

Postverbal *gwai* in Cantonese: A syntactic approach to rhetorical questions

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Outline

- Introduction
- Proposal
- Supporting evidence
- Predictions
- Implications

Introduction: Rhetorical questions (RQs)

- Interrogative utterances as a kind of assertion (Sadock 1971 among others)
- Different theoretical models to derive RQs:

Semantic line (Informativeness, Han 2002)

Discourse line (Common Ground, Caponigro & Sprouse 2007)

- Traditionally considered a pragmatic/semantic issue
- New insight: RQs may be derived syntactically (Spago 2016, Nakashima 2018, Pan 2019, Tang 2022)
- Syntax-semantics/pragmatics interface (Beyssade & Marandin 2006, Heim et al. 2016, Miyagawa 2022)

Introduction: *Gwai* in Cantonese

- Different *gwais* in (Hong Kong) Cantonese (Chan 2004)

- Lexical

(1) Gaaming zong gwai
Kaming encounter ghost
‘Kaming saw a ghost.’

- Intensifier

(2) Gaaming hou gwai lengzai
Kaming very ghost handsome
‘Kaming is so goddamn handsome.’

- **Negator**

(3) Gaaming sik gwai geoifaat
Kaming know ghost syntax
Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

Gwai as RQs

- Negator *gwai*: RQs, a colloquial form to express negation (Matthews & Yip 1994, Lee & Chin 2007)
 - Usually with yes-no question particles *me* or tone 4 *aa* in Cantonese
- (4) Gaaming sik gwai geoifaat me/aa
Kaming know ghost syntax SFP
- Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’
- “Rhetorical yes-no questions” (cf. Han 2002)

Proposal

Gwai in Cantonese

- Base generated within ν P as a suffix of the main verb
- Agree with speaker phrase (SpkP), addressee phrase (AdrP) and commitment phrase (ComP) above CP (cf. Miyagawa 2022)

(5)

[SpkP [AdrP [ComP ... [TP [ν P *gwai*]]]]]



Supporting evidence #1: Properties of *gwai*

- Strong subjectivity expressing negation/denial (Winterstein et al. 2018)
- Subjective adverbial *gai ngo waa*

(6) Gai ngo waa, gaaming sik gwai geoifaat
as I say Kaming know ghost syntax

Intended: ‘In my opinion, Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

Cf.

(7) ??Gai ngo waa, gaming m sik geoifaat
as I say Kaming not know syntax

‘In my opinion, Kaming doesn’t know syntax.’

Properties of *gwai*

Semantic account: *Gwai* as mixed expressive (Beltrama & Lee 2015)

- At-issue meaning: negation
- Expressive meaning: goddamn, bastard...
- “The speaker is in a ‘heightened emotional state’.” (Beltrama & Lee 2015: 153)
- *Gwai*’s expressivity takes the widest scope
- Expressive component (above CP) vs. truth-conditional component (CP) (cf. Miyagawa 2022)

Properties of *gwai*

- Informal register (Zeng 1991)
- Sensitive to non-honorific context → the addressee is identified as a peer to the speaker
- Can be replaced by obscenity words like *nan* (literally ‘penis’), *hai* (literally ‘vulva’)...

(8) Gaaming sik nan/gwai geoifaat me
Kaming know penis/ghost syntax SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

- *Gwai* is closely related to speaker and addressee
- mismatch of form and function (cf. politeness marker *-mas-* in Japanese, Miyagawa 2017)

Supporting evidence #2: SFPs and intonations

a. Agreement between SFPs and *gwai*

- *me/aa/maa/o ho*: commonly used yes-no question particles

(9) Gaaming sik gwai geoifaat me/aa/*maa/*o ho...

Kaming know ghost syntax SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

- *me*: negatively biased, encoding negative expectations (Lam 2014)

(10) Gaaming duk geoifaat me

Kaming study syntax SFP

‘Kaming doesn’t study syntax, am I right?’

→ The speaker commits to the proposition that Kaming doesn’t study syntax.

- *aa*: can be both neutral/negatively biased (Hara 2014)

SFPs and intonations

- *Gwai* Agrees with *me/aa* (or a null negative operator that *me/aa* induced, cf. Choi 2022)
- Agree: [_{ComP} NEG] ... [_{vP} V-*gwai*]
- Negative concord

- *maa/o ho*: neutral/positively biased
- Does not induce any negative operator

SFPs and intonations

b. Agreement between intonations and *gwai*

- Two tonal variants of *me*: high-fall tone and high-level tone
- High-fall tone *me*: rhetorical force (Tang 2015, Rao et al. 2016 among others)

(11) Gaaming sik geoifaat me (high-level tone)

Kaming know syntax SFP

‘Does Kaming know syntax?’

OR Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t know syntax.’

(12) Gaaming sik geoifaat me (high-fall tone)

Kaming know syntax SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t know syntax.’

- a L% boundary tone may superimpose on *aa* (Lee 2021)
- Boundary tone in Cantonese is treated as SFP (Zhang & Tang 2014, Lau 2019, Tang 2020)
- High-fall tone *me*: [SpkP L% ...[Comp me]]

SFPs and intonations

- *Me* in sentences with *gwai*: ✓ high-fall tone ✗ high-level tone

(13) Gaaming sik gwai geoifaat me *(L%)
Kaming know ghost syntax SFP SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

- *Me* may be omitted, but L% must be presented

- *Wan*: ✓ high-fall tone ✗ high-level tone

(14) Gaaming sik gwai maahaktou**wan** *(L%)/*H%
Kaming know ghost Mark Twain SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know Mark Twain.’

SFPs and intonations

- L% in Cantonese: speaker-oriented subjectivity (Ding 2013), assertive force (Lin 2002)
- Obligatory to have the L% for the *gwai* sentence to be typed as an assertion
- [Assert] feature (Nakashima 2018, Tang 2022a)
- Agree: [_{SpkP} L% [_{Assert}]]...[_{vP} V-*gwai*]

Supporting evidence #3: Scopal interaction

- *Gwai*'s negation scope is very high despite its suffixal nature

(15) **Keoi hai zou-gan jat joeng je ge sihau sik**
S/he when do-ing a CL thing PRT time know
gwai jatsamjijung me.
ghost multi-task SFP

Intended: 'It is not the case that when s/he is doing something, s/he is able to multi-task.'

OK $\sim > \exists$ / * $\exists > \sim$

Scopal interaction

(16) **Jyugwo nei jicin tung-gwo jatgojan joekwui,**
If you beforewith-SUF someone dating,
nei jigaa sai gwai hok dim flirt jan me
you now need ghost learn how flirt person SFP

Intended: ‘It is not the case that if you have dated somebody before, you need to learn how to flirt now.’

OK $\sim > \exists$ / $* \exists > \sim$

- premise-conditional attached to the peripheral CP (Haegeman 2003)

Scopal interaction

- “External negation” (Horn 1989, Hsieh 2001)
- u [NEG] for *gwai*
- Semantically empty item for concord
- *Gwai* must Agree with the sentential i [NEG] to be valued
- [*me/aa/Op* i [NEG]]...CP/TP... [*gwai* u [NEG]]

Predictions #1: Minimality effects

- *Gwai* Agrees with NEG in ComP
- Negative concord as syntactic agreement (Zeljstra 2004, see also Yip 2021 and ref. therein)
→ Minimality is expected
- Featural Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 2004)
- Quantificational feature: Neg, focus, modality...
- fRM for *gwai*: $[_{\text{ComP}} \text{NEG}_{[\text{Qu}]}] \dots (*Z_{[\text{Qu}]}) \dots [_{\text{vP}} \text{V-}i_{[\text{Qu}]}]$

Minimality effects

- Focus operator: *dak*, SFP *zaa*

(17) *Dak gaaming sik gwai geoifaat
only Kaming know ghost syntax
'Only Kaming doesn't goddamn know syntax.'

(18) *Gaaming sik gwai geoifaat zaa
Kaming know ghost syntax SFP-only
'Kaming only doesn't goddamn know syntax.'

- Epistemic modals: *jatding*, *ganghai*

(19) *Gaaming jatding/ganghai sik gwai geoifaat
Kaming certainly know ghost syntax
'Certainly, Kaming doesn't goddamn know syntax.'

Minimality effects

- Quantifiers: *sojaujan* (*dou*), (*jau*) *jatdijan*

(20) *Sojaujan (dou)/(jau) jatdijan sik gwai geoifaat

Everyone all have someone know ghost syntax

‘Everyone/Someone (here) doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

- Quantificational adverbs: *sengjat*, *housiu*

(21) *Gaaming sengjat/housiu sik gwai geoifaat

Kaming always/seldom know ghost syntax

‘Usually/Rarely, Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

Minimality effects

Remarks I

- No minimality is observed for temporal/locative adverbials

(22) Gaaming jicin sik gwai geoifaat (Temporal)
Kaming past know ghost syntax

Intended: ‘Kaming didn’t goddamn know syntax in the past.’

(23) Gaaming hai meigwok sai gwai hok geoifaat (Locative)
Kaming in US need ghost study syntax

Intended: ‘Kaming needn’t goddamn study syntax in the US.’

Minimality effects

Remarks II

- For typical negative markers *m*, minimality effects do not occur

(24) Dak gaaming m sik geoifaat (**focus**, cf.(17))
only Kaming not know syntax

(25) Gaaming jatding/ganghai m sik geoifaat (**Epi mod**, cf. (18))
Kaming certainly not know syntax

(26) Sojaujan (dou)/(jau) jatdijan m sik gwai geoifaat
Everyone all have someone not know ghost syntax
(**Quantifiers**, cf. (19))

(27) Gaaming sengjat/housiu m sik geoifaat (**Qu adv**, cf.(20))
Kaming always/seldom not know syntax

→ *Gwai* triggers minimality effects

Predictions #2: Root requirement

- *Gwai* Agrees with top-most SpkP/AdrP/ComP
 - If SpkP/AdrP/ComP does not exist, the uninterpretable features of *gwai* remain undeleted and the derivation crashes
- Root sensitivity is expected

- *Gwai* resists all kinds of subordinate clauses: strongly root sensitive
- Relative clause

(28) *Sik gwai geoifaat ge jan jinggoi hou hoisam
know ghost syntax PRT person may very happy

Intended: ‘Those who doesn’t goddamn know syntax may be very happy.’

Root requirement

- Adverbial clause

(29) *Janwai gaamingsik gwai geoifaat,soji keoi hou hoisam
Because Kaming know ghost syntax so he very happy
Intended: ‘Kaming is happy because he doesn’t goddamn know syntax.’

- Embedded clause

(30) *Gaaming waa ngo sik gwai geoifaat
Kaming say I know ghost syntax
Intended: ‘Kaming said that I don’t goddamn know syntax.’

- Complement clause of noun

(31) *Gaaming sik gwai geoifaat ge jiujin hai co ge
Kaming know ghost syntax PRT rumor be false PRT
Intended: ‘The rumor that Kaming doesn’t goddamn know syntax is false.’

Root requirement

Remark I

- Embeddability of *gwai*: all non-root context is prohibited
- Type A verb in Hooper & Thompson (1973): say

- (32) Taroo-wa Hanako-ga ki-mas-u to itta
Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM come-MAS-PRS C said
‘Taro said that Hanako will come.’ (Miyagawa 2022:48)
- (33) *Gaaming waa ngo sik gwai geoifaat (= (29))
Kaming say I know ghost syntax
Intended: ‘Kaming said that I don’t goddamn know syntax.’

- *-mas-*: states politeness, marks the Adr
- *Gwai*: encodes strong subjectivity, marks the Spk as well
- Subjectivity Hypothesis (Pan 2015): ↑ subjectiveness ↑ difficulty to be embedded

Root requirement

Remark II

- Pseudo example of *gwai* being embedded

(34) ngo gokdak keoi sik gwai geoifaat me
I think s/he know ghost syntax SFP

(35) *ngo **m** gokdak keoi sik gwai geoifaat me
I **not** think s/he know ghost syntax SFP

(36) ***Nei** gokdak keoi sik gwai geoifaat me
you think s/he know ghost syntax SFP

- *Ngo gokdak*: a fixed performative expression (Tang 2022a)
- *Ngo gokdak* as a grammaticalized adverbial adjoined to SpkP

Implications #1: Regarding RQs

- RQs are not completely a pragmatic issue
- [_{SpkP} L⁰_[Assert] [_{AdrP} ∅_[colloquial] [_{Comp} me/aa/Op_[Neg] ... [_{TP} [_{vP} V-*gwai*]]]]]
- Syntactic realizations for RQs
- Existence of S-AP and Comp

- Some forms of RQs being a part of (narrow) syntax (Agree, Minimality...)
- Expressive component within language faculty for communication

Implications #2: Further extensions

- Different types of RQs

1. Negative *wh*-constructions (Cheung 2008, 2009)

(37) Gaaming bindou sik geoifaat
Kaming where know syntax

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t know syntax.’

- Adjoins to TP or even lower than TP in Cantonese: Gaaming where.../*where Gaaming...

2. Negative *what* (*shenme* in Mandarin and *matje* in Cantonese) (Tang 2022b)

(38) Gaaming hok-matje geoifaat
Kaming study-what syntax

Intended: ‘Kaming should not/does not study syntax.’

- Affix of the main verb

Further extensions

Matje in Cantonese

- Similar properties: subjectivity, informal register, negative meaning...
- Interaction with SFPs

(39) Gaaming hok-matje geoifaat aa3/ne/wo...

Kaming study-what syntax SFP

‘What kinds of syntax does Kaming study?’ (more preferable reading)

OR Intended: ‘Kaming should not/does not study syntax.’

(40) Gaaming hok-matje geoifaat aa1

Kaming study-what syntax SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming should not/does not study syntax.’ (RQ reading only)

Further extensions

Matje in Cantonese

- Minimality effects

(41) *Sojaujan hok-matje geoifaat aa1
Everyone study-what syntax SFP

Intended: ‘Everyone (here) should not/does not study syntax.’

- Root requirement

(42) *Ngo m gokdak Gaaming hok-matje geoifaat aa1
I not think Kaming study-what syntax SFP

Intended: ‘I don’t think that Kaming should not/does not study syntax.’

.....

Implications #3: *Me* in Cantonese

- High-fall tone *me* and high-level tone *me*
- Only high-fall tone *me* is compatible with *gwai* (see (13))
- *Gwai* forces the falling intonation to present independently

(43) Gaaming sik gwai maahaktou**wan** *(L%) (= (14))
Kaming know ghost Mark Twain SFP

Intended: ‘Kaming doesn’t goddamn know Mark Twain.’

- Lends supports to the superimposition of the falling tone on *me* (cf. Lee 2021)
- Interaction between SFP, tone and intonation

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Comments and questions are welcome!

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