

The Question Particle and the Nature of Exhaustivity in Wh-questions

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Abstract

Wh-questions typically require an answer that gives the maximal information possible. I argue that this notion of exhaustivity is overtly marked by the Question particle in the root clauses in Japanese. We can detect the exhaustivity associated with the Q-particle by optionally omitting it; in the absence of the Q-particle, the question loses the exhaustive meaning, which signals that a partial answer is what the questioner expects. We will see that the Q-particle provides a test for a number of issues in the meaning of questions that heretofore were not easily testable. We will see that a question that has *for example*, which asks for a partial answer, nevertheless may have the Q-particle because the question can contain the meaning of exhaustivity in its underlying meaning. There is one situation where the Q-particle is prohibited; I argue that it is a pure form of Question Under Discussion, made possible by a question lacking the meaning of exhaustivity. For the mention-all versus mention-one question-answers, we will see that both contain exhaustivity. We will propose that the exhaustivity associated with mention-one questions is directly related to Schwarzschild's (2002) idea of singleton indefinites.