

Don't you think that a rhetorical question can convey an argument?

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Abstract

Rhetorical questions have been addressed from many different linguistic perspectives, however, their interactional role has been hitherto underexplored. We here present an exploratory study of rhetorical questions in a corpus of dialogues discussing a moral dilemma from an interactional perspective, using the notions of enthymemes and topoi. Results show that rhetorical questions are used to introduce enthymematic arguments and to facilitate linking together parts of arguments over several utterances.

1 Introduction

Rhetorical questions (RQs) have been addressed from different perspectives in linguistics, from Discourse Analysis and Speech Act Theory to transformational approaches, yet the interactional aspect of RQs has been neglected. We investigate the roles RQs play in the context of dialogue from an interactional approach, in particular as a device for delivering arguments.

1.1 Speech Acts and RQs

In Speech Act Theory RQs are regarded as indirect speech acts. By asking a question without expecting an answer, a speaker breaks the sincerity condition for questions and gives rise to a conversational implicature, typically conveying a statement (among other functions in discourse an imperative, a piece of advice, a criticism, a threat to face or an argument, etc.) (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1975; Brown and Levinson, 1987). On this view, the RQ makes its answer obvious, through context or by syntactic markers, to the exclusion of other possible answers to the literal meaning of the question. The statement that answers an RQ (and is implied by it) in the majority of cases exhibits the opposite polarity, that is the answer is settled in the negative in the

mind of the hearer (Egg, 2007; Pope, 1972; Ilie, 1994; Han, 2002, 1998). In order to explain the mechanism of delivering arguments through RQs, one needs a way to derive the statement or imperative to explicate the illocutionary force of the RQ – the so called polarity shift or reversal being one of the main tools for glossing the implied statement the RQ carries, and a useful clue to evaluate the felicitousness of an RQ in a given context.

1.2 Discourse context and RQs

Cerović (2016) investigates the use of rhetorical questions in the institutional setting of a police interrogation, where a suspect uses RQs to challenge allegations posed by the detectives, and to demonstrate epistemic primacy regarding the crime, vis-a-vis the detectives interrogating him – the suspect asks “What do I know?” to assert “I know nothing” about his knowledge of the crime. The use of RQs instead of responding directly, poses a challenge to authority in a setting where it is detectives who are supposed to be “asking the questions” (Cerović, 2016). In accordance with this, Frank (1990) argues for the primary role of RQs being persuasive devices attenuating the social cost of face-threatening acts, by “strengthening assertions and mitigating potential threats to face” (Frank, 1990, p.738). Since RQs often convey sarcasm and are otherwise ambiguous regarding interpretation, subjective and easily misunderstood, the intent of a speaker isn't always clear-cut. Relying on SAT alone, a researcher would mistakenly classify as RQs cases where only context can cue such a reading. An assessment needs to be made not only of the speaker's intent but of the contextual environment and of the hearers response, made possible by Discourse Analysis (Frank, 1990).

Ilie's take is that RQs are not a special category of questions that needs not or can not be answered, but rather primarily pragmatic units that “are nei-

ther answerless, nor unanswerable questions, and that they display varying degrees of validity as argumentative acts” (Ilie, 1994, ii). Ilie distinguishes five identifying features as criteria for RQs. These are taken to be cognition oriented — an RQ evokes a cognitive process in the mind of the addressee that mirrors the process in their own mind and arrives at the same conclusion, inducing the addressee to reconsider their own held assumptions. These five criteria are (p.45-46): (i) the discrepancy between the interrogative form of the rhetorical question and its communicative function as a statement, (ii) the polarity shift between the rhetorical question and its implied statement, (iii) the implicitness and the exclusiveness of the answer to the rhetorical question, (iv) the speaker’s commitment to the implicit answer, and (v) the multifunctionality of rhetorical questions.

1.3 Rhetorical questions as enthymematic arguments

In argumentation as it occurs in natural dialogue participants often rely on common sense rather than strictly logical deduction in order to interpret the arguments made. Many arguments in dialogue are enthymematic – that is, the arguments presented lack some premises which would be required in a fully logical chain of reasoning. Instead, enthymematic arguments (*enthymemes*) rely on notions or warrants in the minds of the listeners. These are often referred to as *topoi* (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2007; Ducrot, 1988; Anscombe, 1995; Breitholtz, 2020).

When we interact we expect certain *topoi* to be common ground, or to be accommodated during the course of the interaction. Different *topoi* can underpin one and the same enthymeme, which can lead to misunderstanding, disagreement, or agreement on completely different grounds.

When presented with an inference in a conversation the participants need to find among their rhetorical resources an applicable general principle that would make sense of it, that is to both interpret and to validate it. Ilie (1994) calls enthymemes those RQs that function as whole arguments, that is, imply conditional statements. She distinguishes three types of RQs that are enthymemes according to what kind of inference they correspond to, *modus ponens*, *modus tollens* and *disjunctive syllogism*. However, in our analysis RQs function as different aspects of enthymematic inferences. RQs can serve as replies or as something to be replied

to, thus expressing the premise or conclusion of an argument (except those that reply to the question itself, i.e. that verbalise the implied statement, as they only serve to strengthen the expressed standpoint).

Consider the example below of an RQ that delivers a statement of the speaker’s opinion, (the immediate context is whether throwing out a child from an air balloon could prevent it from crashing):

- (1) She’s nine years old, she’s so light anyway – is she really gonna make a difference? (GP12, 38)

In this example (1) the structure of the argumentation can be described as this enthymeme:

- (2) she’s nine years old she’s too light
throwing her out won’t make a difference

Topos: if x isn’t heavy enough, throwing x out of the balloon won’t help it fly. The proposition that “she’s too light” is itself the conclusion of, “she’s nine years old”:

- (3) she’s nine years old
she’s too light

The wavy line represents defeasibility of the argument – that while there may be a good reason for the conclusion to follow from the premise, it may with additional information be invalidated. For example, one could imagine the child being so heavy that she would constitute an exception to the generalisation that nine year olds do not weigh much – she may not be a typical nine year old and the general rule may not hold true in her case. In other words, the *topos* may be accepted as valid but not its application in a particular context. The speaker appears to be aware of the possibility that the *topos* may not necessarily be accommodated as relevant to the situation, making the generalisation more specific later in the dialogue: “I just think the child is too too light anyway I mean even if the child was morbidly obese” (GP12, 211).

We argue that the employment of an RQ to form an argument strengthens the argumentative force through a presumption that the *topos* warranting it should already be acceptable to the addressee. This is due to the role of RQs in cognition itself, not simply to social tension and the risk of threatening face in the possibility of a challenging response to the RQ in case of eventual disagreement. The speaker, by using an RQ, presumes the notion behind it to be acceptable to the addressee, thus expressing their

own commitment to the implied answer and the expectation of the addressee to do likewise. Casting it as a question to be answered negatively sets off such a process in the mind of the hearer, whether they end up agreeing with the conclusions of this reasoning process or not. We propose that this process can be described as the successful elicitation of a topos that would warrant the enthymeme expressed by an RQ, and the RQ form itself accentuates, or makes salient in discourse the expectation that a topos is already available, and should be acceptable to the other conversation participants.

Schlöder et al. (2016) analyse why-questions in dialogue from a rhetorical perspective, drawing on Ginzburg's (2012) account of Question under Discussion (QUD). A why-question elicits a reason for the question under discussion: when someone utters a proposition *p*, the answer to "why *p*?" is an enthymeme *q* "therefore *p*", and the answer presupposes that there is a topos that warrants that enthymeme. A reason is factive, when what is asked about is why *p* holds, and meta-discursive when inquiring about the reason for the act of saying *p*.

There is a special case where the antecedent of a why-question is a conditional statement. Here the why-question elicits a reason for the stated enthymeme, to explicate the topos that underpins it. A why-question can be posed again to elicit a reason for the one already given, again be questioned, and so on, as there may always be "a topos in the context that the interlocutors do not explicate, but implicitly accommodate" (Schlöder et al., 2016, p.4). So, enthymemes can be nested: a reason provided for one inference is itself an unstated premise in a superordinate enthymeme, as it itself presupposes the application of another topos. Nesting of enthymemes may be useful in the examination of the role of RQs in arguments. The duality of RQs as interrogatives and statements makes it possible for a speaker to answer their own RQ, or to reply with an RQ to their own statements, which allows them to provide backing for the proposition implicit in the RQ, or use RQs to reject a proposition they made. In the following example, 1 poses two RQs, that can be glossed as the inference "She has no special quality. (So) there is no reason we want to keep her"

(4)

- 1 So then we have the pregnant woman, so it's two people in one.
- 2 yeah.
- 1 Wh- what's her special quality? Why do we want to keep her at all?
- 2 Well, if you threw her out, maybe the pilot might well go mad, through losing his wife and his child.
- 3 But if you threw her out, maybe the pilot might jump out as well.
- 2 Yeah.
- 3 Hence, then you'd have two spaces left in the balloon. So you wouldn't have to throw anyone. (GP08, 68-78)

By asking a general question after the fact of stating something that could serve as its answer, 1 implicitly denies that their preceding statement is relevant as an answer.

1.4 Research questions

We report a preliminary study to explore the following questions:

1. Can RQs express enthymematic arguments, or parts of them?
2. Can their use make the warranting topoi likelier to be accommodated by participants, or make the topos that would warrant the enthymematic argument more acceptable?
3. Is the expression of enthymemes through RQs (as well as the structural correspondence between enthymemes and RQs, and their argumentative power) linked to an RQ having the illocutionary force of the statement it implies?

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The corpus, from Lavelle et al. (2013), consists of 40 triadic conversations of approximately five minutes. There are 20 interactions involving one patient with a diagnosis of schizophrenia and two non-psychiatric controls who were unaware of the patient's diagnosis. The 20 control interactions, each involved three healthy participants. Participants within each triad were unfamiliar to each other. This preliminary study focuses on the transcripts from 4 dialogues; 2 including a patient and 2 controls.

2.2 Task

The subjects discussed the balloon task – a moral dilemma which requires participants to reach agreement on which of four passengers should be thrown out of a hot air balloon that will otherwise crash, killing all the passengers, if one is not sacrificed. The choice is between Dr Robert Lewis – a cancer research scientist, who believes he is on the brink of discovering a cure for cancer; William Harris – the balloon pilot who is the only passenger with any balloon flying experience; Susanne Harris – William’s wife, a primary school teacher who is 7 months pregnant with their second child; Heather Sloan – a nine-year old musical child prodigy who is considered by many to be a “twenty-first century Mozart”. This task is known to elicit dialogues containing extended reasoning sequences.

2.3 Annotation

In order to capture as many borderline cases as possible, the criteria we use for what questions are regarded as rhetorical are simply those questions that, taking context into consideration, do not expect informational answers (as far as can be deemed likely from a non-participants’ point of view), including cases where there is a probability of a non-rhetorical reading, or where a rhetorical question is responded to as an ordinary one. The reason for this is that in many cases the likelihood of a rhetorical contra informational reading varies, and since we worked with transcripts only, this likelihood can not be determined without prosodic and nonverbal cues.

3 Results

In these 4 dialogues we identified 19 RQs. 6 of these were regular Y/N RQs, 9 were regular Wh-RQs, and 4 were irregular RQs. We will discuss these types in turn, with examples, below.

3.1 Yes/No RQs

Is she really gonna make a difference?

(5) (GP12, 36-39)

- 1: Are we all agreed that the kid’s not going?
- 2: erm.
- 1: She’s nine years old, she’s so light anyway – **is she really gonna make a difference?**
- 3: Well I’m not throwing a kid out, I just couldn’t cope with it.

The RQ “is she really gonna make a difference?” has the illocutionary force of a statement with a negative polarity “She isn’t really gonna make a difference”, and it expects only negative answers like an ellipsis of the implied statement: “She is not”. The rhetorical reading is motivated by the premise of the implied statement: “She’s nine years old, she’s so light anyway” provided by the speaker, by the modal adverb really, and anyway connecting the premise to the conclusion implicit in the RQ. The entire argument can be glossed as “She isn’t really gonna make a difference [if thrown out], [because] she’s nine years old, she’s so light anyway”, and the chain of reasoning can be represented as the enthymeme in (2), repeated here as (6).

(6) she’s nine years old she’s too light
throwing her out won’t make a difference

Later in the dialogue, when asked for a reason to throw out the child, 1 repeats the argument that the child is too light, even in the case of morbid obesity, and covers the possibility of the child being an exception to a general notion of nine year olds being lightweight. The tag question in the last line is a yes/no-RQ implying a statement of the opposite polarity of the tag (and identical to the statement part of the tag question).

(7) (GP12, 204-213)

- 1: No no if that kid was a trouble maker
- 3: *laughter* No *laughter*
- 1: I would throw them out
- 3: *laughter* No I i- it’s just ethically I I ca-
I can’t make that choice.
- 2: Why?
- 1: I just think the child is too too light
anyway I mean, even if the child was
morbidly obese.
- 3: *laughter*
- 1: **They’re not gonna be as heavy as a sandbag, are they?** So.

“They’re not gonna be as heavy as a sandbag” evokes a topos more specific than the previous one, defining the range of being heavy enough as at least the equal weight of a sandbag (8)

(8) x is not as heavy as a sandbag
throwing x out won’t make a difference

Don't you think that p?

(9) (GP12, 96-112)

2: Yeah but the big question is if you throw the pilot out is what to expect, are you expected to be able to land the thing safely.

3: mmm.

2: Because if not then it's pointless throwing the pilot out. Because you kill everybody then.

3: Yes. But there is a chance

1: **Don't you think that if she's been married to him she might have a little bit of piloting?**

3: Yeah, exactly.

1: She might have been on a hot air balloon more than once.

3: Yeah.

1: So she might sort of know the general idea of how to land one.

The RQ implies the conditional statement: if "she's been married to him" then "she might have a little bit of piloting", evoking the topos in (10)

(10) x is married to a pilot
x has experience of piloting

In this example the speaker makes an argument relevant to the discourse through the use of an RQ to introduce an enthymeme, and further explicates their reasoning (by drawing on implicit topoi: i) that pilot's wives come along on flights sometimes; ii) that going on flights gives one piloting experience and iii) that piloting experience generally includes ability to land the aircraft.

It can be further noted that the introductory expression "don't you think that ..." turns a statement into an RQ (whose implication can be derived by removing the introductory expression, in a similar way to a sentence final question tag). The RQ can be glossed as "Surely you think that if she's been married to him she might have a little bit of piloting". The gloss can explain the persuasive power of the RQ – why it expects (and in this case, receives) an affirmation for an answer. The introductory "don't you think that ..." lays bare an emblematic property of RQs to make it likelier that the addressee will mirror the speaker's thinking process and agree with them.

3.2 Why RQs

Who needs a pilot?

(11) (GP12, 113-121)

1: But the scenario still says it's gonna crash. There's nothing, they can't do anything to land it. It's gonna crash. It's got to the point where they've actually thrown the food out, thrown the sandbags. Fully prepared that it's gonna crash, there's no way to land it.

2: mmm

1: So it's gonna crash, **who needs a pilot?**

3: mmm

We can gloss the RQ as "No one needs a pilot", and the whole utterance as "If the balloon is gonna crash, then no one needs a pilot". This evokes a topos like (12) stating that if a balloon is doomed to crash and it has passengers, then no one who is a passenger needs a pilot.

(12) x is a passenger of a balloon doomed to crash
x doesn't need a pilot

Imagine the RQ "do they really need a pilot?" instead of the one above. It is still drawing on the same topos as "who needs a pilot?", but it would be more dependent on it being assumed by other participants.

What's her special quality? With two wh-RQs in succession, responding to their own statement about the pregnant woman, 1 is conveying the idea that there does not exist a special quality about her, and so there exists no reason to keep her:

(13) (GP08, 68-78)

1: So then we have the pregnant woman, so it's two people in one.

2: yeah.

1: **Wh- what's her special quality? Why do we want to keep her at all?**

2: Well, if you threw her out, maybe the pilot might well go mad, through losing his wife and his child.

3: But if you threw her out, maybe the pilot might jump out as well.

2: Yeah.

3: Hence, then you'd have two spaces left in the balloon. So you wouldn't have to throw anyone.

The rhetorical reading is due to the presence of the NPI “at all” in the second of the RQs. We can see that they together make an inference when glossed as statements of non-existence: “She has no special quality. (So) there is no reason we want to keep her at all”. 1 is drawing upon a notion relevant to the situation described in the balloon task, that a special quality needs to be found for an individual that should be saved.

The locutionary act of asking for an instantiation of this topos seemingly contrasts with 1's previous turn where they ascribed the pregnant woman a quality of counting as two (or, her death being equal to two). This explains why 2 and 3 in the following turns choose to give the RQs informational answers: to provide a reason for why being pregnant/counting as two lives counts as a special quality. Since the RQ implies a null set, the quality that 1 mentioned preceding it isn't found among answers to the inquiry of what her special quality may be, that would motivate saving her. It appears that the RQ allows 1 to reject that being pregnant and counting for two is applicable as a reason to be saved.

Who listens to classical music? The following exchange 3 is arguing for throwing out the child musical prodigy:

(14) (GP10, 54-58)

3: I think they should dash the child

1: *laughter*

3: It's just a child

1: The prodigy, nooo

3: Who listens to classical music?

3 expresses the standpoint that the child should be thrown out, because she is “just” a child, to which 1 objects when referring to the child as prodigy, as a reason to not throw her out. 3 follows up with the RQ “Who listens to classical music?” implicitly stating a hyperbolic “No one listens to classical music”, to reject the notion that being a musical prodigy is a quality worth saving her for, as she is a prodigy in classical music. In other words, 3 draws on another, more specific topos than the one that warrants 1's protest. Let's assume 1 finds musical prodigies worth saving in general, as they make great music (15).

(15) x makes great music
x should be saved

Then, 3's RQ triggers the availability of the topos in (16), that if no one likes classical music, and someone is making classical music, they aren't making great music. In other words, the RQ invokes another topos as a reason for why (15) is unfounded.

(16) no one likes classical music x makes classical music
x does not make great music

How difficult is it to fly the balloon? A common theme in many arguments in the dialogues is that balloons are easy to fly, since operating its propane valve seems like a binary operation – either open or close it.

(17) (GP08 145-149)

1: How difficult is it to fly the balloon?

3: He could train the Mozart.

1: It's just going up and down.

The argument 1 makes is that a task that consists of only two modes of action is not in the upper range for what is complicated, and evokes a topos that delimits the range for what is to be considered a difficult task (analogous to the pragmatic scales that Rohde (2006) describes as being made salient in the context by the RQ). This can be glossed as evoking the topos that if something doesn't have many options then it is not very difficult.

It can be said then, that the topos drawn on can be treated as a generalisation of the contextually relevant property of elements in the relevant range of expected answers to the RQ. The same can be observed in the excerpt below.

(18) (GP10, 34-47)

2: How hard is it to, um, navigate a balloon?

3: *laughter* I don't know *laughter*

2: *laughter* Yeah *laughter*

1: *laughter* Exactly, that's what I was thinking, yeah *laughter*

2: You let hot air in and when when you wanna go you let hot air out.

1: Yeah, it is common sense I suppose.

Below we see 1 employing three RQs drawing on the same idea of a balloon not being difficult to fly, providing additional grounds to throw out the pilot – that flying the balloon can be easily taught.

(19) (GP08, 167-172)

1: The thing is, how easy, or difficult it is to actually teach how to fly a balloon? I mean it's just two things really. What does a pilot do? It's not like flying a Boeing 727 is it?

2: Well, yeah it is just two things like.

3: But if the balloon was sinking anyway, you wouldn't wanna train anyone, you'd just wanna jump out.

The first RQ, glossed as “It is not difficult to teach how to fly a balloon” implies the consequent of a similar topos to that evoked in the previous two examples, with the subsequent comment (“it's just two things”) making up the antecedent.

The second RQ expects an empty set as the answer, that is the absence of what is difficult. “There is nothing [difficult] a [balloon] pilot does”.

The implied statement of the third RQ is derived from simply eliminating the question tag “It's not like flying a Boeing 727.” To make sense of this argument being presented here, the additional topos that “flying a Boeing 727 is difficult” needs to also be accommodated.

Of the three RQs only the first expects answers on the low end of a scale of difficulty. The second two imply cut-off thresholds for the scale, that the difficulty of flying a balloon can not exceed. The second one, a wh-RQ, implies that the whatever a balloon pilot does it is not difficult, or rather, its difficulty is so negligible it is below what can be considered as such. The third, a tag yes/no-RQ, characterises the high end of the scale for piloting aircraft, by placing a passenger plane at that end of the scale.

3.3 Irregular cases

Is he gonna be kind of generous about it or is he gonna sell the cure?

(20) (GP12, 22-27)

1: There's always another doctor out there who is I'm I'm almost curing cancer but he hasn't really.

3: And is he gonna be kind of generous about it or is he gonna sell the cure?

2: Sell the drug to make tons of money

3: Yeah exactly it's

2: But but yeah those things apart I I I still think he's probably the most important

person in in the balloon as he has the power the power to save lives all round the world from then on.

3: Or the power to make money.

“Is he gonna be kind of generous about it or is he gonna sell the cure?” is an exception in terms of the kind of argument participants usually made in the balloon task and in terms of form. The RQ is in disjunctive form, and a derivation of the implied statement can't be done by a shifting the polarity of the entire statement, as it would lead to a neither . . . nor construction, if we take A to represent “he is gonna be kind of generous” and B “he is gonna sell the cure”, the RQ would imply a statement of the falsity of both A and B, which is obviously not the case. Instead consider that a rhetorical reading of the question stems from a reading of the disjunction as exclusive (also known as an either/or fallacy), where posing A leads to a negation of B, and posing B leads to a negation of A.

This doesn't mean that the RQ evokes two topoi at the same time, (“if x is generous then x won't sell the cure” and “if x sells the cure then x is not generous”) rather that the implied statement is an enthymeme that is an instantiation of one of these topoi or the other, in this case, depending on context (in the general, also on utterance content, prosody and syntactic markers that force an RQ reading). Put differently, provided sufficient context is given as to if a rhetorical reading is obvious in the interaction, then it is obvious whether generous(d) or sell.cure(d) is presupposed – and which is negated in the consequent, as well as in the derivation of the implied statement of the RQ. Consider now the context of the exchange between 1 and 3 where they are providing reasons against saving the doctor, and note the introductory “and” in the RQ, connecting it to the previous utterance as yet another argument for not saving the doctor. In other words, the enthymeme implied by the RQ is given as a reason for why the doctor should not be saved. In light of the context, we can gloss the RQ as: “He isn't gonna be generous about it, because he is gonna sell the cure”.

The topos drawn on (21) reflects the rhetorical emphasis on the corresponding part of the RQ, that the doctor is going to sell the cure – in the context its converse interpretation lacks rhetorical power, “He isn't gonna sell the cure, because he is gonna be generous about it” would not be applicable as a reason to not save the doctor. 2 disagrees with 3,

on the grounds that the power to save lives is more important than the notion of morality. 3 reiterates their argument, again drawing upon the topos in (21) since the power to make money is a proxy for not being generous.

- (21) $\frac{x \text{ is not generous}}{x \text{ should not be saved}}$

It is another example of an either/or dilemma, like in the RQ, the emphasised alternative stands in exclusive disjunction with the power to save lives.

4 Conclusions

We have shown that RQs can express entire enthymemes, and either the antecedent or consequent of enthymematic inferences. In the latter case, the RQ is linked to another utterance in the surrounding discourse which serves as the other part of the syllogism. This link is enabled by the literal function of RQs as interrogatives. An enthymematic inference can be constructed by an RQ, the RQ can make up its antecedent, or more frequently, its consequent. Moreover, an RQ can provide a reason to invalidate the premises of a topos previously evoked, or make up an enthymeme by making salient the lack of concludable answers to the RQ.

The only major difference observed between yes/no-RQs and wh-RQs in this regard is that wh-RQs often serve as consequents in inferences. However, due to the limited amount of either kind of RQ in the data, this does not warrant any conclusion as to a fundamental difference between them in this regard. One thing that can be said for wh-RQs contra yes/no-RQs is that the wh-element introduces quantifiers in the statements implied, and by making general statements over groups of individuals having a property they introduce topoi in a more explicit way, whereas yes/no-RQs presuppose this implicitly. Again, drawing any hard conclusions in this matter is difficult due to the small amount of cases of RQs analysed.

An interesting phenomenon emerges when examining adjunct wh-RQs, such as how-RQs, conveying scalar implicatures. In these cases, the RQ implies an inference motivating the gradation of a property of an individual under discussion somewhere along a scale. This analysis gives a more detailed account for the chain of reasoning in such examples, than an approach dealing purely with the probability of distribution of answers to RQs in clusters on an extreme end of presupposed pragmatic scales made salient by the context (Rohde,

2006). The approach suggested here is also consistent with formal approaches to dialogue like KoS (Ginzburg, 2012), which enables an analysis of questions where the interpretation is very open-ended, as it is not purely denotational. However, more work needs to be done regarding the topoi evoked by such RQs, because the high variability of statements implied by them presupposes a very high amount of available topoi as warrants, and how mandated these are in the situation itself varies in relation to generalisations of pragmatic scales invoked (like balloons as easily pilotable aircrafts contra Boeings as difficult ones). More work also needs to be done in relation to how RQs function in regards to incrementally updating the state of evoked and accommodated topoi in the dialogue, especially in the case of how-RQs. The only certain conclusion that can be made in this matter as of now is that RQs are very frequently in use in interactional settings, and when used, are met with agreement, succeeding in the purpose of persuasion, the more common the topoi they invoke is. More investigation can also be done on why the abundance of RQs in one dialogue contrast with the complete lack of them in another, and how this relates to how common the topoi drawn on are.

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