

## A tense question

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Sauerland and Yatsushiro (2017), henceforth S&Y, take the *remind-me* reading of such questions as (1a) to arise from a presupposition triggered by the adverb *again*: (1a) can be read as simply asking for the addressee's name, with the inference that the name was made known earlier.

- (1) a. [<sub>S</sub> [<sub>Q</sub> what is your name] again]?  
b.  $\llbracket S \rrbracket = \llbracket Q \rrbracket$  if there was an event preceding the utterance at which the complete answer to  $Q$  was made common ground, undefined otherwise

S&Y point out that the *remind-me* reading can also come about by way of past tense. Thus, (2a) allows the same reading as (1a). This observation is given a straightforward account by S&Y in terms of reference time effects: (2a) picks out a salient time interval  $C$  in the past which includes the communication of the name and excludes the utterance. We will represent this reading by subscripting the tensed verb with  $C$ .

- (2) a. [<sub>Q<sub>C</sub></sub> what was<sub>C</sub> your name]?  
b.  $\llbracket Q_C \rrbracket =$  'for which  $x$ : your name is  $x$  at  $C$ '

Past tense and *again* can co-occur: (3a) is acceptable under the same reading as (1a) and (2a). S&Y take this to be unsurprising: past tense and *again*, they claim, are "two independent mechanisms that work congruently [...]." Applying their analysis, the meaning of (3a) would be (3b).

- (3) a. [<sub>S<sub>C</sub></sub> [<sub>Q<sub>C</sub></sub> what was<sub>A</sub> your name] again]?  
b.  $\llbracket S_C \rrbracket = \llbracket Q_C \rrbracket$  if there was an event preceding the utterance at which the complete answer to  $Q_C$  was made common ground, undefined otherwise

Now consider the question below, where the subscript  $L$  is mnemonic for 'life.'

- (4)  $Q_L =$  'for which  $x$ : your name is  $x$  throughout your life'

Let us note two facts about  $Q_L$ . The first is specific to English. In this language,  $Q_L$  can be expressed by the present tense sentence in (5).

- (5) what is<sub>L</sub> your name?

The second fact is logical: the complete answer to  $Q_L$  is stronger than that to  $Q_C$ . Obviously, the name you have throughout your life is the name you have at  $C$ . These two facts, together with S&Y's analysis of *remind-me* questions, mean that the presupposition of (6a) is stronger than that of (6b).

- (6) a. [ $s_L$  [ $Q_L$  what is $_L$  your name] again]?  
presupposition: there was an event preceding the utterance at which the complete answer to  $Q_L$  was made common ground
- b. [ $s_C$  [ $Q_C$  what was $_C$  your name] again]?  
presupposition: there was an event preceding the utterance at which the complete answer to  $Q_C$  was made common ground

The two questions (6a) and (6b), therefore, stand in the same relation as (7a) and (7b).

- (7) a. who also $_x$  went to Harvard?  
presupposition:  $x$  went to Harvard
- b. who also $_x$  went to Harvard or Yale?  
presupposition:  $x$  went to Harvard or Yale

We can observe that in a context where the presupposition of (7a) is satisfied, the question with the weaker presupposition, i.e. (7b), is deviant, as evidenced by the contrast between (8b) and (9b) as follow-ups to the assertion *John went to Harvard* (cf. Spector and Sudo 2017).

- (8) a. John went to Harvard.  
b. Who also $_j$  went to Harvard?
- (9) a. John went to Harvard.  
b. #Who also $_j$  went to Harvard or Yale?

In the context of this conversation, the presupposition of  $Q_L$  is satisfied, but  $Q_C$ , to my ear, is not deviant. To the extent that my intuition is reliable, then, we have a question to ponder: what distinguishes the difference between (6a) and (6b) from that between (7a) and (7b)?

## References

- Sauerland, Uli, and Kazuko Yatsushiro. 2017. Remind-me presuppositions and speech-act decomposition: Evidence from particles in questions. *Linguistic Inquiry* 48:651–677.
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