

Questions

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Content of the course

The internal semantic composition and final utterance meaning of questions has, over the years, raised non-trivial issues concerning the syntax/prosody/semantics interface and the division of labor between at-issue content, non-at-issue content and pragmatic processes. This course provides a critical overview of some of these issues. We start with an introduction to the compositional semantics of questions in traditional approaches. Then, we zoom into the three main interrogative clause types – namely, Wh-Question (WhQs), Alternative Questions (AltQs) and Polar Questions (PolQs) – and present, for each of them, one problem currently under debate, including degrees of exhaustivity, the interaction of syntactic and prosodic cues in the construction of meaning, and the licensing of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs). Next, moving away from purely information-seeking uses, we inspect what non-canonical questions reveal about meaning composition and discourse pressures. We will examine epistemic bias in PolQs, illocutionary range and cornering effects in AltQs and the role of discourse particles in German WhQs. Finally, we present puzzles on questions embedded under attitudes, such as the *surprise+whether puzzle and the admit+*if/√whether puzzle.

Week 1

- Monday: Traditional compositional approaches
- Wednesday: WhQ: Degrees of exhaustivity
- Thursday: AltQ: Mapping from syntax/prosody to meaning
- Friday: PolQ (and WhQ): NPI licensing

Week 1

- **Monday:** Traditional compositional approaches

(1) Which students did John invite?

(2) Wh-phrase ex situ: $[_{CP} \text{ which students}_i [C^0 [_{IP} \text{ John invited } t_i]]]$

(3) Wh-phrase in situ: $[_{CP} [C^0 [_{IP} \text{ John invited } \text{ which students }]]]$

(4) Split wh-phrase: $[_{CP} \text{ which students } [C^0 [_{IP} \text{ John invited } t_i \text{ which students}]]]$

Week 1

- **Wednesday:** WhQ: Degrees of exhaustivity

Max enters his favorite shop at the mall: the Confetti Shop. The Confetti Shop offers handmade confetti in all colours, which the owner Hanne punches with her own hand with a paper punch.

- „Hanne, I know how to do it faster“, says Max. He folds a paper four times and gives it back to Hanne. "That way you get four times as many pieces of paper with every punch," he says.

- "That's not true", Hanne answers. "You get eight times as many."

Q: Who is right?

Geolino, Sept 2016

Week 1

- Thursday: AltQ: Mapping from syntax/prosody to meaning

(5) Are you making pasta or $FISH_{L*H-H\%}$?

PolQ

"Is it the case that you are making (at least) one of these two things, pasta or fish?"

(6) Are you making PAS_{L*H-} or $FISH_{H*L-L\%}$?

AltQ

"Which of these things are you doing: making pasta or making fish?"

Week 1

- Friday: PolQ (and WhQ): NPI licensing

(7) Does Frank have any books?

(8) Who has any books?

Week 2: Non-canonical uses

- **Monday:** Biased PolQs
- **Wednesday:** AltQs, Bolinger's (1978) paradigm and cornering
- **Thursday:** Discourse particles in German WhQs
- **Friday:** Embedding puzzles

Week 2: Non-canonical uses

- **Monday:** Biased PolQs

- (9) Is jane coming?
- (10) Is jane not coming?
- (11) Isn't Jane coming?
- (12) Is Jane really coming?

Week 2: Non-canonical uses

- **Wednesday:** AltQs, Bolinger's (1978) paradigm and cornering

(13) Would you like some coffee?

✓ Invitation

(14) Would you like some coffee or not?

Invitation

(15) Are you crazy?

✓ Rhetorical Q

(16) Are you crazy or not?

Rhetorical Q

Week 2: Non-canonical uses

- **Thursday:** Discourse particles in German WhQs

(17) Wo wohnt er?
where lives he
,Where does he live?'

Plain info-seeking

(18) Wo wohnt er **denn**?
(19) Wo wohnt er **bloss**?
(20) Wo wohnt er **schon**?

Special interest

Can't-find-answer

Rhetorical

Week 2: Non-canonical uses

- **Friday:** Embedding puzzles

(21) Al knows / was surprised at / realized [who came]. **WhQ**

(22) Al Al knows / *was surprised at / *realized [whether John_{L*}H- or Mary_{H*}L- came].
AltQ

(23) Al Al knows / *was surprised at / *realized [whether John came]. **PolQ**