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Author(s)	後藤, リサ
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Relevance Theoretic Analysis of the Properties and Understanding Process of Rhetorical Questions

Risa GOTO *

O. Introduction

In the traditional accounts of Speech Act theory (e.g. Austin 1962, Searle 1975, 1979), rhetorical questions (henceforth RQs) are classified as a type of indirect requests. In contrast, there are some authors who claim that the most salient property of RQs is the assertivity of the utterance (e.g. Quirk et al 1985). In their approaches, the assertion of RQs made by the speaker is decided based on the proposition of the utterance. Typical cases of RQs are explained in terms of the polarity-reversed assertions (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985, Han 2002). For example, an RQ *Who knows?* conveys an assertion of the opposite polarity of the proposition of the utterance, i.e. *Nobody knows*.

Intuitively, however, RQs do not assert anything. The assumptions communicated by the utterance *Who knows?* might include assumptions such as *nobody knows*; in fact, the speaker might communicate more than one assumption at a time. The speaker of the utterance *Who knows?* might implicate something like *it could be anyone but I don't care who*. In addition, although there are a number of clear-cut examples of RQs, there are also borderline cases which could either be classed as an RQ or as others such as an information question or an indirect request which has an interrogative form.

The purposes of this paper are to examine the properties of RQs and to discuss how RQs should be distinguished from other types of questions. I will take as a theoretical framework Relevance Theoretic account of interrogative utterances (e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1995, Wilson and Sperber 1988, Blakemore 2002), which argues against the traditional Speech Act theory, claiming that any type of questions can be explained in the same way, in terms of 'desirable thoughts'.

1. Interrogative utterances in the Speech Act theory

According to Speech-act theorists such as Austin (1969) and Searle (1975), the identification of the illocutionary act is necessary in understanding utterances. As well as imperative utterances, interrogative utterances are classed as sub-types of speech acts of directives. Consider:

- (1) a. Pass me the salt. (request for action)
b. Where are you going? (request for *information*)
- (2) a. Can you pass me the salt? (*direct* request for action)
b. Can you reach the salt?¹ (*indirect* request for action) (Searle 1975)

* School of Comparative Culture.

While the imperative utterance in (1a) is interpreted as a request for action, the interrogative utterance in (1b) is interpreted as a request for information. In addition, in the Speech Act theory, some interrogatives are classified as a sub-type of request for action. The utterance in (2a) is a direct request while (2b) is an indirect request. The speaker of (2b) does not want the hearer just to reach the salt, but to pass the salt.

How can RQs be treated in the Speech Act theory? Searle (1975: 65, 67) classifies indirect requests into five basic categories in terms of the properties of the desired activities that the speaker focuses on. The classification includes:

- (3) a. H[earer]'s ability to perform A[ction]
e.g. (=2b) Can you reach the salt?
- b. S[peaker]'s wish or want that H will do A
e.g. I would like you to go now.
- c. H's doing A
e.g. Would you kindly get off my foot?
- d. H's desire or willingness to do A
e.g. Would you mind not making so much noise?
- e. Reasons for A
e.g. How many times have I told you not to eat with your fingers? (Searle 1975)

In Searle's view, all the utterances in (3) are indirect requests. In other words, each utterance has a directive force to get the hearer to do an action. A similar case to (3e) is given by Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 861) as in:

- (4) [At 8 o'clock, which is time her child went to bed, Mother says to her child]
Do you know what time it is?² (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:861)

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) provide example (4) as a typical case of indirect request for action. The utterance has a directive force to let the child go to bed.

In contrast, although Quirk et al (1985) is not one of speech-act theorists, the definition of RQs given in (5) is recognized as one based on a speech-act theoretic approach by their followers such as Han (2002) and Rohde (2006).

- (5) The rhetorical question is interrogative in structure, but has the force of a strong assertion.
(Quirk et al. 1985:825)

According to Quirk et al. (1985), by using the interrogative utterance in (6), the speaker asserts that *nobody* knows.

(6) Who knows?

Speaker's assertion: nobody knows. (Quirk et al. 1985)

Therefore, according to Quirk et al.'s (1985) account, (6) is interpreted as an RQ if the utterance asserts something. They would claim that (6) asserts that *it is 8 o'clock*, and the assertion will derive another assumption that *it is time to go to bed*.

Here we can see two distinct views provided by using speech-act theoretic terms; the utterance (4) has an assertive force (i.e. the utterance functions as a reminder that something is the case) or a directive force (i.e. a reminder that the speaker wants the hearer to do something). We will overview Searle's (1979) five types of illocutionary forces: *assertive, directives, commissives, expressive and declarations*. *Assertives* commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed whereas *directives* are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Searle assumes that sentential mood indicates a certain illocutionary force. Declarative sentences have assertive force, while imperative and interrogative sentences have directive force. Consider:

- (7) a. The capital of the U.K. is London. (Assertion)
b. Pass me the salt. (Request for action)
c. Are you coming to the party? (Request for information)

The declarative utterance in (7a) is interpreted as communicating the speaker's assertion that the capital of the U.K. is London, while the imperative utterance in (7b) and the interrogative utterance in (7c) have a directive force of a request. (7b) is interpreted as a request for action, as the speaker intends to get the hearer to do an action, that is, to pass the salt to the speaker, while (7c) is interpreted as a request for information, as the speaker intends to get the hearer to provide information, that is, whether or not the hearer is coming to the party.

It can be said that the utterance in (3e) is a similar case to the utterance in (4). Some authors (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985) might say that (3e) is not an ordinary question but an RQ, and that the speaker does not expect the hearer to provide an answer, i.e. how many times she has told, although even the speaker might not know the answer. They would say that the point of uttering (3e) lies in that it asserts that *the speaker has told the hearer many times not to eat with his fingers*. In contrast, authors such as Searle (1975) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) might agree with the view that the utterance of (3e) is an indirect request i.e. the speaker intends to encourage the hearer *not to eat with his fingers*.

However, it is strange that an utterance has two distinct forces of speech acts, such as directive force and an assertive force. In fact, the speech-act theoretic accounts do not fit some cases of RQs. I argue that there is a particular context in which the same utterance is NOT a request for action or an assertion. Reconsider example (4) in the following context:

- (8) [At an evening conference, the guest speaker does not appear on the scheduled time and the speaker says to her friend]
Do you know what time it is?

Suppose that the speaker attends an evening conference and the guest speaker is late. If (8) is uttered to the speaker's friend, who sits beside the speaker, the utterance implies an assumption that *it is time for the guest speaker to appear*. The assumption does not have a directive force as a request. The speaker might assume that the guest speaker is late, but does not indicate any request of action for the guest speaker. The difference between (4) and (8) lies in whether the individual who is expected to do an action is the hearer or not.

On the contrary, some authors such as Quirk et al. (1985) might say that the utterance (8) is considered as an RQ, which asserts that *it is time for the guest speaker to appear*. Will this be the case? We will see their view on RQs in detail in the following examples:

- (9) a. *After all*, are you coming to the party?

Speaker's assertion: the hearer is not coming to the party.

- b. Did I receive help from anybody? *Yet*, I managed to complete my tasks on time.

Speaker's assertion: the speaker didn't receive any help from anybody.

(Gutiérrez-Rexach 1998: 142)

- (10) a. Who knows?

Speaker's assertion: nobody knows.

- b. Who doesn't know?

Speaker's assertion: everybody knows. (Quirk et al 1985)

According to Quirk et al. (1985), a *yes-no* RQ communicates an assertion with the opposite polarity of the proposition expressed by the utterance, as given in (9). A *wh*-RQ communicates an assertion which is developed by an incomplete logical form by adding a variable of either an empty value such as *nobody* in (10a) or a value with a universal quantifier such as *everybody* in (10b).

However, there seem to be some RQs whose assertions are not thoughts with reversed polarity as in the following example:

- (11) A: What company's computer will you buy?

B: What company do I work for? (Lee-Goldman 2006)

Speaker's assertion: the speaker works for a (particular) computer company.

Rohde (2002) and Lee-Goldman (2006) treat (11B) as a type of RQs. According to Rohde (2006), the speech-act theoretic *assertion* of an RQ is equivalent to the answer to an RQ, and therefore the speaker's assertion or the answer to (11B) is that *the speaker works for a computer company*. In addition, Rohde

claims that the rhetoricity of RQs can be analyzed in terms of the obviousness of the answer, i.e. the answer should be obvious and shared by both the speaker and the hearer as common ground before the utterance is being made.

2. Limits of Speech-act theoretic accounts

Rohde's (2006) arguments raise two problems: (1) the *answer values*, i.e. the true answers, which are equivalent to *assertions* in Speech Act theory, of RQs are not always obvious among discourse participants; (2) RQs can be uttered in contexts in which the answers to the utterances are not necessarily shared by the discourse participants as common ground *before the utterance is made*.

As for the first problem, the following example shows that the answer values of RQs are not always obvious.

- (12) [Watching a news story about a child who had been murdered, the speaker utters to her husband]
What monster would dare to harm a sleeping child? (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 247)

Suppose that the speaker watches a news story that a child has been murdered while he is sleeping. Then, the speaker utters (12) to her husband. Neither the speaker nor the hearer knows the individual who killed a child, but the speaker is not interested in who the monster is. The point of uttering (12) may lie in the speaker's implicit assumptions such that *the murderer is a monstrous person and that (therefore) the news is terrible*. The speaker does not intend to convey an answer such as *the monster is a certain individual X*. Consider a similar example in Japanese:

- (13) [After watching a movie, saying to her boyfriend]
Doko no baka ga wazawaza konnna hidoi eiga o tsukuru no kashira?
where LK idiot S dare to do such terrible film O make Q
What idiot would dare to make such a terrible film? (Murakami 1991: 263)

In (13), neither the speaker nor the hearer knows who exactly made the film they have just watched. The speaker knows that the hearer doesn't know the answer (i.e., the individual who made the film), and the speaker is not interested in the answer to the utterance. The point of uttering (13) may lie in the speaker's implicit assumptions such that *only an idiot would make such a film, or that the film is terrible*.

We have observed that the answer values of RQs such as examples (12) and (13) are not obvious not only to the hearer but also to the speaker. The problems raised against Rohde's (2006) arguments made it clear that the point of uttering RQs does not lie in the answer (or *assertion* in Speech-act theoretic account).

As for the second problem, consider the following example of a declarative utterance given by Blakemore (1992) to provide evidence that mutual knowledge (i.e. common ground knowledge) is not necessary. Suppose that Mary has asked Peter if he has read a certain book and Peter utters:

(14) I never read books that win prizes. (Blakemore 1992:21)

Even if she does not know that the book has won a prize, Mary can recover the intended interpretation that he didn't read the book she mentioned.

Similarly, the answer (i.e. the speaker's assumption) to the following rhetorical interrogative utterance could become obvious between the speaker and hearer as a result of the utterance. Consider:

(15) [Sue and John are friends. John feels depressed when his girlfriend is leaving him. John utters,]

a. John: Finally, she is leaving.

b. Sue: *Whose fault is that?*

Speaker's assumption (i.e., answer): *It is John's fault.*

In this case, in order to understand Sue's intention, John need not have accessed the assumption that *it is John's fault* before the utterance is made. It means that the assumption that *it is John's fault* need not have been common ground. Even if John had believed that *it is not his fault*, and therefore he believed that the assumption was shared by Sue, it could be possible that *after the utterance being made* John can access Sue's assumption that *it is his fault*. In other words, Rohde's felicity condition that the answer to an RQ should already be shared by the discourse participants *before the utterance being made* is not necessary in the process of understanding utterances.

There are a number of discussions on the definition of common ground (see e.g. Clark and Marshall 1981, Clark 1996, Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995). Clark and Marshall (1981, also see Clark 1996) note that the definition of common ground / mutual knowledge provided by Schiffer (1972) (mutual knowledge is Schiffer's term) is the one which involves 'iterated propositions' or what Clark (1996: 100) calls 'common-ground-iterated' (CG-iterated) as follows:

(16) CG-iterated:

A and B mutually know that $p = \text{def}$

(1) A knows that p.

(1') B knows that p.

(2) A knows that B knows that p.

(2') B knows that A knows that p.

(3) A knows that B knows that A knows that p.

(3') B knows that A knows that B knows that p.

and so on *ad infinitum*.

(Cited in Clark and Marshall 1981)

Some authors, however, claim that CG-iterated has raised a problem in communication (see Clark 1996, Sperber and Wilson 1995, Clark and Marshall 1981)³. Clark (1996: 95) claims that 'it cannot represent people's mental state because it requires an infinitely large mental capacity'. Sperber and Wilson (1995)

claim that mutual knowledge which requires the hearer's access to infinitely iterated assumptions is neither necessary nor sufficient for communication and they have raised a question regarding how participants get to know that certain assumptions are genuinely common ground / mutual knowledge (i.e. CG-iterated) rather than assumptions that are simply shared. Then they have suggested that the notion of 'mutual manifestness' should replace mutual knowledge and solve the problem raised by the notion of mutual knowledge / common ground.

In the framework of their Relevance Theory, an assumption accessed by the discourse participants will become *manifest* in their cognitive environment (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 45). In other words, the participants share the assumption in their cognitive environment or a set of assumptions relevant to each individual. Sperber and Wilson argue that this assumption exists in "the total shared environment of two people [which] is the intersection of their two total cognitive environments, i.e. the set of all facts that are manifest to them both" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 41). The manifestness is defined as in:

- (17) a. A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.
b. A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39)

Any assumptions can be *manifest*, and some assumptions can be more manifest than others. As Sperber and Wilson have pointed out (*ibid*: 40), when you hear the doorbell ringing, you might have an assumption that *there is somebody behind the door*. This might be the most manifest at that time whereas other accessible assumptions might include less manifest assumptions such as *a man behind the door is tall enough to touch the bell*.

To sum up this section, a number of counterexamples have provided evidence that an RQ does not assert anything. The speaker of an RQ communicates explicit/implicit assumptions. The utterance itself might or might not lead the hearer to access those assumptions. In addition, the answer to an RQ should not be obvious or shared by the participants as common ground. The answer is not necessarily accessible to the participants.

3. Relevance Theory: Counter-argument to Speech Act theory

Sperber and Wilson (1988, 1995) claim that not only RQs but other non-ordinary questions such as guess questions and speculative question can be counterexamples to the speech-act theoretic accounts. Consider:

- (18) a. guess question:

[A mother, hiding a chocolate in her hand, utters to her child]

Which hand is it in? (Wilson and Sperber 1988)

- b. speculative question:

Now, who is going to win the by-election tomorrow? (Blakemore 1992: 115)

The guess question in (18a) does not require information or answer because the speaker knows the answer. The speaker of the speculative question in (18b) does not know the answer, but the speaker does not even require the hearer to provide information, because the speaker knows that the hearer does not know the answer either. The variety of non-ordinary questions shows that interrogative utterances do not perform either the speech act of ‘asking’ or a request for information.

The interrogative mood does not encode the speech act of ‘asking’. An interrogative utterance can be used as any type of question including an ordinary question, an RQ, or a guess question. Let me consider *who knows* in the following contexts.

(19) A classroom teacher: Someone must have been who hit Billy. Come on.

Who knows?

(20) [In a class, a student called Billy is crying when the class teacher came in. Then the teacher utters to one of her students,]

A (Teacher): Who hit Billy.

B (Student): *Who knows?*

(21) [A class teacher utters to her students]

A1 (Teacher): Three people in the room know my middle name.

Who knows?

B1 (Student): Ah, uh, Billy, John and Ryan?

A2 (Teacher): No, John, Peter and Brian.

The utterance in (19) is an ordinary question. The speaker wants to know who hit Billy. The utterance in (20b) is an RQ. Obviously the speaker does not seek information, since the speaker knows that the hearer does not know the answer. The speaker of (20b) intends to communicate a thought like *nobody knows*. An utterance in (21A1) is a guess question. The speaker of a guess question intends to encourage the hearer to provide an answer.

Then how can these uses of interrogative utterances be distinguished from each other? As one solution, I’ll take the concept of ‘desirable thoughts’ introduced in the Relevance Theory (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995, Wilson and Sperber 1988). In Relevance Theory, any type of questions can be explained in the same way. The most important concept is a ‘desirable thought’. The thoughts communicated by questions are desirable if it is relevant, giving rise to cognitive effects.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), representations can be either *descriptive* or *interpretive*. As for the descriptive representation, the speaker’s thought about a state of affair is explained by one of four distinct ways: *actual*, *possible*, *potential* and *desirable*. Declarative utterances are ‘descriptive’ representation of *actual* or *possible* state of affairs. When a speaker finds it is raining outside, and she believes that the proposition expressed by the utterance in (22a) is true in the actual world, the proposition represents an actual state of affair. In the same way, (22b) is true in the possible world, and the proposition represents a possible state of affair.

(22) a. *actual* state of affair:

[The speaker sees the outside through the window, and utters]

It rains.

b. *possible* state of affair:

[The weather reporter utters] *It will rain tomorrow.*

On the other hand, imperative utterances represent potential states of affairs. The utterance in (23) represents the potential states of affair in the actual world, that is, a thought that the hearer will open the window.

(23) *potential* state of affair: *Open the window, please.*

Represented thought: The hearer will open the window.

The potential thought should be desirable from the viewpoint of either the hearer or the speaker. For example, if the speaker finds the hearer unable to stand the heat in the room, the thought is desirable from the hearer's viewpoint. On the contrary, if the speaker feels so hot in the room, the thought is desirable from the speaker's own viewpoint.

In contrast, interrogative and exclamative utterances do not describe any definite state of affairs, because they represent incomplete logical forms. Let us look at (24) and (25).

(24) a. How expensive is it?

b. How expensive it is!?

(25) a. It is _____ expensive.

b. It is so expensive.

The incomplete logical form of (25a) does not describe the state of affair, but instead, the propositional form with the completion of the logical form of (25b) represents interpretively a thought which is desirable from the speaker's or hearer's viewpoint. If (24a) is an ordinary question and the speaker wants to know how expensive it is, the thought is desirable from the speaker's viewpoint. The utterance is relevant if the thought brings about some contextual effects. In this case, the thought that it is so expensive achieves relevance because it brings about contextual effect such as making the speaker decide to buy or not to buy something after knowing whether the price is high. An exclamative utterance such as (24b) can also be explained in the same way, but the difference lies in that the thought of an exclamative utterance already exists in the speaker's mind.

In general, desirable thoughts of ordinary questions and guess questions are relevant from the speaker's viewpoint, while desirable thoughts of RQs are relevant from the hearer's viewpoint. Recall examples (19), (20) and (21). The speaker of (19) wants to know the individual who knows the one who hit Billy and expect the hearer to provide the information and the information of the individual who knows

it is relevant to the speaker. To gain the answer to the question *who knows* is directly related to another question *who hit Billy*, and the answer that an individual (e.g. John) hit Billy is desirable from the speaker's viewpoint. Knowing the information is relevant from the speaker's viewpoint, as it achieves a cognitive effect, such as making her decide whether or not she scold the child who hit Billy.

The speaker of (21A1) also expects the hearer to provide information, but as the speaker knows the answer, the speaker just wants to know the ability of the hearer's providing the information. The B1's response is relevant and desirable from A1's viewpoint, as it achieves some cognitive effects.

The speaker of the RQ in (20B) does not expect the hearer to provide information. The speaker expects the hearer to access a thought that *nobody knows* or *I don't know*. The thought is desirable from the hearer's viewpoint, because it is relevant, as it achieves some cognitive effects. Then what cognitive effects are achieved in this case? Why does the speaker utter an RQ, instead of a declarative utterance *Nobody knows* or *I don't know*? I claim that the speaker does not just intend to communicate an assumption that *nobody knows* or *I don't know*, but also communicate implicatures, which might be something like *it could be anyone but I don't care who* or *I don't care who; it is ridiculous to ask such a question*. As a response to the hearer's previous question, the utterance can lead the hearer to access such implicatures.

We go back to examples (4) and (8). Recall:

(4) [At 8 o'clock, which is time her child went to bed, Mother says to her child]

Do you know what time it is? (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:861)

(8) [At an evening conference, the guest speaker does not appear on the scheduled time and the speaker says to her friend]

Do you know what time it is?

The utterances in (4) and (8) are RQs. Neither of them has a directive force to make the hearer do an action. Neither of them asserts anything. Instead, both utterances just give the hearer clues to access more than one assumptions communicated by them.

In these cases, the *yes/no* answer is not relevant. The point of question lies in that it is manifest to the speaker and the hearer that the hearer knows what time it is. The completion of the logical form as in (26a) is relevant.

(26) a. logical form: You know that it is *X* o'clock.

b. desirable thought: The hearer knows it is 8 o'clock.

The speakers of the utterances in (4) and (8) assume that it is, for example, 8 o'clock, as in (26b). The thought in (26b) is desirable from the hearers, and it is relevant from the hearers' viewpoint.

In fact the hearers should have already accessed the assumption in (26b). From (26b), the hearers should be able to derive implicatures in (27) and (28) respectively.

- (27) a. implicated premise: If it is 8 o'clock, the hearer should be in bed.
 b. implicated conclusion (27a)+(26b): The hearer should be in bed (at the time of utterance).
- (28) a. implicated premise: If it is 8 o'clock, the guest should be there.
 b. implicated conclusion (28a)+(26b): The guest should be there (at the time of utterance).

In other words, the speakers have expected that the hearers should have derived the thoughts in (27) and (28) from the proposition expressed by the utterances in (4) and (8).

But here a question is raised. Where does the rhetoricity of those utterances lie in? Why do the speakers utter an interrogative utterance, instead of just uttering *it is 8 o'clock (and therefore you should go to bed or the guest should appear)*? I argue that it might be because the speakers also implicate assumptions given in (29).

- (29) a. The hearer has not derived assumptions in (27).
 b. The hearer has not derived assumptions in (28).

I claim that the rhetoricity of RQs lies in the process outlined above. The implicatures in (29) cannot be derived in the process of the declarative equivalent such as the utterance *it is 8 o'clock*. Moreover, I argue these assumptions in (29) can be associated with the speaker's emotional attitude. By communicating these assumptions, the speaker intends to make her emotional attitudes such as irritation be manifest between the speaker and the hearer. The utterances in (4) and (8) might achieve their cognitive effects as a reminder of the assumptions in (27) or (28), and as a result making the hearer access (29a) or (29b). Therefore, the thought in (26b) is desirable (i.e. relevant) from the hearer's viewpoints, as the utterance achieves its cognitive effect as a reminder.

4. Conclusion

The analysis that has been discussed in this paper leads us to several possible conclusions. First, there are a variety of questions which do not request information. It means that there are a number of cases which do not fit traditional speech-act theoretic accounts; RQs have neither an assertive force nor a directive force of speech act. Therefore we can conclude that to classify illocutionary forces is not necessary in the process of understanding utterances.

Second, by using the Relevance Theoretic concept of *desirable thoughts*, we will be able to explain the variety of interrogative utterances. The speaker's thoughts (or assumptions) are desirable if they achieve some cognitive effects. The relevant assumptions of interrogative utterances are desirable from either the speaker's or the hearer's viewpoint. Whereas the thoughts (i.e. the information or the answer) communicated by an ordinary information-seeking question are desirable from the speaker's viewpoint, the thoughts communicated by RQs are desirable from the hearer's viewpoint. RQs achieve their cognitive effects as a reminder; the utterance gives a clue to the hearer to access the speaker's assumptions. Therefore, the point of uttering an RQ does not only lie in the answer to the question (i.e. the proposition

expressed by the interrogative utterance). The rhetoricity may lie in the hearer's understanding process where the speaker's implicatures can be derived from the proposition expressed by the utterance (i.e. the desirable thought).

Finally, the implicatures are often associated with the speaker's emotional attitude, such as a sarcastic attitude which can be seen in the utterance *who knows*, or an irritated attitude which can be seen in the utterance *do you know what time it is*. These attitudes may be explained as an effect of RQs since they can be strengthened by the use of the interrogative form of RQs. In other words, the syntactic structure plays an important role in the pragmatic process of understanding utterances. Further analysis of the interaction between the form and the attitude of RQs still remains for future studies.

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1 In contrast to SA theory, there are some contexts in which the action verb *reach* in (2b) can be interpreted literally. The utterance will be interpreted as an ordinary question, as it is used just to make sure of whether the hearer can reach the salt or not. In addition, there are also cases in which the utterance cannot be used as an ordinary question, but used as a rhetorical question. If the utterance is made with a sarcastic attitude, with a particular intonation like (i), the utterance communicates the speaker's assumption like *the hearer cannot reach the salt*.

(i) So CAN you reach the salt? (rhetorical question)

2 As Huddleston and Pullum (2002) mention, *do you know what time it is?* indirectly conveys an open interrogative *what time is it?*, since the point of questioning it does not lie in yes/no answer.

3 The theories of CG-iterated should go back to Stalnaker's (1974, 1979) notion of common ground, which is developed from a part of his analysis of presupposition.

Relevance Theoretic Analysis of the Properties and Understanding Process of Rhetorical Questions

Risa GOTO

The purposes of this paper are to examine the properties of RQs and to discuss how RQs should be distinguished from other types of questions. I will take as a theoretical framework Relevance Theoretic account of interrogative utterances (e.g., Sperber and Wilson 1995), which argues against the traditional Speech Act theory. In the traditional accounts of Speech Act theory (e.g. Searle 1975), RQs are classified as a type of indirect requests. In contrast, there are some authors who claim that the most salient property of RQs is the assertivity of the utterance (e.g. Quirk et al 1985). However, there are a number of cases which do not fit traditional speech-act theoretic accounts. Therefore we can conclude that to classify illocutionary forces is not necessary in the process of understanding utterances; RQs have neither an assertive force nor a directive force of speech act.

By using the Relevance Theoretic concept of *desirable thoughts*, we will be able to explain the variety of interrogative utterances. The speaker's thoughts (or assumptions) are desirable if they achieve some cognitive effects. RQs achieve their cognitive effects as a reminder; the utterance gives a clue to the hearer to access the speaker's assumptions. Therefore, the point of uttering an RQ does not only lie in the answer to the question (i.e. the proposition expressed by the interrogative utterance). The rhetoricity may lie in the hearer's understanding process where the speaker's implicatures can be derived from the proposition expressed by the utterance (i.e. the desirable thought).