

日本語否定疑問文の解釈

Interpreting Japanese negative questions

廣瀬 悦子 HIROSE, Etsuko

● 立教大学
Rikkyo University



否定疑問文, 関連性理論, 解釈, 否定と拒否, メタ表象

Negative question, Relevance theory, Interpretation, Negation and denial, Metarepresentation

ABSTRACT

本研究の目的は、日本語否定疑問文がどのようにその言語的意味から実際の解釈が導き出されるのかを明らかにすることである。既存の研究では、様々な用法を分類し、コミュニケーションにおける役割の観点から分析したものが主流であると思われる。本研究では認知的な視点から、聞き手はどのように否定疑問文からその背後にある話し手の意図を理解するのか、関連性理論を用いて分析した。

その結果、ひとつの言語形式により示される意味論的意味はひとつで、多様な解釈は発話理解における次の段階で決定されることが明らかになった。次の段階とは、(1) 非言語的情報を用いて推論を行い、言語化された意味を命題へと発展させる段階、(2) こうして得られた命題と、非言語的情報を用いた推論から、発話者の意図（暗意）を引き出す段階である。つまり、否定疑問文の言語情報から唯一得られる言語的・意味論的意味と聞き手が入手可能な非言語情報を用いた推論の関係によって、コンテキストに最もふさわしい解釈が引き出されることになる。

1. Introduction

Negative yes-no questions are the questions which include at least one negation operator, such as ‘nai’ or ‘sen’ in Japanese. From a logical point of view, positive questions and negative questions seem to be equal. For example, when someone asks a question, “Is he a student? Or, isn’t he a student?”, the purpose of asking this question is to know whether or not the person is a student. This means that, logically, it does not make a difference whether either a positive question or a negative question is uttered in this case, as long as the speaker can achieve this aim. However, in everyday conversation, a speaker often intentionally chooses one question form as more appropriate than the other depending on the purpose of uttering the question or on other contextual factors. In fact, the situations in which yes-no questions are uttered need to be examined carefully, because most positive questions and negative questions cannot be used interchangeably.

Consider the following pair of questions.

- (1) Konya benkyo shimasu ka?
tonight study do Q
(Are you going to study tonight?)
- (2) Konya benkyo shima sen ka?
tonight study do not Q
(You aren’t going to study tonight?)

Question (1) expresses the speaker’s intention to know whether or not the hearer is going to study tonight. The situation in which the negative question (2) is used is more restricted than that in (1). The speaker of (2) wants or needs to know, for some reason, if the hearer is not going to study tonight.

Another feature that should be noted

about negative questions in Japanese is exemplified in the following question.

- (3) Konya issho-ni benkyo shima sen ka?
tonight together study do not Q
(Won’t you study with me tonight?)

Although the difference of linguistic forms between (2) and (3) is only the addition of “issho-ni (with me)” in (3), the communicated information of those questions is quite different. Question (2) is interpreted as an inquiry about the negative proposition mentioned, while question (3) is understood as more like the invitation to study together.

The aim of this study¹⁾ is to explicitly explain how the interpretations, or communicated information, of Japanese negative questions are derived from their encoded linguistic meanings. The previous studies concerning the understanding of Japanese negative questions have tended to focus on categorizing their different uses and describing their functions in communication (Adachi 1999, Hasunuma 1993, Inoue 1994, Inoue and Hung 1996, Miyake 1994, Miyazaki 1998 and 2000, and Tanomura 1988 and 1991). I would like to suggest that these questions, specifically how a hearer interprets a negative question in order to understand the speaker’s intention behind it, deserve greater scrutiny from a cognitive perspective. I adopt relevance theory, a pragmatic theory developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986/95), as the framework of the analysis.

2. Relevance theory

This study aims to analyze the relation between the linguistic forms of Japanese negative questions and their interpretations.

Pragmatics, as well as semantics, must play a crucial role to solve this. This study basically takes the view that semantics is the theory of sentence meanings and pragmatics is the theory of how utterances are interpreted in context.

Relevance theory is a pragmatic theory, developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986/95). Sperber and Wilson claim that human cognition and communication is relevance-oriented. People tend to pay attention to relevant information, by which they obtain adequate cognitive effects for justifiable processing effort. Every utterance addressed to someone communicates its relevance. Therefore, among a range of possible interpretations, the addressee is entitled to search for the one that satisfies his/her expectation of relevance. Any aspect of the process to derive the intended interpretation may involve inferences, which are governed by the principle of relevance². For instance, relevance theory claims that, in identifying the interpretation of an interrogative, not only its semantic meaning but also pragmatic inferences are always required and therefore, this comprehension process involves the considerations of relevance (Clark 1991 and Wilson and Sperber 1988).

Relevance theory provides a clear distinction between what is explicitly expressed by an utterance and what is implied by it, which are called explicature and implicature, respectively. Consider B's utterance in (4).

- (4) A: How about going to the movie tonight?
B: I'm tired.

In B's utterance, the explicature may be expressed as in (5) and the implicature as in (6).

- (5) B is very tired tonight.
(6) B does not want to go to the movie tonight.

What is crucial to distinguish between these two is this: Explicature is derived by fleshing out a decoded semantic representation, while implicature is inferred from the fleshed-out semantic representation on the basis of available contextual information (Carston 1998). In the case of the above example, (6) is inferred from (5) together with the contextual information, such as (7).

- (7) Someone who is very tired usually does not want to go out at night.

One of the notions that relevance theorists have recently put importance on is metarepresentation, which is a representation of a representation (Noh 1998, Sperber 1994 and 2000, and Wilson 1999). Metarepresentational ability is considered as an essential ability to make a successful communication. In the circumstance where Mary says, "I'm happy", the hearer may entertain the thoughts like below.

- (8) Mary said, "I'm happy".
(9) Mary thinks that she is happy.
(10) Mary intends me to believe that she is happy.

These thoughts cannot be entertained without metarepresentational ability (Sperber 1994). Metarepresentation is employed in various aspects of communication and cognition. This study will suggest that this concept is crucial to understand the meanings of some negative questions. In fact, the semantics of interrogatives is an instance of metarepresentation of another thought (Wilson and Sperber 1988).

3. Two types of negative questions

Japanese negative sentences can be divided into two according to their structural difference (Johnson 1994).

- (11) Kyoo wa gakko e ika **nai**.
today T school to go not
(I don't go to school today.)
- (12) Kyoo wa gakko e iku n **ja nai**.
today T school to go N be not
(It is not that I go to school today.)

'Nai' in (11) simply makes the predicate "iku (to go)" negative, while 'nai' in (12) affects the entire sentence. In accordance with this division, negative questions can be divided into two, 'nai (sen)' questions and 'ja nai' questions. They are examined separately in the following sections.

4. 'Nai (sen)' questions

This study suggests that 'nai (sen)' questions need to be divided into two kinds, proposition-negated questions and non-proposition-negated questions.

4.1 Proposition-negated 'nai' questions

Proposition-negated questions can be further divided into two, neutral questions and non-neutral questions. Neutral questions are the ones which do not communicate the speakers' prior assumptions about the propositions asked, while non-neutral questions communicate the speakers' prior assumptions.

Proposition-negated questions are uttered in order to create one of the following three cognitive effects, proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986/95); 1) to yield a further

assumption, 2) to strengthen an existing assumption, and 3) to eliminate an existing assumption.

Neutral questions are uttered in order to gain the first of the three cognitive effects. Consider the example below. Suppose that A has a thought that if it does not rain, she will hang the wash outside. B is reading a newspaper.

- (13) A: (to B) Kyoo, ame fura **nai**?
today rain fall not
(It isn't going to rain today, is it?)

Like the speaker of the positive question in section one, what A wants to know is whether or not it rains today. The reason why A utters the negative question, not its positive counterpart, is that the negative thought is more relevant to her in the given context. More specifically, the speaker has assumption (14-a) at the time of the utterance, and if (14-b) is provided as an answer, she will be able to draw the further assumption (14-c).

- (14) a. If it does not rain, I will hang the wash outside.
b. It is not going to rain.

c. I will hang the wash outside.

The above 'nai' question is uttered to try to yield a further assumption by combining the speaker's existing information and the newly given information. A neutral question like the above does not indicate the speaker's expectation of a particular answer, "yes" or "no", since the speaker has not had the prior assumption about the proposition questioned.

Non-neutral questions, which communi-

cate the speakers' prior assumptions, are uttered in order to create either effect 2) or effect 3). If the questioner manifestly expects the answer to strengthen an existing assumption, the questioner's assumption that the addressee may derive is the same as the thought metarepresented in the question. Consider the underlined question below.

(15) A: Hitori desu ka?

alone be Q

(No one else is here?)

B: Ee.

yes

(Right.)

A: Kokoe wa daremo ko nai n desu ka?

here T anyone come not N be Q

(Doesn't anyone come here?)

B: Ee.

yes

(No.) (Sasazawa 1997:437)

A has had the assumption that B almost always stays home alone and intends to strengthen it by asking this question.

If the questioner manifestly expects the answer to eliminate an existing assumption, the questioner's assumption that the addressee derives has the opposite polarity to the thought metarepresented in the question. Consider the underlined question below.

(16) <A just got home and finds that his brother is working at home.>

A: Nani yo. Niichan, mada ika nai no?

what sf brother yet go not N

(What?!. Haven't you left yet?)

B: Aa.

yes

(Not yet.)

A: Itte yo.

go sf

(Please go.) (Yamada 1983:111)

A has had the assumption that his brother had or should have left already and intends to eliminate this assumption by asking the question. The negative questions which are asked for this purpose strongly imply the speaker's existing assumptions.

What should be noted here is that, whatever assumptions are derived, these assumptions are not expressed explicitly by non-neutral 'nai' questions, or in other words, they are implicatures in relevance-theoretic terms.

4.2 Non-proposition-negated 'nai' questions

The distinction between proposition-negated questions and non-proposition-negated questions corresponds to the two uses of the negation operator, that is, according to Wilson (1999), negation and denial. Non-proposition-negated questions are specialized in that they are negative in form but not interpreted as expressing negative meanings. Consider the following non-proposition-negated question.

(17) A: Doo, kokoa demo noma nai?

well cocoa drink not

(Well, won't you have cocoa?)

B: Ee. Nomi tai wa, totemo.

yes drink want sf very much

(Yes. I want to, indeed.)

(Murakami 1987:234)

This question is understood as an offer to have cocoa. Previous studies analyzed the 'nai' in these questions as part of the discourse marker 'nai ka', which does not have

negative meaning (Inoue 1994 and Tanomura 1988). The present analysis argues against this view and claims that this ‘nai’ is the negation operator, which is the typical use of denial. The structure of the example question may be expressed in (18).

(18) [[Kokoa demo nomu] **nai**] ?

This structure indicates that the assumption communicated by the question, which is “kokoa demo nomu (you have cocoa)”, is the target of the denial use of the negation operator ‘nai’. This question is asking if the desirable thought, “kokoa demo nomu”, should be rejected. In other words, the assumption is an explicature in relevance-theoretic terms.

5. ‘Ja nai’ questions

5. 1 Interpretations of ‘ja nai’ questions

‘Ja nai’ questions are divided into three groups in terms of their interpretations³⁾.

Group 1:

(19) <The speaker finds that the hearer is not studying.>

Benkyo shiteru n **ja nai** no?
 study doing N be not N
 (You aren’t studying?)

Group 2:

(20) A: Ano ko heya de nani shiteru no?
 that girl room in what doing N
 (What is she doing in her room?)

B: Benkyo shiteru n **ja nai**?
 study doing N be not
 (She is studying, isn’t she?)

Group 3:

(21) <Father enters his daughter’s room and she is studying.>

[Surprisingly] Benkyo shiteru (n) **ja nai**.
 study doing N be not
 (You are studying!)

The first group is analyzed as proposition-negated questions. That is, the negation operator negates the propositional content of the question. As briefly mentioned in section three, the difference between this kind of ‘ja nai’ questions and ‘nai (sen)’ questions is that the negation operator of the ‘ja nai’ questions has a wider scope of negation than that of ‘nai (sen)’ questions. The second group is analyzed as non-proposition-negated questions. The structure of the ‘ja nai’ question in (20) can be expressed in (22).

(22) [[Benkyo shiteru] n **ja nai**] ?

The target of the negation operator is the proposition that metarepresents the speaker’s weak assumption. The question is roughly paraphrased as asking if the speaker’s assumption should be rejected. In the case of (20), the question communicates something like “I assume she is studying and I’m asking you if my assumption should be rejected”. These questions are sometimes used in order to simply present the speaker’s assumption. The third group is analyzed as rhetorical questions. The sentence structure of these questions is identical to that of the second group, in other words, the negation operator does not negate the propositional content, in Wilson’s term (Wilson 1999). The target of the negation operator in a rhetorical ‘ja nai’ question is the speaker’s strong assumption. Since the speaker of this question knows the

Table 1. Three types of 'ja nai' questions

	The target of the negation operator	The answer is relevant to.....
Group 1	the propositional content	the speaker
Group 2	the speaker's (weak) assumption	the speaker
Group 3	the speaker's (strong) assumption	the hearer

answer, the answer is regarded as relevant to the hearer. Therefore, the question is not necessary to be answered.

This analysis indicates that there are two factors by which these three different interpretations are derived from one linguistic form, “~ ja nai?”; the one is the difference of the nature of the materials that are the target of the negation operators, and the other is whether the answer is regarded as relevant to the questioner or to the addressee (Table 1).

This analysis has demonstrated that the different interpretations of the above three groups, or even those of the questions in one group, are determined not semantically but pragmatically.

5.2. 'Ja nai' questions and 'darou' questions

'Ja nai' questions in group 2 and 3 above are frequently used similarly to 'darou' questions in adequate contexts (Adachi 1999, Chun 1994, Hasunuma 1993, Miyake 1994, and Miyazaki 1998 and 2000). The following question illustrates this.

(23) <To a taxi driver>

Asoko-ni yuubin-kyoku ga mieru {ja nai/deshou}?

there post office S see be not / aux

(You can see a post office over there, can't you?)

(Hasunuma 1993: 47)

They, however, cannot always be used interchangeably.

(24) A: Kimi, asu-no koogi niwa shusseki-suru
you tomorrow's lecture to attend
{*ja nai ka /darou}?

be not Q/ aux

(You'll attend the tomorrow's lecture, won't you?)

B: Aa. Kanarazu shusseki-suru yo.

yes surely attend sf

(Yes. I'll surely attend it.)

(Adachi 1999:146)

The present study suggests that even though 'ja nai' questions and 'darou' questions can be sometimes used for the same purposes, their meanings are not the same.

'Darou' expresses the speaker's attitude toward the proposition preceding it, which is that the proposition is a description of a possible state of affairs. This study claims that the proposition of a 'darou' question metarepresents the hearer's thought. Therefore, what the speaker intends to communicate by the '[P] + darou' question is roughly paraphrased as the speaker regards that the hearer entertains the thought [P] as a possible state of affairs and s/he asks the hearer if it is true in the actual world.

If the speaker of a 'darou' question does not know the answer, it functions as confirming the speaker's assumption about the hearer's thought. Such a question is sometimes used similarly to a non-proposition-negated 'ja nai' question, illustrated by (25).

(25) Mother: Kasa o motte nai {deshou / n ja nai}?

umbrella O have not aux-probably N be not

(You don't have an umbrella, do you?)

Daughter: Un.
 yes
 (No.) (Yoshimoto 1989: 212)

If the speaker of a 'darou' question knows the answer, it functions as making the hearer entertain the thought and it is sometimes used similarly to a rhetorical 'ja nai' question, illustrated by (26).

(26) Asoko ni yuubin-kyoku ga aru
 there post office S be
 {deshou / ja nai}?
 aux-probably be not
 (There is a post office, isn't it?)
 (adapted from Hasumuma 1993: 47)

However, 'darou' questions and 'ja nai' questions are not interchangeably used when whose thought the question metarepresents is a crucial issue in the given context. More specifically, a 'ja nai' question should be used

to talk about the speaker's thought, since it metarepresents the speaker's thought. In contrast, a 'darou' question should be used to talk about the hearer's opinion, since it metarepresents the hearer's thought. Compare the following exchanges.

(27) A: Mado o akete mo ii **deshou?**
 window O open all right aux-probably
 (It's all right to open the window, isn't it?)

B: Ii desu yo. Doo zo.
 all right be sf please sf
 (Sure. Go ahead.)
 (Adachi 1999:97)

(28) A: Mado o akete mo ii n **ja nai?**
 window O open all right N be not
 (It's all right to open the window, I guess.)

B: ??Ii desu yo. / Soo desu ne.
 all right be sf so be sf
 (??Sure./I think so, too.)
 (Adachi 1999:97)

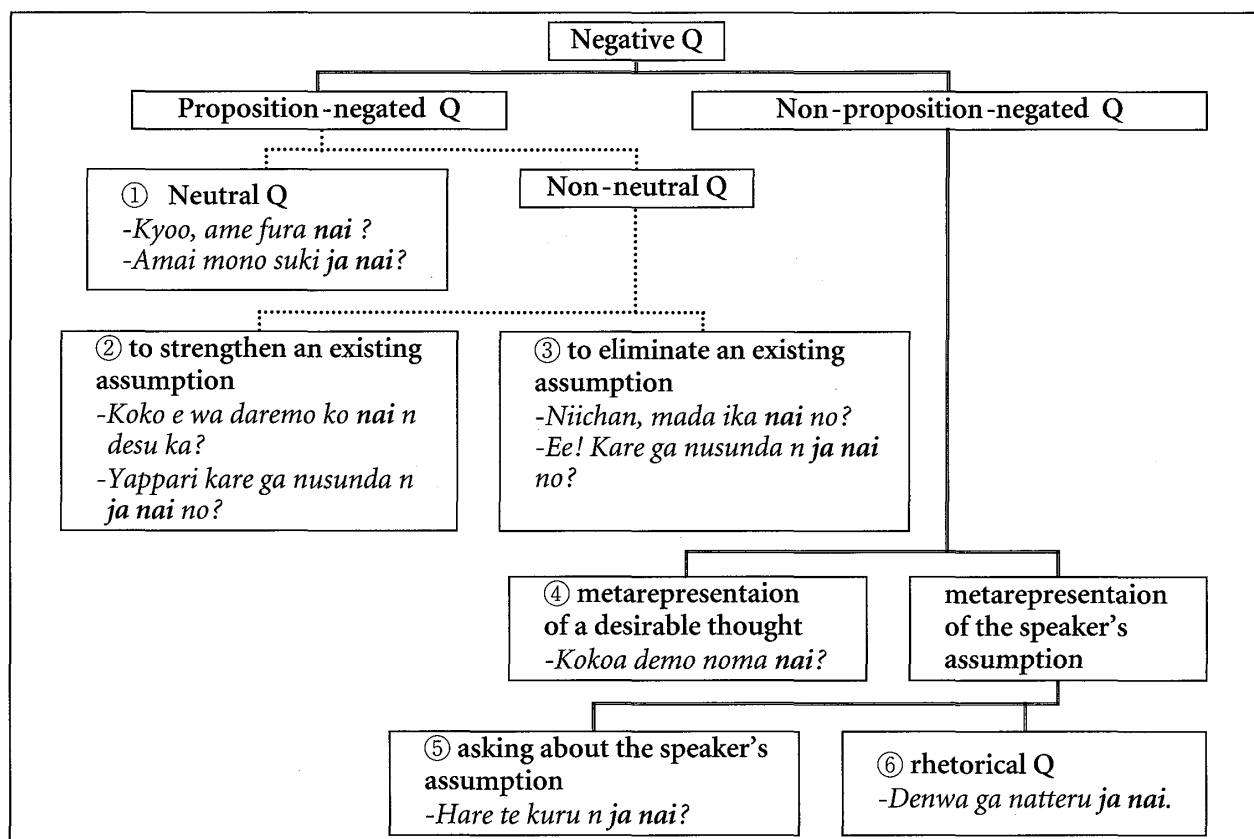


Figure 1. Distribution of negative questions

Adachi (1999) claims that the 'darou' question in (27) is calling for the hearer's permission, while the 'ja nai' question in (28) is interpreted as the speaker's suggestion about the future action. The contrastive interpretations above correspond to the thoughts that these questions metarepresent.

6. Conclusion

Figure 1 provides the generalizations based on the present discussion.

This study demonstrates that one negative question form, namely a 'nai (sen)' question form or a 'ja nai' question form, has a single decoded meaning (semantic representation). What makes their communicated information different is the next stage of interpreting an utterance. It is either the development of the decoded meaning through contextual inferences (explicatures) or the derivation of the interpretation from contextual inferences based on the fleshed out decoded meaning (implicatures).

Figure 2 shows the process of understanding an utterance. (The numbers in figure 2 correspond to the numbers in figure 1.)

Figure 2 illustrates that the communicated information of group ② and ③ is implicature and that of group ④, ⑤ and ⑥ is explicature.

The point is that, in either case, what makes the interpretations various is not the semantic meaning of the question but contextual information which is employed in deriving inferences.

Notes

- 1) See Hirose (2002) for detailed analysis of Japanese negative questions and 'darou' questions.
- 2) This principle, which is proposed as the Communicative principle of relevance, is defined as follows:
Communicative principle of relevance
 Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance. (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260)
- 3) As far as I know, this division was first proposed by Tanomura (1988). Since then, it has been widely accepted among the studies of 'ja nai' questions. Tanomura (1988) and Matsui-Yamamori (1996) provide the detailed analyses of these questions.

Bibliography

Adachi, T. (1999). *Nihongo gimonbun ni okeru handan no shosou* [Some aspects of assertiveness in

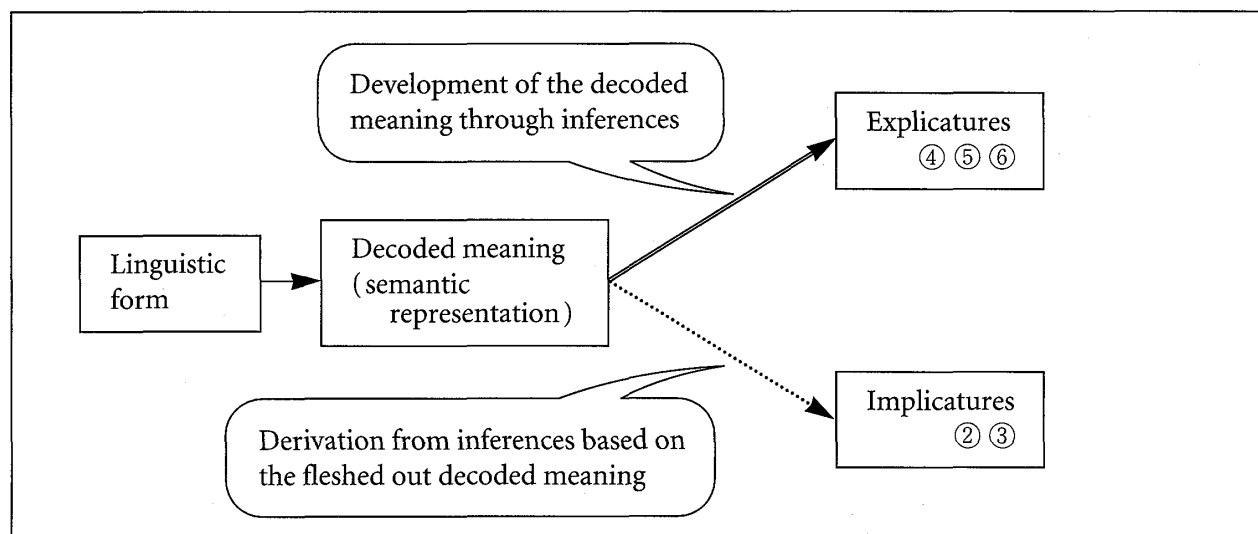


Figure 2. The process of understanding an utterance

- Japanese negative questions]. Tokyo: Kuroshio.
- Carston, R. (1998). Negation, 'presupposition' and the semantics/pragmatics distinction. *Journal of pragmatics*. 34, pp.309-350.
- Chun, S-C. (1994). Iwayuru kakunin-yokuyuu no ja nai ka to darou [On the so-called darou and janaika tag-questions of Japanese]. *Gendai nihongo kenkyuu* [Modern Japanese Studies]. 1, University of Osaka. pp.27-39.
- Clark, B. (1991). *Relevance theory and the semantics of non-declaratives*. Ph.D. dissertation, University College of London.
- Hasunuma, A. (1993). Nihongo no danwa maaka darou to ja nai ka no kinou [The function of the Japanese discourse markers darou and ja nai ka as an evocation of shared knowledge]. *Koide kinen nihongo kyouiku kenkyuu-kai ronbun-shu*. pp.39-58.
- Hirose, E. (2002). *A relevance-theoretic analysis of Japanese negative questions*. Ph.D. dissertation, ICU.
- Inoue, M. (1994). Iwayuru hi-bunseki-teki na hitei gimonbun o megutte [On the so-called unanalytic negative questions]. *Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyusho hookoku* [The National Language Research Institute Report]. 107, pp.207-249.
- Inoue, M. and L. Huang. (1996). Yes-no questions in Japanese and Chinese. *Kokugogaku* [Japanese linguistics]. 184, pp.93-106.
- Johnson, M.Y. (1994). *Japanese modality: a study of modal auxiliaries conditionals, and aspectual categories*. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services.
- Matsui-Yamamori, Y. (1996). Hitei gimonbun to kaishaku no tayoo-sei [Negative questions and their various interpretations]. In Ueda (ed.), *Gengo tankyu no ryoiki* [The field of linguistic studies]. pp.487-503. Tokyo: Daigaku shorin.
- Miyake, T. (1994). Hitei gimonbun niyoru kakunin-yokuu teki hyogen ni tsuite [On negative questions as the expressions of requests for confirmation]. *Gendai nihongo kenkyu* [Modern Japanese Studies]. 1, University of Osaka. pp.15-25.
- Miyazaki, K. (1998). Hitei gimonbun no jutsugo keitai to kinou [Final forms and their functions of Japanese negative questions]. *Kokugogaku* [Japanese linguistics]. 194, pp.88-75.
- Miyazaki, K. (2000). Kakunin-yokuyuu hyogen no taikai-sei [The system of expressions for seeking confirmation in Japanese]. *Nihongo kyouiku* [Japanese teaching]. 106, pp.7-16.
- Noh, E-J. (1998). *The semantics and pragmatics of metarepresentation in English: A relevance-theoretic approach*. Ph.D dissertation, University College of London.
- Sperber, D. (1994). Understanding verbal understanding. In J. Khalfa (ed.) *What is intelligence?* pp. 179-198. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sperber, D. (2000). Metarepresentations in an evolutionary perspective. In D. Sperber (ed.) *Metarepresentations*. pp. 117-137. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sperber, D. and D. Wilson. (1986/1995). *Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tanomura, T. (1988). Hitei gimonbun shokoo [On negative questions in modern Japanese]. *Kokugogaku* [Japanese linguistics]. 152, pp.109-123.
- Tanomura, T. (1991). Gimonbun ni okeru kootei to hitei [On the polarity of yes-no questions in modern Japanese]. *Kokugogaku* [Japanese linguistics]. 164, pp.115-128.
- Wilson, D. (1999). Metarepresentation in linguistic communication. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 11, pp.127-161.
- Wilson, D. and D. Sperber. (1988). Mood and the analysis of non-declarative sentences. In J. Dancy, J. Moravczik, C. Taylor (eds.) *Human agency: Language, duty and value*. pp.77-101. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Data

- Murakami, H. (1987). *Noruwei no mori 1* [Norwegian Wood]. Tokyo: Koudan sha.
- Sasazawa, S. (1997). *Seibun satsujin jiken* [Seven murders]. Tokyo: Keibun sha.
- Yamada, T. (1983). *Fuzoroi no ringo tachi* [Unique apples]. Tokyo: Shincho sha.
- Yoshimoto, B. (1989), *Tsugumi* [Tsugumi]. Tokyo: Chuuo kooron sha.