ON SO-CALLED 'RHETORICAL' QUESTIONS *

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Under the heading 'rhetorical question', very different kinds of sentences appear in grammars and manuals. The present paper starts from a logico-semantical definition based on the pragmatical determinedness of rhetorical questions (Belnap 1963) and limits the linguistic description to definite types exemplified in English, German, French, and Portuguese: the rhetorical use of question-answer-pairs, the auto-responsive rhetorical question, the implicative types of rhetorical question. Furthermore, particular attention is given to elliptical forms. Rhetorical questions, however, can be regarded not only as pseudo-assertions (because of their semantic nature): from a pragmatical and textual point of view, they function as answers (to genuine questions) as well, if so interpreted by the addressee. In a last section, it is discussed whether the complex utterance 'rhetorical question' may be regarded as an indirect speech act or not.

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Although rhetoric — the art of persuasive and/or impressive speaking — is losing ground to disciplines such as semiotics, psychology, sociology, as well as linguistics, the 'rhetorical' question still conserves its name, denoting a somewhat hybrid type of utterance. 'Rhetorical' questions are conceived often in contrast to genuine questions: the speech act of asking a question, which can be realized by means of syntactical forms such as interrogative, imperative or even declarative sentences, is used normally to elicit unknown information, whereas 'rhetorical' questions do not do so and do not lend themselves to easy classification into any particular already established type of speech act. One reason for this state of affairs may be the fact that in many cases such an utterance can be categorized either as a question (iff the utterance is intended as a question and has an answer from another dialogue-part-

ner), or as a statement (if there is no answer to it); this last aspect leads to the classical form of 'rhetorical' question.

Consequently, the quotation marks in 'rhetorical' remind us of the somewhat suspect concept which stands behind the unsystematical and ambiguous use of that term. In attempting to get away from this dilemma, our aim will be to look for some adequate semantic and pragmatic criterion with a view to a possible definition, and to analyze empirically a precisely delimited group of sentences or utterance types. The knowledge gained by discovering some strategic function of 'rhetorical' questions, when a speaker makes use of them in natural languages such as English, German, French, or Portuguese may be the final aim of any description of rhetoricity.

1.

In seeking a logico-semantic definition of rhetorical questions, Belnap (1963) following on from Harrah (1961) proposes this definition: "q is rhetorical [relative to H], iff q is a complete answer to itself [relative to H]" (1963: 151), whereby H is a set of formulae in the semantico-pragmatically based metalanguage. H is the 'basis' of the question q in that H is the set of formulae which are relevant for q in the interpretation which the speaker assigns to q at the moment of uttering q. Thus H may contain (semantically formalized) contextual and/or pragmatic information which is present in the speaker's mind at the outset of the utterance. This means that a question can only be termed rhetorical *relative to something*, in particular the assumptions of the speaker at the moment of uttering.

Belnap further explains the above quoted definition in a later paper (1969) in which he generalizes it to take in the earlier developed concept of *direct answer*; he attempts at the same time a demarcation of *trivial* and *foolish* question:

> Let us define a question q as *rhetorical* relative to a set of sentences S, if S logically implies some direct answer to q, and *trivial* relative to S if the implication is obvious . . . and *foolish* relative to a set of sentences S, if S logically implies (or perhaps: obviously logically implies) the falsehood of the presupposition of the question. That is, a question is foolish relative to S if S is such as to guarantee that the question can have no true answer (Belnap 1969: 36–37).

Thus in the logico-semantical approach of Belnap's we find a general formal category 'rhetorical question' which we will call H-rhetorical question. The main characteristic of such 'questions' is to be seen in the fact that, with reference to any given set of conditions or circumstances H, a direct answer is implied in these sentences. Since Belnap restricts himself to the mere theoretical aspect of semantic treatment, an empirically based linguistic description must discuss his definition on the basis of examples from natural language. Principally, we agree with Belnap's approach that H-rhetorical questions determine H inasmuch as H contains certain formulae which appear in the surface structure of sentences as indicators for rhetor-

icity expressing certain presuppositions of the speaker, but there are of course sentences or sequences of sentences which do not contain such indicators (cf. section 2) and which can be termed 'rhetorical' for other reasons.

From the pragmatic point of view, H has to be considered as a very complex category containing e.g. 'intention of the speaker', 'common knowledge shared by the speaker and hearer', 'the hearer's accepting the utterance as rhetorical', 'acceptability of presuppositions' and others. Presuppositions in rhetorical questions are of primordial importance. With reference to the foolishness of questions (as in Belnap's definition), we might recall a well-known example: if there is at present no king of France, then the question cannot be raised as to whether the present king of France is bald; the rhetorical question "Who could be king of France at present?" may be uttered at the present time, but asking a genuine question such as "Is the present king of France bald?" would be regarded as foolish. Questions must not contain false presuppositions; for the logician "a question is valid if it is precise and unambiguous and furthermore has no false presuppositions; a question is invalid if it is vague or ambiguous or has one or more false presuppositions" (Leonard 1957: 42). It is obvious that such rigid criteria cannot be applied to rhetorical questions since their presuppositions seem to be in some way different from those in genuine questions; rhetorical questions are not genuine questions.

Without intending for the moment to go any deeper into the problem of presupposition (or propositional content), of foolishness or triviality of questions, or even into the somewhat problematic equation of 'rhetorical' and 'irrelevant' in the work of Belnap, we would only partly agree with him that his suggested analysis of rhetorical question is "not altogether happy" (as he admits himself); we would not agree with Belnap that a question such as "What is the sum of 2 and 2?" is rhetorical relative to the ordinary arithmetical assumptions because it has only one correct answer; and he concludes: "Although one cannot in general tell effectively whether or not a given question is rhetorical, there is one sort of question which is obviously rhetorical from its form alone: a Hobson's choice, i.e. a question with but one answer . . . " (Belnap 1963: 152). In opposition to this opinion we would suggest that rhetorical questions do not have an answer (because they are not questions), and, on the other hand, questions (wh-questions) always have more than one possible direct answer. In this context it must finally be mentioned that rhetorical questions, just as exam questions, are viewed as insincere questions because the questioner in any case knows the answer (cf. also on this topic the criticism in Moritz 1940: 125ff.). Belnap also shares this opinion (1963: 51) in that he designates an exam question as rhetorical relative to the knowledge of the examiner. As we pointed out, pragmatically the expression 'relative to H' implies a lot of problems, and therefore an utterance such as "Do we want war?", rhetorical relative to the conviction that nobody does want war, is difficult to accept, unfortunately.

As we pointed out, there is a general agreement about the fact that questions are to be considered as requests for information, whereas rhetorical questions are intended to provide information (cf. Cohen 1929: 352; Moritz 1940: 125–126; Bar-

rento 1969: 149; Laméraud 1970: 86; Dressler 1972: 87; Gülich 1970: 229; Bell 1975: 209). Among these, Gülich lays particular emphasis on the appellative function of rhetorical questions, enabling the speaker to hold the attention of the listener, being constantly aware of his presence. Moreover it has been stressed that the speaker does not expect an answer from the other dialogue partner. In certain cases even, the addressee is prevented from answering, because of particular situational, social or institutional conventions. If, for example, the prosecuting counsel, at the end of his summing up, enounces (1):

(1)   I ask you, gentlemen of the jury, can such a man be innocent?!

this apparently performative speech act would appear to be a question expecting a direct answer. However, since (1) is uttered within a text (context) and since pragmatic constraints of an institutional nature forbid the jury so addressed to come out with a spontaneous answer, *and* since the speaker does not expect an answer, (1) has to be regarded as a statement (or quasi-statement) as Hamblin rightly proposes (1958: 159). It can be added that (1) will be uttered in an exclamative way, which leads us to the sometimes mentioned affinity between exclamation and rhetorical question (cf. Gaatone 1971: 140 and 211ff.). According to Charles Bally, the rhetorical question belongs to the 'langage dit exclamatif', in the category of exclamations; his claim that the rhetorical question "n'a rien de rhétorique" is challenged by Gossen (1963: 112) in that he analyzes it as "affektische Pseudofrage". We will not deny that rhetorical questions are uttered in an exclamatory way — for this reason among others they have been called "rhetorical" — as we do not deny that they contain something of a question as well as of a statement. It is because of its iridescent opacity that the rhetorical question has provoked so many controversial categorizations. [1] In our approach we will base the linguistic analysis of some types of rhetorical questions on semantic and pragmatic grounds. There are indeed linguistic indicators for rhetoricity in utterances, which differ from one language to another; in case these indicators do not occur in the surface structure of sentences they have to be reconstructed from other semantic-pragmatic information. Generally it has to be taken for granted that "whether a particular interrogative sentence is being used rhetorically or not may be made clear not by any linguistic factor but only the nonlinguistic background of the utterance" (Llewelyn 1964: 78). On the grounds of the following linguistic description we will have to modify this absolute statement.

[1] This theoretical hesitation between a syntactic and semantic aspect of rhetorical questions manifests itself in the French terminology: *interrogation oratoire* versus *question oratoire* (cf. Gaatone 1971: 211f.; Schlyter 1957: 110f.).

2.

In rhetoric, the classical type of rhetorical question consists of a sequence *question and direct answer* [2] uttered by the same speaker within a monologue text. The orator puts a question (in the form of an interrogative sentence) not in order to receive the answer but to supply it himself. In using question-answer sequences rhetorically, the speaker imitates this fundamental form of dialogue, simulating in this way a research or acquisition of requested information and dramatizing his way of speaking. Looking more closely at the form of the interrogative sentence and its direct answer, rhetoricity can also be seen in the speaker's focussing interest on a particular constituent (in case of wh-questions) or on the truth/falseness of a propositional content (in case of yes-no questions) of the utterance-sequence. The latter sequence seems to be less frequently used. In the first case, the interrogative pronouns in their function as proforms of a determined category are particularly well suited for the purpose of rhetorical emphasizing, as in the classical example taken from Goethe (2), or in the following French (3) and Portuguese (4) examples:

(2)   Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind? Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind.
(3)   Pourquoi se moque-t-il de ces cornichons de policiers? Parce qu'il craignait autre chose de beaucoup plus grave.
(4)   Que diferença há entre mim e um fidalgo qualquer? Será que tenho uma cara diferente? Será que sou mais estúpido? mais baixo? mais alto? Não, meus amigos. A única coisa que me distingue dum fidalgo é o meu nascimento.

Question-answer sequences such as (2) to (4) can be handled syntactically and semantically by the same basic descriptive methods as those in a dialogue grammar (text grammar) of question-answer. It seems not very adequate to speak in such cases of rhetorical questions but rather of the *rhetorical use of question-answer sequences*. On the strength of textual pragmatic coherence (that the same speaker asks a question and answers it all at once) such utterances end up by being one complex declarative utterance. Presumably, as question and answer are universal phenomena of natural language, so might be the rhetorical use of such sequences. [3] Normally, the aim of a genuine question like (2) is to elicit the name of one or more than one person to which the propositional and presuppositional frame 'somebody is riding late through night and wind' might be assigned and which will then be "true" in the possible world of the poetic text; the direct answer given by the

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[2] In the above-mentioned thesis, 'answer' (response) represents a complex pragmatic category, 'direct answer' a much narrower dialogue-grammatical category defined according to its syntactic and semantico-pragmatical relations to a preceding question.

[3] Lausberg (1960: 379–382) refers to classical examples such as "Quousque tandem abutere, Catillina, patientia nostra?", which are rheotrical relative to their occurrence within a monologue text.

poet himself represents one answer out of the set of possible answers to that question. In (3), the aim of the genuine question will be consequently to elicit one or more reasons for the propositionally and presuppositionally designed content; the direct answer to such questions is often elliptical, and continues the interrogative sentence syntactically. In (4) finally, a wh-question (which presents the topic: 'what social difference between the speaker and a noble person') is followed by a set of yes-no questions (their function being perhaps fictitious conjectures, all to be answered in the negative); after these have been answered, the rhematic answer leads back to the initial wh-question. This last more complex question-answer sequence (4) illustrates some possible variety and combination of question-answer sequences in rhetorical use. The intention of the speaker in examples (2) to (4) is to give prominence to some particular argument in his text. The interrogative pro-forms do not have a genuine information-seeking function anymore; they are used to emphasize the particular nature of an argument indicated by the scope of the interrogative. This is supported by the fact that in rhetorical question-answer sequences, wh-questions are nearly always embedded in matrix-sentences introduced by 'Do you know'. The following examples (5) to (7) are to be considered:

(5)   Do you know how many people live in that flat? A group of six adults, ten children, two dogs and one tortoise.
(6)   Savez-vous combien j'ai vu de patients aujourd'hui? Quatre-vingt deux.
(7)   Sabes em que consistia o meu orgulho? Em ser honesto, leal, e sincero para todos.

The communicative function of such Do-you-know-introductions consists just in capturing and furthermore enhancing the interest and attention of the dialogue-partner; the form of direct address in such utterances is of importance as well. The expression 'Do-you-know' functions as an element of rhetoricity in connection with the presupposition on the part of the speaker that the addressee does not or cannot know/imagine the rhematic information subsequently given by the speaker himself. Generally, in order to focus the interest of the listener on a particular fact or event, the speaker may use the introductory expression "Do you know what?" (German: "Weisst du was?"), thus obliging himself to give some rhematic information; in so far as *what* (or *something*) is an undetermined proform (pronoun) it has to be completed by a proposition (sentence).

It is obvious that the definition of rhetorical question given by Belnap will be applicable to this type of rhetorically used question-answer sequences only if H is interpreted to mean that the speaker uttering the question does indeed know the direct answer to his question. Pragmatically, the speaker gives the direct answer himself, so *for him* the question is rhetorical relative to his knowledge. We still prefer to call this first type the rhetorical use of question-answer sequences; it is distinct from the following types of rhetorical questions.

3.

Whereas up to now we considered the use of a question which is rhetorical relative to a direct answer given by the same speaker, we now turn to those rhetorical questions which are intended as assertions of a special kind. Thus our particular interest will center around the way in which this assertion is made. Because of the somewhat undefinable nature of rhetorical questions with regard to their classification as questions and/or as statements, the other dialogue-partner can "answer the question" and/or "contradict the statement" — in as much as opportunity is given him. Thus pragmatically it can be up to the addressee whether he accepts a rhetorical question as an assertion (as it is intended by the speaker) or, contrary to the speaker's expectation, takes up the interrogative element in the rhetorical question as an opportunity for intervention. Rhetorical questions generally contain certain formal indications by which they are to be interpreted as "rhetorical": intonation pattern, special particles (adverbials), [4] non-deontic modal verbs and verbal mood (conjunctive or conditional) are to be regarded as the main linguistic indicators for whether a sentence is to be regarded as rhetorical (assertive) or not. In case all these formal indicators are deleted in the surface structure of sentences (utterances) which are intended as rhetorical, the rhetorical speech act can fail insofar as it is interpreted as a genuine question. In the following we will overlook such possible pragmatical reasons for unhappiness or unfelicity of rhetorical speech acts, and concentrate just on the semantic aspect of some types of rhetorical questions.

3.1.

We class as auto-responsive rhetorical questions (ARQ) all sentence types in which the focussed constituent is presented as a simple or complex wh-proform ("interrogative pronoun"); this proform — in logical terms it may be called a variable (or a quantified variable) — is assigned by a descriptive term either in the surface structure of the sentence or by contextually determined information (i.e. knowledge shared by the speaker and the addressee). In the latter case, the descriptive term has to be regarded as deleted in the surface structure of the sentence: the speaker omits an explicit naming. Let us consider the first case in which the speaker gives the name of the descriptive term. The noun phrase in ARQ-sentences can be represented semantically by a structure such as (A)

(A) proform_q^x + EEA + descriptive term^x

in which the proform and the descriptive term are linked together by an 'expression of exclusive absoluteness' (EEA) such as in English *other than, (else) if not,* in German *anders als, sonst wenn nicht,* in French *d'autre que, sinon,* or in Portuguese

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[4] As to the interrelation of particles and intonation and the translation equivalence, cf. Schubiger 1965.

outro, senão. Leaving aside for the moment all syntactic or morphological transformations and constraints between the proform and the EEA in each specific language, there is much evidence for the proform and the descriptive term belonging to the same semantic scope or category (*when* → temporal constituent, *which (other) person* → name constituent, etc.). Sentences such as *Who else might do that if not Friday?!* (*Friday* meaning 'day of the week') or *Why should we believe that if not John*?! are ungrammatical in this respect.

The structure (A) is to be applied to sentences such as (8) to (11)

(8)   *Who else* burns a cheque if not *an idiot*?!
(9)   *Welcher Filmstar* kann die Rolle denn sonst schon spielen, wenn nicht *Sophia Loren*?!
(10) *Quand* viendrait-elle sinon *après Pâques*?!
(11) *Onde* é que João se encontra senão em *Lisboa?!*

With respect to these sentences it is obvious that the proforms are by no means genuine interrogative pronouns, but at the most quasi-interrogative since they are assigned by a determinate constituent (this part of the sentence being the "answer part" of the sentence). The speaker makes a statement emphasizing a particular constituent in his utterance. As we pointed out, there still remains the hypothetical possibility of intervention after such utterances on the part of the addressee.

Besides the special function of the structure (A) in the sentences (8) to (11), there are furthermore other linguistic elements expressing rhetoricity: *burns* in (8) can be paraphrased by *would/could burn*, *kann* in (9) by *könnte*. The conjunctive mood of the verb in German and the conditional in French (cf. (10)) and Portuguese (cf. (27)) are indicators of rhetoricity in these languages.

The predominant role of the non-deontic modal verbs or other expressions of "modality" (such as the mood of the verb), which is evident in ARQs is closely connected with the function of rhetorical particles. In German, where particles are more frequent than in other languages, and where they fulfil a variety of pragmatic functions, the particle *schon* (reinforced *denn schon* or *sonst schon*) has the function of a rhetorical question operator; it operates on every normal wh-question, changing it into a rhetorical question. This rhetorical particle is clearly distinguished from the temporal *schon* ('already'): it frequently occupies a syntactically different position. In rhetorical questions, *schon* determines a particular presupposition which must be part of H (in Belnap's terminology). Leaving aside intonation, sentences such as "Wer ist schon gekommen?" are to be regarded as ambiguous, *schon* having two possible readings (cf. Doherty 1973). The anaphoric referential meaning of German *sonst* ('else') is not different from its meaning in normal questions such as "Sonst noch etwas?" ('anything else?' in the sense of 'Do you want anything else besides what you have already?'); in combination with *schon* (*sonst schon*) it refers to a *if not*-introduced constituent and reinforces the rhetorical particle. The translation of (8), (10) and (11) into German from languages that do not possess such a

strong rhetorical particle can serve as a heuristic (discovery) procedure; [5] *schon* has to occur in all these cases. By means of this modal element, the speaker expresses a propositional attitude towards the propositional content of his utterance.

We may note in passing, that ARQs often occur in an elliptical form, the *if not*-constituent being deleted; in this case the preceding utterances or the context (cotext) has to provide sufficient aid to interpretation for both dialogue-partners. Context or common knowledge of the speaker and of the addressee are to be taken as the basis for an adequate interpretation of reduced sentences of the ARQ type such as (12) to (15):

(12)　Who else should become chairman, after all?!
(13)　Wann sonst schon hätte er ihn denn schliesslich gesehen?!
(14)　Dans quel autre lieu pourrait-il finalement être?!
(15)　Onde raio é que afinal este malandro se vai encontrar?!

Special notice should be taken in (12) to (15) of the textually bound particles *after all, schliesslich, finalement, afinal* which refer back to some context or common knowledge between the dialogue-partners to which the speaker makes presuppositional allusion. Adverbials of this kind have a parenthetical status (syntactically parenthetic), they express a certain "summing up"; stylistically, they may be regarded as expressing some protest by the speaker. The sentences (12) to (15) contain furthermore a variety of verbal expression of rhetoricity. The exclamatory nature of these ARQs is underlined by the possible insertion of exclamatory particles such as *the hell, for God's sake* in English, *zum Teufel, in Gottes Namen* in German, *diable, diantre, grands dieux* in French, or *diabo, diacho, raio, meu Deus* in Portuguese.

3.2.

One reason for a speaker to use a rhetorical question instead of a declarative sentence in making a statement can be the emphasis on a particular argument; another, a guarded reserve towards the truth of this quasi-statement. Still another reason might be found in that the speaker considers the propositional content he is going to utter to be trivial or in any case well-known. In order to differentiate the following type of rhetorical question from the ARQ-type, we will christen it "implicative rhetorical question" (IRQ). Undoubtedly, this type is closely related to the former: its semantic implication (meaning), however, has to be reconstructed with respect to general human experience. [6]

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[5] This is a convincing discovery procedure in Beekman 1972.
[6] An interesting definition has been proposed by Paul Valéry in 1917 (*Cahiers,* facsimile edition in 29 volumes, C.N.R.S., Paris 1957–61, vol. 6, p. 691): "On pourrait dire qu'une proposition (ou groupements de mots) est *rhétorique* quand elle suppose pour s'annuler qu'on introduise des termes non-exprimés. On ne peut lui donner un sens sans *trouver* autre chose qui n'est pas exprimée".

As examples (16) and (17) prove

(16) Which reasonable man would vote conservative?!
(17) Welche alte Jungfer hatte keine unglückliche Liebschaft?!

the speaker of these sentences regards the propositional content of (16) and (17) as
generally (or reasonably) acceptable for everybody. Everyday truisms and common-
places show high preference for this type of verbal expression. For this reason it is
not astonishing that IRQs bear a resemblance to certain proverbial figures of
speech: in proverbs such as *'He who* laughs last, laughs loudest' or in German *'Wer*
zuletzt lacht, *(der)* lacht am besten' the textphoric and deictic functions of the pro-
forms (pronouns) become obvious.

In IRQs as well as in ARQs, negation fulfills a special role. In ARQs the focussed
constituent (*who else if not* x → *'only* x') receives its absolute excluding value by a
if-not negating expression. As to the IRQ, it can be regarded as a rule that in non-
negated IRQs such as (16), the focussed constituent (simple or complex proform)
turns out to be intended in a universal negated sense (*which reasonable man*
[+rhet] → 'no reasonable man'). On the contrary, in negated IRQs such as (17), the
focussed constituent turns out to be intended in a universal positive sense (*welche
alte Jungfer* + sentence negation [+rhet] → 'jede alte Jungfer'); the reference seems
to be universally valid. (Note also that in an IRQ such as (17), the rhetorical ques-
tion particles *denn schon* can be deleted in the surface structure of the sentence.)
The special role of negation in rhetorical questions has often been pointed out; [7]
Brinkmann (1971: 786), for instance, regards as an important feature "dass Zustim-
mung oder Ablehnung, die (als stille Antwort) vom Hörer (Leser) erwartet werden,
in der Frage entgegengesetzt markiert sind: Verneinte Frage erwartet Zustimmung,
nicht verneinte Frage Ablehnung". Contrary to this, we would rather say that the
implied expectation of an answer (insofar as one can speak of such a thing in con-
nection with rhetorical questions) is to be regarded semantically as an implicative
presupposition (of the speaker), the aim of such a quasi-assertion always being
agreement on the part of the addressee, whether or not the rhetorical question is
negated.

Our description is confirmed by examples from other languages such as French
and Portuguese (cf. examples (18) and (19)):

(18) Qui est-ce qui se connaît bien?!
(19) Quem é que não tem medo de morrer?!

The presuppositional proposition expressed in IRQs such as (16) to (19) can be

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[7] This has been noticed already by Thiébault (1802): "Une chose assez singulière, c'est que
l'interrogation employée comme figure oratoire doit être prise dans un sens expositif; que si elle
est négative, le sens en est affirmatif, et que si elle est sans négation, le sens en est négatif,
comme dans "N'êtes-vous pas convenu de ces faits?" pour "Vous êtes convenu de ces faits."

reformulated in the form of assertions such as (16') to (19'):

(16') 'No reasonable man will vote conservative'
(17') 'Every old spinster has had her unhappy love-affair'
(18') 'Nobody knows himself well'
(19') 'Everybody is afraid of dying'

The speaker could use these implicative presuppositional assertions in sentence form for an utterance, but he does not. The reason for this may be seen in that he is *not absolutely* convinced of the truth of such universal sentences such as (16') to (19'); he prefers to express his opinion rhetorically in the form of a belief or quasi-conviction which *appears to be absolute* (but is not). [8] The morpheme *ever* in combination with the ("interrogative") proform serves often in English to express the above-mentioned relative absoluteness. The propositional attitude of the speaker in an IRQ such as "*When* have you *ever* heard of such nonsense?!" or "*Wherever* did you find anything comparable?!" or "*Why* should I bother to tell the truth?!" (with the implicative presuppositions 'I guess that never . . .', 'nowhere . . .', 'there is no reason why . . .') is suggested by the implied assertion that the speaker cannot imagine that it might be the case that . . . . [9] So IRQs can be regarded as relatively open structures: the speaker expresses a relative uncertainty (by means of linguistic elements, including intonation) about what he is indirectly maintaining. Both IQRs and AQRs can be characterized in this way.

3.3.

After having considered the IQR-type which semantically represents a universal sentence functioning as a quasi-statement, we finally turn to a similar type of rhetorical question in which, too, a constituent is given emphatic prominence. By means of a comparative structure a particular constituent gets a universally valid touch, and therefore this type of rhetorical question appears to be a combination of ARQ and IRQ. We refer to sentences such as (20) to (23):

(20) Could there be a safer place than prison?!
(21) What could be more wonderful than the universe?!

[8] In rhetorical questions, the equivalence of proforms such as *who/anybody, wer/jemand, quem/alguém, qui/quelqu'un* brings out the absoluteness of nonexistentiality: "*Is there anybody who* doubts that he is guilty?!" "*Who* would doubt his guilt?!" (NOBODY) or "*Y a-t-il quelqu'un qui (=qui)* pourrait imaginer une telle chose?!" (PERSONNE) or "*Alguém (=Quem)* téra dúvidas quanto ao baixo nível moral deste homem?!" (NINGUEM).

[9] Pope (1976) is to be regarded in many respects as supplementary to our analysis; she treats in detail English examples. We may add that *ever* (in German *jemals*, French *jamais*, Portuguese *já*) occurs often in this type of rhetorical question (as well as in the type treated in the next section), e.g. "Ist dir *je(mals)* etwas Verrückteres passiert?!", "Sait-on *jamais*?!", "A-t-on *jamais* eu idée d'un tel complot?!", "*Já* viu cabelos mais pretos?!" (NEVER) (cf. Gaatone 1971: 140).

(22) Gibt es denn schon einen günstigeren Moment als jetzt?!
(23) Was ist schon schrecklicher als absolute Diktatur?!

The rhetorical yes-no questions (20) and (22) imply (20′) 'There is no place such that it is safer than prison' and (22′) 'There is no moment such that it is more convenient than now', and thereby make clear the interdependent semantic relation between proforms such as 'place', 'moment' (time) and their corresponding descriptive terms 'prison', 'now'. The rhetorical wh-questions (21) and (23) imply (21′) 'There is nothing such that it is more wonderful than the universe' and (23′) 'There is nothing such that it is more frightening than absolute dictatorship'. They make clear the semantic relation between ("interrogative") proforms such as *what* and their negated corresponding proforms such as *nothing*. It can be mentioned, by the way, that (20) and (23) could be expressed by means of an ARQ such as "What else would be safe if not prison?!", or "Welcher Moment ist schon günstig wenn nicht jetzt?!", but in these reformulations the expressed degree of absoluteness is diminished.

It seems to be the rule that rhetorical questions of this type do not admit sentence negation. They are distinguished from the former types in that a particular property of the focussed constituent is compared to an absolute value. The propositional attitude of the speaker using such rhetorical question resides in the fact that he cannot imagine anything else within a determined context that might be a safer place than prison (20), a more wonderful thing than the universe (21), a more convenient moment than now (22), a more frightening thing than absolute dictatorship (23). It goes without saying that in the German examples (22) and (23), the rhetorical particle can be deleted in the surface structure; on the other hand, *schon* can be reinforced by a particle such as *überhaupt,* a fact that would confirm the semantic and presuppositional reconstruction of this type of rhetorical question.

Rhetorical questions constructed by means of an absolute comparison can also be documented by examples from French ((24) and (25)), or Portuguese ((26) to (28)):

(24) Connaissez-vous un bruit plus agréable que des rires d'enfants?!
(25) Quoi de plus légitime qu'un frère cadet prenne la place laissée libre par son aîné?!
(26) O senhor sabe de alguma coisa mais importante do que a liberdade da opinião?!
(27) Pois haverá produtos farmacêuticos mais considerados do que os das casas Bayer e Hoechst?!
(28) Quem a conhece melhor do que eu?!

Semantically, the implied presuppositions of the rhetorical yes-no questions (24), (26), and (27) can be formulated in the sense of a negated sentence analogous to (20/20′) and (22/22′); sentence (25) 'quoi de plus légitime que p?!' ('qu'est qu'il y a de plus légitime que p?') implying 'there is nothing more legitimate than p', and sentence (28) implying 'there is nobody who knows her better than I' focus a par-

ticular property of p (25) or of a constituent (28). In particular, (28) with its pre-supposition 'it is only/exclusively me who knows her best' leads directly back to the ARQ-type and the structure (A).

3.4.

With respect to the types of rhetorical question which we have studied in this paper, a final remark should be made about those mostly elliptical expressions which are particulary, though not exclusively typical of the languages analyzed here. These elliptical expressions are mainly used by a speaker to signal that he does not know "what is the point?!" or "what good is that?!" with the implied presup-position that there is no point at all. Elliptical expressions with this special kind of rhetoricity are in French e.g. "A quoi bon?!", "A quoi bon travailler, à quoi bon vivre même?!" In Portuguese, there can be found such expressions as *que interessa*?! *que importa*?! by which a speaker signals a propositional attitude of indifference such as in (29) and (30)

(29) Mas que importam os nomes, afinal?
(30) Se algum cão ladrar, que interessa?!

The rhetorical character of such utterances is moreover supported by particles such as *mas* ('but') and *afinal* ('after all') in (29).

Elliptical expressions which consist just of a proform and an infinitive are to be found in French. [10] As examples, consider "Comment le savoir?!" ('How should I/one know?!'), "Pourquoi s'inquiéter?!" ('Why worry?!', 'Why should I/one worry?!'), "Que faire?!" ('What could I/one do?!'), "A qui s'adresser?!" ('To whom could I/one address my-/oneself?!'), "Par où aller?!" ('Where should I/one go?!'), etc. As we have pointed out, such rhetorical questions in French must be maxi-mized by means of the conditional of the verb and/or the non-deontic modal verb *devoir*; the tense and the grammatical person of the verb are determined by the con-text: "Comment le saurais-je?!" or "Comment j'aurais dû le savoir?!", "Pourquoi devrais-je m'inquiéter?!" or "Pourqoui nous aurions dû nous inquiéter?!" etc. In all these cases, the speaker expresses a certain uncertainty, an unwillingness to do something, an indifference (or even ignorance), which may be regarded as proposi-tional attitudes on the part of the speaker.

4.

All this leads us to the conclusion that "rhetorical" questions can be used as answers to genuine questions since they are pseudo-statements. Because of their

[10] In Portuguese and German, elliptical expressions of the type "Mentir eu?!", "Ich und lügen?!" ('I should be a liar?!') are to be found. Such utterances are contextually bound.

somewhat hybrid nature it appears pragmatically undecidable to what question a particular "rhetorical question" might function as an answer. In any case, a "rhetorical question" can by no means fulfill the role of a direct answer (in Belnap's terminology). They are indeed an indirect way of speaking.

As to the answer function of rhetorical questions, we concentrate first on the pragmatically founded type by which a speaker B expresses his ignorance, as in (31) to (34):

(31) A: When does this lecture finish?
     B: How should I know?!
(32) A: Wer ist der Verfasser dieses Pamphlets?
     B: Woher (Wieso) soll ich das denn wissen?!
(33) A: Pourquoi avez-vous peur de Virginia Woolf?
     B: Et comment voulez vous que je le sache, bon Dieu?!
(34) A: Sabe quem matou o tirano?
     B: E porque eu hei-de saber?!

But the speaker B does not only confess a lack of knowledge by means of such "rhetorical questions"; he even protests against the metalinguistic assumption that he has been inappropriately chosen as being able to give a (direct) answer to the question. It belongs to the set of pragmatical conditions of questioning that A puts his question to such a dialogue partner B whom he considers able to answer it; in case this pragmatical assumption fails, the questioner runs the risk of not getting an (adequate, direct) answer.

Finally it could be noticed from an example such as (33) that not only verbs such as *devoir* in French or *haver de* in Portuguese serve as linguistic elements expressing rhetoricity, but also French *vouloir* and Portuguese *querer* in structures such as (B):

B Pourquoi ⎫   ⎧ veux-tu   ⎫
    Comment ⎭   ⎩ voulez-vous ⎭ que + S (p)

    Porqué ⎫   ⎧ queres tu   ⎫
    Como   ⎭   ⎩ quer o Senhor ⎭ que + S (p)

In this structure the verb of the embedded sentence S(p) has to be put obligatorily in the subjunctive. Special attention can be drawn to the fact that by means of such a construction the speaker addresses his dialogue-partner more directly, indicating the degree of social relationship (*tu/vous, tu/o Senhor*) between the latter and himself.

Generally, if the addressee uses a rhetorical form of utterance for answering a genuine question (which underlines once again the exclamatory protest), he does this to express a propositional attitude of irritation or even of anger about the fact

of being asked a question which he for his part finds completely inappropriate. Therefore he considers it trivial to answer just by *yes* (in case of a preceding yes-no question); he adds a rhetorical utterance to express his wonder or protest. The following examples from English ((35)) and Portuguese ((36), (37)) are to be considered:

(35) A: Do you speak of the lady?
      B: Who else should I be talking of?!
(36) A: Mas você está a falar da senhora?
      B: Pois claro! De quem haverá de ser?!
(37) A: Posso acreditar em ti?
      B: E porque não hás-de acreditar?!

Whereas in (35) and (36) the answer confirms in a rhetorical way the focussed constituent (aim) of the yes-no question, in (37) on the other hand, the addressee of the question expresses a propositional attitude about any possible reason which might be put forward against not trusting him. The speaker answers the question in an indirect persuasive way, insinuating that there is no reason for not trusting him. Formally, answering a genuine question by means of a rhetorical question is to be regarded as a counter-attack against that question; the interrogative form is "abused" and related with an assertive (or quasi-assertive) meaning in such rhetorical utterances.

5.

Starting from Belnap's logico-semantic definition of rhetorical question which embraces both pragma-contextual circumstances and semantic implications (implied direct answer), we have founded our description on certain main types of rhetorical questions.

Looking at the contributions which are collected in Beekman (1972) and which treat rhetorical questions in languages rather different from those considered in this paper, the richness and variety of rhetoricity becomes evident: rhetorical questions function for instance to highlight certitude as well as incertitude (they serve to communicate doubt, perplexity, uncertainty, contingency, or deliberation); or they may contain an evaluation. In any case, rhetorical questions express a propositional attitude of the speaker (e.g. reproach, indignation, protest, wonder, perplexity or dismay, or emphasis). When a speaker makes use of rhetoricity in his utterances, he always expresses that *he personally* is engaged or concerned. This becomes particularly obvious in rhetorical questions such as "Who do you think I am?!", "Wem sagen Sie das?!", "Bin ich *etwa* schuld daran, dass du es vergessen hast?!". "Est-ce ma faute?!", "Est-il surprenant que je m'efforce d'écarter de lui tout souci?!", "Tenho eu *porventura* culpa de que te escolhi, de que sejas minha mãe?! Não fui eu

que te escolhi, *pois não?!*" [11] or "Quantas vezes te pedi que diante dos outros não me trate por director?!".

   With respect to recent research in speech-act theory, the question arises whether rhetorical questions are to be regarded as *indirect speech acts*. However, the primordial question would be whether a rhetorical question can be treated adequately as a speech act at all. In this paper we have called rhetorical questions a speech act in the general sense of an utterance type, without referring definitely to speech act theory. Following on from the strong criticism by Meyer-Hermann (1976), it is indeed necessary to define in precise terms what is meant by a direct speech act before tackling the indirect speech act. Searle starts his paper on indirect speech acts with the observation:

The simplest cases of meaning are those in which the speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what he says. In such cases the speaker intends to produce a certain illocutionary effect on the hearer, and he intends to produce this effect by getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce it, and he intends to get the hearer to recognize this intention in virtue of the hearer's knowledge of rules that govern the utterance of the sentence. (1975: 59)

This may be valid in a very general way for a lot of determined speech acts. However, rhetorical questions are such that they are intended conventionally as statements (insofar as the presupposed implicative assertion is considered) but their rhetoricity profits from the use of the interrogative form on which the rhetorical question operator is operating. So rhetorical questions *can be marked* as such by determinate "illocutionary indicators" for rhetoricity, but they do not need to be. In any case no explicit performative can be assigned to rhetorical question. Should we conclude from this that the rhetorical question is to be classified neither as a direct nor as an indirect speech act? Regardless of our answer, the general hypothesis of Searle (1975: 60) may possibly still apply to rhetorical questions:

In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by the way of relying on their mutually shared background of information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general power of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer.

Consequently, our opinion is that the concept of indirect speech act has to be defined more rigorously than may be possible at the moment; the division between direct and indirect speech act based on mere linguistic indicators does not lend itself to an absolutely satisfactory solution. On the other hand we can follow Davison (1975) who confesses that a perfect structure for indirect speech acts can-

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[11] The role of tags in rhetorical questions has been completely omitted here (cf. Pope 1976): without any doubt, the negation particle plays a particular role in all non-declarative speech acts. Besides the tag, particles such as *etwa, vielleicht* in German, as well as constructions with *tu crois/vous croyez* que + S in French can be indicators of rhetoricity.

not be given because of their complexity (indirect speech acts are undoubtedly more complex than the traditionally assumed canonic types of direct speech act). One remark of Davison's is of particular interest with reference to the rhetorical question:

In SOME way, indirect speech acts are the speech acts suggested by their surface structure forms in addition to being some other speech act. The question that now plagues linguists is whether indirect speech acts are two illocutionary acts, simultaneously, or whether they are primarily one illocutionary act, and secondarily or relatedly some other speech act. (1975: 157)

As to our analysis of certain particular types of rhetorical question, we can say that the surface form can be regarded as an interrogative which semantically and pragmatically is determined by the actual illocutionary force of an assertion. Pragmatically, the other dialogue-partner addressed by a rhetorical question (of those types treated in section 3, especially the ARQ and the ARQ-IRQ combined types) can indeed contradict the statement in the form of a response.

Our analysis thus provides much evidence that the indicators for rhetoricity expressing the particular propositional attitude of the speaker or contextual (shared background) information (H) are conventional signals for the hearer to understand the utterance as a rhetorically intended one. We therefore agree with Belnap (1963) and Llewelyn (1964) that ultimately pragmatic conditions and circumstances decide whether an utterance in the interrogative mood is to be regarded as rhetorical or not.

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