

**OPEN ACCESS**

SUBMITTED 13 June 2025

ACCEPTED 09 July 2025

PUBLISHED 11 August 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue 08 2025

**COPYRIGHT**

© 2025 Original content from this work may be used under the terms of the creative commons attributes 4.0 License.

# Specific Features of Expressing Rhetorical Questions Through Pronouns

Matkarimova Nargiz Muxamataminovna

Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, 2nd-year basic doctoral student, Uzbekistan

**Abstract:** This article discusses the specific features of expressing rhetorical interrogative sentences through pronouns.

**Keywords:** 怎么 zěnmě “how?”, 什么 shénme “what?”, 谁 shéi “who?”, 哪 nǎ “which?”, 干吗 gànma “why?”, “for what reason?”.

## Introduction: The Main Interrogative Pronouns Used in Rhetorical Questions in Chinese

In Chinese, the main interrogative pronouns used in rhetorical questions are: 怎么 zěnmě “how?”, 什么 shénme “what?”, 谁 shéi “who?”, 哪 nǎ “which?”, and 干吗 gànma “in what way, in what manner?”. In rhetorical questions, these pronouns not only function as core components but also eliminate the speaker’s uncertainty typically found in ordinary interrogative sentences [1, p. 12].

### The Pronoun 怎么 zěnmě (“how”)

The pronoun 怎么 zěnmě “how” is the most frequently used component in Chinese rhetorical questions to express the interrogative meaning. While it loses the functional basis of asking for information, in rhetorical usage it carries both affirmative and negative forms, enabling the entire sentence structure to encapsulate pragmatic meanings through this single component.

### Examples:

a) “像这样的老师，我们怎么会不喜欢她，怎么不愿意和她接近呢？” Xiàng zhèyàng de lǎoshī, wǒmen zěnmě huì bù xǐhuān tā, zěnmě bù yuànyì hé tā jiējìn ne?

— How could we possibly not like such a teacher? How could we not want to be close to her?

b) “哼，这屋子除了早上见点日头，整天见不着阳光，怎么不黑？” hēng, zhè wūzi chúle zǎoshang jiàn diǎn rìtōu, zhěngtiān jiàn bùzháo yángguāng, zěnmē bù hēi? — Hmph, this room only gets a bit of sunlight in the morning, and for the rest of the day it sees no sunshine at all—how could it not be dark?

In both examples, although expressed in a negative form, the sentences convey an affirmative meaning. In (a), the underlying meaning is “we do want to be close to such a good, knowledgeable teacher,” whereas in (b) the statement points to the fact that “this room is indeed dark all day.”

The Pronoun 什么 shénme (“what”)

The pronoun 什么 shénme “what” functions as an interrogative marker, and when used independently, it emphasizes a certain idea. In rhetorical questions, it often conveys a generalization of a situation or event. Furthermore, it may appear in combinations such as 有什么 yǒu shénme (“what is there?”), 干什么 gàn shénme (“what did I/you do?” — meaning “what could I/you possibly have done?”), 凭什么 píng shénme (“on what grounds?”), 为什么 wèishéme (“why?”), 算什么 suàn shénme (“what is the value of that?”), etc. These combinations often intensify the rhetorical tone.

#### Examples:

a) “大家不怕，我怕什么？” Dàjiā bùpà, wǒ pà shénme? — Everyone else isn’t afraid, so why should I be?

b) “自杀有什么好大惊小怪的？” Zìshā yǒu shénme hào dàjīngxiǎoguài de? — What is so surprising about suicide?

c) “我现在钱也没有了，还用得着小心干什么？” Wǒ xiànzài qián yě méiyǒule, hái yòng dézháo xiǎoxīn gàn shénme? — I don’t even have any money now, so why should I be cautious?

d) “凭什么把人欺侮到这个地步呢？” Píng shénme bǎ rén qīwǔ dào zhège dìbù ne? — On what grounds can a person be humiliated to such an extent?

e) “什么都改良，为什么我不跟着改良呢？” Shénme dōu gǎiliáng, wèishéme wǒ bù gēnzhe gǎiliáng ne? — Everything has been improved—why shouldn’t I improve myself too?

f) “命既苦到底儿，身体算什么呢？” Mìng jì kǔ dàodǐ er, shēntǐ suàn shénme ne? — If fate itself is filled with suffering, what importance does the body have?

In (a), the pronoun 什么 functions as the object after the verb “fear,” implying there is no reason to be afraid. In (d) and (e), the sentence structures are similar—though they take a negative form, they convey an affirmative meaning. In (d), the tone expresses dissatisfaction, while in (e), the structure 为什么 + 不 emphasizes the speaker’s firm stance.

The Pronoun 谁 shéi (“who”)

The pronoun 谁 shéi “who” is used to denote an interrogative subject. In rhetorical questions, it generalizes a situation or event. When converting a rhetorical question with 谁 into a declarative sentence, 谁 can be replaced with 没有人 méiyǒu rén (“no one”). Affirmative rhetorical questions often become negative statements when rephrased in a non-rhetorical form.

#### Examples:

a) “是的，当年用自己的血汗保卫过第一个红色政权的战士们，谁不记得井冈山上青青翠竹呢？” Shì de, dāngnián yòng zìjǐ de xiěhàn bǎowèi guò dì yī gè hóngsè zhèngquán de zhànshìmen, shéi bù jìdé Jǐnggāngshān shàng qīngqīng cuì zhú ne? — Yes, back in the day, the soldiers who defended the first Red government with their own blood and sweat—who among them could forget the lush green bamboo of Jinggang Mountain?

b) “谅解是一种美德，谁能说不是呢？” Liàngjiě shì yī zhǒng měidé, shéi néng shuō bù shì ne? — Understanding is a virtue—who could possibly say it isn’t?

“谁会不兴奋不欢呼？”

“shéi huì bù xīngfèn bù huānhū?”

— Who wouldn’t be excited or happy?

c) “谁知道他思想上受了多大的污染？” shéi zhīdào tā sīxiǎng shàng shòule duōdà de wūrǎn? — Who knows how deeply his thoughts have been contaminated?

As mentioned above, the interrogative pronoun 谁 shéi “who?” in rhetorical questions expresses the general tone of the sentence and conveys the overall meaning precisely through this component. The meaning derived from the sentence once again emphasizes the speaker’s confidence.

哪 nǎ — “which”, “where?” (interrogative pronoun) When used alone in rhetorical questions, 哪 nǎ transforms the entire sentence into a negative structure. Notably, in rhetorical sentences, 哪里 nǎlǐ “where?” and 哪儿 nǎ’er “where?” do not indicate a specific location; instead, they serve as markers of a

rhetoical question. These interrogative pronouns may also appear with a modifier, in which case 哪 nǎ (“which”, “where?”) generalizes the meaning of the sentence by functioning as a demonstrative pronoun.

Examples:

a) “哪知道当年那洋人欺压咱们的苦?” nǎ zhīdào dāngnián nà yáng rén qīyā zánmen de kǔ? — Who could have known the suffering caused by those foreigners in those years?

b) “他们的生活情趣本来就丰富多彩·现在想必更感到幸福和谐·哪里会有心思顾及许多别的人?” tāmen de shēnghuó qíngqù běnlái jiù fēngfù duōcǎi, xiànzài xiǎngbì gèng gǎndào xìngfú héxié, nǎlǐ huì yǒu xīnsī gùjī xǔduō bié de rén? — Their lives had always been rich and colorful; now they must feel even happier and more harmonious. Who would still have the mind to care about so many other people?

c) “母亲的身体本来就on不好·哪儿经得起这样的忧愁?” mǔqīn de shēntǐ běnlái jiù bù hǎo, nǎ’er jīng dé qǐ zhèyàng de yōuchóu? — My mother’s health was already poor; how could she possibly endure such sorrow?

d) “哪个年轻人不爱漂亮呢?” nǎge niánqīng rén bù ài piàoliang ne? — What young man doesn’t love beauty?

e) “哪还买不到北京烤鸭?” nǎ hái mǎi bù dào Běijīng kǎoyā? — Where could you possibly fail to buy Peking duck?

f) “我亮亮不是没心肝的人, 没有你, 哪会有我一

个女人的今日?” wǒ liàngliàng bùshì méi xīngān de rén, méiyǒu nǐ, nǎ huì yǒu wǒ yīgè nǚrén de jīnrì? — I, Liangliang, am not a heartless person. Without you, how could a woman like me have the life I have today?

干吗 gànma — “in what way?”, “for what reason?”

(interrogative pronoun) The interrogative 干吗 gànma may sometimes be written as 干嘛 gànma with the same meaning. In rhetorical questions, sentences containing this word often appear in a negative form using 干吗不 gànma bù / 干嘛不 gànma bù, meaning “how could (it) not...?” or “why wouldn’t...?”. Sentences with this pronoun occur more often in the negative form than in the affirmative.

Examples:

a) “你干吗不早点告诉我?” nǐ gànma bù zǎodiǎn gàosù wǒ? — Why didn’t you tell me earlier?

b) “一个女孩子家, 整天舞刀弄枪干吗?” yīgè nǚ hái zi jiā, zhěng tiān wǔ dāo nòng qiāng gànma? — What business does a young woman have practicing swordplay (here referring to military drills) all day long?

As can be seen from the examples above, in Chinese rhetorical questions, 干吗 gànma can be used in two positions: at the end of the sentence or in the middle. This positioning does not affect the meaning of the sentence; it merely points to the speaker’s rhetorical intent.

The following table shows the rules for using 干吗 gànma in the middle and at the end of a sentence:

Position	Difference	Syntax	Semantics	Pragmatics	Cognitive State
In the middle of a sentence		Subject + 干吗 + Predicate	Expresses the reason	The reason is asked	Important
At the end of a sentence		Subject + Predicate + 干吗	Expresses negation	Sense of guilt is expressed	Not important

In general, there are two ways to use this type of interrogative pronouns (apart from 怎么 zěnmē “how?” and 干吗 gànma “in what situation?”, “in what

manner?”). The cases we examined above belong to rhetorical stylistics, and the rules for their use within the system of ordinary interrogative sentences differ from

these. We can become acquainted with these rules through the following table:

Interrogative Pronoun	Question Forms	Semantics	Function
什么 shénme What?	Ordinary question forms	Person, object, time, place, reason, purpose	Requests information about a person, object, time, place, reason, or purpose
	Rhetorical question forms	Person, object, time, place, reason, purpose	Expresses negation
谁 shéi Who?	Ordinary question forms	Person	Asks about a person, which can be one or more individuals
	Rhetorical question forms	Someone	Expresses a rhetorical form
哪 nǎ Which?, Where?	Ordinary question forms	Person, type of object, specific time, specific place	Asks about a person, object, time, or place
	Rhetorical question forms	Any person, any object, any time, any place	Expresses a rhetorical form

**The demonstrative pronoun 那 nà (“that”)** The demonstrative pronoun 那 nà (“that”) also includes forms such as 那点 nà diǎn (“that little amount”) and 那种 nà zhǒng (“that kind of”).

Examples:

a) “你以为李莲英是那么好打发的？” Nǐ yǐwéi Lǐ Liányīng shì nàme hǎo dǎfā de? — Do you think Li Lianying is that easy to deal with?

b) “一共就做了那点事儿还好意思说？” Yīgòng jiù zuòle nà diǎn shìr hái hǎoyìsi shuō? — You only did that little bit of work in total, and you still have the nerve to talk about it?

c) “你还记得我名字么？” Nǐ hái jìdé wǒ míngzì me? “那还能忘？” Nà hái néng wàng? — Do you still remember my name? — How could I possibly forget?

The above demonstrative components do not express rhetorical style when used alone, and it is generally inappropriate to use them in isolation. As seen from the examples, the speaker uses the demonstrative pronoun to refer to a previously occurring event or situation, thereby expressing their attitude toward it.

## REFERENCES

Maxmud M., To'ychiyev U. Arastu. Poetika. Axloqi kabir. Ritorika. — “Yangi asr avlodi” nashriyoti, — T.:

2011. —328 b.

Axmedov A. Hozirgi zamon o'zbek tilida so'roq gaplar. — T.: 1965. — 218b.

Nashrga tayyorlovchi Nosirova S.A. O'zbek hikoyalari xitoy tilida. —Toshkent Davlat Sharqshunoslik instituti, T.: 2014. — 62b.

Ismatullayev X. Ritorik so'roq gaplar. — Tosh DU Ilmiy ishlar to'plami. 268-son, — T.: 1964. — 158b.

Samigova X. B. Ingliz va o'zbek nutq madaniyati ritorik aspektining chog'ishtirma tadqiqi: filol. fan. nomz. ... diss. ... avtoref. — T.: 2017. — 207 b.

天昱. 现代汉语反问句研究. 博士学位论文, 2007. — 139页.

刘松江. 反问句的交际作用. 语言教学与研究, 1993.— 189页.

吕明臣张玥. 反问句的功能和意义. 华夏文化论坛, 2011. — 211页.

郭继懋. 反问句的语义语用特点. 中国语文, 1997. —167 页.

朱姝. 反问句的句法结构及意义 — 语用分析. 硕士学位论文, 2004. — 80 页.

11.于根元. 反问句的性质和作用. – 中国语文, 1984.  
– 6-7页.

郭锐. “吗”反问句的确信度和回答方式. – 世界汉语  
教学, 2000. 页33-34.

史金生.表反问的“不是”. – 北京.: 中国语文, 1997.  
78-79页.

沈开木. 反问语气怎样起否定作用. –中国语文通讯,  
198页.

张静. 汉语语法问题. – 北京.: 中国社会科学出版社,  
1999. –36-37-38页.

赵雷.谈反问句教学.语言教学与研究, 2000. – 150 页  
.