

## QUESTIONS TAGS ET PARTICULES INTERROGATIVES : QUELLES SIGNIFICATIONS EN DIALOGUE ?

### Introduction

Recent research about expressions which modify the illocutionary force of an utterance

- Gunlogson (2003, 2008) on rising declaratives
- Malamud and Stephenson (2011) on English tags

English :

- (1) a. [Rise] Sue likes chocolate?  
b. [SP-tag] Sue likes chocolate, does she?  
c. [RP-tag] Sue likes chocolate, doesn't she?

French :

- (2) a. Marie est venue ? (with a rising final tone)  
b. Marie est venue, n'est-ce pas ?  
c. Marie est venue, non ?  
d. Marie est venue, hein ?

- Aim** 1) to capture the similarities and differences between them,  
2) to account for their meaning in a discourse model.

These markers convey both an issue and an informative content.

All indicate uncertainty of the speaker, but there are subtle differences between them

Our study is based on the analysis of examples extract from French oral corpora, such as CID, Ester, Clapi and Corpus Beeching.

### 1. Confirmation requests (CRs) are neither assertions, nor questions

Neither assertions, nor questions, nor a superposition of an assertion and a question.

#### 1.1 CRs are not assertions

(3) Assertion:

A : Marie est venue.

B : Très bien. / # Je sais pas.

(4) Confirmation request:

A : Marie est venue, n'est-ce pas ?

B. : # Très bien. / Je sais pas.

#### 1.2 CRs are not real questions

##### 1.2.1 NPI

(5) Question:

Est-ce que Pierre a jamais aidé Marie ?

(6) Confirmation request:

\* Pierre a jamais aidé Marie ?

*And this property has nothing to do with the position of the « inquisitive » device.*

(6') a. \* Pierre a jamais aidé Marie, n'est-ce pas / non, / hein ?

b. \* Pierre, (n'est-ce pas / non, / hein ), a jamais aidé Marie ?

##### 1.2.2 « Such is the question »

(7) Est-ce qu'il réussira ? Telle est la question.

(8) a # Il réussira (n'est-ce pas / non / hein)? Telle est la question.

b # Il réussira (↑)? Telle est la question.

##### 1.2.3 They don't commute with interrogative sentences

(9) S'il y a une maladie, il doit y avoir des traitements, (n'est-ce pas/ non/ hein /↑)?)

(10) # S'il y a une maladie, doit-il y avoir des traitements ?

## 2. Similarities and differences between these particles

There are contexts where only some of them are possible.

### 2.1 *Non ?* is incompatible with negative sentences

- (11) a. Marie n'est pas partie, (n'est-ce pas / hein / ↑?)  
 b. # Marie n'est pas partie, non ?  
 c. ?? Marie n'est pas partie, si ?

*non ? vs si ?*

- (12) A. Marie n'est pas partie.  
 B. Si, Marie est partie.

### 2.2 Context of reassertion

Reassertion conveying surprise or disapproval (cf Laurens et al. (2011))

- (13) S1. Tu avais assisté à l'accouchement, toi, de ...  
 S2. Non. J'ai pas voulu  
 S1. Tu as pas voulu, \*n'est-ce pas / \* non / \*hein / ↑?  
 S2. Non non

### 2.3 Taste predicate (cf Malamud & Stephenson (2011))

(14) "Blushing/Innuendo" context:

A and B are gossiping. A doesn't know anything about B's neighbor. B says, blushing, "You've got to see this picture of my new neighbor!" Without looking, A replies:

- a. # A: He's attractive, isn't he?  
 b. ok A: He's attractive, is he?  
 c. ok A: He's attractive?

(14') "Blushing/Innuendo" Context: A and B are gossiping. A doesn't know anything about B's neighbor. B says, blushing, "You've got to see this picture of my new neighbor!" Without looking, A replies:

- a. # A: Il est séduisant, n'est-ce pas?  
 b. ok A: Il est séduisant, non?  
 c. # A: Il est séduisant, hein ?  
 d. ok A: Il est séduisant ? (but it is a true question)

The best form would be : Il est séduisant, c'est ça ?

*n'est-ce pas ? non ?* and *hein ?* are excluded because they require a context in which the speaker believes the content of S.

### 2.4 Vague predicates (cf Malamud & Stephenson (2011))

(16) "Borderline paint" context:

A and B are sorting paint cans in a store into a "red" bin and an "orange" bin. B points to orangish-red paint and says, "What color would you say this is?" A replies:

- a. ok A: It's red, isn't it?  
 b. # A: It's red, is it?  
 c. ok A: It's red?  
 d. ok A: It's red. (Which convey a doubt)

(17) Same context.

- a. # A: C'est rouge, n'est-ce pas?  
 b. ok A: C'est rouge, non?  
 c. # A: C'est rouge, hein?  
 d. ok A: C'est rouge ↑ (a suggestion)

→ *n'est-ce pas ?* and *hein ?* are incompatible with a context in which the the speaker knows that the addressee has no reason to know or to believe that p is true.

## 2.5 Bias

(14) Vous êtes pour ou contre ↑

The contrast is also clear when the sentence involves a negation, as in (15).

(15) A. Tu n'es pas de mon avis, (n'est-ce pas ? / hein ?)

- B. a. Oui, effectivement. (different opinion)  
 b. Non, effectivement. (different opinion)  
 c. Non, pas du tout (denial : same opinion)  
 d.\* Si, effectivement (denial : same opinion)

(15') A. Tu n'es pas de mon avis ↑

- B. a. # Oui, effectivement. (different opinion)  
 b. Non, effectivement. (different opinion)  
 c. Non, pas du tout (denial: same opinion)  
 d. Si, effectivement (confirmation: same opinion)

## 2.6 Non requesting uses

Rising declaratives may express surprise (16) or command (17)

(16) S1. Tu avais assisté à l'accouchement, toi, de...

S2. Non. J'ai pas voulu

S1. Tu as pas voulu, \*n'est-ce pas / \* non / \*hein / ↑?

S2. Non non

(17) Pierre. Tu m'écoutes. ↑

All form, except *hein ?*, are always followed by a *yes* or *no* reply.

*non ?* may follow a negative declarative when it involves a modality and in this case the utterance conveys a command. →like an indirect speech act.

(18) Tu peux pas le dire moins brutalement, (non / hein / \* n'est-ce pas, \*↑) ?

## 3. Synthesis : The dialogical force of each form

| Tests\Tags                               | <i>n'est-ce pas</i> | <i>non</i> | <i>hein</i> | Rising int. |
|--|---------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Taste predicate                          | ?                   | OK         | *           | ?           |
| Vague predicate                          | *                   | OK         | *           | *           |
| After a negative declarative             | OK                  | *          | OK          | OK          |
| Biased                                   | +                   | +          | +           | -           |
| Combined with an indirect speech act     | *                   | OK         | OK          | *           |
| Call for <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i> replies | OK                  | OK         | optional    | OK          |

Table 1

### 3.1 Rising declaratives

- RDs don't constraint the commitment of the speaker (contrary to pure assertions)
- but are compatible with the speaker presumption that the propositional content is true.

### 3.2 *N'est-ce pas* and *non*

- Both *non* and *n'est-ce pas* convey a bias towards one answer (contrarily to rising declaratives) but the bias is different with *non* than with *n'est-ce pas*.
- With *n'est-ce pas*, the speaker claims that she believes p and asks for a confirmation.

- With *non*, the speaker doesn't claim that she believes p. The speaker indicates that she guesses that the addressee knows whether p or not p, and the speaker claims that she is ready to accept what the addressee knows or believes.

Explain the contrast with taste predicates and vague predicates : the use of *non ?* indicates that the Speaker thinks that the addressee has some belief or knowledge about p.

### 3.3 *Hein*

- Less constrained than any other forms:
- (19) Nos revenus, à ma femme et moi, hein?, sont assez élevées par rapport aux revenus des français  
Our incomes, to my wife and me, HEIN, are rather high compared to the incomes of French people
- doesn't call for an answer. (cf Leglise (1999))
  - *hein* is used to reinforce the validity of the speaker's commitment.

The speaker makes as if the content associated to the declarative is already shared by herself and the Addressee (like a presupposition trigger). *Hein* is used rather to perform a co-assertion, than to perform an assertion.

- (20) In all cases, hein introduces the idea of an interaction with the addressee (...). In adding hein, the speaker forces the addressee to validate what has been uttered, so that her statement is reinforced rather than simply checked.<sup>1</sup>

## 4. A model of dialogue

- firstly that meaning is context change potential and can embody both informative and inquisitive contents (i.e. data and issues) and
- secondly that speaker's contributions in general don't change directly the common ground, as proposed by Stalnaker, but rather have to be analyzed as
  - changing speaker's public commitments, and
  - proposing to change the common ground.

### 4.1 General framework

We separate

- the (Stalnakerian) **common ground**, which is that set of propositions that have been agreed upon by all participants in c at t together with the propositions that represent the shared background knowledge of the discourse participants.
- the **discourse commitment** set of a participant A, which at a time t in a conversation c contains those propositions A has publicly committed to in the course of c up to t and which have **not (yet) become mutual commitments**.

We have a discourse component that records the **questions under discussion** (QUD).

We register in **the table** the sentences uttered during the conversation.

Besides the common ground and the set of commitments associated with each participant, various **projected sets**. We assume that a conversational move that places an item on the Table simultaneously projects

- a set of future common grounds relative to which the issue on the Table is decided: the **projected CG**

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<sup>1</sup> Dans tous les cas, *hein* introduit une idée d'interaction avec le co-énonciateur (...). L'énonciateur constitue le co-énonciateur comme co-valideur dans son énonciation en ajoutant *hein*, dans le but de renforcer la validité de sa position et non pas de vérifier cette validité.

- and may change the commitment sets associated to various discourse participants: the **projected commitment sets**.

For example, I can assert something, even if I know that the addressee doesn't believe it. In this case, I change my projected commitments, without changing the projected common ground.

(21) Sam is home. (asserted in a context where  $s_1$  is shared)

|                      |                       |   |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Table</b>         | <Sam is home[D]; {p}> |   |
| <b>A Commitments</b> | p                     | <b>A Projected Commitments</b>                      |
| <b>B Commitments</b> |                       | <b>B Projected Commitments</b>                      |
| <b>Common Ground</b> | $s_1$                 | <b>Projected Common Ground</b> $\{s_1 \cup \{p\}\}$ |
| <b>QUD</b>           | No change             |   |

(22) Is Sam home? (asked in a context where  $s_1$  is shared)

|                      |                           |  |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Table</b>         | <Sam is home[I]; {p; ¬p}> |  |
| <b>A Commitments</b> |                           | <b>A Projected Commitments</b>   |
| <b>B Commitments</b> |                           | <b>B Projected Commitments</b>   |
| <b>Common Ground</b> | $s_1$                     | <b>Projected Common Ground</b> $\{s_1 \cup \{p\}, s_1 \cup \{\neg p\}\}$ |
| <b>QUD</b>           | Add <i>Is Sam home?</i>   |  |

## 4.2 The contribution of each particles in this framework

### 4.2.1 Rising declaratives

A utters the rising declarative sentence S, associated with the content p

- S is added to the Table
- p is added to A's projected commitment set
- and the question ?p is added to QUD

≠ a plain assertion which adds p to A's commitments and to the projected CGs.

A suggests no potential resolutions for the issue added in QUD, but gives a clue that she'd be willing to go along with adding p to the CG, since she adds p to her projected commitments.

(23)

|                      |  |  |
|----------------------|--|--|
| <b>Table</b>         | <Marie est venue ↑; {p}>               |  |
| <b>A Commitments</b> |  | <b>A Projected Commitments</b> p         |
| <b>B Commitments</b> |  | <b>B Projected Commitments</b>           |
| <b>Common Ground</b> | $s_1$                                  | <b>Projected Common Ground</b> $\{s_1\}$ |
| <b>QUD</b>           | Add <i>est-ce que Marie est venue?</i> |  |

### 4.2.2 N'est-ce pas ?

A utters a sentence *S-n'est-ce pas?*, associated with the interrogative content {p, ¬p}

- S is added to the Table
- p is added to projected CG (which means that A and B project to be committed towards p)

- ?p is added to QUD

→ *N'est-ce pas ?* cannot serve to express A's own opinion and thus is infelicitous in (11).

→ *N'est-ce pas ?* conveys a bias towards p

(24)

|                      |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|
| <b>Table</b>         | <Marie est venue, n'est-ce pas ?;       | {p, ¬p}>                                  |
| <b>A Commitments</b> |   | <b>A Projected Commitments</b>            |
| <b>B Commitments</b> |   | <b>B Projected Commitments</b>            |
| <b>Common Ground</b> | s1                                      | <b>Projected Common Ground</b> {s1 ∪ {p}} |
| <b>QUD</b>           | Add <i>est-ce que Marie est venue ?</i> |   |

#### 4.2.3 Non ?

A utters a sentence *S-non ?*, associated with the interrogative content {p, ¬p}

- S is added to the Table
- p is added to B's projected commitments
- ?p is added to QUD

With *non*, p is added to B's projected commitments, without being added to A projected commitments, since it is not added to the projected common ground. The speaker is only indicating that if p is confirmed, she will share responsibility for it.

≠ a normal assertion since p isn't added to the speaker's commitments.

≠ a RD since p isn't added to the speaker's projected commitments.

→ a bias, different from the bias associated with *n'est-ce pas ?*, is anchored in the attribution to a belief or a knowledge to B.

(25)

|                      |   |                                     |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Table</b>         | <Marie est venue, non ?;                | {p, ¬p}>                            |
| <b>A Commitments</b> |   | <b>A Projected Commitments</b>      |
| <b>B Commitments</b> |   | <b>B Projected Commitments</b> p    |
| <b>Common Ground</b> | s1                                      | <b>Projected Common Ground</b> {s1} |
| <b>QUD</b>           | Add <i>est-ce que Marie est venue ?</i> |                                     |

#### 4.2.4 Hein ?

A utters a sentence *S-hein ?*, associated with the content {p}

- p is added to GC

→ *Hein* functions as a presupposition trigger with forces B to accept p.

(26)

|                      |                          |                                  |
|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Table</b>         | <Marie est venue, hein?; | {p}>                             |
| <b>A Commitments</b> |                          | <b>A Projected Commitments</b>   |
| <b>B Commitments</b> |                          | <b>B Projected Commitments</b>   |
| <b>Common Ground</b> | {s1 ∪ {p}}               | <b>Projected Common Ground</b> ∅ |
| <b>QUD</b>           | No change                |                                  |

### Conclusion

We have focused on two classes of utterances (confirmation requests and biased questions) which challenge classical typologies of speech acts insofar as they seem to convey informative contents and issues at the same time. This study has shown two things:

- 1) this study proposes empirical data supporting the claim defended in Inquisitive Semantics, (cf Groenendijk & Roelofsen (2009) Farkas & Roelofsen (2011)) according to which the semantic content of a sentence is not identified with its informative content but may embody both data and issues.
- 2) in everyday dialogues, assertions and questions are often refused, or discussed, or recastet. Changing the common ground is the result of a cooperative process, and any model of dialogue has to account for this cooperation in distinguishing two steps in the analysis of speech acts:
  - a) the proposal made by the speaker
  - b) the reaction of the addressee, which may accept or refuse Speaker proposal.

### References.

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