

In eigener Sache (I)

Speech Act workshop in Konstanz

Questioning Speech Acts

- Konstanz, September 14 - 16, 2017
- **Invited Speakers:** Joe Buffington, Cleo Condoravdi, Christine Gunlogson, Magda Kaufmann
- **Deadline for submission:** June 4, 2017 (this Sunday!)
- **Organizers:** Regine Eckardt and Sven Lauer
- <http://goo.gl/fn3UoN>
<https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=qsa17>

In eigener Sache (II)

Two PhD positions in formal semantics/pragmatics

Two PhD positions in formal semantics/pragmatics

- Three years of funding (65% TV-L 13).
- To be announced within the next month.
- Expected start date: October 2017.
- Two sub-projects:
 - Rhetorical uses of interrogatives.
 - Infinitival and 'practical' interrogatives.

What is it to ask a question?

Prolegomena to a comprehensive theory of interrogative force

Sven Lauer (University of Konstanz)

Speech Acts: Meanings, Uses, Syntactic and Prosodic Realizations

Leibnitz-Zentrum für allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

May 29-31, 2017

A first intuition

Interrogatives are good for requesting information.

- (1) Is John an only child?
 - ↪ *Sp* does not know whether John is an only child.
 - ↪ *Sp* takes it to be possible that *Ad* knows.
 - ↪ *Sp* requests that *Ad* see to it that *Sp* knows.

The functional heterogeneity of interrogatives

The functional heterogeneity of imperatives

Imperatives can be used with various 'illocutionary forces' (Schmerling 1982, Schwager 2006, Kaufmann 2012):

- | | | |
|--------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| (2) a. | Stand at attention! | (Command) |
| b. | Don't touch the hot plate! | (Warning) |
| c. | Hand me the salt, please. | (Request) |
| d. | Do the right thing! | (Exhortation) |
| e. | Take these pills for a week. | (Advice) |
| f. | Please, lend me the money! | (Plea) |
| g. | Get well soon! | (Well-wish)} |
| h. | Drop dead! | (Curse) |
| i. | Okay, go out and play. | (Permission) |
| j. | Okay then, sue me, if you have to. | (Concession) |
| k. | Have a cookie(, if you like). | (Offer) |

The functional heterogeneity of imperatives

- The functional heterogeneity of imperatives has been a central challenge for theories of imperative sentential force.
- Substantial progress has been made in addressing this challenge, without giving up the aim of a uniform semantics & conventional force.
 - Schwager (2006), Kaufmann (2012), Condoravdi and Lauer (2012), ...
- But imperatives are not alone in posing a heterogeneity problem.

Requesting information

'Information question'

- (3) Is John an only child?
- ↪ *Sp* does not know whether John is an only child.
 - ↪ *Sp* takes it to be possible that *Ad* knows.
 - ↪ *Sp* requests that *Ad* see to it that *Sp* knows.

- Which of these (if any) are **conventionally associated** with the interrogative sentence form?
- How are these meaning components distributed over different strata of 'illocutionary meaning'? e.g.:
 - preconditions/presuppositions/felicity conditions
 - vs.
 - postconditions/commitments/dynamic effects

Testing knowledge

'Exam question'

(4) [In a chemistry exam] **What is the formula for sulphuric acid?**

- ↗ *Sp* does not know the formula for sulphuric acid.
- ↘ *Sp* takes it to be possible that *Ad* knows.
- ↗ *Sp* requests that *Ad* see to it that *Sp* knows.

Instead:

- *Sp* requests that *Ad* convince him that he knows the answer.

Teaching

Pedagogical/Socratic question

(5) [Geometry teacher to student]

Does this line bisect each of these spaces? (Plato, *Meno*)

- ↗ *Sp* does not know whether the line bisects the spaces.
- ↘ *Sp* takes it to be possible that *Ad* knows.
- ↗ *Sp* requests that *Ad* see to it that *Sp* knows.

Instead:

- *Sp* wants *Ad* to realize what the answer is.

Prompting a commitment

'Combative question'

(6) [Tea party representative in parliament to a Democratic colleague]

Should taxes be raised to balance the budget?

- ↗ *Sp* does not know whether taxes should be raised.
- ↘ *Sp* takes it to be possible that *Ad* knows.
- ↗ *Sp* requests that *Ad* see to it that *Sp* knows.

Instead:

- *Sp* wants *Ad* to 'go on record' with what he believes is the answer.

Setting up extended discussion

'Discussion question' (Type I)

(7) **Who had opportunity to commit the crime?** (Let's figure this out.)

- ↘ *Sp* does not know (yet) who had the opportunity.
- ↗? *Sp* takes it to be possible that *Ad* knows.
- ↗? *Sp* requests that *Ad* see to it that *Sp* knows.

Instead:

- *Sp* wants to start a discussion during which the answer is determined (as far as possible).

Setting up extended discussion

'Discussion question' (Type II)

(8) Where shall we go for dinner?

- ~ Sp does not know (yet) where to go for dinner.
- † Sp takes it to be possible that Ad knows.
- † Sp requests that Ad see to it that Sp knows.

Instead:

- Sp wants to start a discussion during which the interlocutors agree on an answer.
- N.B.: Thereby, they *make an answer the true one*.

Rhetorical questions

of various types

When the answer is CG already

(9) [A does not stop complaining how bad the movie was]

B: Who insisted that we go see this movie?

- † Sp does not know (yet) who it was.
- ~ Sp takes it to be possible that Ad knows.
- † Sp requests that Ad see to it that Sp knows.

Instead (?):

- Sp wants to remind Ad of what the true answer is.

Rhetorical questions

of various types

'Discourse-structuring' (or 'monologic') questions

(10) [At the beginning of a talk.]

What is it to ask a question?

- † Sp does not know (yet) who had the opportunity.
- † Sp takes it to be possible that Ad knows.
- † Sp requests that Ad see to it that Sp knows.

The functional heterogeneity of interrogatives

'Information question'

(11) Is John an only child?

- ~ Sp does not know whether John is an only child.
- ~ Sp takes it to be possible that Ad knows.
- ~ Sp requests that Ad see to it that Sp knows.

- It seems that *none* of these three implications can be part of the conventional sentential force of interrogative sentences.
- At least not if we take all the preceding uses to be 'sincere', 'direct' and 'literal'.

What is a 'literal' use of an interrogative?

Direct vs. indirect speech acts

Consensus (?): The request character of (12) is not coded in its (interrogative) sentential force:

(12) Can you reach the salt?

- Instead, this request character seems to arise *indirectly*, through a *direct* question-asking.
 - Even though the request may be the 'primary point' the speaker is trying to make.
- (*Prima facie*) evidence: We can report (12) with (13-a) or (13-b), or even with (13-c).

- (13) a. *A* requested the salt.
 b. *A* inquired whether *B* could reach the salt.
 c. *A* requested the salt by inquiring whether *B* can reach it.

Direct vs. indirect speech acts

- Indirect uses are 'literal' uses (arguably).
- That is, the utterance has all elements of its conventional force.
 - It just happens to have additional implications in context.
- ↪ 'indirectness' will not help us with our dilemma.
 - But it may be involved in explaining some of the 'Instead:' implications.

Literal vs. non-literal speech acts

- *Prima facie* possibility for any sentence type: [Set aside some troublesome uses as 'non-literal'](#).
 - *e.g.*, declarative irony.
- Perhaps: All but the information-requesting ones are non-literal?
- **But:** History tells us we should be ambitious.

The functional heterogeneity of imperatives

Imperatives can be used with various 'illocutionary forces' (Schmerling 1982, Schwager 2006, Kaufmann 2012):

- | | | |
|---------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| (14) a. | Stand at attention! | (Command) |
| b. | Don't touch the hot plate! | (Warning) |
| c. | Hand me the salt, please. | (Request) |
| d. | Do the right thing! | (Exhortation) |
| e. | Take these pills for a week. | (Advice) |
| f. | Please, lend me the money! | (Plea) |
| g. | Get well soon! | (Well-wish)} |
| h. | Drop dead! | (Curse) |
| i. | Okay, go out and play. | (Permission) |
| j. | Okay then, sue me, if you have to. | (Concession) |
| k. | Have a cookie(, if you like). | (Offer) |

Literal vs. non-literal speech acts

- *Prima facie* possibility for any sentence type: Set aside some uses as 'non-literal'.
 - *e.g.*, declarative irony.
- Perhaps: All but the information-requesting ones are non-literal?
- **But:** History tells us we should be ambitious.
- Setting aside troublesome uses is defeatist.
- Let's venture on.

Some proposals from the literature

Interrogatives as requests

A speaker of an interrogative 'requests' that ...

- | | | |
|---------|---|---|
| (15) a. | ... the addressee make the speaker know an answer. | 'imperative-epistemic' (Åqvist 1965, Hintikka 1976, 1983) |
| b. | ... the addressee assert a/the true answer(s). | 'imperative-assertoric' (Lewis and Lewis 1975, Åqvist 1983) |
| c. | ... the addressee commit himself to an answer in the next discourse move. | (Krifka 2015) |
| d. | ... an answer to become common ground. | (Truckenbrodt 2006a) |
| e. | ... a contextually-specified agent or group of agents come to know an answer. | (Truckenbrodt 2004, 2006b) |
| f. | ... that the addressee be committed to an answer. | (Lauer and Condoravdi 2012) |
| g. | ... a contextually-specified agent or group of agents activate a knowledge-representation of an answer. | (Zaefferer 2006) |

Interrogatives as requests

A speaker of an interrogative 'requests' that ...

- (16) a. ... the addressee make the speaker know an answer.
'imperative-epistemic' (Åqvist 1965, Hintikka 1976, 1983, Bierwisch 1980, ?)
- b. ... the addressee assert a/the true answer(s).
'imperative-assertoric' (Lewis and Lewis 1975, Åqvist 1983)
- c. ... the addressee commit himself to an answer in the next discourse move. (Krifka 2015)
- d. ... an answer to become common ground. (Truckenbrodt 2004, 2006a)
- e. ... a contextually-specified agent or group of agents come to know an answer. (Truckenbrodt 2006b)
- f. ... that the addressee be committed to an answer. (Lauer and Condoravdi 2012)
- g. ... a contextually-specified agent or group of agents activate a knowledge-representation of an answer. (Zaefferer 2006)

Krifka (2015): Interrogatives as meta-speech acts

- Implementation in Krifka's commitment-space semantics.
- Interrogatives restrict the 'legal' continuations of the exchange to those **in which the addressee assertorically commits to an answer.**
 - Other continuations (e.g., 'I don't know' require retraction/rejection of the question act).
- Compatible with (rather obviously):
 - Information questions (like imperative-assertoric approach)
 - Exam questions (like imperative-assertoric approach)
 - Socratic questions (like imperative-assertoric approach)
 - Combative questions (unlike imperative-assertoric approach)
- Not (obviously) compatible with:
 - Discussion questions (both types)
 - Rhetorical questions (all types)

Interrogatives as requests

A speaker of an interrogative 'requests' that ...

- (17) a. ... the addressee make the speaker know an answer.
(Åqvist 1965, Hintikka 1976, 1983, Bierwisch 1980)
- b. ... the addressee assert a/the true answer(s).
(Lewis and Lewis 1975, Åqvist 1983)
- c. ... the addressee commit himself to an answer in the next discourse move. (Krifka 2015)
- d. ... an answer to become common ground. (Truckenbrodt 2004, 2006a)
- e. ... a contextually-specified agent or group of agents come to know an answer. (Truckenbrodt 2006b)
- f. ... that the addressee be committed to an answer. (Lauer and Condoravdi 2012)
- g. ... a contextually-specified agent or group of agents activate a knowledge-representation of an answer. (Zaefferer 2006)

The 'optimistic' approaches

Truckenbrodt (2004, 2006a) and Lauer and Condoravdi (2012)

- Truckenbrodt: Interrogative $q?$ = WANT(S,KNOW(S&A, whether q))
 $\approx Sp$ wants that it becomes common ground whether q .
- Lauer & Condoravdi: Interrogative $q?$ induces the following commitment:
 $PEP_{Sp}(PB_{Ad}(\text{whether } q))$
 $\approx Sp$ commits to a preference for Ad to be committed to a belief in an answer to $q?$
 $\approx Sp$ requests that Ad be committed to an answer to $q?$

The 'optimistic' approaches

Truckenbrodt (2004, 2006a) and Lauer and Condoravdi (2012)

- Both approaches:
 - Request-like force is assumed to be the same as the one present in imperatives.
 - What is requested = the standard outcome of declarative utterances.
- Optimism:
 - Conventional force is universally present on sincere uses.
 - Nothing else is universally present.
 - Variation in uses comes out via (Gricean reasoning and) contextual conditions.

Truckenbrodt (2004)

- Proposal: Request to make common ground whether q .
- Argued to be compatible with:
 - Information questions
 - Socratic questions
 - Exam questions
 - Rhetorical questions (as redundant requests?)
 - Discourse-structuring questions (as requests to listen)
- Also compatible with (arguably):
 - Discussion questions (both types)
- Not so compatible with:
 - Combative questions.

Lauer & Condoravdi (2012)

- Proposal: Request for the speaker to be committed to an answer to q .
- Argued to be compatible with:
 - Information questions
 - Socratic questions
 - Exam questions
 - Rhetorical questions (as redundant requests)
 - Discussion questions (both types)
 - Combative questions
- Not so compatible with:
 - Discourse-structuring questions (unless analyzed as self-addressed?)

Summary

- So far, 'optimistic' approaches are looking good.
- They both are compatible with all our uses except one.
- The respective authors also spell out the conditions under which the various uses ought to arise.
- Success?

A dose of realism

First cracks in the optimistic picture

- Both optimistic approaches take the request-like force to be the same as in imperatives.
- But there are differences:
 - 1 Imperatives cannot be used as vacuous requests for something that is known to be the case, cf. (18).
 - but rhetorical questions allegedly are redundant requests, on these accounts.
 - 2 Imperatives imply that the role of the speaker in fulfilling them is to be minimized (Condoravdi and Lauer 2012).
 - but, at least in the case of discussion questions, the speaker does not imply that his involvement in bringing about common ground / addressee-commitment will be minimal.

(18) Be at the speech act workshop!

Pessimism: Plunze and Zimmermann (2006)

Lauer & Condoravdi's conditions for information-requesting uses:

- **Speaker preference for sincerity:** The speaker effectively disprefers that the addressee commits to believing in an answer unless he actually believes it to be true.
- **Addressee preference for sincerity:** The addressee is effectively disprefers to commit to believing in an element an answer unless he actually believes it to be true.
- **Speaker ignorance:** The speaker does not know which answer is true.
- **Addressee knowledge:** It is possible that the addressee knows which answer is true.
- **Cooperative addressee:** The addressee does not effectively disprefer sharing his information about the answer

Pessimism: Plunze and Zimmermann (2006)

- Crucial challenge by Plunze and Zimmermann (2006): Truckenbrodt (2004)'s optimistic approach undergenerates information-requesting readings.
- Applies also to Condoravdi & Lauer's optimism.

(19) [Customer *C* gets into *T*'s cab at Tegel airport]
C: To the Brandenburger Tor, please.
T: Where is the Brandenburger Tor?

- In this context, it is **very** plausible to assume (antecedently) that *T* knows where BT is.
- And, arguably, *C* just indicated that he assumes this.
- And yet, the interrogative is a **reliable signal that *T* does not know**.

Between a rock and a hard place.

- The original challenge remains.
- In **very many contexts**, the utterance of an interrogative $p?$ is an excellent and reliable way to communicate that:
 - Sp does not know whether q .
 - Sp thinks Ad might know whether q .
 - Sp wants Ad to see to it that Sp whether q .
- And yet, there are various (arguably literal) uses of interrogatives that lack any and all of these implications.

Pragmatics, to the rescue!?

- An optimistic approach might still be feasible.
- But it needs to be complemented with an articulated specification of the (Gricean) reasoning that gives rise to perceived implications in particular contexts.

Pragmatics, to the rescue!?

(20) [Customer C gets into T 's cab at Tegel airport]

C : To the Brandenburger Tor, please.

T : Where is the Brandenburger Tor?

- Hunch for (20):
 - In this case *none* of the alternative motivations for the use of an interrogative make sense.
 - Hence it must be information-requesting.
- To spell out this possibility, we need to be able to reason about possible motivations for using an interrogative.
- Tall order.

Non-literalism, again

Plunze & Zimmermann: Non-literalism

- Plunze & Zimmermann make a different proposal: Assume that all uses that are not compatible with speaker-ignorance are non-literal.
- As before, arguably defeatist.
- And: To be convincing, we need an equally articulated theory of the pragmatic reasoning underlying non-literal uses.
- Otherwise, Plunze & Zimmermann run into their own challenge: Why is *T*'s question in (21) not understood 'non-literally', given that non-literal uses of interrogatives are easily triggered in many contexts?

(21) [Customer *C* gets into *T*'s cab at Tegel airport]

C: To the Brandenburger Tor, please.

T: Where is the Brandenburger Tor?

Upshot

- Interrogatives display functional heterogeneity.
- This poses a substantial problem for any theory of their sentential force.
- In principle, both optimistic and non-literalist accounts may be viable.
- But either must be complemented with an articulated pragmatic theory in order to be convincing.

- Åqvist, L.: 1965, *A new approach to the logical theory of interrogatives*, University of Uppsala.
- Åqvist, L.: 1983, On the "tell me truly" approach to the analysis of interrogatives, in F. Kiefer (ed.), *Questions and Answers*, Reidel, Dordrecht, pp. 9–14.
- Bierwisch, M.: 1980, Semantic structure and illocutionary force, in J. R. Searle, F. Kiefer and M. Bierwisch (eds), *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, Reidel, Dordrecht, pp. 1–35.
- Condoravdi, C. and Lauer, S.: 2011, Performative verbs and performative acts, in I. Reich, E. Horch and D. Pauly (eds), *Sinn and Bedeutung 15*, Universaar – Saarland University Press, Saarbrücken, pp. 149–164.
- Condoravdi, C. and Lauer, S.: 2012, Imperatives: Meaning and illocutionary force, in C. Piñón (ed.), *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics 9*, pp. 37–58.
- Hintikka, J.: 1976, The semantics of questions and the questions of semantics, *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28(4).
- Hintikka, J.: 1983, New foundations for a theory of questions and answers, in F. Kiefer (ed.), *Questions and Answers*, Reidel, Dordrecht.

- Kaufmann, M.: 2012, *Interpreting Imperatives*, Springer, Dordrecht/New York.
- Krifka, M.: 2014, Embedding illocutionary acts, in T. Roeper and P. Speas (eds), *Recursion, Complexity in Cognition*, Vol. 43 of *Studies in Theoretical Psycholinguistics*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 125–155.
- Krifka, M.: 2015, Bias in commitment space semantics: Declarative questions, negated questions, and question tags, *Semantics and Linguistic Theory* 25, 328–345.
- Krifka, M.: t.a., Negated polarity questions as denegations of assertions, in C. Lee, F. Kiefer and M. Krifka (eds), *Contrastiveness in Information Structure, Alternatives and Scalar Implicatures*, Springer, Berlin.
- Lauer, S.: 2013, *Towards a dynamic pragmatics*, PhD thesis, Stanford University.
- Lauer, S. and Condoravdi, C.: 2012, The basic dynamic effect of interrogative utterances. Talk presented at the 13th Texas Linguistics Society (TLS) conference, University of Texas, Austin, June 2012.
- Lewis, D. and Lewis, S. R.: 1975, Review of Olson and Paul (1972), *Theoria* 41(1), 39–60.

- Plunze, C. and Zimmermann, T. E.: 2006, On Truckenbrodt on interrogatives, *Theoretical Linguistics* 32(3).
- Schmerling, S.: 1982, How imperatives are special and how they aren't, in R. Schneider, K. Tuite and R. Chametzky (eds), *Papers from the Parasession on Nondeclaratives: Chicago Linguistic Society*, Chicago, IL, pp. 202–218.
- Schwager, M.: 2006, *Interpreting Imperatives*, PhD thesis, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main.
- Truckenbrodt, H.: 2004, Zur Strukturbedeutung von Interrogativsätzen, *Linguistische Berichte* 199, 313–350.
- Truckenbrodt, H.: 2006a, On the semantic motivation of syntactic verb movement to C in German, *Theoretical Linguistics* 32(3), 257–306.
- Truckenbrodt, H.: 2006b, Replies to the comments by Gärtner, Plunze and Zimmermann, Portner, Potts, Reis, and Zaefferer, *Theoretical Linguistics* 32(3).
- Zaefferer, D.: 2006, Types, moods, and force potentials: Towards a comprehensive account of German sentence mood meanings, *Theoretical Linguistics* 32(3).