



ZAS

EXCURSIVE QUESTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

- We analyze a type of questions which are quite pervasive in conversations but which have not been paid attention to
- These questions represent an “excursus” in discourse, hence “excursive questions” (EQ)
- They seem to ask about an “antecedent question” (AQ)

(1) A: Did John use the car yesterday? (2) A: When do people eat dinner?
B: When?
A: In the evening.
B: No. (He did not use it in the evening.)
B: Where?
A: In Spain.
B: Late at night.

CENTRAL CLAIM OF THE ANALYSIS

Speech acts are grammatically represented

PROPERTIES OF EQS

- Connectivity effects: EQs are constrained by the argument structure of the relevant verb

(3) A: Which ship did they sink? (4) A: Which ship sank?
B: With what?
A: A torpedo.
B: The Japanese ship.
cf. They sank the ship with a torpedo
B: #With what?
A: #A torpedo.
B: #The Japanese ship.
cf. #The ship sank with a torpedo

- Reconstruction effects: EQs may contain bound variables

(5) A: Did every boy₁ write a letter?
B: To which of his₁ relatives?
A: To his₁ uncle.
B: No.

(6) A: What did every boy₁ write?
B: To which of his₁ relatives?
A: His₁ uncle.
B: A letter.

- \bar{A} effects: EQs are unbounded and island sensitive

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

(8) A: Does John believe the claim that Mary had dinner with Bill?
B: #Where?
A: #In Paris.
B: #No.

- Definiteness effects: EQs must relate to definite noun phrases

(9) A: Did John read the book?
B: Which book?
A: Barriers.
B: No.

(10) A: Did John read a book?
B: #Which book?
A: #Barriers.
B: #No.

EQS ARE NOT CASES OF ECHO QUESTIONS OR SLUICING

(11) a. Does John believe the claim that Mary had dinner with Bill WHERE?
b. John read a book, but I don't know which book

ANALYSIS

- Sentences contain a “performative prefix” (cf. Ross 1970, Lakoff 1970, Gazdar 1979, Krifka 2001, 2015, Sauerland & Yatsushiro 2017, Trinh & Truckenbrodt 2018, Trinh 2021)

(12) A: Did John use the car yesterday?
[β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday]]]
B: When?
[δ B ASK A [γ when_x [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday then_x]]]]]
'B asks A for which time x A asks B whether John used the car yesterday at the time x '

- EQ is derived from AQ by merge, move, and trace conversion in the sense of Fox (2003)

(13) [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday]]]
[β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday when_x]]]
[γ when_x [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday when_x]]]]]
[δ B ASK A [γ when_x [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday when_x]]]]]]
[δ B ASK A [γ when_x [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday then_x]]]]]]

AQ
merge
move
merge
TC

- Bounding nodes are TPs (cf. Chomsky 1981, 1986), and performative prefixes introduce no new TP

(14) a. [CP B ASK A [CP when_x [CP A ASK B [CP WHETHER [TP John used the car yesterday then_x]]]]]
b. #[CP B ASK A [CP where_x [CP A ASK B [CP WHETHER [TP John believes the claim [CP that [TP Mary had dinner with Bill there_x]]]]]]]

- A definite DP can be interpreted as a trace, but an indefinite DP cannot: the derivation in (15) would not be possible if the object of *read* is *a book* instead of *the book*

(15) Derivation of the EQ in (9)
[β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John read the_x book]]]
[γ which book_x [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John read the_x book]]]]]
[δ B ASK A [γ which book_x [β A ASK B [α WHETHER [TP John read the_x book]]]]]]
'B asks A for which book x A asks B whether John read the book x '

AQ
merge
merge

QUESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Why is nothing in the EQ pronounced except the wh-phrase?

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