Selection of Sentence-Final Particles in Answers

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Hakata Japanese, spoken in a southern area in Japan, has the two types of SFP, *-bai* and *-tai*.

(1) Taro-wa   gakusee-{bai/tai}.
    Taro-TOP student-SFP
    'Taro is a student.'

Nagano (2016) finds that a sentence with a thetic judgment, bearing information focus, ends up with *-bai*, whereas a sentence with a contrastive topic or a subject bearing an exhaustive interpretation always requires *-tai*. Though both SFPs are markers for new information, *-tai* is used in the environment of identification and valuation of a variable, while *-bai* just introduces new information to discourse, not involved in a process of identification.

Interestingly, she further observes that while an ordinary *wh*-question is answered by *-tai* phrases, a rhetorical question is answered by *-bai* phrases. This is the evidence suggesting that an ordinary *wh*-question truly involves a variable to be valued, while a rhetorical one is not an interrogative sentence but an assertion.

References: • Nagano, A. (2016): Morphological Realization of Focus Head in Hakata Japanese. Tsukuba English Studies 35, 1-31.