Rhetorical Questions Revisited*

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an account of rhetorical questions in the Table model of Farkas & Bruce (2010), and considers its implications for our understanding of assertions and questions more generally. The core proposal is that there are two, connected, necessary conditions, which, together, are also sufficient, for a question to be interpreted as rhetorical: (i) the question must be presupposed to be *closed* in the input context, i.e., the input context must be assumed to be maximally informative relative to it; (ii) the speaker's publicly recognized goal in performing the speech act must be to trigger a mandatory conversational implicature that connects the question to the previous context, and which is calculated based on the status of the question in the input context. In establishing the first condition, I argue against the widely held assumption that in order for a question to be rhetorical, the common ground of the input context must contain its answer. The argument is based on the existence of unresolvable rhetorical questions, noted in Rohde (2006). In establishing the second condition, I argue that the answer to a rhetorical question, in case there is one, need not be assertable in its input context, *pace* Biezma & Rawlins (2017), and propose an explanation for when such an answer is assertable and when it is not. The approach developed below allows us to capture the status of rhetorical questions both relative to ordinary assertions and questions, and relative to other non-canonical questions, as well as to capture the status of conversational implicatures in the Table model.

1 Introduction

Rhetorical questions (RhQs), some examples of which are given in (1), are of interest both in themselves, and with respect to general issues concerning our understanding of the basic speech acts of asserting and questioning.

(1) a. Who likes to be humiliated in public?

The immediate issue that arises is that of understanding what makes a question rhetorical, and therefore what, precisely, distinguishes the questions in (1) from ordinary, information seeking questions, such as (2),

*For useful discussion of issues in this paper, I am grateful to Regine Eckardt, and, particularly, to Michela Ippolito, and Kai von Fintel, as well as to audiences at UCSC, Tübingen, Konstanz, Toronto, Stanford, University of Amsterdam, and CLS60. And, since this is CLS60, it is a good occasion to express gratitude to the CLS student officers from the past to the present, who have kept CLS going for so many years, and to future officers as well, who, let us hope, will continue this important work for at least 60 more years to come.

(2) What time is it?

or from other types of non-canonical questions, such as rising declaratives (RDs) or tag questions:

(3) a. This is a persimmon?
b. This is a persimmon, isn't it?

RhQs have attracted the attention of linguists at least since Sadock (1971), because of a tension between their form and their function. Intuitively, when the speaker (Sp) is asking a RhQ she does not expect her interlocutor, the addressee (Ad), to provide information, or even to publicly engage with the question, but rather, she is making a rhetorical point. Therefore, such questions exhibit a mismatch between form (interrogative) and function (close, though not identical, to assertion), and as such they promise to shed light on how to best characterize the two basic speech acts they appear to straddle, namely assertions and questions.

A useful pre-theoretical starting point is the definition in (4), from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED):

(4) OED definition of RhQs
One says of a question that it is rhetorical if 'asked only to make a statement or to produce an effect rather than to get an answer'.

The immediate questions that this characterization raises, and which I address below, are the following: (i) How can one make a statement by asking a question? (ii) What statement can one make by asking a RhQ? (iii) What properties distinguish RhQs from their non-rhetorical sisters? In the course of answering these questions we will characterize the intended contribution of such questions to the discourse, and situate RhQs relative to ordinary assertions on the one hand, and non-rhetorical questions on the other. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 situates the present approach relative to two previous characterizations of RhQs, and characterizes the notion of *unresolvable question*; Section 3 proposes two necessary conditions that, together, are also sufficient for a question to be interpreted as a RhQ; Section 4 gives an account of RhQs in the Table model, including a proposal concerning the treatment of conversational implicatures in this model, and characterizes RhQs relative to assertions and non-rhetorical questions, ending with general considerations about what a question is; Section 5 discusses an apparent counterexample, and Section 6 summarizes the proposal and points to open issues.

2 Why revisit RhQs?

This section frames the approach to be developed below by discussing two general assumptions about RhQs that I adopt, and two that I provide arguments against.

Two received idea about RhQs that I adopt First, following Rohde (2006) and Caponigro & Sprouse (2007), I assume that RhQs are syntactically and semantically 'interrogative', i.e., they do not differ from their ordinary interrogative counterparts in either basic form or semantic content.

With respect to sentence form, RhQs are interrogative, just like their non-rhetorical sisters.[1] With respect to interpretation, I follow Hamblin semantics in assuming that an interrogative sentence denotes an issue I, which is a non-singleton set of propositions that partitions the logical space.[2] Declarative sentences (at least when pronounced with falling intonation) differ from interrogatives in that they denote singleton issues. Claiming that RhQs are semantically interrogative, or, as we will define in Section 4, semantically inquisitive, amounts to claiming that they denote non-singleton issues, just like ordinary interrogatives, and unlike ordinary declaratives.[3]

Second, following OED, as well as common sense, I assume that RhQs are rhetorical, i.e., Sp's main goal is **not** to get an answer or even to have the responder publicly engage with the question, but rather, to make a rhetorical point, namely to persuade Ad to accept the truth of a proposition that should have been obvious to her but which she appears to overlook. The immediate questions this characterization raises and which the discussion below aims to settle, are the following: (i) What is the proposition Sp intends Ad to adopt? (ii) How does asking the question lead to the goal Sp pursues?

The discussion above leads to the two empirical observations in (5) that any approach to RhQs has to capture:

(5) a. RhQs are interrogatives and yet, they do not involve a request for information, or even an invitation to publicly engage with the question, and therefore, an answer is not typically needed.
b. RhQs have something to do with assertions but exactly how to capture this connection remains to be specified.

A terminological clarification is in order here. The term 'rhetorical question' as used in this paper excludes self-addressed and topic-setting questions, exemplified in (6a) and (6b) respectively, both of which are sometimes called 'rhetorical':

(6) a. Why am I raising this issue? Because I want to be as clear as possible.
b. *Context: A linguist to her colleague, when setting down to work together*
What does our analysis predict? That's what we have to figure out first.

Self-addressed questions are special only in that the participant assumed to respond to the question is Sp rather than Ad; in the case of topic-setting questions, the responder is assumed to be the group made up by the participants in the conversation.

[1] Persuasive arguments have been made for the existence of intonational, gestural or morphological markers that accompany some RhQs in particular languages in Ippolito (2021) for Italian, or Dehé & Braun (2019) for English, for instance. As far as I know, however, there is no conclusive evidence that *all* RhQs in a language have to bear such a marker.

[2] I will be using terminology from the Inquisitive Semantics tradition, pioneered in Ciardelli *et al.* (2018). The crucial differences between Hamblin semantics and Inquisitive Semantics are not relevant for present purposes, and therefore will be ignored here. Also ignored below is the issue of how to treat the effect of presupposition triggers in questions.

[3] For a different way of differentiating declaratives and interrogatives, see Biezma & Rawlins (2012), where declaratives denote propositions, and interrogatives denote sets of proposition. In this view, polar interrogatives differ from constituent interrogatives in that they denote singleton sets.

Such questions share with RhQs in the narrow sense used here the fact that they are not meant to be answered by Ad. To anticipate, they differ from RhQs in that they are not assumed to be closed relative to the input context, which is why they are meant to be engaged with, and why they do not have to have a rhetorical point. For further discussion see Section 4.1 below, and Farkas (2022).

Two received ideas I argue against First, it is widely assumed that in order for a question to be rhetorical, its answer must be taken to be known in the context against which the question is asked. I formulate this condition in (7):

(7) **Known answer (KA) condition**
A necessary condition for a question expressing a set of propositions I to be **rhetorical** relative to an input context c_i is for Sp to assume that $\exists p \in I$ such that $p \in \text{cg}_{c_i}$, where cg_{c_i} is the common ground of c_i.

The term 'answer' in (7) is understood as 'semantic answer' in the sense of Groenendijk & Stokhof (1984) given in (8).

(8) **Semantic answer to a question**
A proposition p is a semantic answer to a question denoting a non-singleton set of propositions I iff $p \in I$.

Don's RhQ in (9) supports the KA condition in (7):

(9) Caitlin: Why did Amy vote for Bob?
Don: Who supports whatever Amy says in every department meeting?

In order for Don's question to function as a RhQ, he must assume that the answer to his question, namely *Bob supports whatever Amy says in every department meeting*, is in cg_i, the cg of the context relative to which he poses his question.

The first point to be made in connection with the KA condition in (7) is that, as argued in Biezma & Rawlins (2017), it is not a *sufficient* condition: there are questions whose answer is assumed to be known in the input context, and which, nonetheless, are not rhetorical. Two examples are given in (10):

(10) a. I just want to hear it again: Will you marry me?
b. So, to review. What will you tell her when you apologize?

In (10a), the presumably positive answer to the question is assumed to be in cg_i. As Sp states, he is asking the question nonetheless for the pleasure of hearing the answer. In (10b), the answer is, again, assumed to be in cg_i. It is raised again because Sp wants to re-confirm it.

More controversially, I argue next that, *pace* Biezma & Rawlins (2017), the KA condition in (7) is not a *sufficient* condition for rhetoricity either. The argument is based on the claim, made already in Rohde (2006), that there are RhQs that are assumed to be *unresolvable* in their input context. Before giving examples of such questions, I clarify below when a question is *resolved*, when it is *resolvable*, and when it is *unresolvable* in a given context at a given time.

A question is said to be resolved relative to a context c at time t iff the issue I

that it denotes is resolved in c at t, where a resolved issue relative to a context is defined as in (11):

(11) **Resolved issue relative to c at t**
An issue I is resolved relative to a context c at t iff $\exists p \in I$ such that $p \in$ cg_c at t, where cg_c is the common ground of c. Otherwise I is not resolved in c at t.

Defining resolvable and unresolvable issues is a complex matter. Intuitively, an issue I is not resolved but resolvable relative to c at t if, given cg_c at t, it is possible for some rational agent a to believe, at some time t' all the propositions in cg_c at t as well as some proposition in I. In short, an issue I is resolvable relative to c at t iff there is a $p \in I$ such that a rational agent can simultaneously believe $\text{cg}_c \cup \{p\}$.

An issue I is nor resolved and unresolvable in c at t if it is not possible for some rational agent a to simultaneously believe all the propositions in cg_c at t as well as some proposition in I. This means that no rational agent can have a doxastic state which contains all the propositions currently in cg_i , and in which I is resolved.

In order to define these notions more precisely, I will first define the auxiliary notion of d(oxastic) consistency as in (12):

(12) D-consistent set of propositions
A set of propositions P is d-consistent iff for any rational agent a, if P = Dox_a at t, $\cap\text{Dox}_a \neq \emptyset$

Dox_a is the set of propositions that a takes to be true in of w_a at t, also called the doxastic base of a at t. The doxastic base of any rational agent at any time t must be d-consistent, since a assumes at t that $w_a \in \cap\text{Dox}_a$. Note also that d-consistency entails consistency but not the other way around. If $p \cap q = \emptyset$ no doxastic base can contain both. On the other hand p and q may be consistent but not d-consistent. Thus, take p to be the proposition expressed in (13a) and q to be the proposition in (13b):

(13) a. My keys are in my purse.
b. I don't know where my keys are.

These two propositions are consistent. Nothing rules out a world in which my keys are in my purse but I don't know where they are. These two propositions are not d-consistent, however. No rational agent can simultaneously believe that her keys are in her purpose but that she doesn't know where her keys are.

Next, note that for any context c at t, the participants in the conversation are committed to all the propositions in cg_c at t. Therefore, for any c and any t, cg_c at t must be d-consistent.

An unresolved but resolvable issue I relative to a context c at t is defined as in (14):

(14) Unresolved but resolvable issue
An issue I is resolvable relative to a context c at t iff there are at least two propositions $p \in I$ and $q \in I$ such that neither $\text{cg}_c + r$ nor $\text{cg}_c + p$ are

d-consistent.[4]

If an issue I is resolvable in c at t it means that there is no proposition in cg_c that rules out someone simultaneously believing the propositions in cg_c as well as one of the propositions in I.

A stronger stance would be one in which the participants in the conversation believe that they, as a group, can resolve the issue. In that case cg_c at t has to be such that it does not rule out the participants monotonically reaching a context c' at t' such that I is resolved in c' at t'.[5]

To exemplify, assume that detective Kim and her team are investigating a murder. All that they have established at time t is that the victim could be Lou, Matt or Nat. Assume further, that the facts of the case support the belief that the victim is identifiable in principle, and this is publicly known to the team. In this case we can assume that cg_c at t, the publicly established facts of the context c in which the team works, is d-consistent with l, m and n, where l is the proposition that Lou is the victim, m is the proposition that Matt is the victim, and n is the proposition that Nat is the victim. Nothing in cg_c at t rules out adding any of these propositions to it. In this case none of these three propositions is in cg_c at t but at the same time cg_c at t is consistent with the proposition that at some t' cg_c at t' will contain one of these propositions. This means that cg_c at t is consistent with the proposition expressed by *It is possible to believe at some future time t' everything that we believe now as well as one of the propositions in {n, m, l}*. One would say in this case that Kim and her team are agnostic with respect to the identity of the victim but believe that in principle one can find out who he is. Such a situation is perfectly compatible with the victim, in fact, being Lou (or Matt or Nat).

We can define now the notion of an unresolvable issue as in (15):

(15) Unresolvable issue
An issue I is unresolvable relative to c at t iff $\neg\exists p \in I$ such that $\text{cg}_c + p$ is d-consistent.

If I is unresolvable in cg_c at t, it must be the case that there is some proposition in cg_c at t which makes it impossible for anyone to ever believe all the propositions in cg_c as well as some proposition in I. For this to be the case cg_c at t must contain a proposition that entails that, given what we assume now, no one will ever resolve I. If we go back to Kim and her team, the issue of the identity of the victim is unresolvable in c_K at T iff the team believes that the facts are such that no one will ever find out who the victim is. This state of affairs is perfectly compatible with any of the propositions in {*l, m, n*}, but incompatible with anyone simultaneously believing cg_k as well as one of these propositions.[6]

[4] We need two propositions to be compatible with cg_c because if only one were consistent with cg_c, then, given the way issues are defined, I would be resolved in cg_c in favor of that proposition.

[5] Assuming that additions to cg is monotonic it follows that t precedes t'.

[6] The definition of unresolvable issue in (15) gives us 'general unresolvability', the assumption that no rational agent a can ever resolve the issue. To render it dependent on particular a cognitive agent, we can define a particularized notion of unresolvability as in (i):

(i) An issue I is unresolvable for a at t iff $\forall p \in I$, $\text{Dox}_a + p = \emptyset$

To sum up, (un)resolvability rests on the distinction between a set of propositions P being consistent, and that set of propositions being consistent *qua* the doxastic base of a rational agent at a particular time. Recall also that d-consistency is a general requirement on the cg of any conversation, a requirement that follows from the fact that at any point in the conversation, the participants are taken to be publicly committed to all the propositions in the cg.

We are now ready to turn to examples of unresolvable RhQs. First, consider (16), inspired by Regine Eckardt:

(16) Andy: I should give up the idea of trying to sue someone in order to recover my losses due to my Covid infection.
Betty: Right. After all, who passed you the virus?

Betty's answer presupposes that the propositions in (17) below are in the cg of the conversation at the point in which she asks her question.

(17) a. Someone passed Andy the virus.
b. We cannot find out who passed Andy the virus.

These presuppositions render the RhQ she asks unresolvable relative to the input context. This is so because while the cg is consistent with any of the non-negative semantic answers to the RhQ, there is no semantic answer to this question which is d-consistent with the cg in the presence of the two propositions in (17). No rational agent can be committed to both always remaining agonstic as to who passed you the virus and believing that a particular, identified person passed it to you.

The rhetorical point Betty makes in asking her question is that precisely because her question is unresolvable in the context, it provides support for Andy's previous move, as well as for her endorsement of it.

Another example of an unresolvable RhQ is given in (18):

(18) *Context: Bob, Carol's teenage son, has failed, again, to make his bed. Carol says to Bob*:
What's wrong with you?

Carol's question presupposes the two propositions in (19):

(19) a. Something is wrong with Bob.
b. One cannot tell what is wrong with Bob.

Carol's question, therefore, is unresolvable in this context. No proposition in the issue she raises is d-compatible with the cg of the input conversation. Carol's rhetorical point is that the question is unresolvable precisely because Bob's behavior is so outrageous as to become incompatible with any plausible explanation.

Further examples of unresolvable RhQs are given below:

(20) Political candidates are no longer necessarily accepting the results of elections. Governors are busing or flying migrants to 'blue' states. What next?

(21) A: Why did she divorce her husband?
B: Why do people do the things they do?

(22) *Context: discussing troops in Eastern Europe after the Cold War*
What are we going to do with all the soldiers over there? (Rohde, 2006)

(23) *Context: Exasperated attorney arguing against an anti-abortion law*
This law is impossibly and impermissibly vague. In the end, when can a doctor legally interfere to save a pregnant person's life? (It's impossible to say.)

(24) *Context: You accidentally erase an important file*
How stupid can I get?

The question in (20) presupposes that something is going to happen next but we cannot tell what precisely because the preceding list shows that there are no longer any limits to how bad things can get, and therefore no prediction is possible anymore. Because of this presupposition none of the propositions in the issue expressed by the question is d-consistent with the cg, and therefore the RhQ is unresolvable in the context. The rhetorical point Sp makes with this question is that because the question is unresolvable, the situation is exceptionally bad. The question is presumably asked in order to support an implicit or explicit claim about the bad state things are in, and the terrible nature of what has already happened and what one may expect in the future, which goes beyond what one would have assumed possible.

In (21), B's question presupposes that the reason people do things are often unfathomable, and therefore the issue raised is unresolvable. The rhetorical point is that A's question is unresolvable as well, and therefore not worth pursuing.[7]

In (22), the presupposition is that in the new world order no one can tell what to do with the troops in Eastern Europe.[8] This presupposition renders the RhQ unresolvable in its context. The rhetorical point Sp makes, presumably, is that since the question is unresolvable, there is no reason to keep the troops there.

In (23) the presupposition is that it is impossible to know the answer to the question because the law does not make it clear. The rhetorical point Sp makes is that this fact justifies Sp's previous statement. Finally, in (24), the presupposition is that the stupidity of Ad's behavior renders the question unresolvable: there is no limit to how stupid Ad can get. The rhetorical point is that it is Ad's previous behavior that led to the impossibility of resolving the issue.

Before leaving the topic of unresolvable RhQs, we discuss an instance of the quasi-rhetorical question in (25):[9]

[7] One could in principle argue that the assumed answer here is that people act without any reason, and therefore that there was no reason behind her decision to divorce her husband. It is not the case, however, that B's answer in (21) *has* to be interpreted in this radical way. A natural interpretation is that in this case, as in many others, if there is a reason behind her action, one cannot tell what it is.

[8] One can also assume that the presupposition is that there is nothing one can do with the troops, which renders the RhQ resolved in favor of the negative answer. The point here is that the question can be interpreted also as assuming that no one can tell what to do with the troops now.

[9] I am indebted to Stefan Kaufmann and Kai von Fintel for drawing my attention to this type of example.

(25) Amy: Where is Paul?
Bob: Where is Paul indeed?

Here Amy's question is a canonical information seeking question which leads to the assumption that she does not know the answer. Bob, by responding with the essentially identical question rather than by providing the information that settles it, signals that he doesn't have that information either, and therefore, after Bob asks his question, it becomes public knowledge that the participants in the conversation cannot resolve the issue even if that issue is in principle resolvable. Under the approach to RhQs taken here, Bob's question is not rhetorical because it does not *presuppose* that the question cannot be resolved, and therefore it does not have a rhetorical bite. The fact that he doesn't know the answer to the question he asks is, in fact, the new information conveyed by his question.

To conclude, then, Rohde (2006) is right: there are RhQs that are unresolvable in the context in which they are asked, and, therefore, the KA condition in (7) is neither sufficient nor necessary for a question to be rhetorical.

The second received idea I argue against is formulated in (26) (Biezma & Rawlins, 2017):

(26) **Assertability of the answer (AOA) condition**
A necessary condition for a question to be rhetorical in c is for the answer to the question to be assertable in c.

Evidence for this condition is easy to find. In (9), for instance, Don's RhQ is felicitously replaceable by its assumed answer, as shown in (27):

(27) Caitlin: Why did Amy vote for Bob?
Don: Bob supports whatever Amy says in every department meeting.

I argue below that the AOA condition in (26) is neither necessary nor sufficient for a question to receive a rhetorical interpretation.

Turning to showing that the AOA condition is not a necessary condition for a question to be interpreted as a RhQ, note first that unresolvable RhQs do not have a known answer in the context in which they are asked, and therefore they cannot have a known assertable answer. Second, there are cases, exemplified in the son's questions in (28) and (29), in which RhQs have a known answer, but that answer cannot felicitously replace the RhQ:

(28) Mother: Did you close the door?
Son: Is the pope Catholic?
Son: #The pope is Catholic.[10]

(29) Mother: Did you leave the door open?
Son: Do I look stupid?
Son: #I don't look stupid. / #I look stupid.

[10] As Jorge Hankamer pointed out (p.c), this type of RhQ is productive. At the same time, it is important to note that this particular use of RhQs is a 'convention of usage', or a 'linguistic habit' not necessarily present in all languages. See Section 3 below for further discussion.

To show that the AOA condition is not sufficient either, note that the question in (30b) is infelicitous as a RhQ in the given context even though it has an assertable known answer in this context.

(30) *Context: Connie and Don meet in the morning before class.*

a. Connie: I will have to leave early today. As you know, Ellen is visiting from Berkeley.

b. Connie: I will have to leave early today. #Who is visiting from Berkeley?

I conclude that the AOA condition is neither necessary nor sufficient for a question to receive a rhetorical interpretation. The discussion of this issue in Biezma & Rawlins (2017) leads us, however, to the issue of explaining when the known answer to a RhQ is assertable and when it is not, a task we turn to at the end of Section 4 below.

While the known answer to a RhQ is not always assertable in a context in which the RhQ is felicitous, such a question can indeed always be felicitously replaced with an assertion, as the OED definition leads us to expect. In the examples in (28), the son could have replied with the assertion in (31),

(31) Of course I did.

while in the case of (24), he could have replied with either assertion in (32), depending on whether it was assumed to be desirable to leave the door open or not:

(32) Of course I did. / Of course I didn't.

Unresolvable RhQs can also be felicitously replaced with an assertion, typically mentioning their unresolvable nature.

To conclude, we have seen above that some RhQs have a known answer in the context in which they are asked while others are unresolvable. Neither property is, however, sufficient for a question to be interpretable as rhetorical. We have also seen that if there is a known answer to a RhQ, that answer is sometimes felicitously assertable in the context, and sometimes it is not. The major issue we are left with, then, which is to be addressed in the next section, is what properties distinguish RhQs from their non-rhetorical sisters. The answer proposed below sheds light on the connection between RhQs and the assertions that may replace them.

3 Two necessary and, together, sufficient properties of RhQs

This section proposes two necessary conditions that a question must meet in order to be interpreted as a rhetorical question, which, together, are also sufficient to ensure such an interpretation: (i) RhQs must be interpreted as closed in their input context; (ii) Sp must be interpreted as intending to make a rhetorical point by raising the question, a point that is connected to the assumed status of the question in the context. We discuss these conditions and the connection between them below.

3.1 RhQs must be closed in their input context

A question asked relative to an input context c_i may be open or closed relative to this context. Intuitively, an open question in c_i is up for discussion. In such a case, it is possible to reach a more informative future context c_f, different from c_i, in which the question is resolved without giving up commitments in cg_i. A closed question in c_i, on the other hand, cannot be resolved in a monotonically reachable future context c_f that is different from c_i. We discuss these two types of questions in more detail below.

Open questions Typical questions, exemplified in (33), are open relative to their c_i:

(33) Are you ready to leave?

The canonical case in which questions are asked is one in which Sp requests information she doesn't have from Ad, whom she assumes has it, and will give it in the immediate future of the conversation. Thus, Sp assumes that the question is not resolved but resolvable in c_i. Open questions are characterized in (34):

(34) **Open question in** c
A question expressing an issue I is open in c iff $\exists p \in I$ such that $p \notin \text{cg}_i$ and $\{p\} \cup \text{cg}$ is d-consistent.

Note that given that the propositions in I are non-overlapping and they exhaust the logical space, if a condition is open, there must be several propositions in I that are d-compatible with cg_i. If there where a unique $p \in I$ d-compatible with cg_i, p would be entailed by cg_i, and therefore the question would not be open.

Sp's immediate public goal in asking an open question is characterized in (35):

(35) **Sp's typical immediate public goal when asking an open question**
When asking an open question, Sp's assumed immediate public goal can be (and usually is) to steer the conversation towards a future state that is different from the current one, in which the question is resolved (by Ad in canonical cases).[11]

Closed questions The issue I raised by a closed question relative to its input context c_i is closed in c_i iff the question is not open, i.e., iff there is no more informative context c_f different from c_i that can be monotonically reached from c_i in which the question is resolved. This condition is met iff I is either resolved or unresolvable in c_i. Closed questions are defined in (36):

(36) **Closed question in** c
A question expressing an issue I is closed in c iff $\forall p \in I$ such that$p \notin \text{cg}_c$, $\{p\} \cup \text{cg}_c$ is not d-consistent.

[11] See Farkas & Roelofsen (2017) and Farkas (2022) for a view under which these properties follow from the basic semantics of questions and their discourse effects, without the need of covert semantic or syntactic structure.

The first necessary, but on its own not sufficient, condition on RhQs is given in (37):

(37) **Closed question (CQ) condition on RhQs**
In order for a question to be interpreted as a RhQ, Sp must be taken as assuming that the issue raised by the question is closed in c_i.

The consequence of (37) relative to Sp's immediate goal in asking a RhQ is given in (38):

(38) **Consequence of the CQ condition**
When asking a RhQ, Sp cannot be taken to have as her immediate goal the resolution of the issue the question denotes.

The CQ condition on RhQ provides an explanation for the empirical observation in (5a), namely that RhQs cannot be interpreted as requesting information or even publicly engaging with attempting to resolve the issue raised. What is, then, the goal Sp pursues in raising such a question? This issue is addressed in the next subsection.

3.2 RhQs must be interpretable as having a rhetorical point

Recall that, according to the OED, the goal Sp pursues when asking a RhQ is to make a statement, rather than to get an answer. The CQ condition in (37) above explains why a RhQ cannot be asked with the goal of getting an answer. The second necessary condition on RhQs proposed in (39) addresses the way in which such questions achieve the goal of making a statement.

(39) **Rhetorical point (RP) condition on RhQs**
In order for a question to be interpretable as a RhQ, Sp must be taken as intending to convey a rhetorical point, i.e., as intending to persuade Ad of the truth of a proposition p by making Ad reach the conclusion that p is true on his own.

The effectiveness of RhQs is linked to the fact that if Sp's intentions are realized, Ad accepts p on her own, which is a more efficient way of persuading her of its truth than if Sp had simply asserted p.

The CQ in (37) and the RP condition in (39) are necessary, and, together, sufficient to render a question rhetorical. Note that the first condition precludes an ordinary request for information interpretation, while the second ensures that the speech act performed is not gratuitous, i.e., Sp is pursuing a non-trivial goal, formulated in (40):

(40) **Immediate public goal when asking a RhQ**
When asking a RhQ, Sp's immediate public goal is to make a rhetorical point.

Before turning to discussing how this point is made, we briefly turn below to further goals Sp may pursue with her rhetorical point. In (9), repeated below,

(41) Caitlin: Why did Amy vote for Bob?
Don: Who supports whatever Amy says in every department meeting?

the goal Don pursues by asking the RhQ is to *resolve* the issue Caitlin raised: the presupposed answer to the RhQ (namely that Bob is the one who supports whatever Amy says in every department meeting) is meant to provide the reason for Amy having voted for Bob thereby resolving the QUD raised by Caitlin. By reminding Caitlin that the RhQ is closed, and by reminding her of its answer, Don is pointing to the fact that the presupposed answer to his question, known to Caitlin, leads her to answer her own question. The connection between the known answer to the RhQ and the answer to the QUD is the rhetorical point of Don's question, which Don assumes Caitlin will reach on the basis of neo-Gricean pragmatic reasoning. In Section 5 we discuss at length examples of RhQs that are meant to resolve the QUD while also contradicting Ad's previous move.

Frequent uses of RhQs involve *challenging* a stance taken by Ad, as in (42).

(42) *Context: Amy asks Barbara to make her a sandwich.*
Barbara to Amy: Am I your mother?

The presupposed answer to Barbara's RhQ is that Barbara is not Amy's mother. Raising this question, whose answer is so clearly obvious in context, is not a gratuitous act because it can be connected to the immediately previous context, namely Amy's request, assuming that Barbara is following Grice's Cooperative Principle. The connection rests on the obviously exaggerated assumption that in order to comply with Amy's request one would have to be Amy's mother. The rhetorical point Barbara makes is that since she is not Amy's mother, she will not comply with the request (by *modus tollens*). The question is meant to make Amy realize that her request is inappropriate for reasons that she should have been aware of. The rhetorical effect is based on the fact that the RhQ challenges an implicit stance on Ad's part that contradicts a blatantly true presupposition, namely that Barbara is not Amy's mother.

The rhetorical point of a RhQ may also be used to *support* or *justify* a previous stance, taken by Ad or Sp, as illustrated in (43):

(43) I will help you with your mortgage. Am I not your mother after all?

Here, the presupposition is that Sp is Ad's mother. This presupposition, together with the generally held assumptions that mothers are supposed to help their children leads to the rhetorical point of the question: helping with the mortgage is part of what mothers are supposed to do for their children. This point justifies the mother's offer, pre-empting a possible objection on Ad's part.

Before turning to a few further examples, we briefly digress to suggest an explanation for the polarity contrast in (42) and (43), a type of contrast noted already in Sadock (1971). In both examples above, Sp's rhetorical stance assumes that Ad may have neglected the truth of the presupposition, either because of an actual inappropriate request, as in the case of (42), or because of a possible future objection, as in the case of (43). Drawing on the large literature on the effect of bias on the form of a polar question, Roelofsen & Farkas (2015) proposes that the form of the

question radical in a polar question (including its polarity) matches that of what the responder's assumed answer to the question is because of pressure to maximize unmarked, agreeing responses. The stance the question challenges in (42) is the positive answer to Barbara's question, which explains the positive polarity of the question, while the challenged stance in (43) is the negative answer, which explains the negative polarity of the question. These facts dovetail with the explanation of the form of the polar question radical proposed in van Rooij & Šafářová (2003), in terms of the 'utility value' of the agreeing answer. The form of the question radical is chosen so as to express that proposition whose acceptance (by an agreeing response) would be of the greatest utility value to Sp (and, more broadly, the conversation community). This is the proposition whose acceptance would cause the most radical belief (or cg) revision. That proposition is *I am your mother* in (42) and *I am not your mother* in (43).

Returning to the issue of the different immediate public goals Sp is assumed to pursue when asking a regular question as opposed to asking a rhetorical one, note that in the case of regular questions, in typical cases, the question is open in the current context, i.e., it is neither resolved nor assumed to be unresolvable. By raising the question, Sp steers the conversation towards a future state in which the question is resolved, and therefore the immediate public goal of Sp's performing the speech act of raising the question is to reach such a future context state. In the framework of Farkas & Roelofsen (2017), which I assume here, these properties follow from the semantic content of interrogatives and a general contextual effect that they share with declaratives, without having to resort to an elaborate left periphery syntax. Farkas (2022) proposes that this semantically and syntactically underspecified approach allows us to capture the ways in which canonical questions differ from their non-canonical sisters. In Section 4 below, we see how RhQs are captured in this approach. Parsimony considerations lead us to posit that if such a simple account is possible, it is also desirable.

Summing up, we conclude that because when asking a RhQ, Sp assumes that the question is closed in c_i, her implicit public goal cannot be that of having the question resolved. Sp's goal in raising such questions is to make a rhetorical point. Thus, RhQs *avoid* being interpreted as soliciting an answer because Sp assumes that the questions she raises is known to be either resolved or unresolvable in its input context. As a result, the reason Sp is raising the question must be other than to have it resolved or even to have the participants in the conversation publicly engage with resolving it. If we are to treat RhQs as questions that are being asked, as we should given that this is how we refer to them, the property of soliciting an answer should not be crucial to our theoretical characterization of questions.

We now turn to discussing in more detail how the rhetorical point of a RhQ is conveyed and what its status is in discourse. This discussion leads us to conclude that the two conditions discussed above are closely connected.

Note first that the rhetorical point p of a RhQ remains implicit. Sp nonetheless is understood as intending to commit to p and expecting Ad to commit to p as well, without further discussion. Ad is expected to recover p and commit to it based on pragmatic reasoning rooted in Grice's Cooperative Principle, based on (i) the semantic content of the question; (ii) its status in c_i imposed by the CQ condition, and (iii) the connection between the RhQ and the QUD. The point Sp

makes is rhetorical because her aim is to persuade Ad of the truth of p by making Ad conclude it on her own and thereby show that Ad could have resolved the QUD on her own.

The known facts about the question that Sp may rely on to convey her message are the known answer, in case there is one, the fact that the question is unresolvable, if indeed that is the case, and whatever else about the question and its answer is assumed to be known and salient in the discourse. We go through some concrete examples next.

In the case of the Catholic pope family of examples in (28), the mechanism involved in generating the rhetorical message is one based on *speech act analogy*. These examples are based on a fixed template: the RhQ is asked as a response to a polar question. Its actual form may vary but it always has to be a polar question with a blatantly obvious positive answer, which is also blatantly irrelevant to the current QUD, expressed by the previous question. The message conveyed by these questions is twofold: (a) a positive answer to the previous question; (b) the comment that this positive answer to the previous question is just as blatantly obvious as the positive answer to the RhQ. The speech act analogy then, is that the previous question, which sets the QUD, is parallel to the RhQ in that they both have blatantly obvious positive answers, and thus need not have been asked. The fact that the answer has to be positive for both questions is shown in (44), where the son's question is much less natural than the 'standard' RhQ in (28):

(44) Mother: Do you want to do your homework on Saturday?
Son: Is the pope Muslim?

There are, however, parallel RhQs where the known answer is negative, conveying a negative answer to the QUD, as exemplified by the son's question in (45).

(45) Mother: Do you like your new prep school?
Son: Do I like prison?

The status of the template involved in such questions, I suggest, is that of a 'linguistic habit' or 'convention of usage' of the speech community. Note that this particular type of RhQ is not necessarily present in other languages though, as I can personally attest, a competent English speaker may figure it out when first encountering it. This is so because the reasoning that leads to recovering the intended message is rooted in Gricean pragmatics. First, the question is obviously closed, a fact that rules out an information seeking question. Second, there is an assumed obvious answer to the RhQ, which is positive in (28) and negative in (45). The semantic content of the assumed answer is blatantly irrelevant to the QUD, and therefore it cannot in itself be relevant to the conveyed message. The assumption that Sp is cooperating despite appearances leads to concluding that something about this question makes it relevant to the QUD. This in turn leads to the speech act analogy step and the intended message. The analogy rests on three properties of the RhQ: it's irrelevance to the QUD, the obviousness of its answer, and the polarity of the answer. The last two properties determine the answer to the QUD Sp intends to convey, while the first leads to the critical comment Sp conveys concerning her addressee's initial question. The critical comment conveyed is the essential difference

between responding to the initial question this way and simply asserting the answer to Ad's question.

The genesis of the message Sp conveys with the RhQ in the more mundane 'department politics' example repeated below for convenience, is much simpler.

(46) Caitlin: Why did Amy vote for Bob?
Don: Who supports her at every departmental meeting?

In this case, the presupposed answer to the RhQ, which Don intends Caitlin to remember based on his asking the RhQ, is that Bob supports Amy at every departmental meeting. This answer is relevant to the QUD that Caitlin posed because it can be used to resolve it. This subtype of RhQs are used instead of asserting the known answer in order to draw the interlocutor in, and draw her attention to the fact that the answer was available to her on her own, without needing Sp's authority to accept it.[12]

The detailed pragmatic reasoning Sp assumes his RhQ will trigger involves the following steps: (i) the question is closed, and therefore getting an answer cannot be the point of raising the question; (ii) the question is closed because there is a known answer; (iii) something about the question and its known answer must be relevant to the QUD; (iv) the obvious way to make the question relevant to the QUD is to assume that the known answer resolves it, and therefore Sp assumes that it does, and that her Ad will agree with this assumption once she recalls the known answer to the question.

In the case of the unresolvable RhQ in (16), repeated below,

(47) Andy: I should give up the idea of trying to sue someone in order to recover my losses due to my Covid infection.
Betty: Right. After all, who passed you the virus?

the presupposition is that the question is unresolvable. This is immediately relevant to the QUD, which involves whether one should sue someone to recover the losses due to Andy's Covid infection, since it points to the impossibility of doing so, supporting Andy's conclusion. The rhetorical effect here is that of supporting Ad's stance by pointing to a known fact that renders this stance unavoidable.

The Ad of a RhQ may object to the intended rhetorical point, which is one of the ways in which a RhQ may fail. Thus, in (9), Caitlin may reply as in (48):

(48) Caitlin: Why did Amy vote for Bob?
Don: Who supports whatever Amy says in every department meeting?
Caitlin: It's true Bob is very supportive of Amy. But she is a principled person; there must have been some other reason.[13]

Note next that having a rhetorical point is not, however, a sufficient condition to render a question rhetorical. This is exemplified in (49):

(49) *Context: Unbeknownst to Bob, his mother has cleaned his room.*

[12] In Gunlogson (2008)'s terms, the message is that Ad could be a *co-source* for the response rather than a *dependent*.

[13] I am indebted to Hans Kamp for making me think about ways in which RhQs may fail.

Bob to his mother: You never do anything for me!
Mother to Bob: Who do you think cleaned your room? Me! So there!

Mother's question here has a rhetorical point, namely that Bob's previous statement was wrong and should be withdrawn. This question does not qualify as a RhQ in the present approach because it is not assumed to be closed but rather, it is a self-addressed question whose answer is new information in the context.

3.3 The connection between the CQ condition and the RP condition

So far, we have established that there are two necessary properties RhQs, which, together, are also sufficient: (i) being closed relative to the input context (the CQ condition); (ii) having a rhetorical point (the RP condition). These two conditions are connected. The first condition rules out an information seeking interpretation, and provides the basis for recovering the rhetorical point, which is the message Ad intends to convey by asking her question. Ad is meant to recover this message based on the assumed status of the question in the input context together with pragmatic, Gricean, reasoning, aided, in some cases, by the linguistic habits of the relevant speech community. The rhetorical point is computed based on the QUD, and therefore RhQs are asked in reaction to a previous discourse move or salient circumstance.

The rhetorical point of a RhQ connects it to the previous discourse. It is an implicit proposition p that is relevant to the QUD. The RhQ is meant to lead Ad to accept p. The rhetorical effect is that this acceptance bypasses Sp having to openly state p based on the assumption that Ad could have reached the conclusion that p is true on her own. The genesis of the rhetorical point rests on the following two assumptions: (i) the question is closed in the input context; (ii) Sp's move is non-gratuitous, and therefore relevant to the QUD. The details of the status of the question in the context imposed by the CQ condition are connected to meeting the RP condition because it forms the basis on which the rhetorical point is reached.

The calculation of p is based on the semantic content of the RhQ, its assumed discourse status, and Gricean reasoning that connects it to the QUD. The status of the question in the context always contributes to the message conveyed but the connection between the two varies. The fact that the question is closed is a presupposition. The rhetorical point, i.e., the message Sp conveys by asking her question is, I claim, a **mandatory conversational implicature(CI)**.[14] It is a CI because it is computed by pragmatic reasoning based on the assumption that Sp is cooperative. It is mandatory because it is the only message Sp intends to convey with her utterance. This implicature is the 'statement' Sp conveys by asking her question.

Summing up, we proposed that in order for a question to be interpreted as rhetorical, two connected conditions must be met: (i) the CQ condition, which is a presupposition, and (ii) the RP condition, which is a CI.

The next section proposes an account of RhQs in the Table model of discourse, which aims to achieve the following goals: (ii) clarify the status of CIs relative to discourse structure; (ii) clarify the connection between RhQs and assertions on the

[14] See Lauer (2014) for a detailed defense of the existence of mandatory CIs.

one hand, and RhQs and non-rhetorical questions on the other; (iii) clarify when a speech act can be referred to as a question that has been asked.

4 RhQs in the Table model

This section proposes an account of RhQs in the Table model and examines some of its consequences relative to the issues raised by the above discussion.

4.1 The Table model

In the account of RhQs proposed here, their special nature is rooted in their status relative to their input context, and therefore properties of that context are crucial to understanding them. In this section we consider RhQs in the Table model in Farkas & Bruce (2010). This subsection summarize this model, elaborating on those points that are relevant to our understanding of RhQs.

The assumed context structure c has the following components:[15]

(i) A set P of participants in the conversation, who play various roles in the speech acts performed. Until now I have made the simplifying assumption that there are two roles participants in every speech act play, the role of speaker, or author of the speech act (Sp), and the role of addressee (Ad), the participant towards whom the speech act is addressed. There are two points to be made in connection with these roles. First, in canonical cases, these two roles are played by two different participants. This, however, is not always the case, as shown in monological internal or external speech acts, exemplified in (50), where the roles of Sp and Ad are played by the same participant:

(50) *Context: Donna, talking to herself*
If you don't start preparing that class soon, you'll be sorry.

A different case, mentioned above in connection with (6a) in Section 2, is exemplified by (51), called here and in Farkas (2022), self-addressed questions:

(51) *Context: Politician speaking on TV*
Why should you vote for me? Because I will work for you.

In (51), unlike in (50), Sp and Ad are not the same participant. Thus, in both (51) and (50), the addressee is the referent of the second person pronoun. In the case of self-addressed questions exemplified by (51), however, the *responder*, i.e., the participant assumed in the conversation to respond to the speech act, by resolving the issue it raises, is the speaker rather than the addressee. In monological examples exemplified in (50), the responder is the addressee, who happens to be the same individual as the speaker. In canonical cases, the roles of responder and addressee are assumed to be performed by the same participant who is assumed not to be the same person as the speaker.

[15] The components discussed here are those needed to characterize assertions and questions. More needs to be added, of course, to account for other speech acts, such as imperatives, as well as to account for other contextual properties, such as, for instance, keeping track of discourse referents.

Note that neither (51) nor (50) are treated as rhetorical in the current approach, although in both cases the speaker is assumed to know the answer to her question. In both cases, the question is open relative to the input context, and the speaker is not assumed to make a rhetorical point. A more subtle point, to which we come back shortly, is that not all speech acts necessarily involve an addressee or a responder.

(ii) For each participant $x \in P$, there is a set of propositions, DC_x, which are the discourse commitments of x in the current conversation. For each $p \in \text{DC}_x$, x takes the public stance of assuming that $w_a \in p$, i.e., x is publicly committed to $p \in \text{Dox}_x$, where Dox_x is the set of propositions x takes as true.[16] As a result, for any $x \in P$, the propositions in DC_x have to be d-consistent.[17]

(iii) The Table is the conversational space on which issues under discussion are entered. Simplifying somewhat, I will assume that the Table is an ordered set of issues under discussion, with the issue ordered highest being the most prominent. In line with Farkas & Bruce (2010), I am assuming that a conversation reaches a stable state when there are no issues on the Table, and that the canonical way of removing an issue from the Table is by resolving it.

(iv) The p(rojected) s(et), a set of future conversational states a speech act steers the current conversational state toward. For each issue I on the Table, there is an element of the ps which specifies a way of removing that issue from the Table, and therefore each state in the ps characterizes a default conversational future.

(v) The c(ommon) g(ground) is a set of propositions such that for every $x \in P$ and every $p \in$ cg, x is publicly assumed to be committed to p. The cg contains all those propositions p such that for every $x \in P$, $p \in \text{DC}_x$, as well as a large and amorphous set of *background assumptions*, which are propositions assumed to be implicitly taken as true by the participants in the conversation. Background assumptions may include general assumptions common to the community the participants belong to, as well as assumptions based on immediate circumstances of the conversation. Since the propositions in the cg are assumed to be believed by the participants, they have to be d-consistent. The intersection of the propositions in the cg, $\cap$cg is the c(ontext) s(et) of the context state.

Particularly relevant for current purposes is the d-consistency requirement on discourse commitments, and the distinction between the Table and the discourse commitments of participants. The former is helpful in characterizing closed questions, and the latter is helpful in characterizing CIs.

[16] To simplify, I am abstracting away from the temporal dimension.

[17] I am disregarding here the difference between *categorical* commitments and *modified* commitments, i.e., commitments that a participant publicly marks by a particular degree of credence. Doing justice to the issues and the philosophical and linguistic literature involved here is beyond the scope of this paper.

4.2 Conventional discourse effects (CDEs) of declarative and interrogative sentences

The discussion below summarizes that part of Farkas & Roelofsen (2017) which concerns the way declaratives and interrogatives update their input context structure, elaborating details involving the ps.

The core proposal is that when uttering a declarative or interrogative sentence S expressing an issue I, the author of the speech act, which we continue to refer to here as Sp, proposes an update of the input context whose details depend on the semantic content and form of the sentence.[18] These changes are the CDEs of the sentence. CDEs are of two types, *basic* and *special*. Basic CDEs are determined by the semantic content of the utterance; special CDEs are additional changes triggered by special markers. In Farkas & Roelofsen (2017) special CDEs are assumed to be monotonic relative to the basic ones. This tight connection has recently been challenged in accounts of special effects introduced by various discourse markers in Woods & Haegeman (2023), Gärtner & Gyuris (2023) and von Fintel & Iatridou (2024). Special CDEs are not relevant for current purposes, and therefore will be ignored below.

The basic CDEs of uttering a declarative or interrogative sentence S are given in (52), ignoring the issue of highlighted or prominent content:

(52) Basic CDEs of uttering a declarative / interrogative S with propositional content I

a. Add I to the set of issues on the Table.
b. Add $\cup I$ to DC_{Sp}.
c. Project each $p \in I$ that is d-consistent with cg_i, the input cg, as a possible resolution of I.

The first step raises the issue I and makes it the current QUD, more aptly referred to as the issue under discussion. This means that the conversation can reach a stable state only once I is removed from the Table. The issue in question is singleton in the case of declaratives and not singleton in the case of interrogatives.

The second step is related to the first because it amounts to committing to the claim that the issue has a resolution. In the case of declaratives, this step amounts to publicly committing to the unique proposition $p \in I$, typically a non-trivial commitment. In the case of interrogatives, however, this step amounts to making a trivial public commitment, given that their semantic content is a set of propositions that partitions the logical space.

The third step specifies the context structures that lead to the default ways of removing I from the Table. As mentioned above, the canonical way of removing an issue from the Table is by resolving it, i.e., reaching a context state c' such that $\exists p \in I$ such that $p \in \text{cg}_{c'}$.

Adding a singleton issue I to the Table projects a unique resolution in favor of the unique proposition in I. Adding a non-singleton issue I on the Table projects as many possible resolutions of I as there are elements of I that are d-consistent with the input cg.[19]

[18] For a discussion of the proposal nature of this update, see in particular Biezma & Rawlins (2017).

[19] In previous work the requirement of d-consistency was not stated explicitly. Note that this

Farkas (2022) proposes to decompose the steps that lead to a projected context state in which I is resolved. In typical cases there are two steps for each $p \in I$ that is d-consistent with cg_i: first, the responder commits to p and proposes it as a resolution, and in the second, Sp accepts p. For declaratives, the second step is superfluous given that Sp commits to the unique $p \in I$ as part of the basic CDEs of the utterance.

Which participant is the responder is a matter decided by the context. For both declaratives and interrogatives, the canonical case is for the responder to be Ad. In the case of self-addressed questions, the responder is Sp.

An issue that has not been addressed so far in this line of work is what happens in cases in which there is no assumed responder. This can happen in two situations: (i) the case in which the issue raised is already closed in the input context; (ii) the case in which a question raises an open issue but is not aimed at any responder at all, either because it is assumed to be unresolvable or simply because it is posed without expecting a response from anyone at all, as exemplified in (53):[20]

(53) *Context: Sick patient alone in a hospital room*
What is to become of me?

This is not a self-addressed question since Sp is not assumed to know the answer to his question or respond to it. There is, however, no other plausible responder.[21] As suggested in von Fintel & Iatridou (2024), as well as Gärtner & Gyuris (2023), and Woods & Haegeman (2023), in these cases, or cases similar to these, the question projects a unique state which is identical to the input state.

To reconcile the typical cases with these special ones I suggest to follow the original proposal in Farkas & Bruce (2010) and assume that what is projected is the cg of the context in which the issue can be removed from the Table in a canonical way. The decomposition into the steps that lead to such a context is done only in case a responder is assumed. In cases like (53), no proposition in the issue placed on the Table is d-consistent with the input cg (since Sp is assumed not to know the answer to his question), and therefore the projected cs is the same as the input cs. In such cases, the issue is removed from the Table without being resolved.

4.3 Closed questions in the Table model

As discussed above, closed questions express issues that project a single cs, namely one identical to the input context set cs_i. This is so because in the case of closed questions, either the question is already resolved in c_i, i.e., there is $p \in I$ such that $p \in \text{cg}_i$ and therefore p is the only possible resolution of I in c_i, or the question is unresolvable relative to c_i, in which case none of the propositions in I are d-consistent with cg_i, and therefore the only possible future state the context projects

requirement follows from the fact that the cg of any discourse structure, as well as the DC of any participant, have to be d-consistent.

[20] See von Fintel & Iatridou (2024), as well as discussion in Lyons (1977).

[21] Some questions, and possibly this one, could be treated as addressed to God or some supernatural power but I do not think that all such questions lend themselves to this type of interpretation. Even for those that do, it is questionable to assume that such discourse moves do in fact always project a responder who resolves the issue.

is identical to cs_i. The current context state is the most informative possible state relative to closed questions and therefore such questions are removed from the Table without further discussion.

To exemplify, let us take a simplified version of the department politics example in (54):

(54) Caitlin: Who will Amy vote for?
Don: Well, who among your colleagues is her biggest supporter in the department?

Let us assume that the semantic content of Bob's question is as in (55):

(55) {b = { w: Bob is Amy's biggest supporter in w }, c = { w': Carol is Amy's biggest supporter in w '}, d = { w": Dan is Amy's biggest supporter in w" }}

Let us further assume that the known answer in the input cg is b, i.e., both Caitlin and Don are assumed to be publicly committed to $w_a \in b$. Under this assumption, the only element of I that is d-consistent (and in fact, plain consistent) with the input common ground is b, and therefore this is the only element of I that the question can project as a resolution of I. Under these assumptions, the only element that I adds to ps is $cg_{c'} = cg_c + b$, which is identical to cg_c. Therefore, the input context state satisfies the default conditions of removing the question from the Table.

In the case of unresolvable questions, such as the one in (56),

(56) After all, who passed you the virus?

uttered in a context in which it is assumed that one cannot know the identity of the person who passed you the virus, though one assumes that someone did so, no element of the issue raised is d-consistent with the input cg, and therefore the cs projected by the question is identical to cg_i. In this case too, the current context is one in which the question can be removed in a default way because the projected context state has already been reached.

In conclusion, in the current approach, RhQs, like all closed questions, do not project a conversational future in which their status is different from the one in the current context state. This is so because either only one element of the issue placed on the Table is d-consistent with cg_i, and is, in fact, an element of that cg, or because none of the elements in this issue are d-consistent with cg_i. Since the current context state is one of the projected ones, RhQs can be removed from the Table without being answered. The same result is reached in Biezma & Rawlins (2017), except without taking unresolvable questions into consideration.

Before turning to further discussion of RhQs in this framework, the next section clarifies the status of conversational implicatures in it.

4.4 CIs in the Table model

Previous work has not addressed the way the distinction between at issue and not-at-issue information is to be captured in the Table model. This section begins to address it by proposing an account of CIs in this model.

I assume that CIs are part of the message Sp intends to convey with her utterance, but which is not part of its semantic content. Because a CI p is part of the intended message, Sp is committed to p and intends Ad to commit to p as well. Special to CIs is that Ad is expected to recover them based on the assumption that Sp is cooperative in Grice's sense, together with the semantics of the uttered sentence, and its status in the discourse, including pragmatic reasoning that connects it to the QUD. CIs are not 'at issue' in the sense that they are not offered for open negotiation.

A natural way of treating such intended CIs in the Table model, I suggest, is to assume that they are propositions that are entered on DC_{Sp}, which captures the fact that Sp is publicly committed to them, but not entered on the Table, which captures the fact that they are offered for negotiation. Unless Ad objects, they become cg under the assumption that a publicized commitment by a participant in a conversation is assumed to be shared, for the purposes of the conversation, unless objected to. This addition is based on the Collaborative Principle of Walker (1996) according to which, in typical cases, participants in a conversation are expected to object to a non-shared publicized commitment. This way of introducing a proposition in the cg differs from asserting it in that it skips the step whereby Ad commits to p. Nonetheless, if a CI is not objected to, it can be presupposed in the next stages of the conversation.

Under this proposal, there are two ways in which a publicized Sp commitment to a proposition p can enter the cg: (i) Sp may assert it, in which case p is entered both on DC_{Sp} and $\{p\}$ is entered on the Table, the latter move opening p up for discussion. If the interlocutors accept Sp's proposal, p is added to the cg_i; (ii) Sp may conversationally implicate p, in which case p is added to DC_{Sp} but is not part of what is added to the Table. If nobody objects, p is added to cg_i. Whether all types of non-at-issue content are amenable to this treatment is an issue that I leave open for now. Promising cases are the content of non-restrictive relative clauses, and that of adnominal modifiers. For a slightly different treatment, see AnderBois *et al.* (2010). See also Schneider (2022) for a parallel treatment of assertions marked by *ja* in German.

4.5 RhQs in the Table model

Recall that in the present approach, when asking a RhQ, Sp assumes that the question is closed relative to the input context. This status, together with the assumption that Sp is cooperative, triggers a mandatory CI which connects to the QUD, and which renders the act of raising a closed question non-gratuitous. The semantic content of the question, together with its assumed status in the context create the rhetorical effect of pointing out that Ad could have made the relevant connection with the QUD on her own.

The assumption about the status of the question in the input context is a presupposition in the sense that it is a requirement on c_i. This requirement must be met in order for the question not to be interpreted as being asked in order to be answered. The fact that the question triggers a particular type of CI, one that could be reached by Ad alone, renders the closed question rhetorical in the sense used here. As mentioned above, the calculation of the implicature is based on those elements of the

input context which render the question closed.

Recall also that a crucial difference between ordinary and RhQs is that the latter are not meant to elicit an answer or even to have anyone in the conversation publicly engage with the question, while the former typically elicit an answer. In the present account, the difference is due to the closed vs. open nature of the raised issue, without the need of extra stipulations.

Finally, note that if a question raises an open issue, it projects several possible resolutions independently of assumptions about which participant knows or ignores the answer. In canonical cases, Sp is assumed to be ignorant and she is assumed to take Ad to be knowledgeable, i.e., to know the true answer, but in the current approach, this is not hard-wired in the syntax, semantics or the discourse effects of the relevant utterances. The semantics of default interrogative sentences and their CDEs are compatible with the canonical case, but also with contexts in which Sp is assumed to be knowledgeable, and the competence of Ad/responder is at issue, as in quiz questions, as well as with cases in which both participants are assumed to be ignorant, as in conjectural or topic setting questions, or with cases in which both participants are assumed to be equally ignorant or equally knowledgeable, as in the case of RhQs. This flexibility, I claim, is a feature of the current account because it allows differences between various subtypes of questions to be resolved pragmatically rather than requiring special syntactic or semantic tools.

Note next that the fact that when asking a RhQ Sp's public goal is other than eliciting an answer follows from the fact that Sp assumes the question is closed relative to the input context, and therefore the question is canonically removed from the Table without further ado.

In the current approach, the crucial change triggered by asking a RhQ is the mandatory CI registered on DC_{Sp}. The RhQ is asked in order to trigger this implicature. The CI triggered by RhQs is special in that its content is supposed to be reachable by Ad on her own: Ad is assumed to have all the information necessary to conclude the CI, though she might need help in accessing this information.

4.6 Assertions, Questions, RhQs

We are now ready to turn to accounting for the similarities and differences between RhQs and assertions on the one hand, and RhQs and non-rhetorical questions on the other. In the process, we make more precise how the speech act labels *assertion* and *question* are to be understood under the current approach.

We start by separating the notions of semantic and contextual inquisitiveness. Semantic inquisitiveness is defined as in (57):

(57) **Semantic inquisitiveness**
A sentence S is semantically inquisitive iff its semantic content is a non-singleton issue.

Under the present approach, typical interrogatives are semantically inquisitive, whether they are used to ask RhQs or not, while declaratives (at least when pronounced with falling intonation) are semantically non-inquisitive.

The notion of contextual inquisitiveness, defined in (58), is based on the notion of an inquisitive context state from Farkas & Bruce (2010).

(58) **Contextual inquisitiveness**
The act of uttering a sentence expressing an issue I is contextually inquisitive relative to a context c iff uttering S in c results in an inquisitive context state c', i.e., in case I projects several resolutions in c'.

There is an obvious connection between semantic and contextual inquisitiveness. Thus, uttering a semantically non-inquisitive sentence cannot be a contextually inquisitive act since there is no context in which a singleton issue can project several resolutions. Note, however, that whether the utterance of a semantically inquisitive issue results in an inquisitive context state or not depends on whether the issue in question is open or closed relative to its input context. Uttering an open semantically inquisitive issue results in an inquisitive context state, since in that case the issue projects multiple resolutions. Uttering a semantically inquisitive sentence that is closed relative to its input context c_i, however, results in a non-inquisitive context because in that case either only one element of I is d-consistent with the cg_{c_i} or none of them are. In either case, such an issue cannot project multiple resolutions.

We can now define the speech acts of asserting and questioning as in (59):

(59) a. The term *assertion* names a speech act that places a singleton issue on the Table.
b. The term *question* names a speech act that places a non-singleton issue on the Table.

Assertions are always semantically and contextually non-inquisitive. Questions are always semantically inquisitive but they are contextually inquisitive if they are open relative to their input context, and contextually non-inquisitive if they are closed relative to that context. Ordinary questions, which raise open issues, are contextually inquisitive relative to their input context since the cg of that context is d-consistent with several resolutions. RhQs, because they raise issues that are closed relative to their input context, involve semantically inquisitive forms that are contextually non-inquisitive.

Under this approach, RhQs are like regular questions in that they involve semantically inquisitive forms. Because they raise issues that are closed in their input context, however, RhQs are like assertions in being contextually non-inquisitive speech acts. Because they are contextually non-inquisitive, both assertions and questions can go unanswered.

Finally, note that just like assertions, RhQs involve a non-trivial commitment on the part of Sp, but unlike in the case of assertions, this commitment is a mandatory CI. We thus correctly predict that an acceptable response on the part of Ad is to confirm the intended CI, as in (60):

(60) Amy: Should I invite Bill to the party?
Connie: *Are you crazy*?
Amy: Yeah, you are right. It would be a crazy thing to do.

The CI Connie intends to convey is that only a crazy person would invite Bill to the party, and since Amy is not crazy, she shouldn't invite him.

In conclusion, under this approach, asserting a sentence S is a contextually non-

inquisitive act because of the non-inquisitive semantics of S. Asking a RhQ is a contextually non-inquisitive act despite the inquisitive semantics of the sentence involved, because of the status of the issue the sentence expresses relative to the input context. In addition, RhQs involve a mandatory CI which results in a semantically non-trivial Sp commitment, similar to what is involved in assertions. This explains the tension between the form and the function of RhQs.

We can now turn to the issue of the AOA condition in (26) above, and the question of what assertions can felicitously replace a RhQ. Under the present approach, the intuition in Biezma & Rawlins (2017) is correct: if a RhQ is felicitous in c it can always be felicitously replaced by an assertion. This is so because RhQs always convey a CI. That implicature, or a sentence that is directly involved in calculating that part of the implicature that connects to the QUD, can always be asserted. It follows from this approach that an assumed answer to a RhQ that is directly involved in calculating the intended CI can always felicitously replace the RhQ. In the departmental politics example in (54) for instance, the assumed answer to the RhQ is *Bob is Amy's strongest supporter.* This answer plays a direct role in generating the implicature that Amy will vote for Bob, which in turn answers the QUD. Note that replacing the RhQ by the assertion of the assumed answer loses, however, the rhetorical effect accompanying the RhQ. As expected, the assertion does not involve the implicature that Amy could have arrived at the answer on her own. The at-issue part of the assertion now provides the link necessary to generate the implicature that answers the QUD.

The present account also predicts that RhQs that involve an assumed answer whose semantic content is not directly involved in generating that part of the implicature that connects to the QUD will not be felicitously assertable in contexts in which the RhQ is felicitous. This is the case with the *Is the pope Catholic* family of examples. These are RhQs that rely on speech act analogy for generating the CI, and therefore the semantic content of the assumed answer is irrelevant to the QUD. The speech act analogy route that is responsible for generating the implicature relies only on the obviousness of the answer, and not on its semantic content. We also predict, correctly, that the RhQ *Do I look stupid?* as an answer to *Did you leave the door open?* will be replaceable not with its assumed answer (*I don't look stupid*) but rather, with the more direct *I am not stupid.*[22]

In sum, we have argued here that RhQs, just like ordinary questions, place a non-singleton issue on the Table. This issue is assumed to be closed relative to the input context. The speech act avoids being gratuitous because it gives rise to a mandatory CI which connects it to the QUD, and which results in Sp conveying that Ad could have reached the relevant conclusion on her own. The assumed answer to

[22]One question that arises at this point is why speech act analogy works in the case of questions but not in that of assertions. Part of the answer is that these types of rhetorical questions are part of a community's linguistic habits. The other is that, in fact, there are parallel 'rhetorical assertions' though much less widespread than their question counterparts:

(i) Andy: I am the best goalie ever.
Barb: And I am the queen of Romania.

One can now ask why rhetorical questions are more common than rhetorical assertions. I suggest that this is so because questions bring Ad into the conversation more dramatically than assertions.

a RhQ, if there is one, can be felicitously asserted in the context in which the RhQ is felicitous iff its semantic content contributes directly to that part of the CI which connects the RhQ to the QUD.

RhQs are non-canonical in several related respects. First, they are non-canonical because they are contextually non-inquisitive as a consequence of the fact that they are presupposed to be closed in the input context. As a result, either both participants are assumed to know the answer to the question, or neither does. A second, related, property is that the message they convey is a mandatory CI which relates to the immediate QUD. In the present account, these properties are due to the status of RhQs relative to their input context rather than to any semantic or syntactic markers. The present approach predicts, correctly, that biased questions may function as RhQs under the assumption that biased questions signal Sp bias for a particular answer. Such questions are compatible with the properties of resolved RhQs. This approach also predicts that although resolved RhQs, just like Socratic and quiz-questions, discussed below, involve a knowledgeable speaker, Socratic and quiz-questions cannot function as RhQs.[23] Finally, since RhQs do not impose any particular restrictions on the responder, they are compatible with being self-addressed, having Ad as their responder, as well as not having a responder at all.

We turn now to some considerations relevant to other borderline cases between assertions and questions.

4.7 What is a question?

This subsection addresses, briefly, the issue of what properties a speech act has to have in order to be referred to as 'a question that has been asked'?[24] The term *question* is among the expressions English, like other natural languages, employs in order to refer to a particular class of speech acts. The null hypothesis should be that the speech acts that are thus characterizable form a natural class, i.e., they share a number of essential properties. Consequently, this hypothesis may help guide non-obvious analytical choices concerning borderline utterance types.

The general approach advocated here leads to the proposal in (61):

(61) **Definition of a questioning speech actact**
A speech act may be referred to as a *question* iff its CDEs result in adding a non-singleton issue I on the Table.[25]

Under current assumptions, (61) predicts, correctly, that canonical questions, as well as the speech acts usually discussed under the rubric of non-canonical questions, including RhQs, are referred to as questions that are asked. It also predicts, correctly, that utterances exemplified in (62), which Gunlogson (2001) calls 'declarative questions', will not be referred to as questions:

(62) *Context:Amy to co-worker who comes in with an unusual hairstyle*

[23] The term 'Socratic question' was introduced in Truckenbrodt (2004).

[24] A further issue that I leave open here is when we can say that a question has been asked *of someone*. For relevant discussion, see von Fintel & Iatridou (2024).

[25] This definition would need to be changed under a monopolar approach to polar questions, such as Biezma & Rawlins (2012).

You've had a haircut.

The declarative here is supposed to be produced with falling intonation. In the current approach, its semantic content is a singleton issue, and part of its CDEs is to place this issue on the Table. This characterization therefore does not qualify it as a question. As Gunlogson notes, the special circumstances of (62) conspire to confer authority over the truth of the unique proposition in I to Ad rather than to Sp. For Gunlogson, this property makes the utterance question-like in that Ad is invited to ratify Sp's guess.[26]

Note next that under the present approach alternative RhQs of the form *p or p?*, discussed in Biezma & Rawlins (2017) and illustrated in (63),

(63) Am I a nerd or am I a nerd? (ex. (2a) in Biezma & Rawlins (2017))

are correctly predicted to fall within the extension of the noun *question*. As Biezma and Rawlins point out, this type of alternative question, because it presents two identical alternatives, presupposes that this alternative is in the input cg. Its rhetorical point is to draw attention to it and point to its inevitability. Under the present account, such sentences place a non-singleton issue on the Table, albeit one containing two identical propositions. They also register Sp commitment to $\cup I$, which in this case amounts to commitment to p. Such questions, then, are semantically inquisitive and contextually non-inquisitive.

The case of rising declaratives (RDs), re-exemplified in (64),

(64) This is a persimmon?

is more complicated because RDs have received a variety of accounts in the literature. In the proposal in Farkas & Roelofsen (2017), the semantic content of these sentences is identical to their polar question counterparts. Their marked form, however, triggers a special CDE responsible for the range of credence levels towards the proposition expressed by the declarative that Sp can signal. Under this account, (61) predicts that the utterance of a RD will be referred to as a question that has been asked. The example in (65) shows that this prediction is correct:[27]

(65) "I think I have made a lot of sacrifices," he blustered. "I've worked very, very hard. I've created thousands and thousands of jobs, tens of thousands of jobs, built great structures. I've done – I've had tremendous success." Stephanopoulos appeared incredulous. "Those are sacrifices?" he asked. "Oh sure," said Trump. "I think they're sacrifices." (from an article on a Stephanopoulos interview with Trump, *Washington Post*, 2016)

In the account of RDs proposed in Rudin (2019), the semantic content of RDs is identical to that of their falling declarative counterpart. The effect of the intonational contour in this account is to prevent registering a Sp commitment to the

[26]Gunlogson does not claim, of course, that declarative questions should be referred to as 'questions' in English.

[27]The account of tag interrogatives proposed in Farkas & Roelofsen (2017) gives them the same semantics and therefore predicts that uttering such sentences would also count as a questioning speech act.

proposition expressed by the declarative.[28] A falling contour, on the other hand, triggers Sp commitment to a resolution of the issue placed on the Table. To explain the fact that utterances of RDs do count, nonetheless, as questions, Rudin proposes that a speech act qualifies as a question iff it places an issue on the Table without registering Sp commitment to a resolution of that issue. How tenable this definition of questioning is depends on how it accounts for RhQs such as (63) or hedged assertions such as (66):

(66) He is home, I suppose / guess / reckon.

Finally, note that the issue of what qualifies as a question becomes even more interesting when we note that interrogatives interpreted as having directive force, exemplified in (67), cannot be referred to as questions that have been asked.

(67) *Context: Professor to students*
Why don't you do exercises 1 - 5 at the end of this chapter?

The professor's speech act can be referred to as a request or polite command, but not as a question. Thus, (68) is not an accurate report of what the professor did in (67), nor is (69) an appropriate continuation.

(68) The professor asked the students why they don't do exercises 1 - 5 at the end of the chapter.

(69) The students did not have to answer this question.

If (61) is to be maintained, (69) cannot be given an account under which it has the semantic content and CDEs of a regular question, with the directive flavor coming purely from Gricean pragmatics. Exactly what analysis such directive interrogatives should be given remains an open question.

The above remarks assumed that the contribution of an utterance to the Table is determined by its semantic content. Giving up this assumption still allows us to maintain the distinction between utterances that place a singleton issue on the Table and those that do not on the one hand, and utterances that project several resolutions of the issue from those that do not.

This subsection proposed a characterization of the extension of the noun *question* in English, and to point to the issues raised when one considers the interaction between general features of an approach, particular accounts of the semantics and discourse effects of borderline cases between assertions and questions, and the interpretation one assigns to speech acts falling in the extension of nouns such as *question*.

5 An apparent counterexample

In this section we turn to RhQs exemplified in (70), called *discordant* RhQs in Ippolito (2024):

[28] This account entails giving up the tight connection between semantic content and Sp commitments assumed in Farkas & Roelofsen (2017).

(70) Amy: Carl is in trouble. Someone is bound to help him.
Bob: Who (the hell) would help Carl?

The assumed answer to Bob's RhQ is the negative one, given in (71):

(71) Nobody would help Carl.

Under the present account, Bob's question is resolvable, and therefore (71) must be presupposed, i.e., it should be in the cg of the conversation at the time Bob utters it.

The challenge such examples pose to the current account is that the presupposition of Bob's question directly contradicts his interlocutor's immediately previous assertion. How is it possible to presuppose p when your interlocutor has just asserted q, and p and q are (d)-inconsistent? Ippolito correctly points out that one cannot assume that the presupposition of Bob's question is accommodatable. Accommodation involves inviting one's interolocutor to add an unsurprising, uncontroversial proposition p to the current cg before updating it with the speech act performed by Sp, which presupposes p.[29] Here the presupposition flatly contradicts Ad's previous assertion and therefore it is not a suitable candidate for accommodation.

To meet this challenge, note that the message Bob intends to convey is that, upon consideration, Amy will see for herself that no one is going to help Carl, and therefore she will retract her previous statement, not because Bob says so, or because he knows better, but because she herself can reach this conclusion. This message is conveyed by signaling, with the RhQ, that (71) is, in fact, already in the cg of the conversation, and therefore that Amy's previous statement cannot be felicitously added to it. The RhQ contradicts the previous statement based on its assumed inconsistency with the cg.

The difference between (70) and run-of-the mill contradictions exemplified in (72),

(72) Amy: Carl is in trouble. Someone is bound to help him.
Bob: Nobody is going to help Carl.

is that in (72), Bob contradicts Amy's previous statement without suggesting that she could have reached this conclusion on her own, as happens in (70). Note also that Bob could have made his point somewhat less forcefully, without recourse to his RhQ, by responding as in (73):

(73) Bob: This cannot be true. We both know he has no friends or relatives. We both know there is no one who will help him.

In short, Bob's RhQ is meant to make his interlocutor realize that her statement is inconsistent with the cg. Other examples of contradictions based on facts Sp assumes to already be in the cg but which do not involve RhQs are given below:

(74) Carl: We should eat out tonight.

[29] Chris Kennedy (p.c.) notes that the presupposition of RhQs appears not to be accommodatable in general. I suggest that this is so because of the crucial role the presupposition plays in the interpretation of the RhQ.

Barbara: But I told you this afternoon that I prepared moussaka for today.
Carl: Oh yes! Let's stay in then.

(75) Della: Amy and Ben will give a huge housewarming party soon.
Fred: That's impossible. You told me just now that they've just moved here and they hardly know anybody.
Della: I guess you are right. Perhaps a very small housewarming party then.

In conclusion, a participant may well make, in good faith but in error, an assertion that is inconsistent with the cg, and in such cases it is natural for her interlocutor to draw her attention to this fact in order to have her retract her assertion. One way this can be done is by using a RhQ whose presupposition contradicts the immediately previous assertion. In such cases, what is involved is an attempt at *synchronizing* the participants' view of the cg because with such discourse moves Sp means to correct Ad's erroneous assumption about it.[30]

The above discussion leads us to conclude that not all the propositions in the cg are equally salient and obvious to all participants and, therefore, not all of them are always attended to. The effect of a questioning move, whether rhetorical or not, may be precisely to make the interlocutor ponder the question and thereby direct her attention to a proposition present in the cg but which may have been overlooked.

We end this section with a brief discussion of Socratic questions and the way they differ from quiz questions and RhQs. Socratic question, exemplified by Jorge's second question in (76),

(76) Jorge: What is the subject of the sentence *The children were given candy by the shopkeeper*?
Student: It's *the shopkeeper*.
Jorge: Well, thinking again. Which NP does the verb agree with?
Student: Ah, I see. The subject is *the children*.

are similar to 'quiz'-questions in that the questioner is assumed to know the answer to the question. They differ in that in the case of Socratic questions, the public aim of the questioner is to help lead the interlocutor to the right answer once the interlocutor ponders the question herself. Thus, in quiz questions, Sp has no assumption as to whether Ad is competent or not – her aim is to find out whether she is. In Socratic questions on the other hand, Sp assumes that Ad may access the true answer and that the question will help her in doing so.

In the case of RhQs, unlike in Socratic or quiz questions, Sp assumes that Ad is competent regarding the status of the question in the input question, and thus that she will access the true answer, if there is one. Therefore, in RhQs the Sp's public aim cannot be that of helping Ad access the true answer. Sp's aim in RhQs is for Ad to use the status of the question in the c_i (and thus, the true answer, if there is one) in order to connect it to the QUD and access the CI Sp conveys.

[30]To model conversations like those in (74) and (75), as well as discordant RhQs more accurately, one would have to introduce assumed context structures for each interlocutor, rather than a single common one, as done here. Disagreements about the cg may give rise to long arguments, and even end inconclusively.

These observations explain why an *I don't know* response to a RhQ indicates that the question has failed as a RhQ. Such a response to a Socratic question will most likely simply trigger another Socratic question.

Note that, as exemplified in (76), Socratic questions, just like the RhQ in (70), can be used to signal that the questioner does not accept the interlocutor's previous statement based on information available in the cg. The difference pertains to the Ad's assumed epistemic stance relative to this information. In the case of Socratic questions, Sp assumes that although Ad may access it she will not necessarily do so. In the case of RhQs, on the other hand, Sp assumes that Ad has access to the relevant information.

Finally, note that Socratic questions can be biased, as in (77):

(77) Teacher: We need an even number bigger than 5.
Student: I don't know what to pick.
Teacher: 6 is even, isn't it?
Student: Right. Let's pick 6.

Here, Sp's indication of her overt bias points the student to the right answer directly.

To sum up, Socratic questions and RhQs differ with respect to Ad's assumed epistemic stance with respect to the status of the question. As a result, the public aim in raising the issue differs as well. The public aim of the questioner in the case of Socratic questions is to help Ad to access the right answer. The public aim of the questioner in the case of RhQs is to generate a CI based on the assumed status of the question in the c_i, and the ways in which it can be connected to the QUD. In both cases, Sp is assumed to be competent, and in both cases the question itself points Ad to relevant information accessible in the cg. Note that the fact that the questioner is assumed to know the answer is constant across Socratic, quiz, and RhQs. Quiz questions do not necessarily assume that Ad is able to provide the true answer. In fact, typically, Sp's goal in asking such a question is to find out whether Ad can or can not answer it. Socratic and RhQs assume that the answer is in the cg, and therefore, in principle, available to Ad. Socratic questions are meant to help Ad get to the answer. When asking a RhQ, Sp assumes that Ad can access the answer and moreover, she can recover the CI that connects the question to the assumed QUD. This implicature is the main contribution Sp intends to make by asking her question. Finally, at least some self-addressed questions presuppose that Sp knows the answer but they also usually presuppose that Ad does not.

6 Conclusion

The gist of the proposal above concerning RhQs is that they raise issues that Sp assumes are closed in their input context, and give rise to a special type of mandatory CI that connects them to the current QUD. The special nature of the implicature is that Sp overtly assumes that its content was recoverable from the input cg. These two conditions are necessary, and, together, also sufficient to render a question rhetorical. These conditions are connected: the closed nature of the question ensures a non-canonical interpretation. Moreover, the CI is generated based on the details of the status of the question relative to c_i. The assertion-like flavor of RhQs

is due to their being contextually non-inquisitive, just like assertions, and to their involving a speaker commitment, as part of the mandatory CI they trigger. They are, however, questions because of their inquisitive semantic content.

With respect to theoretical lessons one can draw from the above discussion, note that the proposed account derives the properties of questions in general, and of RhQs in particular, from two theoretical assumptions: (i) the semantic content difference between declaratives and interrogatives; (ii) the common basic CDEs of declaratives and interrogatives. These assumptions interact with pragmatic considerations concerning the status of the issue raised relative to the input context and assumed Sp goals that guide her speech act, and which are recoverable to her interlocutor. This account does not rely on a syntactically elaborate left-edge periphery, nor does it involve special speech act operators that distinguish between questions and assertions, let alone operators that distinguish between subtypes of questions we encounter. It therefore shows that it is possible to characterize questions in general, and RhQs in particular, without hard-wiring requirements with respect to the epistemic stance of the participants or the request of an answer. As mentioned above, parsimoniousness considerations lead us to the claim that if such an account is possible, it is also desirable.

Focusing on RhQs, the aim of this paper was to characterize them as broadly as possible, without, however, claiming to have touched on all the varieties of RhQs in English or beyond. An issue that arises next is how to draw a linguistically illuminating typology of RhQs. One dimension of such a typology suggested by this discussion concerns subtypes of RhQs depending on properties of their answer. Within this dimension, relevant considerations involve the status of the answer in c_i, its role in generating the CI, and, in the case of constituent RhQ, the special role of the negative answer. A further distinction regarding the status of the answer in the input context, mentioned in Gärtner & Gyuris (2023), concerns how available the answer of resolved RhQs is for Ad. In some cases, the answer is assumed to be obvious, and thus immediately available, while in others, Ad is assumed to be able to get to the answer only after pondering the question. This latter property is shared between RhQs and Socratic questions.

A typology of RhQs is relevant to another crucial open issue, namely which RhQs are marked in particular languages, and how this marking is achieved. As mentioned in footnote 1, we don't know yet whether there are languages that consistently mark all RhQs in the same way. If particular languages mark particular RhQs by different means, the empirical issue that needs to be addressed is what, precisely, the function of those specialized markers is.

Finally, the discussion of discordant RhQs points to the need for clarifying the differentiated prominence / availability status of information in the cg independently of questions, as well as to the need for understanding the discourse moves meant to synchronize the participants' assumptions about the cg.

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