

Semantic analysis of tag questions in Japanese: *deshoo* and *janai ka*

YUKO ASANO

Curtin University of Technology

Y.Asano@curtin.edu.au

Abstract

This paper presents a semantic analysis of two Japanese expressions which are used when the speaker requires confirmation — *deshoo* and *janai ka*. These words are often used in similar situations and interpreted as a tag question in English — *don't you think?* or *right?* Although *deshoo* and *janai ka* are semantically closely related, they are not always interchangeable. The subtle differences between them are difficult to capture, especially for language learners. Numerous studies have been undertaken in order to clarify the meanings of *deshoo* and *janai ka* (e.g. Hasunuma 1995, Miyazaki 2000). However, many of these studies have attempted to define their meanings through the use of explanatory terms. But these same terms may also apply to different expressions and thus this approach fails to identify the unique meaning of each marker. This study is the first explication of the meanings of *deshoo* and *janai ka* using the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) Theory developed by Anna Wierzbicka and others (see especially Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002). Importantly it proposes new explications in terms of semantic primitives. The proposed semantic formulae clarify the differences between the expressions, and serve as practical tools to indicate criteria that can assist in choosing an appropriate word for a given situation.

1. Introduction

Language provides people with a tool for expressing meaning and also for communicating thoughts, feelings, or perceptions. Indeed most typically, language is used for sharing knowledge or information. Notwithstanding, there are some things of which speakers are certain, and others of which they are less certain. Depending on the level of certainty, a speaker may seek confirmation from a hearer in order to check if the statement is correct. Japanese expressions, *deshoo* and *janai ka* are often added to the end of the sentence, and they have an interrogative function of requiring confirmation from the hearers.¹ For instance, consider the following examples of *deshoo* (*desho* is a variant of *deshoo*):²

¹ *Deshoo* is the polite form of *daroo*. As Nakakita (2000) says, *daroo* makes an utterance masculine and rough. The polite form *deshoo* is generally chosen by both male and female speakers in daily conversation.

² As discussed by Miyake (1996) and Kanokwan (1998), *deshoo* has two slightly different meanings

- (1) *Otsuki ga atasshu-keesu o te ni tachiagat-ta. Yukie wa hohoende, 'Hai! Wakari-mashi-ta.' to genkiyoku it-ta. Shimada no kao ni, hottoshi-ta yoona hyoojoo ga hirogaru. 'Ne, kachoo, yappari hen **DESHO?**'* (Akagawa 1983: 119)

Otsuki said, standing up and holding his attaché case. Yukie smiled. 'Yes, of course,' she answered brightly. Shimada look relieved. After Otsuki left, the girl sitting next to her said, 'There's something a bit funny about the chief today, **DON'T YOU THINK?**' (Translated by Frew 1984: 120)

- (2) *'Ne, konna tokoro ja tachi-banashi mo nan da kara, ohiru, go-issho shi-nai? O-shokuji, mada **DESHOO?**'* (Mori 1989: 71)

'Listen, we can't talk here in the middle of the street, so how about lunch? You haven't eaten, **HAVE YOU?**' (Translated by Johnson 1993: 69)

In (1), office workers are gossiping about the chief of the section. In (2), two old classmates are talking in the street after unexpectedly meeting. In these examples, *deshoo* or *desho* is interpreted as *don't you think?* or a tag question in English. By using *deshoo*, the speaker is seeking confirmation from the hearer.

Next consider the following examples of *janai ka* (*janai* is a variant of *janai ka*):

- (3) *'Minna, soo it-te-ru wa.'*
'Soo kanaa.'
*'Soo yo, daiichi, natsu nanoni sonna gakusee-fuku o ki-te-iru hito nante, imadoki, mezurashii n **JA-NAI?**'* (Endo 1993: 53)

'Everyone says that about you.'

'They do?'

'Yes. For starters, **DON'T YOU THINK** it's a little strange these days to be wearing that uniform in the middle of summer?'

(Translated by Gessel 1994: 37)

- (4) *'Nonde-nai noni yopparat-te-ru mitai. Watashi no koe, hen **JA-NAI?**'* (Yoshimoto 1990: 148)

'I feel like I'm drunk even though I haven't had any alcohol. **DOESN'T** my voice sound strange to you?' (Translated by Sherif 1994: 129)

In (3), a university student is teasing her classmate, and *don't you think* is given as a translation of *janai*. In (4), a young woman is talking to her friend, and *janai* is translated as a negative question. In these examples, *janai ka* (*janai*) carries rising intonation, and the speakers apparently seek confirmation from the hearers.

Although *janai ka* is semantically similar to *deshoo*, they are not always interchangeable. For instance, *deshoo* can be replaced by *janai ka* in (1), while it is not natural in (2):

which can be roughly distinguished by its intonation (rising and rising-falling intonation). This paper focuses on *deshoo* which carries rising intonation.

- (1') *Ne, kachoo, yappari hen JA-NAI?*
 Hey chief as.expected strange COP-NEG
 'There's something strange about the chief, don't you think?'
- (2') *?O-shokuji mada JA-NAI?*
 P-meal yet COP-NEG
 'You haven't eaten, have you?'

Similarly, *janai ka* cannot be replaced by *deshoo* in (3), while it is natural in (4):

- (3') *?Imadoki, mezurashii n DESHOO?*
 these.days strange NOM would + P
 'It's a little strange these days, isn't it?'
- (4') *Watashi no koe, hen DESHOO?*
 I GEN voice strange would + P
 'My voice sounds strange to you, doesn't it?'

These examples suggest that there is a semantic difference between *deshoo* and *janai ka*.

This paper discusses the meanings of *deshoo* and *janai ka*. By analyzing the deficiencies of the previously presented definitions, the paper uses the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) Theory (see especially Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002) to explicate the meanings of *deshoo* and *janai ka*. The paper addresses the issue of how to define such synonyms. It also clarifies the invariant concept embedded in each expression, which guides the native speakers of Japanese in their choice of the expression.

2. The problems

There are a number of previous studies which attempted to identify the meanings of *deshoo* and *janai ka*, and clarify the differences between them (e.g. Tanomura 1988, Hasunuma 1995, Miyazaki 2000). Among the previous research, Hasunuma's discussion of the semantic differences between *deshoo* and *janai ka* is particularly pertinent. Hasunuma points out that *deshoo* is used when the speaker calls for the hearer's attention so that both share a common understanding, and then the speaker confirms the establishment of mutual understanding. For instance (Hasunuma 1995: 393):

- (5) (showing a direction to a taxi driver)
Asoko ni yuubin-posuto ga mi-eru DESHOO.
 over.there LOC mail.post ACC see-POT would + P
 'You can see the post box over there, can't you?'

In (5), the speaker draws the hearer's attention to a particular piece of information so as to share this information and confirms a common understanding. According to Hasunuma, *deshoo* in this case can be replaced by *janai ka* which is also used to elicit confirmation but not always. For instance (Hasunuma 1995: 395):

- (6) *Okaa-san, asobi ni i-ttemo ii DESHOO.*
 mother-HON play L-D go-LINK good would + P
 ‘Mother, can I go to play outside?’

This example concerns a matter about which the hearer has the right to have a strong position and be judgemental. Since the topic is a matter for which the hearer has responsibility, the speaker requires the hearer’s approval, and therefore, *deshoo* is used to confirm the provision of this approval. From this observation, Hasunuma claims that a key function of *deshoo* is to ‘confirm one’s conjecture’ (*suiryoo-kakunin*), which is unique to *deshoo*.

On the other hand, Hasunuma states that *janai ka* has the characteristic function of ‘appealing that the speaker has recognised something’ (*ninshiki-keese no apiiru*), which *daroo* does not have (1995: 396). For instance (1995: 396):³

- (7) *tsuma: Kono jaketto suteki desho.*
 wife this jacket nice would + P

otto: Un, nakanaka niatteru JA-NAI KA.
 husband yes pretty look.good COP-NEG SF

Wife: ‘This jacket is nice, isn’t it?’

Husband: ‘Yes, it looks pretty good on you.’

- (8) (after opening a box, the speaker finds out that it is empty inside)
Nanda, karappo JA-NAI KA.
 oh empty COP-NEG SF
 ‘Oh, it’s empty inside.’

In (7), a husband is commenting on his wife’s jacket. In (8), the speaker has noticed that nothing is inside the box. In these examples, the speakers are indicating to the hearers that they have acquired new information. From these observations, Hasunuma argues that a main function of *janai ka* is not to ‘require confirmation’, but to show that the speaker has acquired new information. Therefore, it is usually used in showing surprise, or in conveying the speaker’s personal evaluation or opinion to the hearer.

The labels such as ‘*suiryoo-kakunin*’ (‘confirmation of one’s conjecture’), or ‘*ninshiki-keese no apiiru*’ (‘appealing that the speaker has recognised something’) may be useful in distinguishing the difference between *deshoo* and *janai ka*. However, the same explanatory terms can also be used for the meaning of other epistemic markers such as *yone*, or *no da*.⁴ For instance, in the following example of *yone*:⁵

³ This case of *janai ka* does not carry rising intonation.

⁴ I will use the term ‘epistemic’ to refer ‘not simply to modal systems that basically involve the notions of possibility and necessity, but to any modal system that indicates the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he says’ (Palmer 1986: 51).

⁵ As discussed by many (e.g. Hasunuma 1995), *yone* is also often used in requiring confirmation.

- (9) “*Moo daremo, shuppan-shiyoo-to-shi-nai wa.*” *Watashi wa warat-ta.*
 “*Noroware-te-iru no yo.*”
 “*Soo, nihongo-yaku ni kakawat-ta hito ga san-nin mo shinderu. Shit-te-ru*
YONE?” (Yoshimoto 1990: 28)

“Publishers just aren’t interested in it anymore.” I smiled.

“The book is cursed.”

“It’s gotta be. The three people who attempted to translate it into Japanese are all dead. You knew about that?” (Translated by Sherif 1994: 23)

In (9), the speaker is asking whether or not the hearer knows that the translators of a book are all dead. In this case, it is possible to consider that the speaker is ‘confirming his conjecture’ through the use of *yone*.

In a similar way, *no da* may also have the function of ‘appealing that the speaker has recognised something’. Consider next:

- (10) ‘*Yuushoku o soto ni suru nara, ie ni denwa-suru wa. Aa, Hiragi wa? Ie de tabe-naku-te ii no?*’
Watashi ga tatoo to suru to Hiragi ga, ‘Aa, sooda. Kyoo wa chichi-oya ga shucchoo dat-ta N DA.’ (Yoshimoto 1988: 180)

I got up. ‘If I’m going to eat dinner out, I have to call home and let them know. What about you? Is it okay for you not to eat at home?’

Hiragi said, ‘Oh, yeah, right. My father’s away on a business trip.’ (Translated by Backus 1993: 121)

In (10), a high-school student, while talking to his friend, has just remembered that his father is away on a business trip. It is possible that *no da* is used by the speaker to ‘appeal that he has recognised something’. That is to say, the attempt to define the meaning by these explanatory terms involves a problem of wide applicability that the definition applies not only to one expression, but several, and thus does not help in identifying the particular meanings of different epistemic markers.⁶

Moreover, the explanations given in previous research are not sufficient since they contradict the fact that *deshoo* and *janai ka* have a pragmatic restriction. Recall that Hasunuma (1995) says that *deshoo* is used to confirm with the hearer whether or not the speaker’s inference is correct as in a matter which the hearer has the right to make a final decision or judgement. Similarly, for *janai ka*, Miyazaki (2000: 11) says that *janai ka* is used to ‘seek confirmation of the information in terms of the speaker’s hypothesis about the hearer’s information’. Although these explanations cover the general usage of *deshoo* and *janai ka*, the expressions are generally inappropriate when used in conversation with someone who is older or higher in social status than the speaker. As Nakakita (2000) points out, *deshoo* has a pragmatic restriction (2000: 26):

⁶ In addition, *janai ka* which carries rising intonation should be discussed separately from *janai ka* which does not carry rising intonation. As Tanomura (1988) points out, two types of *janai ka* can be syntactically distinguished. This paper discusses the meaning of *janai ka* which carries rising intonation.

(11a)?*Sensee, repooto no shimekiri wa, raishuu DESHOO?*
 teacher report GEN deadline TOP next.week would + P
 ‘Professor, the due date of the report is next week, isn’t it?’

Suppose that a university student makes the utterance to a socially conservative professor. Although *deshoo* is the polite form of *daroo*, and the speaker is ‘confirming a matter on which the hearer has the right to have a strong position’, the utterance is culturally impolite and it is totally inappropriate. Similarly, *janai ka* is also not appropriate:

(11b)?*Sensee, repooto no shimekiri wa, raishuu nan JA-NAI-DESU KA?*
 teacher report GEN deadline TOP next.week NOML COP-NEG-P Q
 ‘Professor, the due date of the report is next week, isn’t it?’

Nakakita argues that the act of ‘requiring confirmation’ itself is not appropriate in talking to someone who is older or higher in social status than the speaker. Her observation may sound reasonable. However, the pragmatic restriction does not seem to be simply due to the act of ‘requiring confirmation’. Consider the following example of *yone*:

(11c) ?*Sensee, repooto no shimekiri wa, raishuu desu YONE?*
 teacher report GEN deadline TOP next.week COP + P SF
 ‘Professor, the due date of the report is next week, isn’t it?’

In (11), the use of *yone* is more acceptable than that of *deshoo* and *janai ka*, which means that *deshoo* and *janai ka* involve a distinctive meaning which causes the pragmatic restriction. This observation demonstrates that the definitions proposed in the previous studies are not a reliable guide to describing the meanings precisely. In order to reach a high level of descriptive accuracy, a new semantic approach needs to be utilized which enables articulation of the correct meanings, so that the differences are clarified both semantically and pragmatically.

3. Methodological tool

The theory I adopt to analyse and explicate meanings is the NSM Theory. This theory has been proposed in an attempt to overcome problems in previous research, including not defining meanings accurately. The basic idea of the theory is that the meaning of a linguistic expression can be paraphrased by simpler words than the original. This approach aims at a descriptive accuracy so that the explication and the original expression have the same meaning. The ultimate goal for using this framework is to ensure that the resulting definition provides consistency in how the word is used.

For over nearly 30 years of cross-linguistic semantic research, Wierzbicka and colleagues have introduced a set of universal and culture-independent concepts: I, YOU, KNOW, THINK, SEE, WHEN or BECAUSE. These lexical items are called ‘semantic primitives’ because they represent innate concepts that are fundamental to human thought. In other words, these are a set of indefinable words, the meanings of which are so basic that they cannot be broken down any further. Significantly, their equivalent counterparts (about 60 of which have been discovered so far) are found

in all languages.⁷ A full table of semantic primitives explained in English is presented in Table 1 (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2002):^{8 9}

Table 1: Semantic Primitives

Substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE/PERSON, SOMETHING/THING, PEOPLE, BODY
Determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER
Quantifiers	ONE, TWO, SOME, MANY/MUCH, ALL
Attributes	GOOD, BAD
Evaluators	BIG, SMALL
Mental/Experiential Predicates	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, Events, Movements	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, (BE), (TOUCHING)
Existence and Possession	THERE IS, HAVE
Life and Death	LIVE, DIE
Time	WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOMETIME, MOMENT
Space	WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE
Logical Concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Intensifier, Augmentor	VERY, MORE
Taxonomy, Partonomy	KIND, PART
Similarity	LIKE

The NSM Theory provides syntactic rules for combining primitives. NSM hypothesizes that certain patterns of combination of primitives are found universally. For instance, given the primitives SOMEONE, SOMETHING, SAY, BAD and YOU, it is assumed that in any language one can put them together to express ‘Someone said something bad about you’. That is, the resulting sentences have the form of simple clauses which have equivalents in all other languages; the same is not true of language-specific, complex sentences such as participial constructions, relative clauses, or nominalizations. This method of semantic description is called reductive paraphrase. It solves the problem of circularity and terminological obscurity, which are often observed in conventional dictionaries and often approaches to linguistic semantics. On the basis of simple syntactic patterns, it is possible, within the framework of the NSM Theory, to define words and identify the embedded meanings. Semantic differences and similarities between synonyms can be clearly explained and can be compared and tested cross-linguistically. Therefore, the NSM approach is quite useful for anyone in search of better understanding of meaning, as it can facilitate comparisons of related concepts across languages.

⁷ For the semantic primitives of other languages including Japanese, see Goddard & Wierzbicka (1994).

⁸ New elements which were included after 2002 are in parentheses.

⁹ The semantic primitives listed in Table 1 have variant forms called ‘allolexes’. See Wierzbicka (1996) for discussions on allolexy.

4. Analysis of *deshoo* and *janai ka*

4.1 Data

In the analysis, I have attempted to use naturally occurring examples obtained from written sources. In order to illustrate and compare how the expressions are generally interpreted in English in the same context, I have chosen modern Japanese novels which are translated from Japanese to English by professional translators. I have used six novels which were published after the 1950s, to provide authentic linguistic evidence in order to demonstrate how these expressions are used in daily conversation. The frequencies of the expressions which occurred in the corpus are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Frequencies

Title of novel	<i>deshoo</i>	<i>janai ka</i>
<i>Beddo no otogibanashi</i> (Bedtime tales)	47	11
<i>Fukai kawa</i> (Deep river)	23	7
<i>Kicchin</i> (Kitchen)	9	6
<i>Mayonaka no tame no kumikyoku</i> (Midnight suite)	16	15
<i>N.P</i> (N.P)	32	7
<i>Hookago no kii nooto</i> (After school keynotes)	20	11
Total number	147	57

Although the number of examples presented in this paper is necessarily limited, the proposed definitions have been tested and are applicable to other examples found in the corpus. The sources of each example are cited at the end of the article. For the romanization of Japanese, I use the modified Hepburn style.

4.2 *Deshoo*

What *deshoo* represents is the speaker's belief that signifies 'I think: I can say that I know this'. To illustrate this point, recall the following example where two old classmates are talking in the street after unexpectedly meeting:

- (2) 'Ne, *konna tokoro ja tachi-banashi mo nan da kara, ohiru, go-issho shi-nai? O-shokuji, mada **DESHOO?***' (Mori 1989: 71)

'Listen, we can't talk here in the middle of the street, so how about lunch?
You haven't eaten, **HAVE YOU?**' (Translated by Johnson 1993: 69)

In this example, although the speaker does not actually know whether the hearer has eaten lunch, the speaker assumes that she hasn't, and presumes that the hearer

will simply agree with the comment. That is to say, *deshoo* indicates that the speaker is very certain of the presumption although she has not directly experienced this herself. Hence, this speaker's epistemic state can be paraphrased by 'I think: I can say that I know this. I think that you know the same'.

On the contrary, what *yone* stands for is the speaker's knowledge, implying 'I know this, I think that you know the same'. Therefore, *yone* can be used when the speaker is sure of a proposition, whereas *deshoo* assumes less certainty. To illustrate this point, consider the following example of *yone*:

- (12) 'Onna ni naru no mo taihen YONE.' *Aru yuugata, toototsu ni Eriko-san ga it-ta.*
(Yoshimoto 1988: 65)

'It's not easy being a woman,' said Eriko one evening out of the blue.
(Translated by Backus 1993: 41)

In (12), the speaker who has become a woman, having previously been a man, is saying to a female hearer that 'it is not easy being a woman' — the speaker is sure of this. *Deshoo* cannot replace *yone* in this situation as an alternative:

- (12') ?*Onna ni naru no mo taihen DESHOO?*
woman become NOML too hard would + P
'It's not easy being a woman, is it?'

Deshoo involves the speaker making an assumption, indicating 'I think: I can say that I know this'. Therefore, if *deshoo* were chosen, the utterance would mean that the speaker, who does not have the experience of being a woman, makes an inference and seeks confirmation of the proposition. In contrast, *yone* expresses the speaker's knowledge, indicating 'I know this'. Therefore, *yone* is a natural choice when the speaker seeks confirmation of a matter of which the speaker is certain.¹⁰

To sum up, *deshoo* signifies that the speaker forms a conjecture, and seeks confirmation of it from the hearer, while assuming the hearer's agreement. Therefore, as observed by Hasunuma (1995), *deshoo* is often used to confirm with the hearer whether the speaker's inference is correct, as in a matter which the hearer is likely to know directly, or a matter on which the hearer has the right to make a final decision or judgment. Observe the following example:

- (13) '*Anata, Junichi no koto doo omou?*'
'*Doo tte?*'
'*Suki DESHOO?*' (Yamada 1989: 43)

'What do you think of Jun'ichi?'
'What do you mean, 'What do I think?''
'You like him, DON'T YOU?' (Translated by Johnson 1992: 39)

In (13) a high school student believes that her classmate likes her friend called Jun'ichi, and asks the classmate about it. *Deshoo* carries rising intonation, and it includes the function of asking a question of the hearer. In addition, *deshoo* means

¹⁰ The analysis of *yone* is beyond the scope of this paper. See the discussion in Asano (2003).

that the speaker presumes the hearer's consent. Hence *deshoo* involves the following components: 'I think that you will want to say the same, I want you to say it, I think you will say it'.

Judging from the examples discussed above, it is clear why the usage of *deshoo* has a pragmatic restriction. Recall the following example presented in Section 2:

- (11a)?*Sensee, repooto no shimekiri wa, raishuu DESHOO?*
 teacher report GEN deadline TOP next.week would + P
 'Professor, the due date of the report is next week, isn't it?'

As shown earlier, in (11), *deshoo* is inappropriate. This is because *deshoo* implies that the speaker presumes that he or she is correct regarding the due date of the report and seeks confirmation of it, while assuming the hearer's consent. In this situation, however, it is the hearer who has the advantage of the information, and therefore the speaker's confidence would sound intrusive. In other words, *deshoo* signifies the speaker's presumption regarding the hearer's matter, and therefore, its use is not generally appropriate when the speaker and the hearer are not in a close relationship. Viewed in this light, the meaning of *deshoo* can be portrayed as involving five components.

deshoo

- (a) I think: I can say that I know this
- (b) I think that you know the same
- (c) because of this, I think that you will want to say the same
- (d) I want you to say it
- (e) I think you will say it

Component (a) shows that *deshoo* comprises the speaker's belief; components (b) and (c) mean that the speaker considers that the hearer recognises the same, and therefore agrees with the utterance; component (d) shows that the speaker asks for the hearer's consent; and component (e) indicates that the speaker assumes the hearer's agreement.¹¹

4.3 *Janai ka*

Finally, this section discusses the meaning of *janai ka*. *Janai ka* has been treated as having the function of requiring confirmation (Miyake 1996, Miyazaki 2000). However, if each utterance is observed carefully, it is clear that the speaker is not actually asking a question to seek confirmation from the hearer. *Janai ka* simply indicates the speaker's inference, and therefore the hearer does not necessarily have to respond to the utterance. Consider first:

¹¹ It is more natural to say 'I think you know the same' without the complementizer *that*. However, as discussed by Wierzbicka (2006), the meaning of *I think* \emptyset (without *that*) is different from that of *I think that*. As Wierzbicka (2006: 38) says, *I think* \emptyset carries an additional implication 'I don't say more. I don't say: I know it'.

- (14) ‘*Ame ga furu kana.*’ *watashi ga iu to,*
 ‘*Iya, hare-te-kuru n JA-NAI?*’ *to Sotaro wa it-ta.* ‘*Nande futaride hisashiburi ni at-*
te, tenki no hanashi shi-teru n daroo ne.’ (Yoshimoto 1988: 37)

‘I wonder if it’s going to rain.’

‘Naah, it’s clearing up, DON’T YOU THINK? Funny, isn’t it, we haven’t seen each other in all this time and we talk about the weather.’

(Translated by Backus 1993: 24)

In (14), university students are having light-hearted conversation about the weather. In this case, the speaker does not know whether it is actually clearing up. The speaker only expresses his inference, without expecting the hearer’s response. This observation indicates that unlike *deshoo*, *janai ka* does not involve the meaning ‘I think that you will want to say the same, I want you to say it’.

The question is what kind of inference *janai ka* expresses. Recall that *deshoo* involves the speaker’s belief, indicating that ‘I think: I can say that I know this’. That is, *deshoo* implies that the speaker is nearly certain of the proposition. On the other hand, what *janai ka* expresses is the speaker’s simple inferential thought, indicating ‘I think that it is like this’. In support of this claim, *janai ka* is often used in making a negative comment to the hearer. This is illustrated in Example (3) where a university student is teasing her classmate about him wearing a uniform. In this case, the speaker is not making an assertion of the proposition. By using *janai ka*, the speaker is expressing her mere opinion, indicating that ‘I think that it is like this’.

There is another point to be added. Similarly to *deshoo*, *janai ka* plays an interactional role. In short, *janai ka* cannot be chosen without a hearer, which suggests that *janai ka* includes the speaker’s concern for the hearer. What *janai ka* involves is that the speaker does not know whether the hearer will agree with the utterance. In Example (3), for instance, the speaker expresses her speculation about the hearer’s wearing of a uniform, while not assuming the hearer’s consent. To sum up, *janai ka* signifies ‘I think maybe you will say that you want to say the same, I don’t know’. The following example further illustrates this point. *Janai ka* is often selected when the hearer is apparently unsure of the proposition. Consider next:

- (15) ‘*Kanshi? Dooshite?*’
 ‘*Wakara-nai wa. Ano too ni, dareka tooboo-hannin no shinrui demo iru N JA-*
NAI?’ (Akagawa 1983: 267)

‘Surveillance? Why?’

‘I don’t know. You don’t suppose we’ve got any fugitives or their relations living here, **DO YOU?**’

(Translated by Frew 1984: 130)

In (15), a housewife who is talking to her neighbour suspects that fugitives or their relations are living in the same apartment block. In this case, the speaker is speculating about a matter about which the hearer is also not sure.

Therefore, *janai ka* cannot be used to confirm something of which the hearer is certain. Recall Example (2) where two old classmates are talking in the street after

unexpectedly meeting. If *janai ka* were chosen, the utterance would indicate that the speaker is speculating about another person's lunch and not the hearer's. That is, *janai ka* cannot be used in confirming information of which the hearer would be certain. Hence, *janai ka* involves the speaker's uncertainty about the hearer's agreement. On these grounds, the following explication of *janai ka* is proposed:

janai ka

(a) I think that it is like this

(b) I think maybe you will say that you want to say the same

(c) I don't know

Component (a) shows the speaker's inference of a proposition; and components (b) and (c) show that the speaker does not presume the hearer's consent.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the meanings of *deshoo* and *janai ka*, and presented new semantic formulae within the framework of the NSM Theory. The proposed explications for *deshoo* and *janai ka* clearly illustrate that there are semantic differences between these expressions such as 'I think: I can say that I know this', and 'I think that it is like this', and that these differences lead to various implications. While the sentence-final particle *yone* focuses on what the speaker or hearer knows, *deshoo* and *janai ka* mainly deal with how the speaker thinks about the proposition. With regard to future research, contrastive analyses of tag questions in other languages in terms of semantic primitives are urgently needed.¹² Such studies, including both a semantic and a pragmatic perspective, will benefit second-language education and practical bilingual lexicography, and will facilitate cross-cultural understanding.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this paper: ACC Accusative case; COMPL Complementiser; COP Copula; HON Honorific; LINK Linking suffix; NEG Negative form; NOM Nominative case; P Polite form; PAST Past form; POT Potential form; TOP Topic particle; and SF Sentence-Final particle.

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¹² See Wong (2008) for the analysis of Anglo English and Singapore English tags.

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