

Modulating Question Acts: The Case of Hungarian Particle *Vajon*

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Under normal circumstances, use of a standard (matrix) interrogative like *Is it snowing?* or *Who came?* “communicates” two things in addition to propositional content:

A) “doubt”:

I wonder whether it is snowing.

I wonder who came.

B) “inquisition”:

Tell me whether it is snowing.

Tell me who came.

(cf. Maynard 1995)

Searle (1969:66) distributes these components over three conditions:

- (1) a. *preparatory*: *S* doesn't know the answer to *q*
- b. *sincerity*: *S* wants the information
- c. *essential*: the utterance counts as an attempt by *S* to obtain the information from *A*

(1a) + (1b) \approx “doubt”; (1b) + (1c) \approx “inquisition”

Q1: Are these components grammatically encoded?

Q2: What is the status of sentence mood and its determination of illocution types (“sentence type meanings”)?

Lyons (1977:755) discusses the “distinction between asking a question of someone and simply posing the question (without necessarily addressing it to anyone).”

In some languages, interrogatives can apparently be marked such that only “doubt” is expressed and “inquisition” is suspended:

- (2) a. dubitative marking (non-affirmative mood) in Blackfoot
- b. Danish/Swedish interrogative particles *mon* / *månne*
- c. German sentence type *Ob/W ... (wohl) ... V_{fin}*
- d. **Hungarian interrogative particle *vajon***

Vajon is adequate in contexts where inquisition is inadequate:

(3) A: *Have you heard from John recently?*

B: *No, not at all.*

A: #(*Vajon*) *elvégezte már az egyetemet?*
prt vm.finished already the university.acc
#‘Has he graduated already?’
‘Might he have graduated yet?’

Vajon is inadequate in contexts where inquisition is the purpose:

(4) [Context: Windows calls on user:]

(# *Vajon*) *folytatja a leállítást? Igen/Nem*

prt continue.3sg the closing.acc yes/no

'Do you want to continue with shutting down (the computer)?'

If *vajon* is used, inquisition hedges are inadequate:

(5) (# *Megkérdezhetem, hogy vajon mennyit keres Kovács?*

vm.ask.may.1sg that prt how.much.acc earns K.

'I wonder how much K. makes, (# if I may ask).'

Truckenbrodt (2004) develops a theory of “sentence type meanings” that covers a wider range of types of interrogatives and declaratives.

The main distinction concerns German “V⁰-in-C⁰” vs. “V-final” forms:

(6) A: *Have you heard from John recently?*

B: *No, not at all.*

A: # **Hat** er inzwischen promoviert?

A: **Ob** er inzwischen (**wohl**) promoviert **hat**?

Semantically, this main distinction is captured in terms of the presence or absence of reference to the addressee in the STM-formula

- (7) a. INT_{ViC} : $WANT(S, A, KNOW(S\&A, ANS(q)))$
“S wants A to make the answer to q common ground”
 (“intersubjective”)
- b. INT_{VF} : $WANT(S, KNOW(S, ANS(q)))$
“S wants to know the answer to q”
 (“subjective”)

At least from a naive point of view, rhetorical questions also suspend the inquisitive component of questions.

Vajon-interrogatives seem to have rhetorical uses:

(8) *Van-e vajon más választása Magyarországnak,*

be-e prt other choice Hungary.dat

mint az Unióhoz való csatlakozás?

than the Union.to being joining

'Does Hungary have any choice other than joining the Union?'

(9) [Context: Lance wins all the races.]

A: *Who won this time?*

B: *Na, vajon ki?*

prt prt who

'Well, guess who!'

Problem 1:

Ob/W ... (wohl) ... V_{fin}-interrogatives, for which the “subjective” analysis in (7b) was designed, are less natural as rhetorical questions (but see Meibauer 1986: 76ff).

Problem 2:

Truckenbrodt (2004) argued that rhetorical questions should receive an “intersubjective” treatment in terms of (7a):

Through using a rhetorical question q in a specific context, S makes the answer to q salient. Together with (7a) this amounts to a call on A to adopt the answer to q . (\approx indirect assertion)

Toward a solution: Option 1

- Assume Truckenbrodt's approach is correct.
- Assume that the *vajon*-interrogatives in (8) and (9) are “indirect rhetorical questions”, comparable to declaratives like (10):

(10) *I ask myself/I wonder/The question is
whether Hungary has any choice other than joining the Union.*

Evidence for this would be effects of strength and irony (see below).

- Assume that *Ob/W ... (wohl) ... V_{fin}*-interrogatives have a stronger dubitative component.

→ (7b) is OK for Hungarian but insufficient for German.

(11) B. Obama:
(#Vajon) *Am I responsible for the sins of the Bush-administration?*

(12) (#Vajon) *Am I your slave?*

(13) [Context: A comes home carrying several bags full of groceries.]

B: *Where have you been?*

A: *Na, vajon hol?*

prt prt where

'Let's think about where I have been.'

Option 2

Challenge Truckenbrodt's analysis:

- argue against intersubjectivity (Plunze and Zimmermann 2006, Zaefferer 2006, Potts 2006)
- rhetorical questions as indirect speech acts
- performative counterparts of STMs: inadequate(?)

Vajon is inadequate in expository questions:

(14) A: # *Vajon mit csináltam ma?*
prt what.acc did.1sg today
What have I done today?

A: I did the shopping, washed up the dishes, fed the cat...

Vajon and *Ob/W* ... (*wohl*) ... *V_{fin}* interrogatives express “reflective questions” (sometimes called deliberative questions).

Expository questions lack the necessary amount of reflectiveness while indirect rhetorical questions are compatible with a pretense of reflectiveness.

Vajon is adequate in titles of articles/books:

(15) *Vajon elavulttá vált a hagyományos házasság?*

prt obsolete.into became the traditional marriage

'Is formalized marriage becoming obsolete?'

(16) *Vajon hány selyemút van?*

prt how.many silk.road is

'How many silk roads are there?'

THANK YOU!