

Comparative Study of Chinese and Japanese Confusion Questions—Centered on “Yara” and “Bu Zhi Dao”

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Abstract

The main research content of this article is the expression of “temptation, interrogative sentence” in Chinese and Japanese. Previous study about confusion questions is mainly about “darōka” “kana-kashira” or the comparison of them with Chinese sentences ended with “ne”. But the author found that besides “ne” “darōka” “kana-kashira”, both “yara” in Japanese and “bu zhi dao” in Chinese can be used as expressions in confusion questions which do not have the function of information inquiry. If these two usages are not included in the research scope, then the study of Japanese and Chinese interrogative sentences will be incomplete and one-sided. This paper will first clarify the usage and meaning of “bu zhi dao” and “yara”, and then makes a comparative study of them to prove that the “only declarative, not interrogative” characteristics of the usage of “yara” are more similar to “bu zhi dao”.

Keywords

Chinese, Japanese, Confusion Questions, Yara, Bu Zhi Dao

1. Introduction

In language, there are both declarative sentences that provide information to the other side and interrogative sentences that ask for information to the other side. In addition, scholars have long pointed out that there is also a form of question, but the meaning of the statement expressed question-confusion without information inquiry. In order to distinguish the two, this paper calls the interrogative sentences to have the function of both question confusion and information inquiry to the other side as “inquiry questions” and the interrogative sentences expressed question confusion without information inquiry “confusion questions”.

The confusion questions do not have the function of information inquiry, but to express the speaker's "not clear", "not sure", "confused" and "uncertain" psychology. Sentence (1) is an example of inquiry question. Sentence (2) is an example of confusion question. The greatest research value of this article lies in: first, it can facilitate the language exchange between China and Japan, so that the two sides have a clearer understanding of the inner meaning of the text; second, promote cultural exchanges between China and Japan, and promote cultural cooperation between the two countries.

1) (Ask a person with a watch)

Ima nanji desuka.

2) (In a place where people couldn't know the time)

Ima nanji darōka/kana/kashira.

As shown in the above examples, the specific construction form of confused questions in Japanese mainly includes "darōka" "kana-kashira". The concrete expression form of "interrogative sentence" in Chinese mainly includes "ne".

3) A: Ni dai zhe shou biao ma?

B: Mei you.

A: Xian zai ji dian le ne?

Although there are many advanced studies on "confusion questions" in Chinese and Japanese, most of them limited their research objects to "darōka" "kana" "kashira" and "ne". In addition, the author found that the Japanese "yara" and Chinese "bu zhi dao" can also express "confusion questions".

4) a. Kono chōshi dato dōnarukoto yara.

b. Anohito imagoro dokode nani o shiteiru yara.

5) Bu zhi dao ta xian zai guo de hao bu hao.

In this paper, the usage and meaning of "yara", which have not been included in the research object in the former articles, are discussed and analyzed first, and then the author compares them with the Chinese "ne" "bu zhi dao" and makes clear their corresponding relationship.

2. The Usage of "Confusion Questions"

The former researches on Japanese confusion questions are mainly conducted by Nitta Yoshio (1991), Adachi Tarō (2002), and Miyazaki Kazuhito (2005). Nitta Yoshio (1991: p. 44) pointed out that the confusion questions do not have the intention of asking questions to the other party, but only the speaker states his doubts. However, it should be noted that, as shown in the example sentences (6) and (7), confusion questions in different situations sometimes tend to be declarative and sometimes confusing.

6) (The speaker is alone in a place where he doesn't know the time)

Ima, nanji kana ↓ ./nanji kashira./nanji darōka.

7) (A and B are in a place where they don't know the time)

A: (Talking to B) Ima, nanji kana ↓ ./nanji kashira./nanji darōka.

B: Saa.

Dialogue in example sentence (6) happened in the situation of the absence of a listener, the sentence meaning tends to be declarative function, which is called “declarative confusion” in this paper. In example sentence (7), due to the existence of listeners, the meaning of the sentence tends to do interrogative function, this paper calls it “interrogative confusion”. In terms of the two aspects of “confusion question”, Nitta Yoshio (1991), Adachi Tarō (2002), and Miyazaki Kazuhito (2005) gave the following explanations respectively (**Chart 1**).

It is important to note that the declarative or interrogative of confusion questions will be strengthened in some contexts. If the declarative is strengthened, the “declarative confusion” will be closer to the “declarative sentences” and assume the function of providing information to a certain extent. If the interrogative is strengthened, “interrogative confusion” will be closer to “inquiry question” so as to undertake the function of inquiring about information to a certain extent.

8) (The superior speaks to the subordinate)

Kimi, rei no ken wa dōnatta kana ↑ ?

In example sentence (8), instead of asking questions indirectly to the other party, it is better to weaken the meaning of inquire information by taking the form of “confusion question”, which becomes “Just tell me if you know” as a euphemistic question. “kana, kashira” and “desyōka” can be used in this way, “darōka” can’t.

In addition, the “confusion question” is used to express the speaker’s uncertainty, such as example sentence (9).

9) A: Ima nanji?

B: (Looking at the sky) Shichiji kana.

This kind of “confusion question” expressing uncertain judgment is because the declarative function is strengthened. Because of the existence of listener, the confusion question in example (9) actually assumes the function of providing information. “kana” “kashira” “desyōka” has this function while “darōka” does not have.

To sum up, we can see that the confusion questions are first divided into “declarative confusion” and “interrogative confusion”. Because of the different contexts, whether there is a talking object and other “declarative” can be strengthened, “declarative confusion” can provide information to the other party, which is called “uncertain judgment” in this paper. If the “interrogative” is

Chart 1. The declarative and interrogative interpretation of “confusion questions” in the previous research.

	Research Object	Declarative	Interrogative
Nitta Yoshio	kana	inadvertently asking	minor questioning
Adachi Tarō	kana-kashira	an unforced inquiry	a question that takes care of the listener’s mind
Miyazaki Kazuhito	darōka	ask the listener for an explanation	euphemistic questions

strengthened, the “interrogative confusion” becomes able to inquire about information from the other party, which is called “indirect question” in this paper.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the left side is the most declarative and the right side is the most interrogative. In this paper, we will use the classification of **Figure 1** as the framework of the research of “yara” and to clarify which of the four usages mentioned above.

3. “Yara” Confusion Questions

3.1. The Research Category of “Yara” in This Paper

“Yara” is changed from “niyaaramu” (determine auxiliary term “nari” connection form “ni” + interrogative auxiliary word ya + action term ari + deductive auxiliary term mu) (『Daijirin』) (Akira, 2006). There are a total of three uses: focus particle, parallel marker and ending particle.

1) Focus particle: generally followed by the body, some adverbs and auxiliary words.

a) [Followed by words expressing doubt or uncertainty], meaning not sure.

Example: Nan no koto yara, sappari wakaranai.

b) [Usually in the form of “toyara”], to express in an indirect or vague way.

Example: Nkamura toyara iu hito.

c) [Usually in the form of “... yara... yara”], used with a negative word to indicate that either is uncertain.

Example: Dore to dore ga honmono yara nisemono yara wakaranai.

2) Parallel marker: followed by the conjoined form of the body words or living terms, indicating the listing of things.

Example: Banana yara, orenji yara.

3) Ending particle: used at the end of a sentence. Indicating asking or speculating in a tone of uncertainty.

Example: Nani o omotteru yara.

So we can be sure that the object of this study is the usage of the final auxiliary word “yara”.

According to the author’s superficial knowledge, the usage of “yara” of confusion questions has not been found in the former study. However, Shen Maoyi (1986) expounds the whole usage of “yara” and makes the following explanation of “yara” as final auxiliary word. With the “yara”, the composition of the sentence generally contains interrogative words, indicating the meaning of confusion. However, this confusion does not have the function of inquiring the listener.

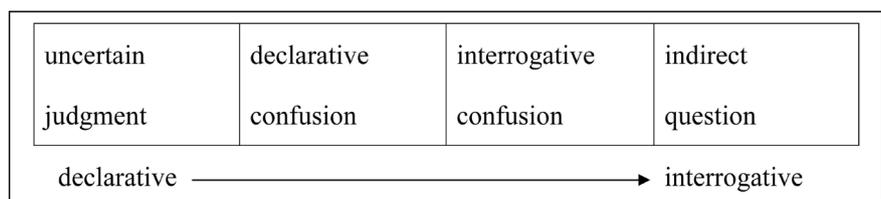


Figure 1. Four ways to use confusion questions.

Instead, it casts a “bu zhi dao” question on itself, about which the speaker, while feeling uneasy, has his own thoughts. And it’s the speaker talking to himself. (Translated by the author)

Below, the research and analysis to “yara” will be carried on based on Shen’s explanation.

3.2. Characteristics of Confusion Questions with “Yara”

First, “yara” does not have all the information inquiry functions of “darōka, desyōka” “kana, kashira”, this means compared with “darōka, desyōka” “kana, kashira”, “yara” is more closer to declarative sentences characteristics.

- 10) a. #(Anata)Chūgokujin yara?
 b. (Anata) Chūgokujin {?? darōka?/desyōka?}
 c. (Anata) Chūgokujin {kana?/kashira?}
- 11) (A and B are in a place where they don’t know the time)
 A: (Talking to B)
 a. Ima, nanji kana ↓ ?/nanji kashira?/nanji darōka?
 b. #Ima nanji yara?
 B: Saa.

Second, “darōka” “kana, kashira” can be used to represent the meaning of “you can tell me if you know” as inquiry questions, compared with this, “yara” means that the speaker is in a kind of “no way to know” helpless situation or “it is none of my business”. The example sentence (12a) means “worried about what the matter will look like in the future”, while (12b) means that although the speaker has considered the future development of the matter, it doesn’t have much to do with himself.

- 12) a. Dōnaru darōka./dōnaru kana./dōnaru kashira.
 b. Dōnaru yara.

In addition, because “yara” has a strong meaning of “no way to know”, it is hard to use it with predicates that means inquire about information. In contrast, the meaning of “darōka” is focused on the speaker’s conjecture, so it can be used with predicates that represent the meaning of the inquiry for information.

13) So no hen no seigōsei ga dōnano {darōka/*yara} toiu koto o otazuneshiteiru wake desu ga, mōippen tōben itadakemasuka.

(『Minutes of Congressional Meetings』)

Third, “darōka” “kana, kashira” can be used in true and false interrogative sentences, alternative questions, interrogative questions. However, “yara” can only exist in interrogative questions. The author searched two corpus of “modern Japanese written language corpus (2008 Edition)” and “Chinese and Japanese translation corpus”, a total of 85 cases of confusion questions with “yara”, all of which are interrogative word questions. The distribution of interrogative words used with “yara” is as follows in **Figure 2**.

Fourth, according to the characteristics that “yara” can only exist in interrogative word questions, we can say that “yara” does not have the use of “kana, kashira” to mean the speaker’s “uncertain judgement”.

Nani	16	nanji	2	nannen	1
itsu	8	itsukara	1	itsumade	2
doko	9	izuko	1	dokomade	3
dō	13	dōnaru	10		
donna	7	dōiu	1		
dore	1	doredake	2	dorehodo	1
dono	1	donogurai	1		
dochira	2	dare	4	naze	1

Figure 2. Interrogative words used with “yara”.

14) a. A: Tarō wa kekkon shita?

B: Mō kekkon shita kana.

b. A: Tarō wa kekkon shita?

B: #Mō kekkon shita yara.

The use of “uncertain judgement” in confusion questions generally exists in sentences that do not contain interrogative words and express the authenticity of a particular proposition in an uncertain tone. Therefore, “yara”, which can only exist in interrogative word questions, naturally does not have the use of “uncertain judgement”.

Thus it can be seen that “yara” has only declarative functions, and it can only express the “speaker’s doubt” which is the most basic usage of confusion questions. The derivative uses such as “indirect questions” and “uncertain judgement” are not used on “yara”.

To sum up, we can summarize the usage and characteristics of “yara” as follows:

- i) It is declarative
- ii) It shows that the speaker “has no way to know”
- iii) It can only exist in interrogative word questions
- iv) It cannot mean “uncertain judgement”

4. The Corresponding Relationship between “Yara” and Chinese Confusion Questions

Just like Japanese, there is “confusion questions” that express question confusion without information inquiry. In general, the Chinese “confusion question” is expressed by the final auxiliary word “ne” or the adverbial verb “bu zhi dao”.

15) a. Ta qu na li le ne.//Kare wa doko ni itta darōka.

b. Bu zhi dao ta qu na li le.//Kare wa doko ni itta darōka.

Most of the advance studies take “ne” as the only way to express confusion questions in Chinese. In addition, Kimura Hideki, Moriyama Takurō (1992), Inoue Masaru, Huang Lihua (1998) also did a comparative study on “ne” and Japanese. However, the author failed to find the advance research on the expression of “bu zhi dao” as “confusion questions”.

4.1. The Characteristics of “Ne” Confusion Questions

“Ne” is used in a wide variety of ways. The Modern Chinese Dictionary (Dictionary Editing Room, Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2005) divides the usage of “ne” into the following categories.

a) Used at the end of an interrogative sentence to express the meaning of pushing for an answer.

e.g.: Na ge ren shi shui ne?//Ano hito wa dare desuka?

b) Used at the end of a state sentence to express a definite tone. Eg: Ta ren ke hao ne.//Kare wa totemo yasashii desu yo.

c) Used at the end of a state sentence to indicate the persistence of an action or state.

e.g.: Wo zheng zai chi fan ne.//Watashi wa ima gohan o tabeteimasu.

d) Used in the middle of a sentence to indicate a pause.

e.g.: Qi shi ne, ta bu lai geng hao.//Jitu wa ne, kare ga konainowa yori tsugō ga ii.

The first research object of this paper should be the usage of “ne”. Kimura Hideki and Moriyama Takurō (1992) pointed out that the “ne” confusion question can be used as a self-question to express the speaker’s doubts when there is no listener, so it can be said that the explanation of the Modern Chinese Dictionary is incomplete.

16) (While looking in the mirror)

Wo zui jin shi bu shi pang le ne.//Watashi wa saikin futottakashira.

That is to say, “ne” is used to express one’s confusion and has the interrogative function just the same as “darōka” “kana” “kashira” in Japanese. And same as Japanese “darōka” “kana, kashira”, the “ne” confusion questions can be used as indirect interrogative sentences.

(Kimura Hideki and Moriyama Takurō (1992))

17) A: Zhe li fa sheng shen me shi le ne?//Koko ni nani ga attan darōk.

B: Bu zhi dao a.//Saa, wakaranaine.

From the above example, we can see that “ne” has both declarative and interrogative functions. It has a lot in common with Japanese “darōka” “kana” and “kashira”. However, as described in Chapter 2, the usage of confusion questions includes the information-providing function of “uncertain judgment”, while Chinese “ne” does not have this function at all. Generally, “ba” will be used to express this kind of information providing with uncertain judgment.

18) A: Ji dian le?//Ima nanji?

B: (While looking at his watch) En, Qi dian ban le ba/*ne.//Eeto, shichijihantte toko kana.

In conclusion, we can sum up the characteristics of “ne” confusion questions into the following three points:

i) Both declarative and interrogative.

ii) Can indicate indirect questions.

iii) Does not have this function of “uncertain judgment”.

If we try to compare “ne” with the “yara” discussed in previous section, we will find that the two are common in terms of not being able to express “uncertain judgement”. The (i) and (ii) features of “ne” are not owned by “yara”, and “ne” does not have the meaning of “no way to know” as expressed by “yara” from the semantic point of view.

4.2. The Characteristics of “Bu Zhi Dao” Confusion Questions

There is another verb called “bu zhi dao” in Chinese to express “do not understand” “not clear”, it can be used to express confusion questions through adverbialization.

19) Bu zhi dao ta xian zai guo de hao bu hao.//Kanozyo ima donna kurashi o shiteiru yara.

On the face of it, example sentence (19) has the same form as declarative sentence “watashi wa kanozyo ima donna kurashi o shiteiru ka wakaranai”, but in terms of meaning, it is more closer to “kanozyo ima donna kurashi o shiteiru yara”, which expresses the “confusion” psychology that the speaker wants to know but doesn’t know. Mori Hiroko (2005) pointed out that verbs in modern Chinese have the tendency of weakening the nature of verbs and tends to be adverbial. “Bu zhi dao” is one of them. In this regard, it has something in common with the Japanese “kashira” evolved from “~kashiranu”.

20) a. Wo bu zhi dao ta jin tian lai hai shi bu lai.//Kare ga kyō kuru nokaashita kuru noka wakaranai.

b. Ta bu zhi dao shang na qu le.//Kare wa doko e itta no kashira?

Compared with “darōka” and “kana, kashira” in terms of meaning, “bu zhi dao” is closer to “yara”. There are six reasons as follows:

First, the words “ne” and “darōka” “kana, kashira” all have the function of “asking questions indirectly” when they express confusing questions. Neither “bu zhi dao” nor “yara” has this function. This is because compared to “ne”, “bu zhi dao” confusion question is more declarative.

21) (In the face of the service man)

a. Zhe ge duo shao qian ne?//Kore wa ikura desyōka.

b. #Bu zhi dao zhe ge duo shao qian.//Kore wa ikura yara.

22) (Ask a friend)

a. Ni kao le duo shao fen ne?//Tensū wa nanten kashira.

b. #Bu zhi dao ni kao le duo shao fen.//Tensū wa nanten yara.

Second, the expression of “darōka” means that it is impossible to draw a conclusion because of insufficient evidence and other reasons. So, like the following example, it represents a thinking process of the speaker, after considering all kinds of situations, finally cast a question about the meaning of “I don’t know. I can’t tell.” through the “darōka”.

23) Kako no yūsyōchiimu no rei wo miru to, ichizi riigu kara kessyō made kōtyō o izi sitsudsukete tsuppatta chiimu wa hotondo nai.ichizi riigu de kuru-shimi, kessyō toōnamento ni haitte michigaeru yō na chiimu wa umarekawatte yūsyō toiu rei ga ōi.buraziru mo, koko e kite yūsyōkohō toshite fuzyō sitekita,

daga, kono chirisen no buraziru wa, honmono nano darōka.

(『Battle of the 98 World Cup』)

In contrast, “bu zhi dao” is rarely used in such sentences that represent the speaker’s thinking process. In most of the cases, it is used in articles before reaching a conclusion. The confusion question of “bu zhi dao” expresses a problem that the speaker does not understand, but the speaker does not think of the problem as an obstacle. In other words, the confusion expressed in the “bu zhi dao” confusion question is not important to the speaker, or the speaker gives up his judgement on his own initiative.

Third, “ne” confusion question means “if I can know, I want to know”, compared to this, the “bu zhi dao” confusion question means “want to know and impossible to know” which indicates a situation of “no way to know”. This is basically the same as “bu zhi dao” and “yara”. It is also the case in practical use. It is more appropriate to use “bu zhi dao” in the situation of you cannot know no matter how much you want to know.

24) (Talking to himself at the grave of his dead wife)

a. Bu zhi dao ni zai na bian guo de hao bu hao.//Mukōde donnakurashi o shiteiru yara.

b. #Ni zai na bian guo de hao bu hao ne.//Mukōde donnakurashi o shiteiru darōka.

In addition, the exclamation word “Ai” in Chinese is easier to occur with the “bu zhi dao” confusion question, but it is not easy to exist in the “ne” confusion question. This is due to the fact that the confusion question of “bu zhi dao” is more declarative than that of “ne”.

25) a. Ai, bu zhi dao ta xian zai guo de hao bu hao.//Aa, kanozyō wa ima donna kurashi o shiteiru yara.

b. ??Ai, ta xian zai guo de hao bu hao ne?//Kanozyō wa ima donna kurashi o shiteiru darōka

This “no way to know” tone is prominent in positive and negative interrogative questions, but it is hardly felt in interrogative word questions.

26) a. Xian zai ji dian le ne?//Ima nanji darōka.

b. Bu zhi dao xian zai ji dian le?//Ima nanji darōka.

In example sentence (26a), you can strongly feel the meaning of information inquiry as an answer, “en...” (“saa”) is obviously inappropriate to be used as reply here. But we can hardly feel the meaning of the inquiry about information as an answer in the example sentence (26b), so, as the answer to the sentence, “en...” (“saa”) is totally appropriate. We can see from the example sentences that: when “bu zhi dao” is used in interrogative word questions, the speaker has quite little expectation for any information feedback. It can only undertake the weak inquiry interrogative function. In terms of expressing the meaning of “no way to know”, (26b) is not strong as (25a), but to some extent, it is still can express some.

Fourth, “bu zhi dao” confusion question, especially in interrogative word question, when used with the adverb “dao di” (“ittai”), it means that a strong

feeling of “no way to know” which indicates” completely unaware and totally don’t know (normally the sentence will be ended with the exclamation mark “!”). Compared to this, if “ne” confusion question is used with “dao di” (“ittai”), although the speaker’s confusion is strengthened, it is absolutely impossible to reach the level of “no way to know” (the sentence will not be ended with the exclamation mark “!”). Instead, the “ne” confusion question used with “dao di” (“ittai”) expresses a stronger sense of information inquiry (use the question mark “?” at the end of the sentence will be more natural).

27) a. Wo Bu zhi dao ta ci ke dao di zai xiang shen me!//Kare wa ima, ittai nani o kangaeteiru no yara.

b. Ta ci shi ci ke dao di zai xiang shen me ne?//Kare wa ima, ittai nani o kangaeteiru no darōka.

28) a. Bu zhi dao ta dao di zai gan shen me!//Kare wa ittai nani yatteru no yara.

b. Ta dao di zai gan shen me ne?//Kare wa ittai nani yatteruno darōka.

Fifth, because “bu zhi dao” and “yara” are the same meaning as “no way to know”, it is difficult to co-arise with predicates that express the meaning of inquiry information. “Ne” is different.

29) a. Wo wen ta shui lai ne?//Kare ni dare ga kuru ka o tazuneta.

b.* Wo wen ta bu zhi dao shui lai?

Sixth, just like “ne”, “bu zhi dao” does not have the usage of “uncertain judgement”.

30) A: Ji dian le?//Ima nanji?

B: (Looking at his watch) * En, bu zhi dao qi dian ban le.//Eeto, shichijihann tte took kana.

To sum up, we can conclude the characteristics of “bu zhi dao” confusion questions into the following three points:

i) Basically only declarative (interrogative word questions can indicate weak “inquiry interrogative confusion”)

ii) Means “no way to know”

iii) It has the usage of “uncertain judgement”

Although the “bu zhi dao” confusion questions can express a weak “inquiry interrogative confusion” in certain circumstances, it is used a little more widely than the usage of “yara”. When compared with Chinese “ne” and Japanese “darōka” “kana-kashira”, the interrogative nature is still much weaker and the usage is more closer to that of “yara”, and both “bu zhi dao” and “yara” can indicate the meaning of “no way to know” in terms of semantic.

5. Conclusion

The author summarizes the characteristics and usage of Chinese and Japanese confusion questions as follows in **Figure 3**.

We can see from **Figure 3** that, with the exception of the usage of “uncertain judgement”, the Chinese “ne” and the Japanese “darōka·desyōka” “kana-kashira” are closer to each other in terms of usage. In contrast, “bu zhi dao” is almost

		darōka	desyōka	kashira	kana	yara	Bu zhi dao	Ne
Declarative	Declarative confusion	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Uncertain judgement	○	○	○	○	×	×	×
Interrogative	Interrogative confusion	○	○	○	○	×	○	○
	Indirect question	×	○	○	○	×	×	○

Figure 3. A comparative study of the usage of confusion questions between Chinese and Japanese.

non-interrogative and only declarative, which is essentially different from that of other Japanese confusion questions, and “bu zhi dao” is closer to “yara”. Because both mean “no way to know”.

All in all, language is an important symbol and medium of communication, and further sorting out the ways of expression between two languages is the basis of two cultural exchanges. The greatest research value of this article lies in: first, it can facilitate the language exchange between China and Japan, so that the two sides have a clearer understanding of the inner meaning of the text; second, promote cultural exchanges between China and Japan, and promote cultural cooperation between the two countries.

Fund

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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