Rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay

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Rhetorical questions in Papuan Malay

Pseudo question

(1) a, *sembu apa?*

ah be.healed what

[Nephew: ‘(I already) recovered’] Aunt: ‘ah, *(from) what (have you) recovered?’

Stimulus question

(2) jadi *akirnya apa yang terjadi?, de biking malam*

so finally what REL happen 3SG make night

[About an ancestor:] ‘so finally what happened?, he created the night!’
Introduction

- Outline
  - Introduction
  - Syntactic and phonological features
  - Pragmatic uses
    - Pseudo questions
    - Stimulus questions
    - Quantitative analysis
  - Summary
Introduction

- Papuan Malay [pmy]
  - LWC in coastal West Papua
  - 1,100,000 or 1,200,000 speakers (Kluge 2017: 37)

- Recorded corpus
  - 16-hour of spontaneous conversations and narratives
  - 231 identified rhetorical questions
Introduction

- **Rhetorical questions** *(Abrams and Harpham 2009: 315)*
  - Question format
  - No request for information

- **Basic types of rhetorical questions** *(Hackstein 2004)*
  - Pseudo questions
  - Stimulus questions
Introduction

- **Pseudo questions with social functions** (Bussmann 1996: 1009; Frank 1990: 737; Hackstein 2004)
  - Provide indirect way to imply more than is said
    - Declare an expectation or point of view
    - Strengthen or soften a statement
  - Answer is obvious and implicit
  - Example
    - “Are you crazy?”
- **Emotive meanings** (Schmidt-Radefeldt 1977: 389; Beekman and Callow 1974; Larson 1998)
  - Express the speakers’ propositional attitude
    - Dismay, emphasis, indignation, perplexity, protest, reproach, wonder, etc.
Introduction

- Stimulus questions with discourse-marking functions (Hackstein 2004)
  - Raise an issue for discussion
    - Signal clarification, conclusion, or explanation
    - Announce new topic or new aspect of same topic
  - Answer is provided by the speaker
  - Example (Larson 1998: 260)
    - “Why is there so much unemployment these days?”
Introduction

- Interpretation of rhetorical questions (Frank 1990)
  - Difficult to define
    - Impossible to get inside the speakers’ head
    - Impossible to know with certainty their intent
  - Analysts’ subjective judgments
    - Speakers’ true intent
    - Speakers’ underlying emotions
  - As non-participant observers, analysts make best guesses regarding intent and effect
Introduction

- Present study
  - 16-hour corpus of spontaneous conversations and narratives
  - Analysis based on analyst’s subjective judgments
    - Experience as participant observer in Papuan household
  - 231 rhetorical questions identified and analyzed
    - Outsider’s perspective
    - Not perspective of Papuan speakers of Papuan Malay
Syntactic and phonological features

- Rhetorical questions versus content questions
  - No formal, linguistic signals
    - Same syntax
    - Same intonation patterns
Pragmatic uses

- Pseudo questions with social functions
- Stimulus questions with discourse-marking functions
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Social functions
  - Negative and positive assertions
  - Negative evaluations
  - Statements of incertitude
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- **Realization**
  - **Polar questions**
    - “Didn’t you listen to …?” (≈ “You didn’t listen to …!”)
  - **Content questions**
    - **Polarity**
      - “Who told you to …”? (≈ “Nobody told you to …!”)
    - **Neutral polarity**
      - “Why did you come”? (≈ “You shouldn’t have come!”)
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Assertions
  - Functions
    - Express speaker’s certitude
      - Challenge interlocutors
      - Rebuke interlocutors
      - Tease interlocutors good-naturedly
      - Make thoughtful statements
  - Realization
    - Polar questions
    - Content questions
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

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Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Assertions

  (3) Challenge
  a, *sembu apa?*
  ah be.healed what
  [Nephew: ‘(I already) recovered’] Aunt: ‘ah, *(from) what (have you) recovered?’
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Assertions

(4) Good-natured banter

ko su bosang bicara deng bapa ka?
2SG already be.bored speak with father or

[Phone conversation between a father and his daughter:] ‘do you already feel bored talking with me (‘father’)?’
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Evaluations
  - Functions
    - Express opinions as to whether an action, utterance, or attitude is good or bad, right or wrong
    - Express disapproval
  - Realization
    - Content questions
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Negative evaluations
  - Content questions

(5) Disapproval

\[
\text{kamu ana skola itu makang pinang untuk apa?}
\]

2PL child school D.DIST eat betel.nut for what

‘what for are you school kids (EMPH) chewing betel nuts?’
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Statements of incertitude
  - Functions
    - Express incertitude in various forms
      - Doubt and uncertainty
      - Perplexity
      - Deliberation
  - Realization
    - Content questions
    - Polar questions
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Statements of incertitude
  - Functions
    - Express incertitude in various forms
      - Doubt and uncertainty
      - Convey perplexity
      - Communicate deliberation
  - Realization
    - Content questions
    - Polar questions
Pragmatic uses as pseudo questions

- Statements of incertitude
  - Content question
    
    (6) Expressions of doubt and uncertainty

    a, bulang depang nanti bagemana?
    ah month front very.soon how

    adoooo, bagemana ini?

    oh.no! how D.PROX

    [Insufficient financial support:] ‘ah, how (are things going to be) next month?, oh no! how (EMPH)?’
Pragmatic uses as stimulus questions

- Discourse-marking functions
  - Cross-linguistically
    - Signal clarification, conclusion, or explanation
    - Announce new topic or new aspect of same topic
  - Papuan Malay
    - Announce new aspect of same topic
Pragmatic uses as stimulus questions

- Announce new aspect of same topic

(7) siapa yang bawa dorang dari sana?, saya dengang Domi who REL bring 3PL from L.DIST 1SG with Domi [Preparations for a youth retreat:] ‘who’s going to (pick them up and) bring them from over there?, I and Domi!’
Quantitative analysis

- Identified rhetorical questions 231 tokens
  - Pseudo questions 197 tokens (85%)
  - Stimulus questions 34 tokens (15%)
Quantitative analysis of pseudo questions

- Pseudo questions types across functions

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<th>Assert</th>
<th>Eval (neg)</th>
<th>Incert</th>
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Quantitative analysis of pseudo questions

- Pseudo questions types across functions

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Quantitative analysis of pseudo questions

- Pseudo questions across functions and underlying emotions

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Quantitative analysis of stimulus questions

- Overview
  - Frequency
    - 34/231 (15%)
  - Function
    - Introduce new aspect of same topic
  - Question type
    - Content question
Summary

- Formal characteristics
  - No formal, linguistic signals
  - Context determines interpretation as rhetorical question

- Functions
  1. Pseudo questions with social functions
  2. Stimulus questions with discourse-marking functions
Summary

- Pseudo questions
  - Functions
    1. Assertions
    2. Expressions of incertitude
    3. Negative evaluations
  - Underlying emotions
    1. Negative
    2. Neutral
    3. Positive
References