

CHARLES FILLMORE FORUM LECTURE

Navigating the Interfaces at the Interrogative Left Periphery

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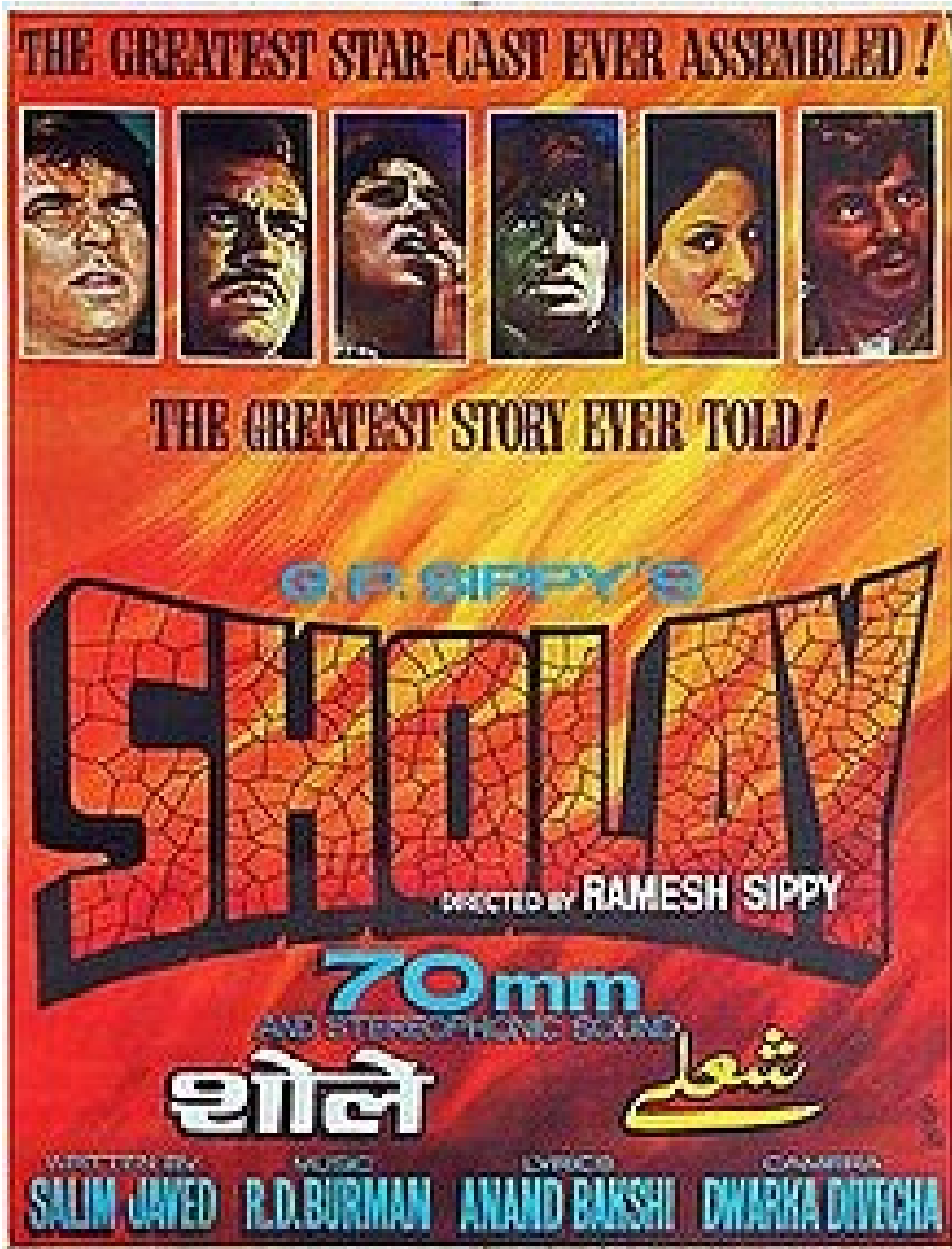


I want to start my talk with a scene from the blockbuster Hindi language film SHOLAY.

Why? You might ask.

First, because everyone loves Bollywood.

Second, because it illustrates something very fundamental about the grammar of natural language questions and how we use them in conversation.

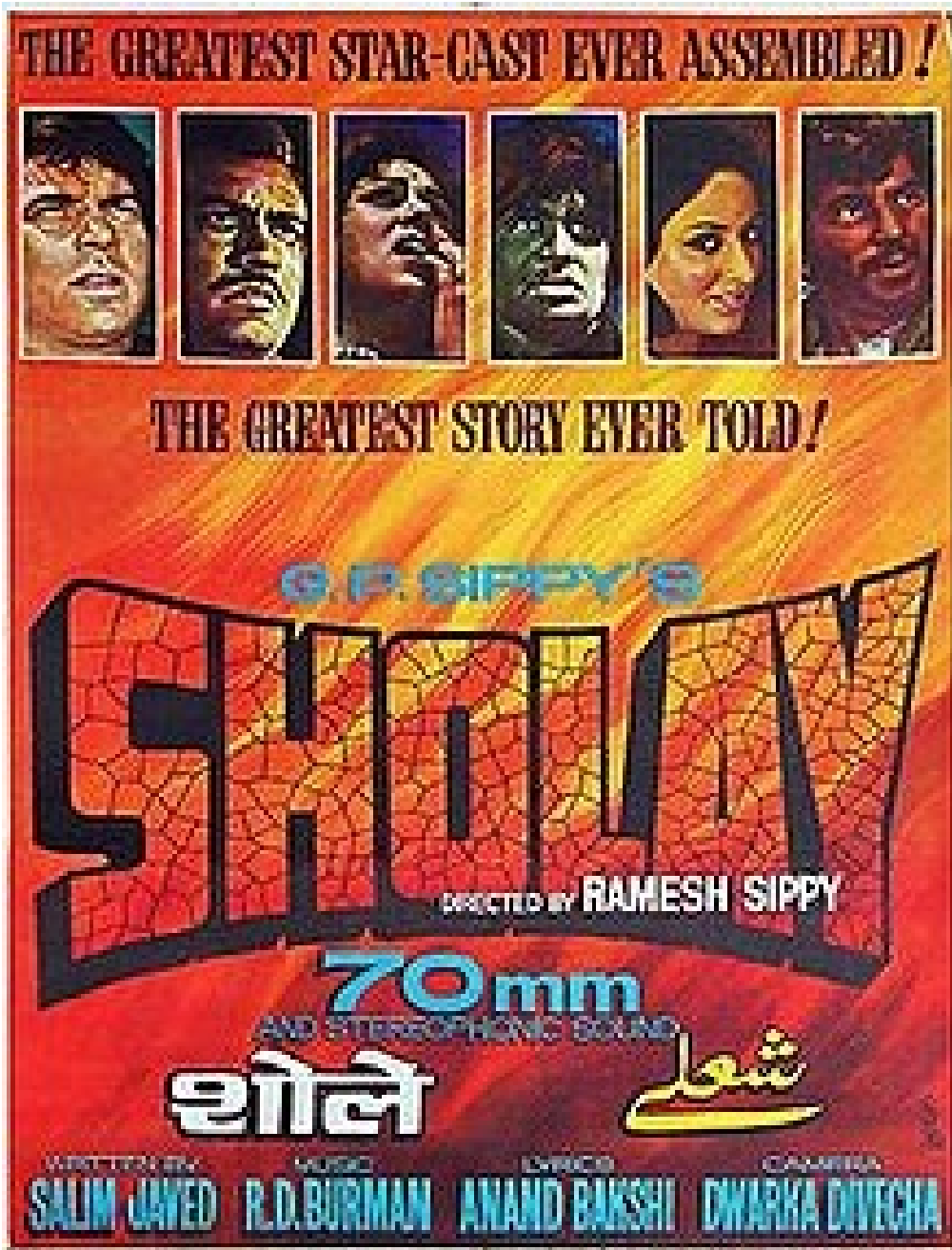


SHOLAY

1975 Hindi Language Film
Produced by G.P. Sippy
Directed by Ramesh Sippy
Written by Salim-Javed

Estimated sales worldwide: 250 million tickets

Characters in the scene: Basanti (Hema Malini)
Jai (Amitabh Bachchan)
Veeru (Dharmendra)



SHOLAY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsqNSXEZsuA>

You only need to watch the first 3 minutes, and you can turn the audio down. Except at the very end of the 3 minutes when Jai asks the question on slide 6.

In this scene Hema Malini is negotiating the fare with Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra, who have just arrived in this small town on an assignment. Hema Malini, as you can see, is extremely talkative and is giving them all kinds of information, referring to herself by her name, Basanti. Dharmendra (Veeru) is totally taken up with her and is lapping everything up; Amitabh Bachchan (Jai), not so much. He is on to her and to the effect on his friend. At any rate, after several minutes of chatter, Basanti says, “We have been talking all this time, and you haven’t even asked me my name” to which Jai responds:

SHOLAY

tumhaaraa naam kyaa hai, basanti?

Your name what is, basanti?

“What is your name, Basanti?”

SHOLAY

This scene was a HUGE success. It is still considered an iconic comedy scene.

One might wonder why.

The reason is simple: the question doesn't make sense – you don't ask for someone's name if you already know it. But how does something that doesn't make sense lead to irony?

The 250 million people who went to see Sholay could compute that at the literal level the question was infelicitous and reasoned in the following way.

Why would a rational person violate the felicity conditions for asking a question, if not to create an effect?

And so, a non-sensical question becomes an ironic comment on Basanti's loquaciousness.

So, this scene illustrates two things about language and how we use it.

- The first is that there is a felicity condition on asking a question – the speaker must not know the answer to the question. This, I argue, has to be encoded in the grammar of natural language questions.
- The second is that interlocutors in a discourse look for alternative explanations in the face of blatant deviations from the norm, a structure that would otherwise be an information-seeking question becomes something else. And this I argue is not encoded in the grammar of natural language questions, but relies on general Gricean reasoning.

A FELICITY CONDITION ON ASKING QUESTIONS

The Speaker **should not know** the answer to the question

WHEN THE FELICITY CONDITION IS VIOLATED

The co-operative listener might look for **alternative explanations**



Charles Fillmore: Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis (1971)

Essay 1: May we come in?

Our task is to make explicit everything that we know about the sentence as a linguistic object, and everything that we can know, as speakers of English, about the situation, or class of possible situations, in which it was uttered. We will be interested, in short, in the grammatical form of the sentence, the meanings and grammatical properties of its words, and in the assumptions we find ourselves making about the speaker of the sentence and about the setting in which it was uttered.



Charles Fillmore: Santa Cruz Lectures on Deixis (1971)

Essay 1: May we come in?

I take the subject matter of linguistics, in its grammatical, semantic and pragmatic sub-divisions, to include the full catalogue of knowledge which the speakers of a language can be said to possess about the structure of the sentences in their language, and their knowledge about the appropriate use of these sentences. I take the special explanatory task of linguistics to be that of discovering the principles which underlie such knowledge.

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY A QUESTION?

A question is an interrogative used to elicit information:

What is your name?

Basanti

What is the time?

It's 5.20 pm.

But the map between form and function is not so simple.

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY A QUESTION?

Form

Interrogative

Declarative

Direct Speech Act

To elicit information

To add information

Can you pass the salt?

I wonder what the time is.

#Yes, I can.

It's 5.20 pm.

HOW DO WE IDENTIFY A QUESTION?

The Direct Speech Act of Asking

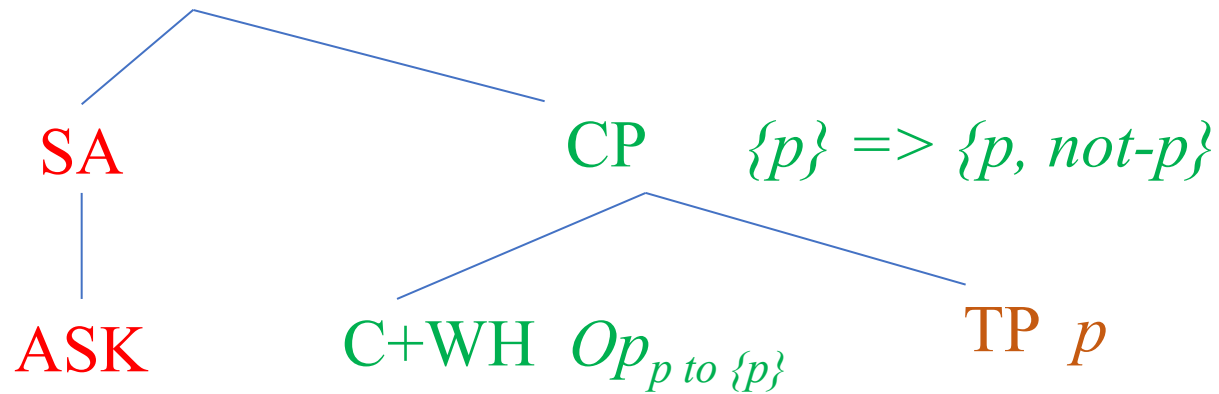
- A Question is an interrogative used to elicit information
- A Question is felicitous if the Speaker does not know the answer to the question.

Indirect Speech Acts are the result of a co-operative interlocutor using Gricean reasoning to make sense of deviations from the norm.

HOW DOES A CLAUSE BECOME A QUESTION?

In incremental steps: starting with a **nucleus proposition**
and ending with an utterance that elicits information

SAP: *Speaker_C asks Addressee_C to Ans({p, not-p})*



Hamblin-Karttunen Semantics

A question denotes a set of possible answers Q.

Ans(Q) picks out the true answer from the set.

$[_{SAP} Sp_C ADDR_C SA_{ASK} [_{CP} C^0_{+WH} [_{TP \dots}]]]$
discourse anchoring *set of propositions* *proposition*

CP:

The structure of subordinated questions.

Subordinated questions are not directly related to the context, their discourse status depends on their relationship with the expressions in the embedding clause.

SAP:

The structure of matrix & quoted questions.

The contextual coordinates in SAP, $Speaker_C$ & $Addressee_C$, for example, anchor the question to the context.

[_{SAP} SA_{ASK} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP}...]]]

The idea of representing the speech act in the structure has a well-established provenance at this point, both in the syntactic and in the semantic literature. See, for example:

Ross (1970)

Szabolcsi (1982)

Rizzi (1997)

Speas and Tenny (2003)

Farkas and Bruce (2010)

Krifka (2014)

And many others

$[_{SAP} \text{Speaker}_C \text{SA}_{ASK} [_{\text{PerspectiveP}} \text{PRO}_i \text{Persp}_{CQ} [_{CP} C^0_{+WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]$

Proposal:

There is a projection between **SAP** and **CP**, namely **PerspP** (for perspectival phrase), which makes the set of propositions denoted by **CP** *potentially active* for someone.

It introduces a null argumental PRO, the perspectival center for the question.

PRO must be bound by Speaker_C in direct questions; by the matrix subject in **quasi-subordinated questions**.

WHAT IS QUASI-SUBORDINATION?

Mary is asking Sue,

“Can you_{SUE/*ADDR} help me_{MARY/*SP}?”

Mary is asking Sue

if she_{SUE} can help me_{*MARY/}^{OK} SP.

Mary is asking Sue

can she_{SUE} help me_{*MARY/}^{OK} SP?

McCloskey 2006 (examples adapted from there)

Mary is asking Sue,

“Can you_{SUE/*ADDR} help me_{MARY/*SP}?”

can she_{SUE} help me_{*MARY/OK} SP?

if she_{SUE} can help me_{*MARY/OK} SP.

Quasi-subordination

- like *direct questions* wrt intonation & syntax
(rising intonation, V to C inversion in English)
- like *subordination* wrt pronominal reference.

$[_{SAP} \underline{\text{Speaker}}_i \text{ SA}_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} \text{ PRO}_i \text{ Persp}_{CQ} [_{CP} \text{ C}^0_{+WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]]$

$[_{TP} \underline{\text{Mary}}_i \text{ [asked} [_{PerspectiveP} \text{ PRO}_i \text{ Persp}_{CQ} [_{CP} \text{ C}^0_{+WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]]$

Proposal

The null argument PRO is bound by the Speaker_C in direct questions; by the matrix subject in quasi-subordinated questions.

The binder of PRO becomes the bearer of the attitude towards the question:

- in direct questions, Speaker_C must not know the answer.
- in quasi-subordinated questions, the matrix subject must not know the answer.

Quasi-subordination of PerspP by rogative predicates is predicted. The lexical meaning of a predicate like *ask* & the requirement of Q being potentially active for the binder of PRO converge:

[_{TP} Mary_i [asked [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP} ...]]]]]

Felicity Condition: Mary does not know Ans(Q)

Note: The full utterance is an assertion, not a question. Particular discourse contexts might prompt the interlocutor to provide an answer. This is not part of the grammar proper.

[_{SAP} SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP} ...]]]]

Claim: **SAP**, unlike **PerspP**, does not subordinate or quasi-subordinate.

Contra Krifka (2014)

PerspP can quasi-subordinate, not subordinate

SAP level modifiers do not occur in any embedded question.

namae-wa nan da-**kke**-(ka)
name-Top what Cop-kke-Q
“What is your name, again?”

Japanese (Sauerland & Yatsushiro 2007)

Quick, what’s your name?

English (Dayal 2016)

Quick, like **-kke**, is an SAP level modifier that does not embed:

*Mary is asking [_{PerspP} quick what’s your_{ADDR} name?] *Quasi-Subordination*

*Mary is asking [_{CP} quick what your_{ADDR} name is]. *Subordination*

Optional Polar Ques Particles in **PerspP** can embed:

Ti:char-ne pu:cha: ki **kya:** vo ca:i piyegi: ↑
Teacher-ERG asked SUB PQP she tea will-drink
“The teacher asked if she will drink tea.”

[_{TP} **Teacher_i** asked [_{PerspP} **PRO_i kya:** Persp-CQ
[_{CP} She will drink tea ?]]

Bhatt & Dayal 2020 (see also Biezma et al 2017, 2023, Mumtaz et al 2023)

Interim Summary:

[_{SAP} Sp_{C-i} SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP} ...]]]]

MQP (kke, quick)

↑_{MATRIX}

PQP (kyaa)

↑_{MATRIX}

Q-particle (ka)/*whether* nucleus

wh fronting

Only Quotation Quasi-subordination Subordination

For related ideas on the interrogative left periphery and/or embedding of speech acts under centering, see among others:

Crnic and Trinh (2009)

Woods (2016, 2020)

Zu (2018)

EMPIRICAL PAYOFF: Shifty Responsives

- a. * I remember [was Henry a communist ↑]
- b. ? I don't remember [was Henry a communist ↑]
- c. Do you remember ↑ [was Henry a communist ↑]
McCloskey 2006: 112

- a. I remember [whether Henry was a communist]
- b. I don't remember [whether Henry was a communist]
- c. Do you remember [whether Henry was a communist] ↑

EMPIRICAL PAYOFF: Shifty Responsives

- a. * I remember [was Henry a communist ↑]
- b. ? I don't remember [was Henry a communist ↑]
- c. Do you remember ↑ [was Henry a communist ↑]

“the necessary discriminatory work is done by ultimately pragmatic conditions...we do not want to hardwire into the lexical entry of a resolute [responsive] predicate a constraint which forbids it to combine with a complement of the higher type.”

McCloskey 2006: 116

EMPIRICAL PAYOFF: Shifty Responsives

I agree with McCloskey that “we do not want to hardwire into the lexical entry of a resolute [responsive] predicate a constraint which forbids it to combine with a complement of the higher type.” but by hardwiring a requirement of potential ignorance about the answer into PRO, which occurs in PerspP, we can capture the relevant pragmatic conditions in the grammar.

EMPIRICAL PAYOFF: Shifty Responsives

The binder of PRO must not know the answer to the question

* [Sue remembers [was Henry a communist ↑]]

◇ ¬know(Sue, Ans(Q)); remember(Sue, Ans(Q)) contradiction

√ [Sue doesn't remember [was Henry a communist ↑]]

◇ ¬know(Sue, Ans(Q)); ¬remember(Sue, Ans(Q))

compatibility

√ [Does Sue remember [was Henry a communist ↑]]

◇ ¬know(Sue, Ans(Q)); { remember(Sue, Ans(Q))
¬remember(Sue, Ans(Q)) }

EMPIRICAL PAYOFF: Shifty Responsives

Remember & *Forget* are close kin but differ on quasi-subordination:

* I *remember* [was henry a communist ?]

√ I *forget* [was henry a communist ?]

Both predicates presuppose knowledge of Ans(Q) at a prior time

Remember: knowledge of Ans(Q) at UT \Rightarrow contradiction *

Forget: lack of knowledge of Ans(Q) at UT \Rightarrow compatibility √

2nd Interim Summary:

$[_{SAP} Sp_{C-i} SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C^0_{+WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]$

MQP (kke, quick)

PQP (kyaa)

Q-particle (ka)/*whether* nucleus

↑_{MATRIX}

↑_{MATRIX}

wh fronting

Only Quotation

Quasi-subordination

Subordination

discourse anchoring

centering

clause typing

Empirical Payoff: The seemingly strange behavior of shifty responsive predicates can be located in the felicity condition that the binder of PRO be potentially ignorant of the answer to the question.

FURTHER EMPIRICAL PAYOFFS

Puzzle 1:

- Rising declaratives are questions but do not (quasi)-subordinate (noted in Gunlogson 2003, McCloskey 2006, Rudin 2018, 2019):

*The question is [it's raining?]

Puzzle 2:

- Rising declaratives are not obligatorily biased in Italian or Hindi-Urdu like they are in English.

WHY CAN'T RISING DECLARATIVES QUASI-SUBORDINATE?

Grimshaw 2012: *ask* has selectional restrictions even when taking quotations as complements:

Mary asked, “ did you have a haircut? ”	<i>rising interrogative</i>
#Mary asked, “ You had a haircut. ”	<i>falling declarative</i>
Mary asked, “ You had a haircut? ”	<i>rising declarative</i>

A rising declarative can satisfy the selectional needs of a rogative predicate – **it is a question!**

WHY CAN'T RISING DECLARATIVES QUASI-SUBORDINATE?

Inversion *Rising Intonation*

Is it raining? Yes Yes

It is raining? No Yes

Prosody is enough for identifying a declarative as a question.

BUT there are restrictions on its conditions of use.

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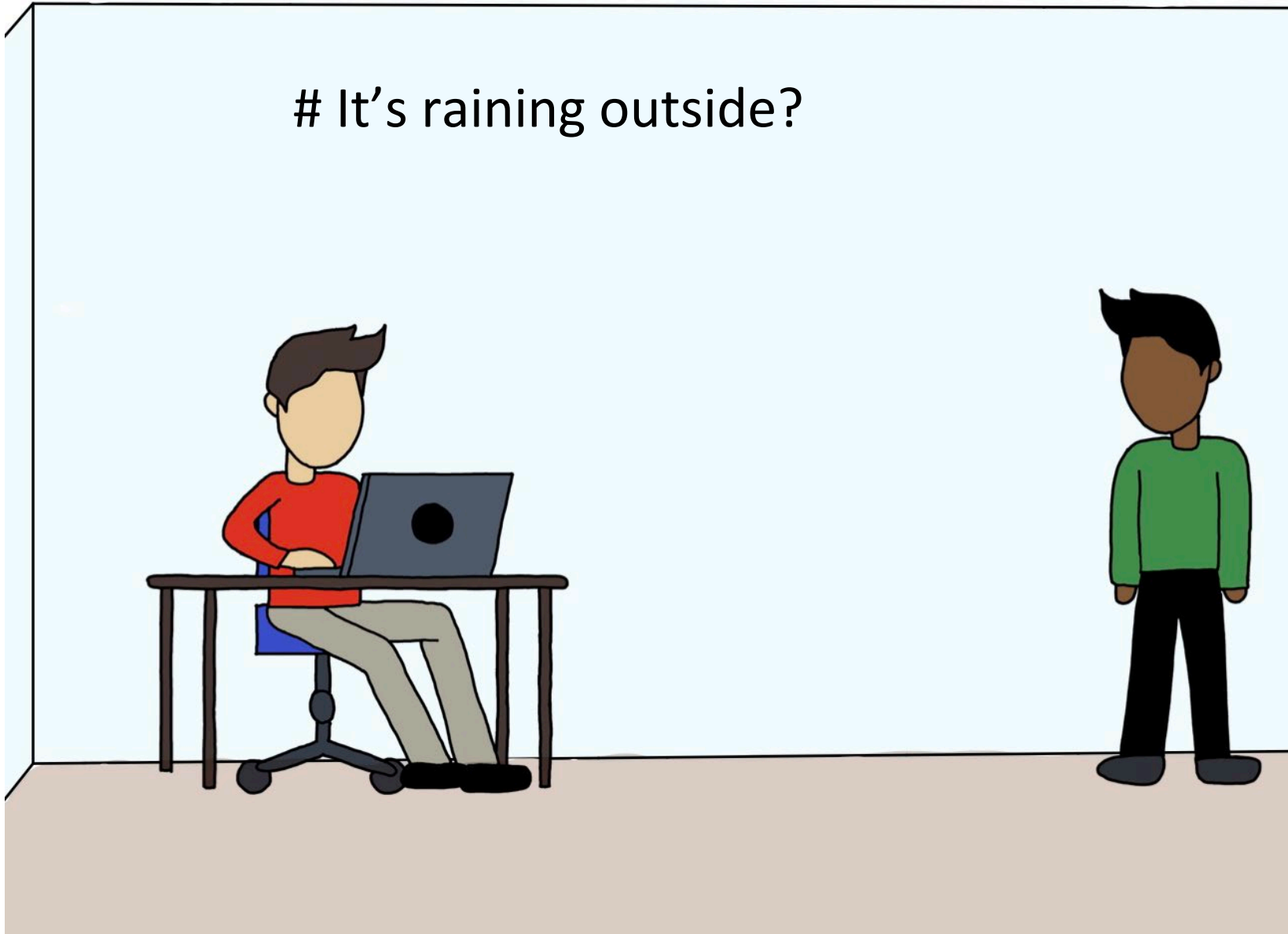
The Windowless Basement Office

Buering and Gunlogson (2000)



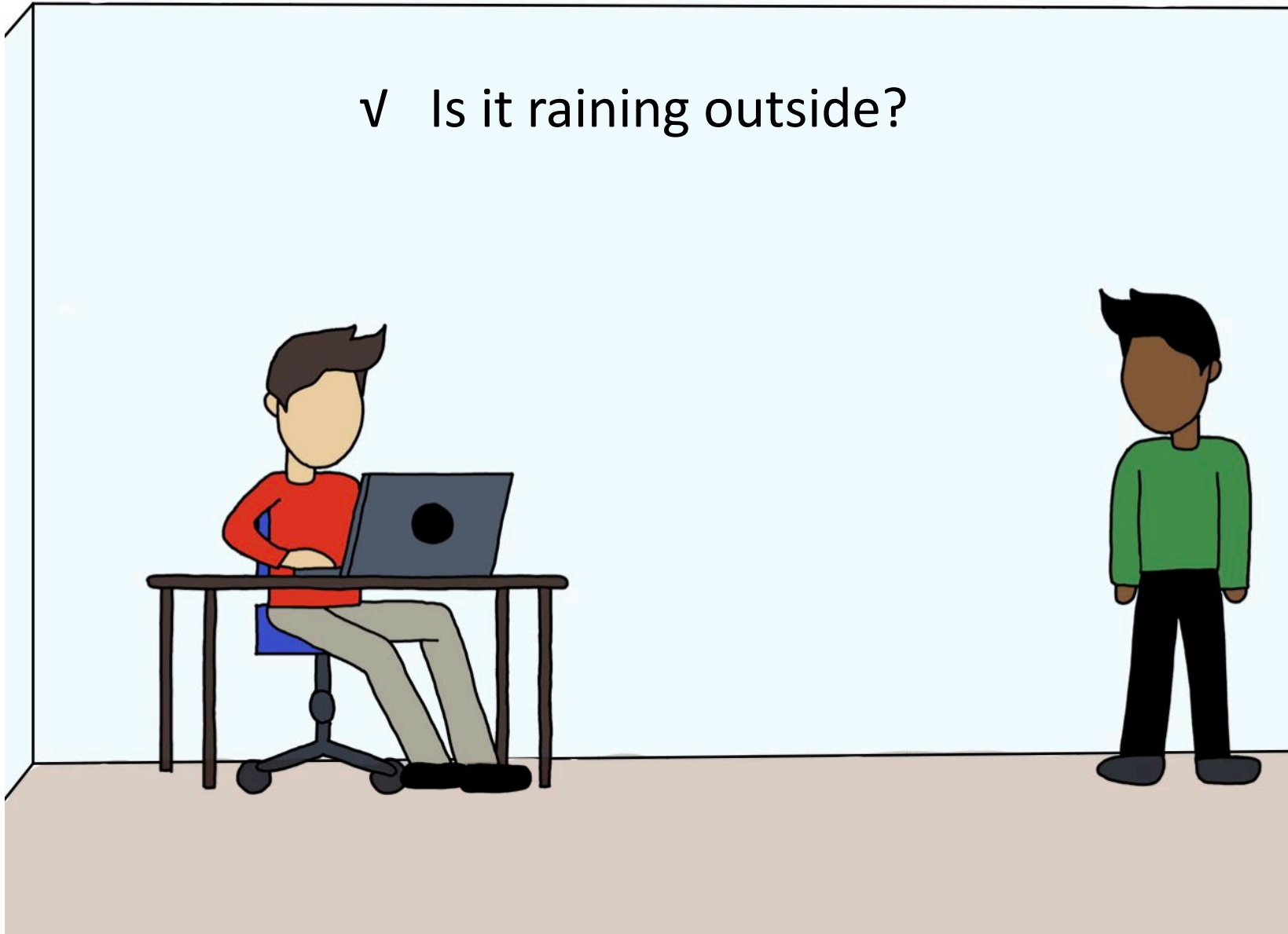
The Windowless Basement Office

It's raining outside?



The Windowless Basement Office

✓ Is it raining outside?



WHY CAN'T RISING DECLARATIVES QUASI-SUBORDINATE?

Rising declaratives are biased questions that involve the **SAP** projection and **SAPs** do not quasi-subordinate (or subordinate).

Bias arises from the interaction of C_{-WH} contributed by a declarative and the rising intonation contributed by the *speech act of asking*.

WHY CAN'T RISING DECLARATIVES QUASI-SUBORDINATE?

- If CP is a declarative, PRO must have an attitude to a proposition. This attitude does not mesh with the speech act of asking.

* $[_{SAP} Sp_{C-i} SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C^0_{-WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]$

- A biased question involves a tentative assertion of the proposition denoted by CP_{-WH} & a request to the addressee to confirm/answer(Q)

$[_{SAP} Sp_{C-i} SA_{ASSERT.ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C^0_{-WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]$

WHY CAN'T RISING DECLARATIVES QUASI-SUBORDINATE?

If a rising declarative can satisfy the selectional needs of a rogative predicate, why can't it be quasi-subordinated?
(Gunlogson 2003, McCloskey 2006, Rudin 2018)”

* Mary is asking *you*_{ADDR-C} *can help her*_{Mary} ?
Mary is asking *if you can help her.*

- This follows from the claim that SAP does not embed, and SAP is where the bias associated with rising declaratives is computed.

WHY AREN'T RISING DECLARATIVES BIASED QUESTIONS X-LINGUISTICALLY?

	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Biased</i>
<i>English</i>	NO	YES
<i>Italian</i>	YES	YES
<i>Hindi-Urdu</i>	YES	YES

At a Nice Restaurant in NYC

A rising interrogative is a neutral question.

The speaker wants to know if the addressee drinks wine so they can decide whether to order a bottle – no expectation of a yes or a no answer.

Do you drink wine?

[_{SAP} ASK ↑

[_{PerspectiveP} Persp_{CQ} (↑) [_{CP} C_{+WH} you drink wine]]]

Thanks to Sarmad Hussain (personal communication) for experimentally verifying the prosodic effects of neutral and biased interpretation for Hindi-Urdu

At a nice restaurant in NYC

The speaker is with someone who they assumed didn't drink alcohol but sees them looking at the wine list. The speaker asks with some surprise:

You drink wine?

[_{SAP} ASSERT (↓)•ASK↑ [_{PerspectiveP} Persp_{CP} (↓) [_{CP} C-_{WH} you drink wine]]]

A biased question involves a *complex speech act*: a tentative assertion of p combined with a request for confirmation about p .

Reese & Asher 2010 on tag questions; Krifka 2014, Bhadra 2017

The **-WH** feature of **CP** and the tentative assertion at **SAP** are compatible so the prosodic feature at **PerspP** can agree with both **CP** and **SAP**.

At a nice restaurant in NYC

What goes wrong in a neutral context?

You drink wine?

$[_{SAP} \text{ ASSERT } (\downarrow) \bullet \text{ ASK } \uparrow [_{\text{PerspectiveP}} \text{ Persp}_{CP} (\downarrow) [_{CP} \text{ C}_{-WH} \text{ you drink wine}]]]$

* $[_{SAP} \text{ ASK } \uparrow [_{\text{PerspectiveP}} \text{ Persp}_{CQ} (\uparrow) / \text{ Persp}_{CP} (\downarrow) [_{CP} \text{ C}_{-WH} \text{ you drink wine}]]]$

The feature at PerspP that gets interpreted as a rise or a fall must match both the specification on its CP argument as well as on the Speech Act that it is a complement to. This cannot happen in a neutral context.

At a restaurant in Rome or Mumbai

Why don't Hindi-Urdu or Italian rising declaratives force a biased question interpretation?

bevi il vino? a:p shara:b pi:te haĩ?
drink the wine you wine drink

“Do you drink wine?” & “You drink wine?”

[_{SAP} ASK↑ [_{PerspectiveP} Persp_{CQ} (↑) [_{CP} C_{αWH} you drink wine]]] *neutral*
[_{SAP} ASSERT (↓)• ASK↑ [_{PerspectiveP} Persp_{CP} (↓)[_C C_{αWH} you drink wine]]] *biased*

Neither Italian nor Hindi has inversion or any other syntactic cues for matrix questions: **CP_{αWH}** is determined *after prosody enters the picture at **PerspP***.

(see also Bhadra 2020, Davis 2009 for a somewhat different take)

Take-away from Puzzles related to Rising Declaratives

The map between prosody and meaning is mediated through a feature that is expressed at **SAP** and at **PerspP** but not at **CP**.

In Y/N Q final rise signals the SA **ASK**; final fall the SA **ASSERT**.

An interrogative **CP** calls for rising intonation at **PerspP** (PRO has an attitude towards a question); this must match the speech act **ASK** at **SAP**.

A declarative **CP** calls for falling intonation at **PerspP** (PRO has an attitude towards a proposition); this must match the speech act **ASSERT** at **SAP** – it can only do so with a rising intonation at **SAP**, when the speech act is both **ASSERT** and **ASK**, as in biased questions.

Take-away from Puzzles related to Rising Declaratives

There is no such thing as a declarative question at **PerspP**, there is either a PRO that has an attitude to a question (interrogative **CP**) or an attitude to a proposition (declarative **CP**).

In languages like Italian and Hindi-Urdu, clause-typing need not happen at **CP**. This allows PRO at **PerspP** to either have an attitude to a question, and yield a neutral question interpretation in the presence of a final rise; or to a proposition and have a biased question interpretation in the presence of a final rise.

On the present proposal, **PerspP** can quasi-subordinate, **SAP** cannot – cross-linguistically.

FURTHER EMPIRICAL PAYOFFS

Some puzzles:

- There is cross-linguistic variation in the optionality vs. obligatoriness of “or not” in polar questions under full subordination (not previously discussed in the literature):

*John knows [whether it is raining (or not)]
optional in English and Italian
obligatory in Hindi-Urdu.*

A puzzle about “or not”

In English, Italian and Hindi-Urdu, Y/N (polar) questions “or not” is optional in matrix and quasi-subordinated clauses:

[_{SAP} Do you drink wine (or not)]?

[_{SAP} Bevi il vino (o no)]?

[_{SAP} aap sharaab piyeNge (yaa nahiiN)]?

The question is, [_{PerspectiveP} do you drink wine (or not)]?

La domanda è [_{PerspectiveP} se berrai il vino (o no)]?

Savaal yeh hai [_{PerspectiveP} ki aap sharaab piyeNge (yaa nahiiN)]?

A puzzle about “or not”

In subordination, “or not” is optional in English & Italian, not in Hindi-Urdu:

John knows [_{CP} Whether she will drink wine (or not)]

Maria sa [_{CP} se berrà il vino (o no)]

ravi ja:nta: hai [_{CP} ki anu ja:egi: *(ya: nahĩ:)]

Ravi knows SUB Anu will-go or not

Intended: “Ravi knows whether Anu will go.

Possible explanation: English *whether* & Italian *se* licenses C_{+WH} which allows the shift to a set of propositions meaning at CP.

Hindi *ki* is not a licenser – it is equally compatible with C_{+WH} and C_{-WH}

A puzzle about “or not”

Possible explanation: English *whether* & Italian *se* licenses C_{+WH} which allows it to shift to a set of propositions at CP. Hindi-Urdu *ki* is not a licenser, being equally compatible with C_{+WH} and C_{-WH} .

- But then why isn't *whether* enough to make “or not” optional in English unconditionals?

John will leave [whether she is there *(or not)] *Biezma & Rawlins 2012*

- Why is the embedding verb not enough in Hindi like it is in English?
- Why is intonation, that enters at **PerspP**, needed for optionality in Hindi-Urdu?

Take away from the Puzzle about “or not”

Prosody at **PerspP** (rising intonation) is able to take a proposition denoting **CP** in Hindi-Urdu and shift it to a (proper) question meaning without the syntactic support of “or not”, an embedding verb by itself cannot:

[V ask [PerspectiveP ↑ Persp_{CQ} [CP C⁰ {p, not-p} p [TP ...]]]]

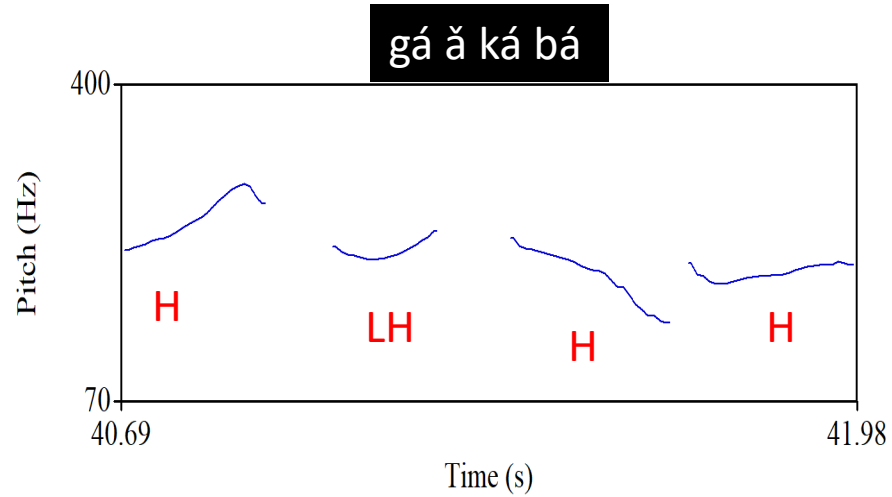
* [V ask [CP C⁰ p [TP ...]]]]

It is worth asking why.

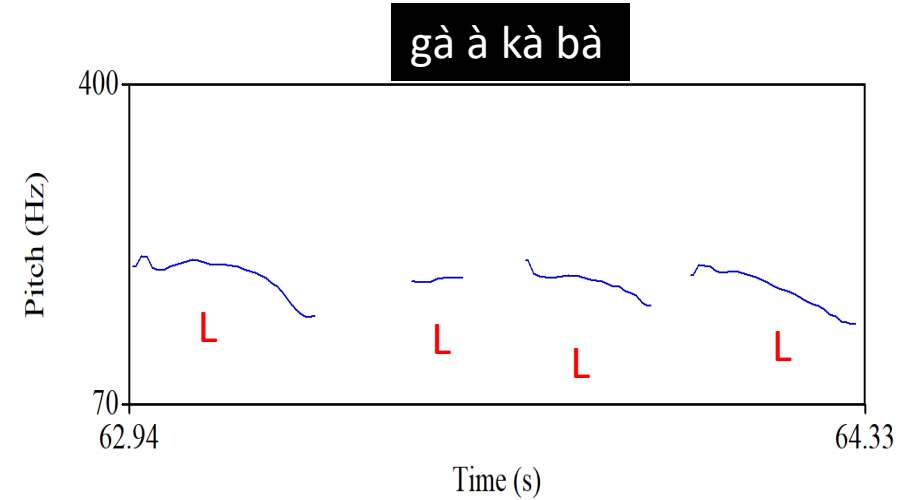
Prosody and the Left Periphery

Rikpa (Gam and Franich 2023)

DEC

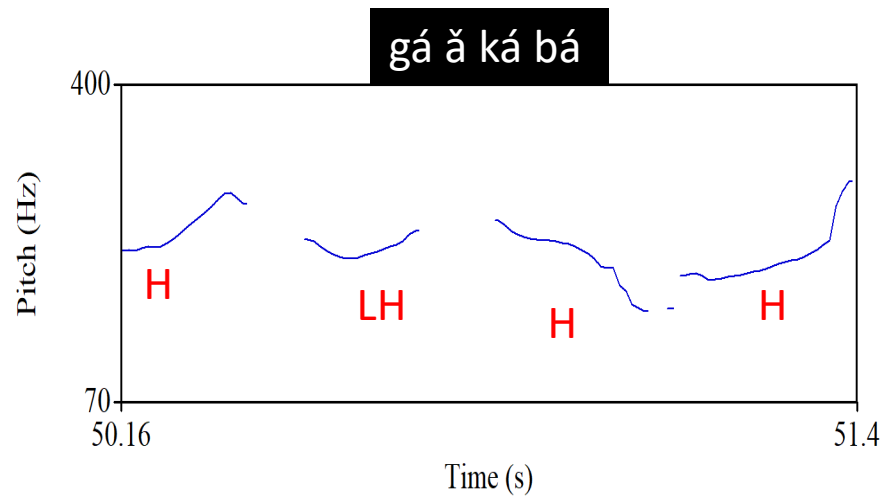


“Mother looks for the meat.”

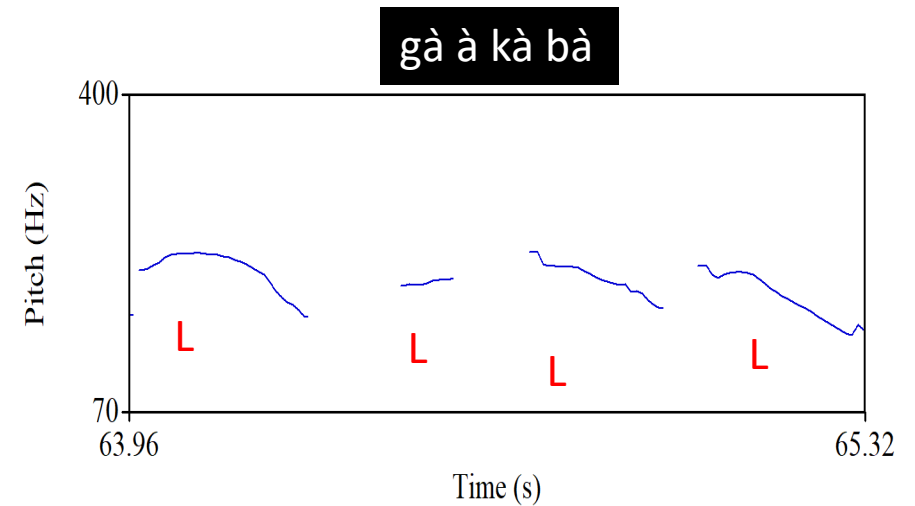


“Ga served the sea salt.”

QUES



“Does mother look for the meat?”



“Does Ga serve the sea salt?”

PROSODY & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Rhetorical questions are interrogatives whose true answer is obvious to speaker and hearer.

RQ are formally the same as ISQ. The *rhetorical* aspect is pragmatic, arising from the recognition that the context makes a ISQ interpretation unlikely.

Rhode (2006), Caponigro and Sprouse (2007)

RQ and ISQ are formally distinct – the LF of RQ has an operator that converts it into a statement.

Han (2002)

*(see Dehé & Braun 2018 for overview
and other references)*

PROSODY & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Why do we even use rhetorical questions?

As a way of justifying a position the speaker has taken:

Speaker A: Let's hire Onavi.

Speaker B: Let's not – **what does he know about Semantics?**

based on Caponigro and Sprouse (2007)

⇒ Onavi knows nothing about semantics

Often preceded by *after all* (a justification providing
expression, *Eckardt 2023*,
see also Sadock 1974)

PROSODY & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Why do we even use rhetorical questions?

Sometimes to answer a different question:

Prospective Graduate Student: Does the committee have to pass the dissertation in order to get your degree?

Advanced Graduate Student – **Is the Pope Catholic?**

⇒ The answer to your question is as obvious as the answer to “Is the Pope Catholic?” – Yes!

Often preceded by *duh*

Dayal (2022)

How do we identify Rhetorical Questions? Not just context!

Audio files (removed in this version) courtesy Bettina Braun (Dehe & Braun 2018)

Does anyone want roses?

Who studies algebra?

Does anyone eat Brussel sprouts?

Who eats Limburger?

Prosodic differences: Info-Seeking vs Rhetorical Questions

Does anyone want roses?
ISQ

Who studies algebra?
ISQ

Does anyone eat Brussel sprouts?
RQ

Who eats Limburger?
RQ

A Minimal pair

Does anyone read novels?

ISQ

Does anyone read novels?

RQ

PROSODY & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Dehé and Braun (2018) note:

“Our results for edge tones go against Han (2002), who maintains that polar RQs are realized with a final fall due to their semantic similarity to assertions, as well as against Banuazizi & Cresswell (1999), who suggest more falls for RQs due to the presence of obvious answers.”

They caution against putting too much stock on the boundary tone or edge tone and to include phonological and phonetic aspects in calculating the interface between prosody and illocution type.

PROSODY & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

It might be worth comparing RQ (and Rising Declaratives) to other cases where an ISQ interpretation is implausible:

What's your name, Basanti?

What's his name, Basanti?

OR the more familiar:

Can you pass the salt? Obvious answer 'yes' => request

Can you lift this table? No obvious answer => ISQ

No prosodic difference here!

No studies that I know of, possibly because no one has felt the need to test such cases of indirect speech acts.

PROSODY & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Is RQ a different type of speech act that is formally represented at SAP, with its own characteristic prosody?

Or do we want to maintain the view that the RQ interpretation simply results from Gricean reasoning?

I leave this as an open question for now...



Conclusion to “May we come in?”

Let me now summarize the various kinds of facts which must, I suggest, be included in a fully developed system of linguistic description.

- (1) The linguistic description of a language must characterize for each lexical item in the language
 - (a) The grammatical constructions in which it can occur,
 - (b) The grammatical processes to which it is subject in each relevant context,
 - (c) The grammatical processes which its presence in a construction determines, and
 - (d) Information about speech act conditions, conversation rules, and semantic interpretation which must be associated in an idiosyncratic way with the lexical item in question;
- (2) It must provide the apparatus which characterizes
 - (a) The grammatical structures of sentences on the “deep” or more abstract level, and
 - (b) The grammatical processes by which abstract linguistic structures are processed and become surface sentences;



Conclusion to “May we come in?”

A fully developed system of linguistic description.

- (3) It must contain a component for calculating the complete semantic and pragmatic description of a sentence given its grammatical structure and information associated with these lexical items;
- (4) It must be able to draw on a theory of illocutionary acts, in terms of which the calculations of (3) are empowered to provide a full account of the illocutionary act potential of each sentence
- (5) It must be able to draw on a theory of discourse which relates the use of sentences in social and conversational situations; and
- (6) It must be able to draw on a theory of “natural logic” by means of which such judgments as the success of an argument or the appropriateness of elements in conversations can be deduced.

A formidable set of injunctions!

50 years after Fillmore's Lectures on Deixis, we can say:

We have been trying

We have made some progress

There's more to do

But we can end by taking stock of where we stand on questions:

Wrapping up

But let us see where we stand on questions:

$[_{SAP} \text{Speaker}_C \text{SA}_{ASK} [_{\text{PerspectiveP}} \text{PRO}_i \text{Persp}_{CQ} [_{CP} C^0_{+WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]]$

There are parts of this proposal that are uncontroversial and parts that may be open to debate.

CP: This is the part of the structure that we have been working on for the last 50 years in syntax and semantics. My proposal preserves all the progress we have made in understanding questions so far, modulo differences of detail. But the fact that interrogatives and declaratives are differentiated syntactically and semantically, I take to be uncontroversial.

Wrapping up

[_{SAP} Speaker_C SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP} ...]]]]

SAP: Perhaps fewer people would agree with placing speech acts in the syntax, but I gave you some motivations for this move: lexical expressions that only occur in direct questions and quotations and can be interpreted compositionally as modifying the speech act. This adds to the growing body of work on the syntax of allocutive agreement and indexical shift, which argues for the representation of discourse participants at the left periphery.

Wrapping up

[_{SAP} Speaker_C SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP} ...]]]]

PerspP: Even fewer people would go along with this. But I hope to have shown you that there are real grammatical consequences to this move, and that making room for a projection at this level which has its own syntactic, semantic and prosodic characteristics is necessary.

This is the part of the structure at the left periphery that is implicated in embedded root phenomena and non-canonical forms of discourse such as wh-slifting, free indirect speech and maybe even sequential scope marking.

Wrapping up

$[_{SAP} \text{Speaker}_C \text{SA}_{ASK} [_{\text{PerspectiveP}} \text{PRO}_i \text{Persp}_{CQ} [_{CP} C^0_{+WH} [_{TP} \dots]]]]$

While much of the focus was on English, I have provided some evidence along the way for the cross-linguistic validity of this proposal.

And, finally, as in all new work, there are some questions that this gives rise to:

Wrapping up

[_{SAP} Speaker_C SA_{ASK} [_{PerspectiveP} PRO_i Persp_{CQ} [_{CP} C⁰_{+WH} [_{TP} ...]]]]

Some open questions:

Which indirect speech acts should be included in the grammar and which left to the Gricean reasoning?

How much of prosody should be represented at the left periphery, and in what way?

Which other speech acts does this proposal extend to?

THANK YOU!!

With very special thanks to Priscilla Ehrgood for help with the presentation