

Sorting Out the Implications of Questions

1. The Issue Despite extensive debate in the literature, there is no consensus regarding the status of the existential proposition associated with a *wh*-question (1). Part of the difficulty in determining whether this is a presupposition, implicature, or other meaning component, derives from disparate interpretations of certain presupposition diagnostics and the inapplicability of other criteria to interrogatives. In this paper we propose two novel diagnostics for the status of this proposition, (i) intervention effects and (ii) the ability to serve as an antecedent for *too*, both of which indicate that a fine-grained classification of different types of questions is needed. Accordingly, we claim that argument *wh*-questions and alternative questions indicate an epistemic bias, while adjunct *wh*-questions and clefted *wh*- and alternative questions are associated with a presupposition.

2. Existing Analyses According to one view, the proposition associated with *wh*-questions is a presupposition (Katz & Postal 1964, Comorovski 1996, a.o.). Evidence for this comes, for example, from the impossibility of cancelling the presupposition by the speaker who uttered the question (2). Alternative questions (3) are also commonly thought to involve a presupposition, whereby one and only one of the alternatives is true (Karttunen 1977). However, others maintain that no such presupposition exists: Ginzburg (1991) claims that an implicature is involved in *wh*-questions, based on the fact that it is (i) amenable to suspension (4), (ii) does not always arise, so that in (5) the speaker of the House does not necessarily believe that anyone supports amending the Bill of Rights, and (iii) is calculable from the fact that the more neutral yes/no question form was not used.

3. A Novel Approach We argue that a uniform analysis of questions is misguided, given that on a number of tests, argument *wh*-questions and alternative questions give different results from adjunct *wh*-questions, clefted *wh*-questions, and clefted alternative questions. First, the former allow negative answers (6), while the latter do not (7)-(8) (cf. Brandtler 2008). Second, clefted questions cannot be suspended (9), unlike non-clefted questions (4), and third, argument *wh*-questions can be answered with a positive indefinite (10), but adjunct *wh*-questions cannot (11). Furthermore, we offer two novel diagnostics which support a non-uniform analysis: First, although adjunct *wh*-questions (12) and clefted *wh*-questions (13) provide an antecedent for the presupposition of *too*, on a par with presuppositions in declaratives (14), argument *wh*-questions do not (15). Second, the first group of questions exhibit intervention effects, becoming degraded when a focused phrase precedes the *wh*-phrase (16), or, in the case of alternative questions, losing the alternative question reading (17). Adjunct *wh*-questions (18) and clefted questions (19) do not show this effect. The latter finding is explained under an information structural approach to intervention effects (Tomioka 2007), whereby they are the result of a mismatch between the information structure of questions and the properties of interveners. This mismatch is avoided in adjunct *wh*-questions and clefted questions because their presuppositions include the potential intervener, which is thus backgrounded and does not clash with the informational articulation of the question. The results of all these tests point to the same conclusion: adjunct *wh*-questions, clefted *wh*-questions, and clefted alternative questions are associated with a presupposition, but argument *wh*-questions and alternative questions are not. We propose that the latter indicate an epistemic bias (cf. Romero & Han 2004), which unlike a presupposition, need not be shared by the discussants.

4. Ramifications This study develops recent work demonstrating that a uniform analysis of questions as presupposition triggers is inadequate (Fitzpatrick 2005). In addition, it establishes that infelicitous negative answers are true indicators of presuppositional status, contra Comorovski (1996), and it provides support for an information structural approach to intervention effects: syntactic or semantic theories cannot connect the findings reported here to their account of intervention.

- (1) Who read the book? *Associated Proposition*: Someone read the book.
- (2) #Although nothing is on the table, what is on the table? (Postal 1971:73)
- (3) Did John drink coffee or tea? *Presupposition*: John drank either coffee or tea, but not both.
- (4) What, if anything, should I buy at the store?
- (5) Who is in favor of amending the Bill of Rights?
- (6) Q: Who bought that book?
A: No one.
- (7) Q: When did John buy that book?
A: #Never.
- (8) Q: Who is it that failed the test?
A: #No one.
- (9) #Who is it that failed the test, if anyone?
- (10) Q: Oh gosh, who locked up the house?
A: Don't worry, someone did. I heard the keys turn as I walked below. (Ginzburg 1995:474)
- (11) Q: When did John buy that book?
A: #I don't know, but he did it at some point.
- (12) Q: Where on campus did John give the lecture yesterday?
A: I don't know, but he gave it at Drexel too.
- (13) Q: Who is it that went to the meeting with the dean?
A: I don't know, but I did too.
- (14) John quit smoking. I used to smoke too.
- (15) Q: Who went to the meeting with the dean?
A: #I don't know, but I did too.
- (16) *amuto nuku-lul manna-chi anh-ass-ni?
anyone who-ACC meet-CHI not.do-PAST-Q
'Who did no one meet?' (Korean; Yoon 2008:381)
- (17) Q: Does only John like Mary or Susan?
A1:#Mary. [*AltQ]
A2: Yes. [√Yes/NoQ] (Beck & Kim 2006:167)
- (18) (?) amuto encey sukce-lul cechulha-chi anh-ass-ni?
anyone when homework-ACC submit-CHI not.do-PAST-Q
'When did nobody submit their homework?' (Korean; Yoon 2008:381)
- (19) Is it Mary or Susan who only John likes? (Beck & Kim 2006:167)

Selected References: Comorovski, I. 1996. *Interrogative Phrases and the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. Fitzpatrick, J. 2005. The whys and how comes of presupposition and NPI licensing in questions. In J. Alderete et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of WCCFL 24*, 138–145. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla. Tomioka, S. 2007. Pragmatics of LF intervention effects: Japanese and Korean *wh*-interrogatives. *Journal of Pragmatics* 39, 1570–1590.