An analysis of the use of rhetorical questions in the 2012 Legislative Council election debates in Hong Kong

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Objectives

• To elucidate how political candidates use effective communication strategies to compete for votes in election debates.

• To examine candidates’ use of rhetorical questions in the 5 televised Hong Kong legislative council election debates in 2012 in terms of:
  o frequencies
  o question types
  o functions

• To further examine how candidates use rhetorical yes/no and wh-questions (the two most dominant question types in the debates) to challenge the following aspects of their political rivals:
  o Ability
  o Integrity
  o Presupposition(s)
Introduction

- Televised election debates are particularly important in election campaigns for voters to compare:
  - candidates’ performance as they discuss issues and respond to questions on the same topics
  - candidates’ interaction with their political opponents (Benoit & Hansen 2004)

- Candidates pay great attention to:
  - establishing a positive relationship with the general public
  - projecting a positive image of themselves as serious and reliable leaders, mainly through their style of speaking (Allen 1998; Coupland 2001).
• Often, candidates do more than promote themselves and their policies; they often engage in challenging, criticizing and discrediting their political rivals at the same time. To maintain such a delicate balance between attracting public attention and engaging in rival talk that is socially calibrated such that it mitigates face threats to self and others, candidates frequently rely on various rhetorical strategies.

• In the 2012 Legislative Council election campaign in Hong Kong, candidates used **rhetorical questions** frequently for criticizing each other and for enhancing the persuasiveness of their messages.
Introduction

- The use of rhetorical questions
  - has been identified as one of the most effective means of engaging in rhetorical demagogy (Ephratt 2007: 1922),
  - mainly because it enables speakers to “minimize face-risk” while engaging in face-threatening acts (Brown and Hansen 1978: 229-230).
Previous studies

1. Four types of rhetorical questions

• 1.1 Yes/no question

  • Demands only an acceptance or a denial of the proposed fact from the addressee (usually involving a simple “yes” or “no” answer);

  • Enables speakers to follow up with more detailed information, or to use the question as an assertion by implicating the speaker’s expectations towards the answer (Han 1998).

• Syntactic markers in Cantonese yes/no interrogatives (Matthews & Yip 1994):
  
  • A-not-A constructions
    (juxtaposition of the verbs or adjectives with the negative marker m4 'not')
    e.g. hai6-m4-hai6 “be-not-be”
    e.g. hou2-m4-hou2 “good-not-good”
1.2 Wh-question

- The *wh*-question allows for a wider range of possible answers, and this provides the speaker with the advantage of simply leaving the question to the listener to interpret the intended meaning (Monzoni 2008).

- The speaker can thus use *wh*- RQs in the following ways:
  - To convey the speaker’s knowledge base since RQs function like an assertion rather than a real question (Quirk et al. 1985);
  - To make a criticism;
  - To throw a challenge.
• Syntactic markers in Cantonese *wh*-interrogatives:

  • **What-questions**  
    e.g. *mat1*, *mat1je5*  
    *me1*, *me1je5*  
    (Matthews & Yip 1994: 32)  
    (Cheung 1992: 137)

  • **Where-questions**  
    e.g. *bin1*, *bin1 dou6*,  
    *bin1cyu3*/*bin1syu3*  
    (Matthews & Yip 1994: 327)

  • **Who-questions**  
    e.g. *bin1*, *bin1go3*  
    (Matthews & Yip 1994: 324)

  • **Why-questions**  
    e.g. *dim2gaai2*, *zou6mat1*  
    (Cheung 1992: 136)

  • **When-questions**  
    e.g. *gei2si4*  
    (Matthews & Yip 1994: 328)

  • **How-questions**  
    e.g. *dim2*, *dim2joeng2*  
    (Matthews & Yip 1994: 330-331)
1.3 Alternative question

- To offer a choice between alternative responses; however, the alternative question is “not always neutral” with respect to the speaker’s desire (Van Rooy & Šafářová 2003: 304).

- Syntactic markers in Cantonese alternative interrogatives: e.g. ding6hai6, jik1waak6
1.4 Declarative question

• To emphasize or establish the truthfulness of a known fact (Balogun 2011)

• Two types of declarative questions:
  • Structurally identical to declarative statements but uttered with interrogative prosody; its final rising intonation can signal surprise or disbelief rather than a true interest in getting information.
  • Question tag (especially in a falling tone), e.g. “She dances well, doesn’t she?”
    • The speaker is sure of the fact in the declarative question, and the question tag is used to urge the hearer to agree with the assumption(s) in the declarative question (Balogun 2011: 44).

• Some commonly used Cantonese sentence final particles: e.g. *aa4, me1* (Matthews & Yip 1994).
2. Functions of rhetorical questions in political discourse

• 2.1 Challenge

  • RQs are often used as a challenging statement to solicit the listeners’ commitment to its implicit answer, essentially by inducing mental recognition of its obviousness and its logical acceptability (Ilie 1999: 128).
  • 2.1.1 To challenge the ability of one’s opponent
  • 2.1.2 To challenge the integrity of one’s opponent
  • 2.1.3 To challenge the presupposition of one’s opponent
2. Functions of rhetorical questions in political discourse

• **2.2 Self-Promotion**
  • Politicians can more aggressively “self-promote” themselves and therefore gain immediate political power and credibility (Edwards 2007)
    • especially by calling attention to their work on certain issues via the strategic use of RQs

• **2.3 Involving audiences**
  • **Persuasion**: RQs could be used to get the approval and support of the listeners by affecting their attitude, emotion and psychology during a debate (Nguyen 2010).
  • **Doubt-inducing**: RQs could subtly give the addressee more freedom to consider the implied message, allowing the speaker to play a more neutral role by avoiding the use of more leading and value-loaded declarations (Bendahmane & McDonald 1992).
Methodology

• Data
  o 2012 Legislative Council Election
    ▪ Geographical constituencies (GC)
      • Hong Kong Island district
      • Kowloon East district
      • Kowloon West district
      • New Territories East district
      • New Territories West district
  o Televised debates (a total of 280 minutes) hosted by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)
  o Date: 18th August, 2012 – 1st September, 2012
Methodology (contd.)

Procedure for examining the frequency, features and functions of candidates’ use of RQs

1. Classified each candidate/party according to their political stance:
   • Pro-establishment
   • Pan-democracy
   • Independent
     o Viewed as pro-establishment
     o Viewed as pan-democracy
     o Not clear

2. Counted the number of RQs
Methodology (contd.)

3. Classified each token into one of the following 4 types:
   - Yes/No question
   - Wh-question
   - Alternative question
   - Declarative question

4. Classified each RQ token into types of functions:
   - Self-promotion
   - Challenge
   - Involving audiences
   - Doubt-inducing
Mixed quantitative-and-qualitative analysis

Within the 5 televised election debates, the candidates used of 274 rhetorical questions.

Our analytical approach:

• Both **quantitative** (frequency-count) and **qualitative** (discourse-context) analyses were used to evaluate how candidates used RQs to challenge their political rivals during the debates.
Number of RQs

![Bar chart showing the number of RQs among political parties.](chart.png)

- **Pro-establishment**
  - DAB: 0.236
  - FTU: 0.125
  - Liberal Party: 0.028
  - New People’s Party: 0.125
  - Kowloon West New Dynamic: 0.111
  - Civil Force: 0.000

- **Pan-Democracy**
  - Democratic Party: 0.344
  - Civil Party: 0.299
  - LSD: 0.227
  - People Power: 0.422
  - Labour Party: 0.188
  - Neo Democrats: 0.154
  - Independent Democratic Party: 0.368
  - Concern Citizen Club: 0.667
  - NWS: 0.643
  - Democratic Alliance: 1.000

- **Independent**
  - (Viewed as Pro-government): 0.236
  - (Viewed as Pan-Democracy): 0.333
  - (Not dear): 0.171
Candidates of pan-democracy camps sked RQs more frequently than the pro-establishment candidates in the election debates, with an average of 0.325 RQs for each turn.

Independent candidates who were viewed as pan-democratic asked RQs more frequently than those who were viewed as pro-establishment (0.333 vs. 0.236 RQs per turn).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>RQs/ turn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro-establishment</td>
<td>0.186</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pan-Democracy</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (viewed as Pro-establishment)</td>
<td>0.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (viewed as Pan-Democracy)</td>
<td>0.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (neither pro-establishment not pro-Pan-Democracy)</td>
<td>0.171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of rhetorical questions
# Types of rhetorical questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>RQ No.</th>
<th>Types of RQs</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Kowloon West New Dynamic</td>
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<td>Civil Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>People Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>NWSC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>(Not clear)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>274</td>
<td>90</td>
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</table>
Types of rhetorical questions (contd.)

- Frequency and types of rhetorical questions

![Types of RQs](Image)

- Of the 274 RQs, two of the most frequent question types were *wh*-questions and *yes/no* questions at 55% and 33% respectively (152 & 90 tokens), while the declarative questions and alternative questions accounted for only 9% (25 tokens) and 3% (7 tokens) respectively.
Types of rhetorical questions (contd.)

- Similar distributions of question types between the two camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Favored RQ types</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-establishment</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan-Democracy</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The high incidence of *yes/no* and *wh-questions* between the two camps is noteworthy.
  - As the answer to a *yes/no* question is usually limited to “yes” or “no”, the questioner can limit the options of the respondent, especially if the questioner manipulates the RQ to elicit an intended ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response, e.g. “Will you apologize to Hong Kong citizens?”
Types of rhetorical questions (contd.)

• Koshik (2003) point out that *wh*-questions enable the speaker to “convey a strong epistemic stance” when making challenges.
  • e.g. “Who believes such nonsense?”
    • Cancel certain otherwise possible answers
    • Indicate undesirability

• Koshik also notes that *wh*-questions enable speakers to deny the prior claim by challenging the “grounds for a prior claim” with the implication that there are no adequate grounds for it.
  • e.g. “You have wasted LegCo’s time and public funds” (previous claim) - “When have I?” (response)
    • Challenging the earlier accusation
    • Implication “I have never done so!”
Functions of rhetorical questions
## Functions of rhetorical questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>RQ No.</th>
<th>Pro-establishment</th>
<th>Pan-Democracy</th>
<th>Independent</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>DAB</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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</table>

### Functions/Intensions of RQs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Challenging political rivals</th>
<th>Involving audience (Persuasion)</th>
<th>Involving audience (Doubt-inducing)</th>
<th>Self-Promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequency and functions of RQs

- Of the 274 RQs, the pragmatic function of “challenging political rivals” dominated at 90% (247 tokens), while the pragmatic functions of “involving audiences” and “self-promotion” accounted for only 9% (25 tokens) and 1% (2 tokens) respectively.
Types and functions of RQs (Contd.)

• Types and functions of rhetorical questions (Cantonese data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions of RQs</th>
<th>Types of RQs</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes/ No</td>
<td>Wh-</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>Declarative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging political rivals</td>
<td>79 (87.78%)</td>
<td>138 (90.79%)</td>
<td>7 (100.00%)</td>
<td>23 (92.00%)</td>
<td>247 (90.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving audience (Persuasion)</td>
<td>7 (7.78%)</td>
<td>10 (6.58%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>2 (8.00%)</td>
<td>19 (6.93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving audience (Doubt-inducer)</td>
<td>3 (3.33%)</td>
<td>3 (1.97%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>6 (2.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Promotion</td>
<td>1 (1.11%)</td>
<td>1 (0.66%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>2 (0.73%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Romney’s 125 RQs in his 48 political speeches during the 2012 US presidential election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions of RQs</th>
<th>Types of RQs</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes/ No</td>
<td>Wh-</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td>Declarative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>29 (40.28%)</td>
<td>9 (23.68%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>1 (14.29%)</td>
<td>39 (31.20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>16 (22.22%)</td>
<td>14 (36.84%)</td>
<td>6 (75.00%)</td>
<td>5 (71.43%)</td>
<td>41 (32.80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubt-inducer</td>
<td>21 (29.17%)</td>
<td>15 (39.47%)</td>
<td>2 (25.00%)</td>
<td>1 (14.29%)</td>
<td>39 (31.20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Promotion</td>
<td>6 (8.33%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>6 (4.80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types and functions of RQs (Contd.)

- Interestingly, we noticed a very different trend in our Cantonese data in comparison to Romney’s use of wh-questions in the 2012 US presidential election.

- Romney used a wider range of RQ types.

- In the Cantonese data, most of the RQs were used for challenging rivals. These comprised mainly the direct yes/no questions and the more indirect wh-questions, in the ratio of 3:5. That is, there was a significant preference for the more indirect wh-questions when challenging others.

- Romney, on the other hand, predominantly used the more direct yes/no questions to challenging his rivals, which is more aggressive, and he used the more indirect wh-questions to persuade and to induce doubt in the minds of the audience.

- There may be genre differences, given that Romney could target more specific audiences in his election speeches (e.g. Republican-safe states, Democrat-safe states, swing states), while the Hong Kong election candidates were debating before a more heterogeneous television audience. In subsequent work, we will further look into the use of wh-questions in the 3 televised US presidential election debates for comparison with our Cantonese data.
Types of challenging RQs

- Sub-categorization of challenging rhetorical questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenging types</th>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Integrity</th>
<th>Presupposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Of the 247 challenging RQs, the two most frequent types refer to “Challenging the presupposition of one’s opponent” and “Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent” at 46% and 34% (114 tokens and 85 tokens respectively), while the tokens for “Challenging the ability of one’s opponent” accounted for a lower but still significant 20%.
Types of challenging RQs (contd.)

- Sub-categorization of challenging rhetorical questions

- Challenging the presupposition of one’s opponent:
  -- consistent with the nature of election debates that candidates have to immediately and consistently challenge or counter the claims, positions and policies of their rivals

- Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent:
  -- advantageous that candidates focus on the weaknesses of their rivals, often picking on controversial political issues and revelations of scandals that arise during the election period
    e.g. unauthorised building works of government officials, unpopular national education curriculum
Distributions of sentence final particles (SFPs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>RQ No.</th>
<th>SFP</th>
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<td>DAB</td>
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Distributions of SFPs (contd.)

- Challenges to rivals are often mitigated by the use of SFPs such as $aa3$.

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Example (1): Rhetorical *wh*-questions

**Challenging the ability of one’s opponent**

KLE_00:30:16-00:30:37_Mandy Tam:

01 MT: 啊謝偉俊你點質詢政府啊？
   "aa3 ze6 wai5 zeon3 nei5 dim2 zat1 seon1 zing3 fu2 aa3"

02 你提出來既係騎泥喺議案，
   "nei5 tai4 maai4 ceot1 lai4 ge3 hai6 ke4le4 ge3 ji5 on3"

03 咩身高五呎四吋唔夠呢個高度呢，
   "me1 san1 gou1 ng5 cek3 sei3 cyun3 m4 gau3 lei1 go3 gou1 dou6 le1"

04 就唔好去選呢個超級區議員喺個位。
   "zau6 m4 hou2 heoi3 syun2 lei1 go3 ciu1 kap1 keoi1 ji5 jyun4 go2 go3 wai2"

"Paul Tse, *how can you question the government? You always propose **very strange motions**, like one having to be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall before one can take part in the ‘super’ (i.e. Hong Kong-wide) Legislative Council (LegCo) election."
Example (1): Rhetorical *wh*-questions

Challenging the ability of one’s opponent *(contd.)*

05 謝偉俊，你晒左立法會嘅時間同
ze6 wai5 zeon3 nei5 saai1 zo2 laap6 faat3 wui2 ge3 si4 gaan3 tung4

06 公帑喇。你根本呢個係毫無是處，
gung1 tong2 laa1 nei5 gan1 bun2 le1 zau6 hai6 hou4 mou4 si6 cyu3

07 點樣監察政府呢？
dim2jeong6 gaam1 caat3 zing3 fu2 le1

“Paul Tse, you have wasted LegCo’s time and public funds. You do not have any merit. How can you monitor the government?”
Example (1): Rhetorical wh-questions

Challenging the ability of one’s opponent (contd.)

- Negative wordings: “Strange motions”, “do not have any merit”
- The use of wh-rhetorical questions
- Repetition of the rhetorical question
  “How can you question/monitor the government?”
  - Mandy Tam’s criticism of Paul Tse is amplified
    - Question → reasoning → subjective criticism → Repeated question
    - produce a powerful verbal punch against Paul Tse
- Sentence final particles in the question:
  - aa3
    - Side effect: Semantic contribution as “smooth-alert” (Matthews and Yip, 1994:340)
    - Highlight RQs as a verbal indirectness strategy
  - le1
    - Law (1990:121): “drawing someone’s attention to something”
Example (2): Rhetorical wh-questions

Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent

HK_00:08:18-00:08:28_S Stephen Shiu:

01 SS: 四百年嘅議會史，我未曾見過
sei3 baak3 nin4 ge3 ji5 wui2 si2 ngo5 mei6 cang4 gin3 gwo3

02: 一個政黨，好似民主黨咁卑鄙嘅。
jat1 go3 zing3 dong2 hou2 ci5 man4 zyu2 dong2 gam3 bei1 pei2 ge3

03 如果而家仲同佢合作，下次政改，
jyu4 gwo2 ji4 gaa1 zung6 tung4 keoi5 hap6 zok3 haa6 ci3 zing3 goi2

04 佢又擅自出賣自己人點啊？
keoi5 jau6 sin6 zi6 ceot1 maai6 zi6 gei2 jan4 dim2 aa3

“In the past 400 years of legislative history, I have never seen any political party that is as despicable as the Democratic party. If we keep cooperating with them and they betray us, their own kind, yet again another time, then what would happen?”
Example (2): Rhetorical *wh*-questions

Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent (contd.)

- Integrity: soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue, especially in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, sincerity.“ (the Oxford English Dictionary)

- Negative wordings: “despicable”, “betray”
  - Implying that the Democratic Party did not keep their campaign promises and did something harmful to the interest of Hong Kong people.

- Use of *if*-clause:
  - more open-ended
  - but with the implication that Hong Kong people cannot tolerate the result caused by Democratic party again

- Use of 自己人 ‘their own kind’ (group identity)

- Sentence final particles in the question *aa3* (smooth alert)
  - Chinese characteristics: use of sentence final particles as FTA (face-threatening act) mitigators
Example (3): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the ability of one’s opponent

NTW_ 53:35-53:48_Lee Wing Tat

01 LWT: 第 二 呢，田 北 辰 未 做 過 立 法 會 議 員，

dai6 ji6 le1 tin4 bak1 san4 mei6 zou6 gwo3 laap6 faat3 wui2 ji5 jyun4

02: 起 一 個 街 市 十 幾 億，一 百 個 街 市 呢，

hei2 jat1 go3 gaai1 si5 sap6 gei2 jik1 jat1 baak3 go3 gaai1 si5 lei1

03: 係 千 幾 億 架。 你 識 唔 識 計 數 架？

hai6 cin1 gei2 jik1 gaa3 nei5 sik1 m4 sik1 gai3 sou3 gaa3

04: 你 做 下 立 法 會 議 員 先 講 啦。

nei5 zou6 haa5 laap6 faat3 wui2 ji5 jyun4 sin1 gong2 laa1

“Secondly, Michael Tang has never been a LegCo member. It takes more than one billion (dollars) to construct one market and more than one hundred billion for one hundred markets. Do you know the math? You better speak only after you have become a LegCo member.”
Example (3): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the ability of one’s opponent (contd.)

- Repetition of the verb phrase “have been a LegCo member”
  - Emphasize Michael Tang’s lack of experience of being a LegCo member
    - Statement → reasoning → question → statement (with repeated verbal phrase)
    - produce a powerful verbal punch against Michael Tang

- The rhetorical question “Do you know the math?” was asked after Lee Wing Tat’s elaboration on the simple calculation.
  - Criticism of Michael Tang’s inability of simple logic and math

- Sentence final particles in the question: gaa3
  - essentially the same as ge3 (Sybesa & Li, 2007: 1745)
  - “for assertions of facts, often marking focus or emphasis” (Matthews and Yip, 1994:349).
Example (4): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent

NTW_00:08:25-00:08:40_Lee Wing Tat

01 LWT: 你根本係支持共產黨洗腦式嘅

nei5 gan1 bun2 hai6 zi1 ci4 gung6 caan2 dong2 sai2 nou5 sik1 ge3

02: 國民教育。你可唔可以做一個

gwok3 man4 gaau3 juk6 nei5 ho2 m4 ho2 ji5 zou6 jat1 go3

03: 有良心嘅人，

jau5 loeng4 sam1 ge3 jan4

“You actually support CCP’s brainwashing national education. Can you not have some conscience,”
Example (4): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent (contd.)

04: 要求 梁振英 立即撤回 呢個
   jiu1 kau4 loeng4 zan3 jing1 laap6 zik1 cit3 wui4 lei1 go3

05: 洗腦 式 嘅 國 民 教育 科 呢？
   sai2 nou5 sik1 ge3 gwok3 man4 gaau3 juk6 fo1 le1

“and ask CY Leung to immediately withdraw the brainwashing national education curriculum?”
Example (4): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the integrity of one’s opponent (contd.)

• Key wording: “brainwashing”, “have some conscience”
• The rhetorical question “Can you have some conscience and ask CY Leung to withdraw the brainwashing national education curriculum?” came after the statement “You actually support CCP’s brainwashing national education curriculum.”
  • As pro-establishment parties kept hedging the issue of national education, Lee Wing Tat first used a statement here as an identification of the stance of his opponent (Tam Yiu Chung).
  • Lee Wing Tat then asked a rhetorical question to put pressure on his opponent along with the following two implicatures:
    • According to Lee Wing Tat, the opponent was previously not conscientious since he supported the “brainwashing” national education curriculum.
    • The implication then is, if the opponent does not do as Lee Wing Tat suggested, he cannot possibly be conscientious.
• Sentence final particles in the question: le1 (‘‘drawing someone’s attention to something’’) (Law, 1990:121).
Example (5): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the presuppositions of one's opponent

HK_00:06:17- 00:06:28_ Miriam Lau (Presupposition)

01 ML: 外國議會呢都尊重議員嘅
ngoï6 gwok3 ge3 ji3 wui2 le1 dou1 zyun1 zung6 ji5 jyun4 ge3

02: 發言權嘅，但係亦都係要有規矩。
faat3 jin4 kyun4 ge3 daan6 hai6 jik6 dou1 hai6 jiu3 jau5 kwai1 geoi2

03: 咁所以呢，外國亦都有好多既規條呢，
gam2 so2 ji5 le1 ngoï6 gwok3 jik6 dou1 jau5 hou2 do1 ge3 kwai1 tiu4 le1

04: 係規限喱個發言時間，
hai6 kwai1 haan6 lei1 go3 faat3 jin4 si4 gaan3

05: 唔準係過份嘅拉布嘅。
m4 zeon2 hai6 gwo3 fan6 ge3 laai1 bou3 ge3

“In other countries, legislative members' right of speech is respected, but there must be rules, so in other countries there are many rules to limit the speaking time, so that there will not be excessive filibustering.”
Example (5): Rhetorical yes/no questions

Challenging the presuppositions of one’s opponent (contd.)

HK_00:08:12-00:08:18 _Stephen Shiu (Challenge)

01 SS: 姐係我睇見啊劉建儀黎講你好好笑，
ze1 hai6 ngo5 tai2 gin3 aa3 lau4 gin3 ji4 lai4 gong2 nei5 hou2 hou2 siu3

“I think what Miriam Lau said is really funny.”

02: 其實拉布正係喺議會規則以內嘅，
kei4 sat6 laai1 bou3 zing3 hai6 hai2 ji5 wui2 kwai1 zak1 ji5 noi6 ge3

03: 你而家係咪要彈劾啊曾鈺成主席啊？
nei5 ji4 gaa1 hai6 mai6 jiu3 taan4 hat6 aa3 zang1 juk6 sing4 zyu2 zik6 aa3

“In fact, filibustering is allowed within the rules of legislative procedure. Do you want to impeach chairman Tsang Yuk Shing?”
Example (5): Rhetorical *yes/no* questions

Challenging the presuppositions of one’s opponent (contd.)

- Statement: “I think what Miriam Lau said is really *funny*.”
  - Criticism of Miriam Lau’s presupposition

- “*rules*” and the question of whether “to impeach chairman Tsang Yuk Shing”
  - Stephen Shiu first pointed out that filibustering is actually allowed within the *rules* of legislative procedure”, so what Miriam Lau said is not rational. But in fact he was misquoting Miriam Lau, who was referring to “excessive filibustering” rather than “filibustering” per se.
  - Stephen Shiu then used a rhetorical question to ask whether or not Miriam Lau wanted to impeach chairman Tsang Yuk Shing, which would be a ridiculous move, and in this way implying that Miriam Lau is the one not following the rules, since she would then be the one challenging the rules and authority.

- Sentence final particles in the question *aa3* (smooth alert)
  - Chinese characteristics: use of sentence final particles as FTA (face-threatening act) mitigators
Example (6): Rhetorical declarative questions

Challenging the presuppositions of one’s opponent

HK_00:40:20-00:40:25_Avery Ng (Presupposition)

民 建 聯，就 係 靠 蛇 齋 餅 粽 去 擲 議 席 嘅。
man4 gin3 lyun4 zau6 hai6 kaau3 se4 zaai1 beng2 zung2 heoi3 lo2 ji5 zik6 ge3
“DAB gets votes by offering free gifts and free meals.”

HK_00:40:33-00:40:47_Jasper Tsang (Challenge)

01 JT: 虧 你 仲 呢 話 要 爭 取 民 主，
kwai1 nei5 zung6 le1 waa6 jiu3 zang1 ceoi2 man4 zyu2

02 你 都 唔 相 信 選 民。 蛇 齋 餅 粽
nei5 dou1 m4 soeng1 soen3 syun2 man4 se4 zaai1 beng2 zung2

03 就 擲 到 選 票 架 嘅？
zau6 lo2 dou2 syun2 piu3 gaa3 naa4

“Well you talk about fighting for democracy, but you don’t believe in our voters. Do you mean you can get votes by offering free gifts and free meals?”
Example (6): Rhetorical declarative questions
Challenging the presuppositions of one’s opponent
(contd.)

“If you think that is the case for Hong Kong citizens, you should give up on universal suffrage.”
Example (6): Rhetorical declarative questions
Challenging the presuppositions of one’s opponent
(contd.)

- Use of words: “fighting for democracy”, “universal suffrage”
  - Core values of Democracy
  - Criticizing that Avery is contradicting the spirit of democracy since he does not believe in the voters
  - Shifting the attention from the accusation - DAB gets votes by offering “free gifts and free meals”

- Use of 香港市民 ‘Hong Kong citizens’ (group identity)
Conclusion

• Candidates of pan-democracy camps asked RQs more frequently than the pro-establishment candidates in the election debates.

• Most of their rhetorical questions serve the pragmatic function of challenging their political rivals in terms of:
  • Ability
  • Integrity
  • Presuppositions

• Frequent use of yes/no questions and wh-questions

• Frequent use of sentence final particles (SFPs) such as aa3, serving as FTA (face-threatening act) mitigators
Conclusion (2)

• In this study we have seen how skillful politicians effectively deploy rhetorical questions (RQs) to achieve their political goals.

• In particular, we see a high incidence of *wh*-questions, which provide the speaker with a more indirect means of challenging their rivals and thus still maintain a positive self-image for themselves in the eyes of the general public.
Acknowledgement

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References


