

## Intersubjectivity in Chinese and Japanese Yes-no Questions

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**Abstract:** Cross-linguistic syntactic similarities can be deceptive as indicators of discourse-pragmatic functions. This comparative study demonstrates that such similarities in form do not necessarily map their function. By using discourse analysis to examine yes-no questions in natural conversations of Mandarin Chinese (236 cases) and Japanese (127 cases), my study argues that the intersubjectivity that emerges from on-going interactions between interlocutors is a primary factor driving speakers to choose different interrogative forms in various sequential contexts.

In particular, this study demonstrates that 1) Chinese speakers often use zero-marked yes-no questions (YNQs), while Japanese speakers rely on *-no desu ka* YNQs to respond to “newly-learned” information from the addressee for the purpose of showing interest or expressing surprise in order to solicit further elaboration from the addressee; 2) Chinese V-not-V questions share certain intersubjective features with Japanese zero-marked YNQs in that both convey the speaker’s eagerness and high expectation for confirmation from the addressee in similar interactive contexts such as invitations.

**Keywords:** Questions, yes-no questions, discourse-pragmatic function, intersubjectivity, newly-learned information

### 1. Introduction

There can be no doubt that questions are vital forms of communication without which it is difficult if not impossible to imagine carrying on a conversation. At the same time, questions are one of the elements that often cause cross-linguistic miscommunication. In every language, there are multiple interrogative forms used in various contexts. For instance, in English, a person might say “Is it raining?” or “It’s raining?” depending on the situation. (Gunlogson, 2003, pp. 64-65) Are these merely variants in levels of formality? Chinese and Japanese have more varieties of interrogative forms than English. How do Chinese and Japanese native speakers decide which question form to select from the options their languages provide them?

#### 1.1. Chinese and Japanese YNQs

This study explores the discourse-pragmatic functions of certain yes-no questions (YNQs) of Mandarin Chinese and Japanese in conversational discourse. The primary YNQs in Chinese and Japanese show significant similarities in terms of syntactic formations and pragmatic functions.

As shown in Examples (1a) and (1b), the prototypical Chinese and Japanese YNQs typically end with “question particles” or “interrogative markers” (cf. Hinds, 1984; Chu, 1998) (*ma* in Chinese and *ka* in Japanese).

(1a) Chinese *ma*-marked YNQs:

*Xiayu le ma?*  
rain ASP Q  
'Is it raining?'

(1b) Japanese *ka*-marked YNQs:

*Ame ga futte imasu ka?*  
Rain NOM dropping Q  
'Is it raining?'

Further, in both languages, the interrogative particles are often omitted in casual conversations to form declarative questions or zero-marked YNQs that are signified by final rising intonation, as shown in (2a) and (2b).

(2a) Chinese *zero*-marked YNQs:

*Xiayu le Ø?*  
rain ASP  
'It is raining?'

(2b) Japanese *zero*-marked YNQs:

*Ame ga futte imasu?*  
Rain NOM dropping  
'It is raining?'

Besides the *ka*-marked and zero-marked YNQs, Chinese also has a well-known YNQ structure called V-not-V or A-not-A question ("A" signifies any predicate including verbs, adjectives or auxiliaries), which is an alternative variant formed with the main predicate followed by the negation and the reduplicated predicate, as shown in (3).

## (3) Chinese V-not-V question:

*Xia-mei-xia yu ?*  
Rain NEG rain  
'Is it raining (or not)?'

Japanese also has a unique yet remarkably common YNQ form, *-no desu ka* YNQs as in (4), which is formed by inserting the predicate *no da* construction (*no* is normally said to be a "nominalizer" and *da* a "copula") in front of the interrogative marker *ka*.

(4) Japanese *-no desu ka* question:

*Ame ga futteiru n<sup>1</sup> desu ka?*

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<sup>1</sup> In colloquial Japanese, "n" is the stylistic variant of *no* stemming from phonological syllable shortening.

## Rain SUB dropping NML COP Q 'Is it true that it is raining?'<sup>2</sup>

The matching forms of YNQs in Chinese and Japanese invite the assumption that these corresponding syntactic YNQ forms perform identical or similar discourse-pragmatic functions in conversations.

As Thompson (1998) points out, "Cross-linguistic generalizations must also be explainable in terms of language use" (p. 331). By comparatively analyzing certain Chinese and Japanese YNQs in authentic conversational discourse, this study investigates the regularities between the syntactic forms and discourse-pragmatic functions of YNQs. It aims to provide a case study to interpret cross-linguistic grammatical similarities and differences by investigating the ways in which human beings think and interact, and thereby to demonstrate that these cross-linguistic generalizations can be explained in terms of cognitive and interactional patterns of human communication.

### 1.2. Previous Studies and Subjectivity/Intersubjectivity

What do questions do in conversations? Previous studies of questions have tended to focus on the syntactic features or the epistemic perspectives of questions. They have been seen as "special cases of requests" (Bach & Harnish, 1979, p. 48), mainly for requesting or seeking information (Katz & Postal, 1964; Gordon & Lakoff, 1975; Labov & Fanshel, 1977). Contrary to that, Lyons (1977) proposes that the primary function of questions is to show the speaker's "doubt" toward the proposition contained in the question. Other studies (Quirk et al., 1972, 1985; Hudson, 1975) propose that YNQs not only neutrally seek information, but can also confirm the speaker's expectation of a certain "biased" answer from the addressee. Whether a question is biased or neutral has drawn many linguists' attention. For diverse opinions on V-not-V questions, see for the neutral camp (e.g. Li & Thompson, 1979, 1981) and against neutrality (e.g. Ree, 1981; Chang, 2001). Regardless of the disagreement over particular claims, those studies have in common that they focus on the speaker's internal judgement or belief of whether the statement contained in the question is true or false. In other words, the speaker's belief-state or attitude toward what is being said and how is being said, which is defined as *subjectivity* by Traugott (2003, p. 128), has been considered as the key to respond to issues such as "What do questions do in conversations?" or "How do speakers decide which question form to select in different contexts?"

However, in contrast to those previous studies, this study proposes that *intersubjectivity* rather than *subjectivity* plays a more important role in the pragmatic usages of questions. *Intersubjectivity* is a popular concept that has been adapted to analyze various linguistic phenomena in a number of languages, such as epistemic markers (Nuyts, 2001; Karkkainen, 2006; Pizziconi, 2009; Lim, 2011) and modality markers (McGloin & Konishi, 2010; White, 2003). According to Traugott (2003), *intersubjectivity* is the explicit expression of the speaker/

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<sup>2</sup> In English translations, the wording of "Is it true that..." is used for *-no desu ka* questions to signal its contrast with *ka*-marked questions.

writer's attention to the self of the addressee/reader in both an epistemic sense (paying more attention to their presumed attitudes to the content of what is said), and in a more social sense (paying more attention to their 'face' or 'image needs' associated with social stance and identity) (p. 128). It grants the speaker's attitude toward the situational and the interactive social relationship between the speaker and addressee more weight than the speaker's belief about the factuality of the proposition. Therefore, it is insufficient to understand the meanings and usages of a certain linguistic expression by examining only the individual speaker's attitude, knowledge, belief or assumptions as "a static and isolated mental position or interior state" situated within the mind of an individual speaker (Karkkainen, 2006, p. 700); rather, those linguistic forms emerge from dialogic interaction between interlocutors in particular dialogic and sequential contexts, and reveal the speaker's active, interactive and intersubjective state of mind, reflecting the communicative social reality. *Intersubjectivity* has until now not been broadly applied to the study of questions. This study will use this concept to investigate speakers' intersubjective stance-taking in the on-going interaction that underlies the usages of various YNQs in Chinese and Japanese.

## 2. Data

The database of my study consists of 26 face-to-face casual conversations of native Chinese and of native Japanese speakers (13 in Chinese and 13 in Japanese). Each conversation lasted 10-40 minutes. Most of the data was taken in a semi-natural setting, where the speakers were invited to have a conversation for the purpose of this research, without assigning any particular conversation topics. The participants were aware that their conversations would be used as linguistic data, but they were not informed of the particular topic and purpose of the current research. The researcher was absent during the recording process. Five of the conversations were recorded in a completely natural setting: three in meetings between Japanese instructors, in an informal gathering of four Chinese close friends, and a chat between two Chinese mothers at a playground.

A total of 12 Chinese speakers (4 males and 8 females) and 18 Japanese speakers (8 males and 12 females) participated in this project. The participants include undergraduate students, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows or scientists and professors at a university in the northwestern United States. All the Chinese participants and Japanese participants are largely similar in terms of age, education and social status.

The genders and relationships between the speakers in each pair were balanced as much as possible in the arrangement of the conversational pairs, as shown in Table 1-1 and Table 1-2.

Table 1-1. Descriptions of Each Conversation in Chinese Data

<b>Data</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Relations</b>	<b>Length</b>
F-H	F: female, visiting parent, 50s H: female, accountant, 30s	Strangers	10:20
J-H	J: female, housewife, 20s H: female, accountant, 30s	Strangers	10:10
J-M	J: female, housewife 20s M: female, Ph.D student, 30s	Strangers	15:00
Y-W	Y: female, Ph.D student, 30s W: female, staff, 30s	Acquaintances	12:10
L-E	L: male, engineer, 30s E: male, scientist, 30s	Acquaintances	11:30
L-M	L: male, engineer, 30s M: female, Ph.D student, 30s	Acquaintances	34:20
S-L	S: male, scientist, 30s L: male, engineer, 30s	Intimate friends	23:50
S-L	S: male, scientist, 30s L: male, engineer, 30s	Intimate friends	13:20
L-W	L: male, engineer, 30s W: female, staff, 30s	Intimate friends	12:10
L-N	L: male, engineer, 30s N: female, scientist, 30s	Intimate friends	10:10
Q-J	Q: male, scientist, 30s J: female, MA student, 30s	Intimate Friends	8:40
J-Y	J: female, MA student, 30s Y: female, Ph.D student, 30s	Intimate friends	17:50
JYN	J: female, MA student, 30s. Y: female, Ph.D student, 30s N: female, scientist, 30s	Acquaintances	23:30
Total	4 males and 8 females		293 minutes

Table 1-2. Descriptions of Each Conversation in Japanese Data

<b>Data</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Relations</b>	<b>Length</b>
F-M	F: male, junior MA. student, 20s M: female, Ph.D student, 30s	Strangers	9:30
F-T	F: male, junior MA student, 20s T: male, senior MA student, 20s	Strangers	9:30
S-R	S: male, senior MA student, 30s R: female, junior MA student, 20s	Strangers	9:10
H-N	H: male, junior MA student, 30s N: female, senior MA student, 30s	Strangers	10:00
K-O	K: male, Ph.D student, 30s O: male, junior MA student, 20s	Acquaintances	10:10

T-E	T: male, senior MA student, 20s E: female, senior MA student, 20s	Acquaintances	11:50
H-Y	H: male, junior MA student, 30s Y: female, senior MA student, 30s	Acquaintances	9:50
T-N	T: male, senior MA student, 20s N: female, junior MA student, 20s	Intimate friends	9:40
B-D	B: male, undergraduate student D: female, undergraduate student	Couple	8:50
U-C	U: male, undergraduate student, C: female, undergraduate student	Intimate friends	6:40
meeting 1	M: female, Ph.D student, 30s L: female, senior MA student, 20s G: female, junior MA student, 20s	Senior-junior	29:20
meeting 2	J: female, professor, 40s M: female, Ph.D student, 30s O: female, senior MA student, 20s G: female, junior MA student, 20s	Senior-junior	36:20
meeting 3	P: female, lecturer, 30s M: female, Ph.D student, 30s O: female, senior MA student, 20s	Senior-junior	31:00
Total	8 males and 12 females		192 minutes

In total, in the 293 minutes of Chinese and 192 minutes of Japanese conversational database, 236 tokens of Chinese and 127 tokens of Japanese YNQ forms were found/noted. Within the scope of the investigation described, the YNQs in the database examined by the present study display the certain distributions, as summarized in Table 2-1 (Chinese) and Table 2-2 (Japanese).

Table 2-1. The Frequency of the Targeted Chinese YNQs (236 tokens in total)

<i>Ma</i> -marked	<i>Zero</i> -marked	<i>V-not-V</i>
66	142	28
28%	60%	12%

Table 2-2. The Frequency of the Targeted Japanese YNQs (127 tokens in total)

<i>Ka</i> -marked	<i>Zero</i> -marked	<i>-no desu ka</i>
48	27	52
38%	21%	41%

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Scope of This Study

Linguists in previous studies (Li & Thompson, 1979, 1981; Narahara, 2002; Wang, 2009) agreed that Chinese and Japanese particle-marked YNQs mainly serve to solicit information from the addressee. Wang (2009, pp. 228-229) defines Chinese *ma*-marker YNQs and Japanese *ka*-marked YNQs as **information-focused YNQs** since they are primarily used to seek *new* information that belongs to the addressee's informational territory. In other words, compared to other YNQ forms, those particle-marked YNQs focus more on information rather than the speaker's subjective belief/assumption or attitude toward the addressee. Aiming to provide a case study for subjectivity and intersubjectivity, hence, this study will exclude particle-marked YNQs and limit the scope of investigation to the rest of YNQ forms: Chinese and Japanese zero-marked declarative questions, Chinese V-not-V questions and Japanese *-no desu ka* questions. In fact, the statistics of the data of this study, as shown in the prior section, indicate that the so-called typical YNQ, the particle-marked forms, are not the most frequent in either Chinese or Japanese; instead, up to 60% of Chinese YNQs are zero-marked declarative questions, and *-no desu ka* questions represent 41% of all the Japanese YNQs in my database. It would be ideal if the forms and functions were a perfect match in the two languages. However, the results of my analysis are quite unexpected: my study demonstrates that Chinese zero-marked questions play different roles from Japanese zero-marked questions, but are closer to Japanese *-no desu ka* questions in terms of pragmatic functions in conversational discourse.

Based on the investigation into the 142 cases of Chinese zero-marked YNQs and 28 cases of V-not-V questions, in comparison with 52 cases of Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQs and 27 cases of Japanese zero-marked YNQs in conversations, my study claims: First, Chinese zero-marked YNQs and Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQs tend to trigger/elicit the addressee to add explanations, elaborations or additional information by highlighting some element of the "newly-learned information" (Akatsuka, 1985). Second, Japanese zero-marked YNQs and Chinese V-not-V questions often convey the speaker's eagerness and high expectation for confirmation from the addressee. Section 3.2 and 3.3 will demonstrate these two arguments with examples of conversational sequences chosen from the database described previously.

#### 3.2. Chinese Zero-marked YNQs and Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQs

Chinese zero-marked YNQs display similar discourse-pragmatic functions as Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQs rather than Japanese zero-marked YNQs in the present database. My data shows the most common sequential patterns appearing in both languages are as the following:

Speaker A: [X]  
Speaker B: [X] YNQ?

This is one type of echo question, an interrogative form that repeats part or all of utterance that the prior speaker has just said. In this pattern of echo questions, Speaker A reveals a piece

of information—[X], in his/her utterance that is new to Speaker B. In response, Speaker B forms a particular echo question (zero-marked YNQs in Chinese and *-no desu ka* in Japanese) by including the “newly-learned information” [X] in the proposition part of the YNQs. The concept of “newly-learned information,” proposed by Akatsuka (1985), refers to the information that has been newly received from others, which has not been completely “assimilated into one’s established body of knowledge” (p. 625). The continuum provided by Akatsuka (1985, p. 636), as shown below, reflects the speaker’s subjective evaluation of certain information, in which, known information belongs to REALIS domain, while unknown information belongs to IRREALIS domain. The information newly learned from others falls in between.

REALIS	IRREALIS	
know <i>(given info)</i>	get to know <i>(newly-learned info)</i>	not know <i>(new info)</i>

Figure 1. Newly Learned Information (Akatsuka, 1985, p. 636)

According to Akatsuka, although the “newly-learned information” is located in the Realis domain in the real world, the speaker tends to treat it subjectively as something in the Irrealis domain. Only after a certain amount of time and information processing does it move into the domain of Realis, established as a piece of knowledge. This explains why “newly learned information” is often associated with questions.

Adapting Akatsuka’s (1985) concept of “newly-learned information” into my study on Chinese zero-marked and Japanese *-no desu ka* echo YNQs, Figure 2 shows the process that the “newly-learned information” is transferred from the information giver to the receiver. However, in such cases, by echoing the information newly received from the addressee, the speaker, rather than revealing his/her stance with respect to the information as non-factual or uncertain within the IRREALIS domain, shows keen interest or expresses surprise toward what the interlocutor has just said for various intersubjective purposes.

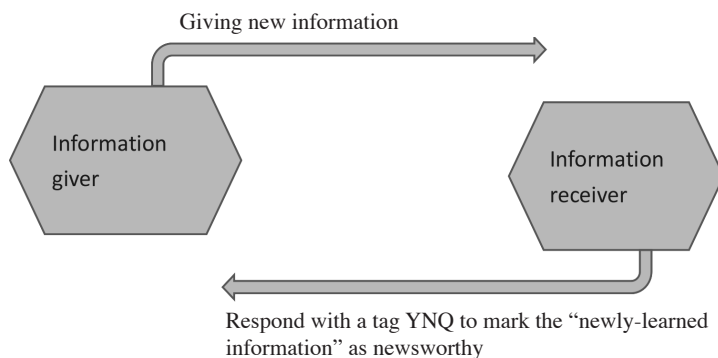


Figure 2. Newly-learned Information in the Case of Echo-questions



My findings are consistent with Brazil's (1985) observation on English echo questions. Brazil notices that English echo questions tend to elicit "greater precision" of relevant information. The example of a conversation between a doctor and a patient given by Brazil shows a typical case.

- (5) Doctor: *Where do you get this pain?*  
 Patient: *In my HEAD*  
 Doctor: *You got it in your HEAD?*

Brazil (1985, p. 159)

Brazil points out that rather than confirming the patient's response, the doctor's true intention is "asking for greater precision" about the information; in other words, to elicit the patient to add more details about his pain. As a result, the patient may clarify the particular location of the pain such as "behind my eyes." The strategy that the doctor uses is to mark the "newly-learned information" as a piece of news or a piece of "newsworthy" information by showing the addressee that "it is so new to me that I have to put it into a question," and by doing so, the speaker signals his/her keen interest to learn more about what the addressee has just shared. The same interpretation can be applied to the Chinese zero-marked echo questions exemplified in (6) and (7).

- (6)
- 1 L: *Ni didi zai na-er?*  
 You younger brother at where  
 'Where is your younger brother?'
- 2 G: *Wo didi zai Beijing*  
 I younger brother at  
 'My younger brother is in Beijing.'
- 3 →L: *Zai Beijing Ø?* =  
 at Beijing  
 'In Beijing?'
- 4 G: = *En::, 'shangban-er'*.  
 yeah work  
 'Yeah, he is working.'

In (6), L asked G where her younger brother was and G answered "in Beijing". L repeated G's answer with a zero-marked echo question: "In Beijing?" This question is neither showing skepticism nor confirming information, given the fact that L did not have independent access to the information about G's brother and G just gave a clear answer to L's question. What L was doing with the echo question was to mark the information he just got from G as a piece of newsworthy information and thereby to encourage G to share more information about this topic. Consequently, in Line 4, G added additional information about her brother: "He is working there".

(7) is a similar case in the same conversation, where G is the one producing zero-marked

echo question to prompt L to add “greater precision” to the information he just shared in his previous utterance.

- (7)
- 1 L: *Qi ba nian le (.)* *Xiang W tamen tongxue dou jiben chulai le.*  
seven eight year ASP like they classmates all basically come out ASP  
‘It has been 7 or 8 years. Like W’s classrooms, they almost all left (China).’
- 2 G: → *Dou chulai le Ø?*  
all come out ASP  
‘They all came out?’
- 3 L: *Yaomo qū riben, yaomo meiguo, haoxiang dou chulai le.*  
or go Japan or U.S. seem all come out ASP  
‘They either go to Japan or come to the U.S. It seems that they all came out.’

The only difference between (6) and (7) is that, in (7), in addition to showing interest, G might have revealed her surprise, by putting an intonation stress on the adverb of frequency *dou* “all.” Chinese native speakers tend to downgrade the semantic meanings of the adverb that indicates totality, *dou* “all,” which is able to be co-used with the adverb *jiben shang* “basically” in L’s utterance in Line 1. Based on the understanding the usage of this particular adverb, it is unlikely G was showing skepticism toward L’s statement of the totality: G did not doubt that all of W’s classmates had all left China. Rather, by marking this “newly-learned information” with an echo question, L’s purpose was to engage in the conversation and encourage G to continue to elaborate her previous utterance. Instead of merely giving a minimal confirmatory response to G’s echo question, in his response in Line 3, L provided more detailed information to specify his prior statement.

Yet, in the case of Japanese, instead of a zero-marked YNQ form, native speakers often use a special *-no desu ka* YNQ form in a similar discourse context to perform discourse-pragmatic functions analogous to the Chinese zero-marked YNQs; that is, to show keen interest in the particular information newly shared by the conversationalist, and thus to elicit the conversationalist to continue the conversation on the same topic by adding more precise or additional information. (8) is an example of Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQ.

- (8)
- 1 K: *Soko ga go doru de tabe-hoodai (.)*  
there NOM five dollar with buffet  
‘There, with \$5, you can eat a buffet.’
- 2 *Hiru mo yoru mo itsumo [ chuuka tabehoodai*  
noon also night also always Chinese buffet  
‘It is always Chinese buffet, both at noon and night.’
- 3 H: *[A, sore wa ii.*  
oh that TOP good  
‘Oh, that’s good.’
- 4 K: *Are wa- are wa kyoo hajimete tameshi ni ikimashita kedo*

- that TOP that TOP today first time try to go-PST FP  
 ‘Today I tried it for the first time.’
- 5 →H: =A- *kyoo itta [n desu ka?*  
 today go-PST NML COP Q  
 ‘Oh, did you go there today?’
- 6 K: [*Kyo, kyo- kyoo yuugata itte kimashita*  
 Today today today evening go come-PST  
 ‘I went there this evening.’

In this example, K told H he just went to a new Chinese buffet restaurant today for the first time. Responding to the information newly received from K, H produced a *-no desu ka* echo question, “Oh, (Is that true) you went there today?” to indicate that this piece of information from K was new to him, and he was eager to learn more about it. As expected, in his response to H’s echo question, K added more information to specify the time when he went to the restaurant.

Below is another Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQ used as echo question to respond to the information shared by the prior speaker.

- (9)
- 1 Y: ... *Watashi mo:::kono fuyu ni nihon ni jitsuwa kaettete=*  
 I also this winter at Japan to actually return  
 ‘Actually this winter I went back to Japan.’
- 2 R: =Un un ::: A- *kaetta n desu ka?*  
 hum oh return-PST NML COP Q  
 ‘Oh, so you went back?’
- 3 Y: =Un *kaette- a moo tyotto konkai moo kaera nakya::*  
 yeah return oh already a little this time already return if-NEG
- 4 *enerugii ga motanai wa to omotte*  
 energy NOM hold-NEG FP MQ think  
 ‘Yeah, I went back. I think, “Oh, if I don’t go back this time, I cannot not maintain my energy”...’

In this case, responding to Y’s sharing about her returning Japan in winter, R used *-no desu ka* YNQ as echo question to show that she did not know about R’s trip until now. Notice that in both (8) and (9), both of the information receivers produced a non-lexical item “a-” before the *-no desu ka* YNQs. The exclamatory cutoff sound “a-” is normally observed in a context where the speaker has some new discovery, as in the utterance *a-, atta!* “Oh, there it is!”<sup>28</sup> which is produced when the speaker spots an object for which he/she has been searching. Therefore, this “a-” sound, cooperating with the *-no desu ka* echo question, allows the speaker to convey that he/she has suddenly discovered something new.

Note that in both Chinese zero-marked echo questions and Japanese *-no desu ka* echo questions, the speaker’s intention is clearly not on confirming the information newly shared by the addressee, or showing the speaker’s subjective epistemic stance about the “newly-learned information.” Rather, those questions allow the speakers to pursue intersubjective purposes:

to communicate his/her keen interest to the addressee and thereby to provoke the addressee to keep engaging in the current topic.

### 3.3. Japanese Zero-marked YNQs and Chinese V-not-V Questions

Different from Chinese zero-marked YNQs, the Japanese equivalent form—Japanese zero-marked YNQs, are not often observed in echo questions. This study found that among 27 cases Japanese zero-marked YNQs, 10 of them are identified as so-called “knowledge checking” questions (Wang, 2009, p. 191), such as *Wakarimasu? Shitemasu?* “Do you know?” For instance, in the sequence below, which occurs in the initial position of the conversation, R and Y, who were not acquainted in the past were attempting to search social connection between them in order to initiate the conversation. In Line 7 and 9, R asked two zero-marked YNQs: “Do you know Takeshi?” “Do you know Michiko?”

(10)

- 1 R: *R desu*  
COP  
'I am R'
- 2 Y: *A, R-san, a? nanka namae demo kiita koto aru kara::: nande daroo*  
oh Ms.R FI name such as hear-PST thing there-is because why COP  
'A, Ms. R. It seems that I have heard your name before, I wonder why'
- 3 R: *A, demo watashi wa [nihonjin no tsunagari wa hotondo watashi nai desu=*  
Oh but I TOP Japanese LK connection TOP almost I NEG COP  
'But I have almost no connection with Japanese people=
- 4 Y : *[Un*  
'Oh'
- 5 R: *=gakusee dooshi no wa : [::*  
student peer LK TOP  
'-with student peers.'
- 6 Y : *[so kka so kka so kka*  
so Q so Q so Q  
'Really? Really?'
- 7 →R: *Takeshi tte shitemasu Ø?*  
(name) QM know  
'Do you know Takeshi?'
- 8 Y: *Uun , wakara [nai desu ne*  
nope know-NEG COP FP  
'No, I don't know.'
- 9 →R: *[A, Michiko tte shitemasu Ø?*  
Oh (name) QM knowing  
'Do you know Michiko?'
- 10 Y: *Michiko-san u::n wakara nai desu ne:::*  
Ms.Michiko nope know-NEG COP FP  
'Michiko? I don't know...'

Obviously, R wished that Y did know one of her acquaintances, which would give them a social link and common ground for further interaction, although R did not have shared base resources to assume whether Y really knew Takeshi or Michiko. Therefore, the zero-marked YNQ here primarily serves for the intersubjective purpose; namely, to orient toward the addressee in the on-going interaction, rather than the speaker's subjective attitude about the information.

(11) is another example, where K was giving H travel directions by frequently checking whether H was following him by pointing at the map. K repetitively used *Wakarimasu? Wakarimasu?* "Do you understand (know)?" to query H whether he knew Regent Street. It reveals K's eager expectation for a confirmative answer from H so that he could keep on with his intended action of direction-giving.

(11)

- 1 K: *Sore nansee desu yone. Nansee ni sono-mama orite iku to:*  
That southeast COP FP southeast toward as-it-is go down go if  
'That is Southeast St. If [you] keep going down Southeast,'
- 2 H: *Un*  
'Uh huh.'
- 3 →K: *Ano Rijgent to koosashimasu yone. (.) Wakarimasu Ø?*  
FI Regent with cross FP understand  
'It crosses Regent. Do you know (it)?'
- 4 (0.8)
- 5 H: *U::n (hh) ano- imaichi mi-michi no namae ga anmari [wakaranai °n des°*  
hum FI now road LK name NOM so much know-NEG NML COP  
'Hum, I am afraid I don't know the names of roads yet'
- 6 K: *[A- wakan nai. Rijjento*  
oh know-NEG Regent  
'Oh, you don't know. Regent-'
- 7 → *Rijjento sutoreeto tte wakarimasuØ?*  
Regent Str. QM know  
'Do you know Regent street?'
- 8 (0.9)
- 9 H: *°Wakan nai°*  
know-NEG  
'I don't know'

The two examples above demonstrate that Japanese zero-marked YNQs tend to occur in particular contexts where the speaker intentionally delivers an attitude or emotion that he/she is thirsty for a positive answer from the addressee. Speech acts such as invitations are another situation where the speaker passionately expresses strong expectation that the addressee will accept his/her offer. Three cases of Japanese zero-marked YNQs in my data occur in contexts of invitation. (12) is one of them. In this sequence, the junior MA student F met the PhD student M for the first time. F indicated he was thirsty and asked M if it was okay to open the soda on

the table that was prepared by the researcher. After receiving a confirmation, F invited M to join him to have drink.

(12)

- 1 F: *Nomimasu ka. Docchi ka irimasuØ ?=*  
 drink Q which Q need  
 ‘Will you drink? Do you need one of these?’
- 2 M: *=A so shitara maunten juusu kudasai*  
 Oh so do-if mountain juice please  
 ‘Oh, if so, please give me Mountain juice.’

F’s the first question *Nomimasu ka* “Will you drink?” may sound more like a neutral, indifferent or unpassionate question. Immediately following that, F adds the zero-marked YNQ in a fast tempo to make his offer to M more persuasive.

This study found that Chinese V-not-V questions, rather than Chinese zero-marked YNQs, carry expressive functions similar to Japanese zero-marked YNQs. This impression is strengthened by the fact that V-not-V questions also tend to occur in contexts such as invitations. The following Chinese example shows an invitation similar to the Japanese zero-marked YNQ we saw in (12).

(13)

- 1 L: *Yao-bu- yao chang chang wo de fenjiu?*  
 would not would taste taste I LK Fenjiu (a brand of Chinese alcohol)  
 ‘Do you want to taste my Fenjiu?’
- 2 (.) *You huashengmi*  
 there-is peanut  
 ‘There are peanuts’
- 3 S: *Hao ya*  
 good FL  
 ‘Okay’

In this sequence, L invited S to taste his alcohol with a V-not-V question, *yao bu yao...* “Do you want to...” As an alcohol lover, L seemed excited and was eager to offer his friend some of the precious alcohol he had. *Fenjiu* is a very popular and highly esteemed alcoholic drink in China but hard to find in the United States. By means of his V-not-V question, L showed his enthusiastic desire that S would accept his offer of the alcohol. Facing S’s hesitation, indicated by the short pause in Line 2, L further upgraded his offer with peanuts as a snack to go with the alcohol, which again demonstrates L’s persuasive attitude.

In the examples in my database, whether a boss desperately requests an employee to do overtime work or an attendant at a real estate exhibition persuades a customer to take a look at their products, V-not-V questions reveal the speaker’s persuasive tone and show the speaker’s eagerness to pursue the addressee’s positive answer.

Consider the following two constructed questions:

(14)

- a) *Ni qu ma?*  
 you go Q  
 ‘Will you go?’
- b) *Ni qu-bu-qu?*  
 you go-not-go  
 ‘Will you go (or not)?’

Imaging the speaker is asking the addressee if s/he plans to attending a party. While (a) focuses on the content of the question, the V-not-V question in (b) is more oriented to the addressee, which sounds more longing, hopeful, earnest, or even impatient. In contrast, the *ma*-marked YNQ seems more calm and indifferent. Therefore, by choosing V-not-V form, the speaker shows his/her close attention to the addressee’s reaction and high desire to be connected with the addressee. The focus is on the interpersonal or intersubjective aspect rather than the subjective aspect of the information or assumption contained in the question.

Observe another V-not-V question in (15), where the pregnant woman Y realized that her friend M might also be pregnant based on the hints that M revealed in the previous sequence.

(15)

- 1 Y: *Ni ye huaiyun le shi ba?*  
 you also pregnant ASP COP FP  
 ‘You are also pregnant, right?’
- 2 M: *Wo::-*  
 ‘I...’
- 3 Y:= *Ni shi-bu-shi ye huaiyun le?*  
 You COP-NOT-COP also pregnant ASP  
 ‘Is it real that you are also pregnant?’
- 4 M: *Dui::*  
 ‘Right’

The first question Y produced in Line 1 was a confirmative tag question to confirm her assumption. Before M responded, Y cut in and rephrased her question to be a *shi-bu-shi* question, which is a particular type of V-not-V question. *Shi* is a so-called assertive or emphatic marker, appearing prior to the main predicate of the sentence. *Shi-bu-shi* questions are typically used to confirm what the speaker has seen, heard, or assumed. Nonetheless, this *shi-bu-shi* question is not merely a confirmative question here, which otherwise would be similar to the tag question in Line 1. Instead, this V-not-V form adds intersubjective and emotive tone to the original confirmative question. Y’s paraphrase of her first tag question to be a V-not-V question made her utterance more expressive and interpersonal. In particular, Y revealed her emotions of astonishment and excitement to M upon discovering this surprising news that M might also be pregnant. By using this V-not-V form, Y not only showed her eagerness to get a “Yes” answer from M, but also let M know how startled and thrilled she was by her news. It serves as an interactive device to get the speaker emotionally connected with the addressee.

#### 4. Conclusion

By comparatively investigating some primary Chinese and Japanese YNQs in natural conversational discourse, this study demonstrates that the various YNQs in both Chinese and Japanese are not merely stylistic variants. Rather, the various syntactic forms occur in different contexts and carry distinct discourse-pragmatic functions in conversations. At the same time it is important to be aware that cross-linguistic formal similarities can be deceptive as indicators of the same discourse-pragmatic functions. The examples in this comparative study have shown how similar forms of question do not necessarily carry similar discourse-pragmatic functions.

In particular, this study demonstrates that Chinese zero-marked declarative YNQs do not serve the same functions as Japanese zero-marked YNQs, but align more with Japanese *-no desu ka* YNQs, which tend to appear as echo questions by the speaker to respond to a piece of information newly shared by the prior speaker. By using these particular interrogative forms (Chinese zero-marked and Japanese *-no desu ka*), the speaker highlights the “newly-learned information” as a “newsworthy” piece, through which the speaker is able to pursue interpersonal goals such as showing keen interest, expressing surprise and encouraging the addressee to provide more detailed and precise information on the same topic. On the other hand, Japanese zero-marked YNQs are similar to Chinese V-not-V questions in that they both serve similar discourse-pragmatic functions in conversations: to reveal the speaker’s intense desire or expectation for a confirmative response from the addressee, which often occur in contexts where the speaker attempts to check the addressee’s knowledge or to persuade the addressee to accept an offer etc.

Further, in either case described above, this study suggests that intersubjective factors such as social relationships between the interlocutors, shared social understanding and unfolding conversational dynamics, the speaker’s interpersonal intention toward the addressee, play significant roles in the speaker’s choice of the YNQs in both Chinese and Japanese conversations. This means that language educators would do well to guide learners to consider the speaker’s intersubjective motivations and the interpersonal impact underlying the specific choice of linguistic forms expressing questions in conversational discourse. Understanding the *intersubjectivity* underlying grammatical expressions such as YNQs, has a crucial role to play in understanding and participating in intercultural communication.

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### Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative case
COP	Copula
FP	Sentence-final particle
FI	Filler
LK	Linker
NEG	Negation
NML	Nominalizer
NOM	Nominative case
QM	Quotation marker
Q	Question marker