

# snippets

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## A tense question

Tue Trinh · Leibniz-Zentrum Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

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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.  $[[S]] = [[Q]]$  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.  $[[Q_C]] = \text{'for which } x: \text{ your name is } x \text{ at } C\text{'}$

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.  $[[S_C]] = [[Q_C]]$  if there was an event preceding the utterance at which the complete answer to *Q<sub>C</sub>* was made common ground, undefined otherwise

Now consider the question below, where the subscript *L* is mnemonic for ‘life.’

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

Let us note two facts about *Q<sub>L</sub>*. The first is specific to English. In this language, *Q<sub>L</sub>* 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<sub>L</sub>* is stronger than that to *Q<sub>C</sub>*. 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

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Tue Trinh  
[tuetrinh@alum.mit.edu](mailto:tuetrinh@alum.mit.edu)  
 Leibniz-Zentrum Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft  
 Schützenstr. 18  
 10117 Berlin  
 Germany