ASKING WITH ASSERTION
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Vietnamese has two morphemes, *không* and *à*, which can be suffixed to a declarative to turn it into a yes/no question. For example, both (2a) and (2b) are understood as requesting the addressee to say whether John likes Mary, i.e. whether (1) is true. (Note that *không* triggers the appearance of the morpheme *có* at the preverbal position.) Let us call (2a) a "polar question" and (2b) a "particle question".

(1)   John   thích Mary
        John   like   Mary
        'John likes Mary'

(2)   a.   John   có thích Mary không?
        b.   John thích Mary à?

Polar and particle questions do not share the same conditions of use. In this paper, we describe and propose an explanation for the differences between these two kinds of yes/no question, and suggest that our analysis of particle questions can be extended to "declarative questions" in English.

1. Observations

1.1. The most salient difference between polar and particle questions is that the latter are in some sensed "biased", i.e. they are inappropriate in contexts where the questioner is supposed to maintain neutrality or ignorance with respect to the addressee's belief. Thus, we might expect a visa application form to contain (3a), but not (3b), as a question as to whether the applicant intends to work in the US.

(3)   Context: visa application form
        a.   Bạn   có   định   làm-việc   tại   Mỹ   không?
                you   có   intend work   in   America   không
        b.   #Bạn   định   làm-việc   tại   Mỹ   à?
                you   intend work   in   America   à

Questions (3b) gives the impression that there is suspicion that the applicant intends to work in the US. Here is another example. Suppose John calls up his girlfriend, knowing nothing about her plan for the evening. In that context, (4a) can be the first thing he says to her, but not (4b). The conversation can start with (4b) only if John is <u>not</u> ignorant about his girlfriend's intention.

(4)   Context: starting a conversation
        a.   Chào em.   Em   có   muốn   đi xem phim   tối nay   không?
                Hello.   You   có   want   go to the movie   this evening không
        b.   #Chào em.   Em   muốn   đi xem phim   tối nay   à?
                Hello.   You   want   go to the movie   this evening   à

1.2. Particle questions can be used to indicate that a presupposition is "informative", i.e. is not part of the addressee's belief (von Fintel 2006). Consider the discourse in (5).

(5)   A: Tôi   phai   di   don   chi toi
                I   must   go   pick up   my sister
                'I have to go pick up my sister'
        B: Anh   có   chị   à?
                You   have   sister à
        B: #Anh có   chị   không?
                You   have   sister không

Suppose B did not know that A had a sister. In other word, A's presupposition is informative to B. Then B can make this known to A by way of a particle question. Asking a polar question would be inappropriate in this context.

1.3. Polar questions allows NPIs, but particle questions do not.

(6)   Intended meaning: 'Did he bother to stand up and say hello to you?'
        a.   Nó   có   buồn đứng dậy   chào anh   không?
                he   có   bother stand up   greet you   không
        b.   *Nó buồn đứng dậy chào anh à?

1.4. Polar and particle questions differ with respect to their (positive) answers. Consider (2a) and (2b) again. If John does not like Mary, the true answer to both questions will be *không*. But suppose John does like Mary. The true answer to (2a) will then be *có*, but the true answer to (2b) in this case will be *vâng*, not *có*. Also,

particle questions such as (2b) can be answered with *đúng vậy* ('that's correct') or *hoàn toàn không phải* ('totally untrue'). This is not possible with polar questions: uttering any of these expressions after (2a) would be unacceptable.

1.5. Polar questions can be embedded, but particle questions cannot.

(7)   Intended meaning: 'Bill knows whether John likes Mary'
    a.   Bill   biết   John có   thích Mary không
            Bill   knowsJohn có   like   Mary không
    b.   * Bill biết John thích Mary à

2. Analysis

2.1. It turns out that polar questions in Vietnamese have the same conditions of use as their English counterparts. We will assume, then, that (2a) and (7a) are semantically equivalent to (8a) and (8b), respectively.

(8)   a.   Does John like Mary?
    b.   Bill knows whether John likes Mary

We take a polar question with propositional content p, then, to represent a partition of logical space into two cells, one containing the possible worlds where p is true and one containing the possible worlds where p is false (Groenendijk & Stokhof 1984, Groenendijk 1999).

2.2. For particle questions, we propose that the semantics of *à* is similar to that of a "performative prefix" (Levinson 1983). In other word, φ *à* means roughly "you say φ". The pragmatics of a particle question is the pragmatics of a declarative: the speaker proposes to add its content to the common ground (Stalnaker 1978, 2002). This means that the speaker of φ *à* proposes to make it common ground that his addressee says φ.

2.2.1. The bias of particle questions (cf. 1.1) is accounted for as follows. Conversational maxims dictate that one should only say what one believes, and one should propose to add p to the common ground only if one has sufficient evidence for p (Grice 1975). It follows that proposing to make it common ground that x says φ comes to the same thing as proposing to make it common ground that x believes that φ. And if it can be assumed that x knows whether or not φ is true, proposing that x believes that φ comes to the same thing as proposing that φ. Thus, the speaker of (3b) gives the impression that she has reasons to believe that her addressee intends to work in the US.

2.2.2. The facts in 1.2 can be explained as follows. Suppose it is a rule of conversation that one should not say what is already presupposed, i.e. what is already mutual knowledge (Stalnaker 1978). By assumption, the speaker of the particle question in (5) proposes to make it common ground that A says that he has a sister. If his proposal is accepted, it will become a fact about the conversation that A says that he has a sister, which means the conversation will become one in which it is not a presupposed that A has a sister. Thus, the particle question in (5) feels like an attempt at "repairing" the discourse, like a "reminder" that it is not to be taken for granted that everyone knows that A has a sister.

For lack of space, we cannot show how the other facts about particle questions are explained. We will do this in the talk.

3. Extending the analysis to English

It turns out that particle questions in Vietnamese are very similar in its usage to "declarative questions" in English, i.e. yes/no questions which have the syntax of declaratives and which are usually spoken with rising intonation (cf. Gunlogson 2002). For example, it can be shown that (2b) is used in the same contexts as (9).

(9)   John likes Mary?

In fact, the discourse particle *à* shares a distintive property with intonation patterns: its semantics is non-compositional. Specifically, it cannot be manipulated by truth-conditional operators such as tense, negation, conjunction and propositional attitude verbs (cf. Constant 2009). We suggest to extend our analysis to English, and show that previous proposals made for English (Gunlogson 2002, Safarova 2005, Truckenbrodt 2009) are inadequate.

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