \neg P_x$

Problem: $S_1 \neq \neg S_2$

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Surface scope

- (38) a. một số người đọc sách
some people read books
 $\exists x P_x$
- b. một số người không đọc sách
some people not read books
 $\exists x \neg P_x$

*some people có VP không

(39) *một số người có đọc sách không?

(40)	some people có	đọc sách	$= \exists x P_x$
	some people không	đọc sách	$= \exists x \neg P_x$

Problem: $S_1 \neq \neg S_2$

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Ambiguity

- (41) a. Nam đọc nhiều sách
Nam read many books
 $MxPx$
- b. Nam không đọc nhiều sách
Nam not read many books
 $\neg MxPx, Mx\neg Px$

Disambiguation by Q

(42) A: Nam có đọc nhiều sách không?

B: Không!

$\neg MxPx, *Mx\neg Px$

→ Q forces S_2 to have the meaning which is the negation of S_1

(43) Nam có đọc nhiều sách

$= MxPx$

Nam không đọc nhiều sách

$= \neg MxPx, *Mx\neg Px$

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Position and scope

(44) Nam chỉ đọc sách

= Nam has no property other than 'reading books'

only(p)

(45) a. Nam không chỉ đọc sách

= Nam has some property other than 'reading books'

\neg *only(p)*

b. Nam chỉ không đọc sách

= Nam has no property other than 'not reading books'

only(\neg p)

Subj có chỉ VP không

(46) Nam có chỉ đọc sách không?

(47) Nam có chỉ đọc sách $= \text{only}(p)$
~~Nam~~ không chỉ đọc sách $= \neg \text{only}(p)$

*Subj chỉ có VP không

(48) *Nam chỉ có đọc sách không?

(49)	Nam chỉ có	đọc sách	= <i>only</i> (<i>p</i>)
	Nam chỉ không	đọc sách	= <i>only</i> ($\neg p$)

Problem: $S_1 \neq \neg S_2$

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A contrast

- Disjunctive questions can “associate” out of islands while polar questions cannot

(50) Intended question = {Nam likes people who **do** read books, Nam likes people who **don't** read books}

(51) Nam thích [NP người [**có** đọc sách hay **không** đọc sách]]
 Nam likes people **do** read books hay **don't** read books

(52) *Nam thích [NP người [**có** đọc sách **không**]]
 Nam likes people **do** read books **don't**

hay has no presupposition

(53) Nam thích [NP người [có đọc sách hay không đọc sách]]
 Nam likes people do read books hay don't read books

(54) Nam thích [NP người [có đọc sách]]
 Nam likes people do read books

hay

~~Nam thích~~ [NP ~~người~~ [không đọc sách]]
 Nam likes people don't read books

Q presupposes $S_1 = \neg S_2$

(55) *Nam thích [NP người [có đọc sách không]]
 Nam likes people do read books don't

(56) Nam thích [NP người [có đọc sách]]
 Nam likes people do read books

Q

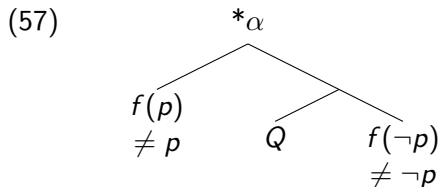
~~Nam thích~~ [NP ~~người~~ [không đọc sách]]
 Nam likes people don't read books

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Non-trivial embedding

- Let f be some non-trivial semantic environment, i.e. $f(p) \neq p$. We predict the following.



- This means polar question cannot associate out of any non-trivial embedded position

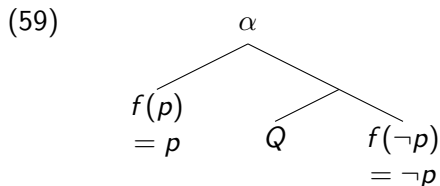
Prediction confirmed

- Intended question = {Nam wants My to read books, Nam wants My not to read books}

(58) *Nam muốn [My có đọc sách không]
Nam want My có read books không

Trivial embedding

- Now let f be a trivial semantic environment, i.e. $f(p) = p$. We predict the following.



- This means polar question can associate out of trivial embedded positions

Prediction confirmed

- Intended question = {It is true that Nam **does** read books, It is true that Nam **doesn't** read books}

(60) Đúng ra là [Nam có đọc sách không]
It is true that Nam **does** read books **doesn't**

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Previous works

- Trinh (2005), Duffield (2007, 2013), Phan and Duffield (2019)
 - these works analyze polar question as a monoclausal and not as a biclausal structure
 - have to fit affirmation and negation into one TP
 - have to postulate remnant movements which are unmotivated
 - they do not make a systematic connection between the structure of the question and the structure of its answers
 - fail to assimilate polar questions to wh-questions
 - fail to account for many correlations between facts about polar questions and facts about negated and non-negated declaratives
 - they do not provide a semantically transparent syntax

Future research

- work out the semantics of future and preterite tense
- extend the proposal to Chinese A-not-A questions (cf. Huang, 1981, 1982; McCawley, 1994; Tsai, 1994; Biberauer et al., 2014)
- relate the analysis to English polar questions (Guerzoni and Sharvit, 2014)
- situate the investigation in the wider context of the research on the interface between logic and grammar (cf. Fintel, 1993; Fox, 2000; Gajewski, 2002; Abrusán, 2007; Magri, 2009; Chierchia, 2013, among others)

Thanks!

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