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修辞问句与关联理论

——基于语料库的修辞问句在独白式文本中的语用研究（英文版）

Rhetorical Questions and Relevance Theory

A Corpus-based Pragmatical Study of Rhetorical Questions in Monologic Genres

杨志霞◎著

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内容提要

本书是“当代外语研究论丛”之一，以语料库为研究工具，提取西方独白式文本中的修辞问句，以语用学的主流理论——关联理论为框架，对修辞问句的使用原因、句式特征、文本功能、言语接受者辨别修辞问句类型、推断言者话语意图的过程等进行了深入分析。本书读者对象为对语料库研究、语用学、修辞学、语篇分析等语言学领域感兴趣的学者、博士生、研究生及本科生。

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前　言

修辞问句作为雄辩与修辞的重要构成部分，频繁出现在演说、报道、社论、广告、教学、日常话语等不同语域语体中；而国内学者对修辞问句的界定、特征、标示、功能及运用的理论框架等方面的研究则较少。本书以语料库为研究工具，提取西方独白式文本中的修辞问句，以语用学的主流理论——关联理论为框架，对修辞问句的使用原因、句式特征、文本功能、言语接受者辨别修辞问句类型、推断言者话语意图的过程等进行了深入分析，以期填补空白，抛砖引玉，为对英语修辞、语料库的应用、语用学新发展感兴趣的学者们提供借鉴。

本书主要研究两个问题。首先，探索言语接受者是如何辨别一个问句并非是真正问句，而是不需回答的旨在传达一个命题的修辞问句，又是如何推断出言者的话语意图，隐含之意的，论证了主张人类交流是通过对言语进行赋码与解码来实现的话码模式不足以解析修辞问句的隐含之意：修辞问句的分析必须引入推理模式。而1986年法国学者斯波伯（Sperber）和英国学者威尔逊（Wilson）提出的关联理论作为推理模式的重要代表，能够成功揭开修辞问句使用及理解的神秘面纱。其次，本书通过语料库数据，探讨了修辞问句有哪些不同的类型，又是如何分别在独白式文本语境下帮助言者实现其说服的意图的。

本书不仅包含了理论论证，也是对语料库数据的定性研究，目前语料库的应用研究主要集中在词汇学、语义学和句法领域。本书从英国国家语料库（BNC）与英国书面语语料库（FLOB）中提取语料，并自建两个文本语料库作为补充，涉及英美两个国家的政治演

讲和报纸社评两个语域，尝试把语料库的研究扩展到修辞和语用的领域。

在本书的第一部分，基于关联理论中的“隐含之意”（implicature）、“互明”（mutual manifestness）和“最佳关联”（optimal relevance）这三个核心概念，建构了鉴别修辞问句的基本步骤。在之后的论述中，这个鉴别准则被应用于两个独白式语域中用来提取和解析其中的修辞问句，并论证了修辞问句在这两个语域中的共有及独有特征。

本书进一步印证了相对于奥斯汀（Austin）和瑟尔（Searle）的言语行为理论与格莱斯（Grice）的合作原则而言，关联理论对于修辞问句的使用与功能具有更强大的解释力。旨在为交流者更好地理解修辞问句，避免交流误解的产生，对语言使用这一大范畴做出贡献。

在本书的撰写过程中，得到了 Richard Ingham 教授、Antoinette Renouf 教授、Andrew Kehoe 博士的宝贵建议与指点，对文本中所涉及的英国文化与典故等背景知识给予了热情的解答。三位专家学者花费了大量的时间通读书稿，保证了全文语言与表达的正确性。本书也得到了上海交通大学杨惠中教授的悉心指导，一并致谢。

著者　杨志霞

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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1.1 Research background

According to definitions in established dictionaries, such as *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Volume VIII) (Murray, 1933: 627), *Webster's New World Dictionary* (third college edition) (Neufeldt, 1988: 1151), *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary* (Sinclair et al., 1995: 1427), and *the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Summer, 2003: 1817), it is agreed that an Rhetorical Question (RQ) is an utterance, in the form of an interrogative, posed to achieve stylistic effect. It functions as a statement, and does not require an explicit answer from the addressee.

I developed an interest in an investigation of RQs as a result of two observations. Firstly, I observed that failed communication and exchange dilemmas arise in daily conversation if the recipient fails to perceive the rhetorical status of a question, and instead provides an unexpected answer. An example of this phenomenon is exemplified in [1-1]

[1-1] "①a. How high will taxes be when my kids are my age?

b. Well, that's a great question! Let me tell you, based on the current trajectory of income tax valuation along with the growing number of Americans on social security and Greenspan's waning

① Throughout the thesis, I use double quotation marks when directly quoting words, phrases, chunks, or sentences from literature. Single quotation mark is used for linguistic terminology. Classes of words or the interpreted propositions are italicised for the sake of emphasis and easy reading.

confidence in the dollar, I'd say taxes are likely to increase drastically over the next thirty to thirty-five years."

(Rohde, 2006: 162)

Even in formal political contexts, it may happen that politicians fail to recognise the rhetorical intent of a question and thus cause a dilemma or become a laughing stock, as shown in [1-2]:

[1-2] "But this time the executive had come up with a compromise of sterling dimness. OK, there should be an affiliated 'socialist society' for blacks and Asians, but whites could join too [...] It was an insult: they didn't need white nannies — did more than two black people in a room constitute a riot? — were they to step back to the old plantation days? — had Kinnock and Hattersley been drunk when they drafted the proposal? At which poor Jack Rogers — a former bricklayer and union leader, and the member of the executive taking the can back as he replied to the debate — innocently protested they hadn't been drunk, they hadn't even had a cup of tea."
(Cited from "Making the change with body talk", by Terry Coleman, the *Independent*, May 10, 1989.)

In [1-2], what the speaker challenging the proposal intends when uttering a rhetorical question is not to query whether Kinnock and Hattersley were drunk, but to express sarcasm at the inappropriateness of the proposal wording, namely, "an affiliated socialist society for Blacks and Asians". So the response of the reported hearer, Jack Rogers, when he interprets the question as a genuine one reveals a misunderstanding of the RQ.

It is therefore of great practical significance to find a criterion for identifying an RQ, to avoid misunderstandings or exchange dilemmas, and thus guarantee smooth communication. This problem could be solved if there existed a way of signalling an RQ by 'irony punctuation'. If that were so, the Code Model, which holds that "communication is achieved by encoding and decoding messages" in words, like Morse code (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 2), would be sufficient to account for the identification of an RQ.

In the past, the sign "؟" did in fact exist as a marker for RQs. ① Unfortunately,

① According to Wikipedia, "The percontation point, a reversed question mark later referred to as a rhetorical question mark, was proposed by Henry Denham in the 1580s and was used at the end of a question that does not require an answer — a rhetorical question."

its use died out in the 17th century.

Theoretically, it is possible that a language could always signal an RQ with an overt marker. The nearest I can find is the signal 'nonne' in Latin, which means *Isn't it the case that?*, signalling an RQ expecting an answer 'yes'.

If all other languages were just like Latin, that would be the end of the story. But do other languages, such as English, have the same marker guaranteeing the rhetorical reading of a question?

According to the research literature, the rhetorical reading of a question can be signalled (Ilie, 1983; Slot, 1993; Rohde, 2006; Kleinke, 2012) by the existing introductory phrases *after all*, *you know*, *etc.* so that the addressee can easily infer the rhetorical intention of the addresser, as in [1-3] and [1-4] or by the existing emphasising particles *really*, *actually*, *the hell*, *for God's sake*, etc. as in [1-5].

[1-3] "Why, after all, would you not choose to make the most of all the tax-benefits your insurer has to offer?"

(Slot, 1993)

[1-4] "So it's like, what are you going to do, you know?"

(Rode, 2006: 154)

[1-5] "With all the suffering humans in the world do we really need to spend money on animals?"

(Kleinke, 2012: 190)

Some words in the question may be endowed with strong semantic prosody, serving as loaded words, and helping to indicate the question's rhetorical reading. Slot (1993: 146) identifies the words "rashly" and "whatever" which "represent the implicit negative element" in the example [1-6], thus labeling the rhetorical reading of this question.

[1-6] "Is it the task of a good newspaper to rashly take over whatever information the authorities give?"

(Slot, 1993: 146)

However, do these expressions guarantee a question's rhetorical reading, or are they just indicators① increasing chances of its being an RQ? Let us consider [1-7]—

① I employ the term 'indicator' in the current study to mean a weaker sense of a signal: not being a full marker, just an indication or a pointer to the rhetorical reading of a sentence.

[1 - 9]. The previous literature has not discussed the contexts in which such indicators fail to mark an RQ.

[1 - 7] Do you **really** want to spend that money?
[1 - 8] Who **the hell** are you?
[1 - 9] How did she, **such a beautiful** girl, survive in such a **filthy** environment?

Questions containing the emphatic adverbial "really" are not necessarily RQs, as in [1 - 7]. It may express a sense of disapproval and criticism when uttered in a rising intonation by a mother, in which case it should be taken as an RQ. Alternatively, in a falling intonation, it may serve as a genuine question, giving the hearer a chance to decide whether to spend the money or not, even if the speaker has expressed his/her preference to disagree with the spending of all the money.

The same goes for the exclamatory particle "the hell". Example [1 - 8] may serve as a genuine question although with strong emotion of surprise or censure when uttered by a man opening his door at midnight, only to see a stranger standing outside. It may also work as an RQ when uttered in the context where a man shouts at his roommate who accuses him of not washing his socks for days, showing that *you are in no position to say that to me*.

Semantic indicators cannot guarantee the rhetorical reading of a question, but only increase chances. In different contexts, [1 - 9] may either serve as an informational question, inquiring about the girl's past experience, or as an RQ, showing sympathy of the speaker.

As above analysed, the existence of linguistic indicators supports the general theory of communication known as the Code Model. However, the Code Model alone is not sufficient to explain the identification of RQs, since linguistic indicators are not a total guarantee of the rhetorical nature of a question. There still exist large numbers of RQs without indicators. Most importantly, the Code Model is unable to help infer the possible intention of the addresser beyond the linguistic expression. As shown in [1 - 2], the intention of the speaker has nothing to do with 'drunk' or 'not drunk' but with his disapproval of the proposal. Similarly, in the question *Do you know what time it is?*, the intention of the speaker may actually be to suggest that it is time to go to sleep.

It is therefore the main task of the current study, which is how to identify an RQ and interpret it to infer the possible intended assumptions of the addresser beyond a linguistic expression, that calls for an inferential model, which holds that

communication is achieved by producing and interpreting evidence of an addresser's intention. In this inferential process, we need to keep in mind that we can never be certain about addressers' intentions and we can only speculate and infer them.

My second observation for the thesis is that RQs are often used by politicians in monologic political speeches, as shown in [1 - 10].

[1 - 10] Are we going to double-down on the top-down economic policies that helped to get us into this mess? Or do we embrace a new economic patriotism that says America does best when the middle class does best?

(Barack Obama, the 1st TV debate with Mitt Romney, 2012)

These two observations lead to the research questions in the current study, which are:

- Why does an addresser still employ different kinds of RQ in a monologic context (where only one person speaks or writes), when s/he cannot expect an answer to be provided?
- Why does an addresser employ an indirect expression, which requires more interpreting effort from the addressee, rather than a direct assertion?
- What meanings might an addresser convey in addition to the proposition entailed in an RQ?
- How do the addressees identify the rhetorical nature of a question and successfully infer the possible intended assumption(s) of the addresser?

1.2 Research objectives

This thesis addresses the research problems by presenting a pragmatic discoursal analysis of Rhetorical Questions (RQs) in terms of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986; see Chapter 3). The purpose is to implement a new methodology of combining theoretical argument with corpus analysis. The thesis provides new insights into the distinction between RQs and other question types, and into the inferential process of implicatures beyond the linguistic structure of an RQ, with particular references to two fields of monologic context, namely political speeches and newspaper editorials.

It should be noted that this is not psycholinguistic experimental research into what people are actually doing in real time. When I discuss the communicative

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