

Excuse questions

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1 Introduction

2 A previously unanalyzed class of questions

3 Analysis

Sentences and speech acts

(1) Sentences

A: Did John use the car yesterday?

WHETHER [John₁ used the car yesterday]]

LF

B: No he did not.

NOT [he₁ used the car yesterday]

LF

(2) Speech acts

a. A asks B whether John used the car yesterday

b. B tells A that John did not use the car yesterday

The Performative Hypothesis (PH)

(3) Sentences

A: Did John use the car yesterday?

A ASKS B [WHETHER [John₁ used the car yesterday]]

B: No he did not.

B TELLS A [NOT [he₁ used the car yesterday]]

(4) Speech acts

a. A asks B whether John used the car yesterday

b. B tells A that John did not use the car yesterday

Linguistic communication under PH

(5) A to B: "Did John use the car yesterday"

LF: A ASKS B [WHETHER [John₁ used the car yesterday]]
performative prefix

(6) Conversation

- Producing *contingent* symbolic representations that are *guaranteed to be true*, thereby making changes to the world
→ the theory of grammar tells us how these representations are constructed, interpreted, and phonologically realized
- Reacting appropriately to these changes
→ the theory of discourse tells us what kind of reactions is appropriate

Research on “speech acts in grammar”

(7) A to B: “Did John use the car yesterday”

LF: A ASKS B [WHETHER [John₁ used the car yesterday]]
performative prefix

Object of investigation: the syntactic structure, semantic contribution, and phonological realization of performative prefixes

→ cf. Stenius (1967); Ross (1970); Lakoff (1970); Gazdar (1979); Chomsky (1981, 1986); Krifka (2001); Miyagawa (2012); Krifka (2015); Sauerland and Yatsushiro (2017); Trinh and Truckenbrodt (2018); Krifka (2019, 2020); Trinh (2021); Wiltschko (2021); Miyagawa (2022); among others

The silence of performative prefixes

(8) What makes (9a) different from (9b), assuming both sentences are spoken by A to B?

- A ASKS B [WHETHER [John₁ used the car yesterday]]]
- I'm asking you [whether John used the car yesterday]

Maybe this question is related to another question.

(9) What makes (10a) different from (10b)?

- The king of France is bald
- France has a king and the king of France is bald

(10) Conjecture

Performative prefixes express non-at issue meaning, and non-at issue meaning is not phonologically realized

Today's talk

- (11) a. Introduce a novel observation
- b. Propose an analysis in which
 - (i) performative prefixes are needed for semantic interpretation
 - (ii) performative prefixes can be shown to occupy a position between two *grammatically* related positions

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Examples

(12) A: Did John use the car yesterday? antecedent question
B: When? excursive question
A: In the evening.
B: No. (He only used it in the morning.)

(13) A: When do people eat dinner? AQ
B: Where? EQ
A: In Spain.
B: Late at night.

(cf. Schmitt, 2021)

Connectivity effects

EQs are constrained by the argument structure of the relevant verb

(14) a. They sank the ship with a torpedo
b. #The ship sank with a torpedo

(15) A: Which ship did they sink?
B: **With what?**
A: A torpedo.
B: The Japanese ship.

(16) A: Which ship sank?
B: **#With what?**
A: #A torpedo.
B: #The Japanese ship.

Reconstruction effects

EQs may contain bound variables

(17) A: Did every boy₁ write a letter?

B: **To which of his₁ relatives?**

A: To his₁ uncle.

B: No.

(18) A: What did every boy₁ write?

B: **To which of his₁ relatives?**

A: His₁ uncle.

B: A letter.

Ā effects: unboundedness & island sensitivity

(19) A: Does Bill think John used the car?
B: **When?**
A: Yesterday.
B: No. (But he does think John used the car last week.)

(20) A: Is it Bill's thought that John used the car?
B: **#When?**
A: **#Yesterday.**
B: **#No.** (But it is Bill's thought that John used the car last week.)

This is evidence that EQs are not elliptical “echo questions”.

(21) Does John believe the claim that Mary had dinner with Bill
WHERE?

Definiteness effects

EQs must relate to definite noun phrases

(22) A: Did John read the book?

B: **Which book?**

A: Barriers.

B: No.

(23) A: Did John read a book?

B: **#Which book?**

A: **#Barriers.**

B: **#No.**

This is evidence that EQs are not cases of sluicing

(24) John read a book, but I don't know which book

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Claim: HP is correct

(25) A: Did John use the car yesterday?

A ASK B WHETHER John used the car yesterday

'A asks B whether John used the car yesterday'

B: When?

B ASK A [when_x [A ASK B WHETHER John used the car yesterday then_x]]

'B asks A **which time** x is such that A asks B whether John used the car yesterday **at the time** x '

Claim: EQ is derived from AQ

(26) A: Did John use the car?
 B: When?

$[A \text{ ASK } B \text{ [WHETHER [John used the car]]}]$ $[A \text{ ASK } B \text{ [WHETHER [[John used the car] whenx]]]}]$ $[\text{when}_x [A \text{ ASK } B \text{ [WHETHER [[John used the car] whenx]]]}]]$ $[B \text{ ASK } A \text{ [when}_x [A \text{ ASK } B \text{ [WHETHER [[John used the car] whenx]]]}]]]$ $[B \text{ ASK } A \text{ [when}_x [A \text{ ASK } B \text{ [WHETHER [[John used the car] thenx]]]}]]]$	AQ <i>merge</i> <i>move</i> <i>merge</i> <i>TC</i>
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Excursus to trace conversion

(27) Trace Conversion (Fox, 2003)

$[\text{which}_x \text{ NP}] \rightarrow [\text{the}_x \text{ NP}]$

(28) a. Traces are interpreted as definite descriptions (cf. Fox, 2003; Sauerland, 2004)

b. Determiners come with indices (cf. Hackl, 2019)

(29) $[\![\text{the}_x \text{ NP}]\!] = \text{the NP identical to } x$

Accounting for the definiteness effects

(30) A: Did John read the book?

B: Which book?

AQ

merge

merge

(31) A: Did John read a book?

B: #Which book?

AQ

merge

merge

Accounting for the \bar{A} effects

(32) a. TPs and NPs are bounding nodes (cf. Chomsky, 1981, 1986)
 b. Performative prefixes introduce no new TPs

(33) A: Does Bill think that John used the car?
 B: When?

[B ASK A [when_x [A ASK B [CP WHETHER [TP Bill thinks [CP when_x that [TP John used the car when_x]]]]]]]

(34) A: Is it Bill's thought that John used the car?
 B: #When?

[B ASK A [when_x [A ASK B [CP WHETHER [TP it is Bill's [NP thought [CP when_x that [TP John used the car when_x]]]]]]]]]

An open question

Why can only the EQ wh-phrase and nothing else be pronounced?

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