On Discourse Effects of Biased Questions in Japanese  
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I. Introduction. Biased questions are very common cross-linguistically (Farkas and Roelofsen (2017), Gyuris (2016), a.o.). Japanese is not an exception and has a variety of biased questions (Ito and Oshima 2014, Sudo 2013). Building on previous work, this paper aims to achieve two goals. First, I will slightly modify Sudo (2013)’s analysis and propose discourse effects of outer negation questions (ONQs): (1) and no(da) questions (no-Qs): (2). Second, I will show that the discourse effects of biased questions with multiple particles can be derived compositionally. This analysis can also derive possible combinations of discourse particles in (3).

II. Discourse effects of outer negation and no(da).
1. ONQs: The Japanese negative morpheme nai can be used as inner or outer negation (Ito and Oshima 2014). When outer negation is used in the question, it conveys a positive bias toward the sentence radical. I modify the account in Sudo (2013) and claim that positive bias is necessary (indicated by +positive in Table 1) besides the neutral contextual evidence (-positive & -negative in Table 1). Here, a private bias is only accessible to the speaker, and the contextual evidence is available for all discourse participants.

2. no(da): According to Ijima (2010), no(da) marks information that is new to the speaker. Thus, p-no(da) in declaratives signals the speaker has just become aware that p is true. With no-Qs, the effects remain the same: no-Qs indicate that positive contextual evidence is necessary. The speaker has a positive bias toward p based on the available contextual evidence.

   The comparison of polar interrogatives and the two discussed above is in Table 1.

III. Combinations of particles. Now we can predict all the possible combinations of no(da) and nai, and also their discourse effects. The interpretation of nai depends on how it is combined with no(da) as shown in (3) (Ito and Oshima 2014).

   For instance, the unavailability of outer negation in (3a) can be obtained in the following way. If the outer negation interpretation were available, the whole discourse effects would be that there is contextual evidence that the speaker has a private bias for p. This contradicts with a definition of a private bias, which is only available to the speaker.

   By contrast, when noda precedes nai, nai can be interpreted as outer negation. [(p-noda)-naiOUT] questions suggest that the speaker thinks there is contextual evidence that supports p, which leads her to have moderate to high credence in p.

   We can get the discourse effects of complex patterns as in (3c) in the same way: Both interpretations are possible since neither brings inconsistency. Table 2 illustrates that different combinations indicate different information on contextual evidence and epistemic bias.

IV. Conclusion. On the empirical side, the paper gives a compositional account of a group of biased questions in Japanese and predicts the available particle combinations and their interpretation. On the theoretical side, it shows the need to allow context structures to make subtle distinctions in terms of the nature of the evidence for a particular bias.
(1) a. Ima, ame hutte nai?
   now rain fall nai\textsubscript{OUT}
   ‘It is raining now, isn’t it?’

b. Un, futteru yo.
   yes raining
   ‘Yes, it is raining.’

(2) Ima, ame hutteru no?
   now rain falling NO(DA)
   ‘(Wow,) is it raining now?’

Table 1: Polar interrogative (PI) versus ONQ versus no-Q

(3) Possible combination of nai + (no)da and interpretations:
   a. nai + noda → nai\textsubscript{IN} + noda
      [inner negation interpretation only]
   b. noda + nai → noda + nai\textsubscript{OUT}
      [outer negation interpretation only]
   c. noda + nai + noda → noda + nai\textsubscript{IN/OUT} + noda
      [Both interpretations are available]

Table 2: Questions and their discourse effects

References


