

Taxonomy of questions in Taiwan Southern Min [臺灣閩南語中問句的分類]

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Abstract

Contra the conventional four-way distinction of syntactically-formed questions in Taiwan Southern Min (TSM): (i) yes-no, (ii) A-not-A, (iii) disjunctive, and (iv) *wh*-questions (e.g., Lau 2010a), we justify a more revealing dichotomy of confirmation-seeking (CS) polar questions and information-seeking (IS) constituent questions, based on a suite of semantic and syntactic tests proposed in extensive literature for Mandarin and adapted further for TSM, where A-not-A belongs to the disjunctive type, which is in turn a subcategory of IS constituent questions. Controversies over the proper status of some sentence-final question particles and *kám* questions are also deliberated. Dismissing some alleged polar question particles as polar or A-not-A tags, we recognize *nih* and *honnh* as interrogative polar particles. We also show that *kám* has two underlying forms. One is a portmanteau word of the modal *kánn* and the negator *m̄* and thus forms a *whether-or-not* disjunctive question (Huang 1988a, 1991). However, when *kám* is short for *kámkong* ‘don’t tell me’, similar to the Mandarin *nandao*, it appears in a polar question.

Keywords: TSM, IS constituent questions, CS polar questions, question particles, *kám* questions

關鍵詞： 臺灣閩南語、徵求訊息問句、請求確認問句、疑問助詞、「敢」問句

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