

# What sentences do

*Act 5: Situating in the cross-linguistic landscape*

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# Taking stock

We started with a question:

*“How do we get from a unified semantics/discourse effects for clause types to heterogeneous interpretations of sentence utterances?”*

Our answer, so far:

- ❖ Relatively bare-bones meaning for declaratives and interrogatives
- ❖ Commitment-based model for context updates
- ❖ Some general, intuitive rules which guide interpretation of those updates in context
- ❖ (New, yesterday): Intonation can modify context updates to produce new interpretative effects
- ❖ Empirical coverage: a lot of declaratives and interrogatives, rising intonation (pretty good for 4 days!)

# The in the room

Our theory is almost exclusively tailored to English 🚓🚓

There is shockingly little work on the sentence type-discourse effect link outside English

- ✚ You should calculate some implicatures about what I am suggesting you do

But, it may still be instructive to consider what typological facts we *do* know, and what that might tell us.

# A plausible picture

## **Universal across languages:**

- ❖ Declaratives and interrogatives (and imperatives?) as primitives
- ❖ Sentential denotations
- ❖ Mapping from sentential denotations to context updates (basic discourse effects)

## **Can vary across languages:**

- ❖ Discourse effects of a specific intonational tune
- ❖ Morphosyntax of clause typing
- ❖ What counts as being 'cooperative' (purely speculative, unexplored here)

# Universals in clause typing

# (Polar) interrogatives are marked

## (1) Japanese

- a. Hanako-ga hon-o yonda.  
Hanako book read  
'Hanako read a book.'
- b. Hanako-ga hon-o yonda **ka**?  
'Did Hanako read a book?'

## (2) Eastern Ojibwe (Valentine 2001: 975)

- a. Mno-kwaabiigad  
it.CLASS-long.enough  
sabaabiins.  
string  
'The string is long enough.'
- b. Mno-kwaabiigad **na** sabaabiins.  
'Is the string long enough?' (6)

## (3) Estonian

- a. Liis luges raamatut.  
Liisi read book  
'Liis read a book.'
- b. **Kas** Liis luges raamatut?  
'Did Liis read a book?'

## (4) Canadian French

- a. Anne a lu un livre.  
Anne has read a book  
'Anne read a book.'
- b. Anne a=**tu** lu un livre?  
'Did Anne read a book?'

## Chamorro (Topping 1973: 155)

- a. Mediku gue'.  
doctor he  
'He is a doctor.'
- b. **Kao** mediku gue'.  
'Is he a doctor?'

## Finnish

- a. Liisi luki kirjaa.  
Liisi read book  
'Liisi read a book.'
- b. Luki=**ko** Liisi kirjaa?  
'Did Liisi read a book?'

# A tentative generalization

- ★ Interrogatives seem to be *at least* as marked as declaratives cross-linguistically
  - ❖ Clearly more marked: additional particle in interrogatives compared to declaratives
  - ❖ Plausibly more marked: using a less frequent intonational tune/word order in interrogatives
  - ❖ Expected if semantic complexity/markedness correlates with morphosyntactic markedness

WALS (955 languages), only 4 languages have explicitly marked declaratives/unmarked interrogatives:

- ❖ Dinka (Nilotic; S. Sudan)
- ❖ Kabardian (NW Caucasian; Russia)
- ❖ Puquina (isolate; Bolivia)
- ❖ Zayse (Afro-Asiatic; Ethiopia)

The data sources for these claims were either inaccessible or had other issues (data from Puquina from a 1607 grammar)

# No difference at all?

Lone example: Chalcatongo Mixtec (Oto-Manguean; Mexico)

Macaulary (1996): ‘Yes/No questions are identical in form to statements. That is, there is no marking of the interrogative status of such forms—by question particle, intonation, tone, or other method.’

- (7)    xakú=ro  
        laugh=2  
        ‘You’re laughing/Are you laughing?’                    (Macaulay 1996: 126)
- (8)    ñábaʔa=ró librú=ro  
        have=2      book=2  
        ‘You have your book/Do you have your book?’    (Macaulay 1996: 126)



# Do languages mark declaratives?

Gascon, a variety of Occitan (France), has been argued to require clause type markers in affirmative declaratives:

- (9)    \*(Que) parli gascon.  
         DECL speak.1SG Gascon  
         ‘I speak Gascon’

However, this is also true of interrogatives, so it does not separate declaratives from interrogatives per se:

- (10)    \*(E) parlatz gascon?  
         Q speak.2PL Gascon  
         ‘Do you speak Gascon?’

Why should obligatory declarative marking be rare?

# What is a ‘basic’ interrogative?

A second issue: what do we mean when we say *language X forms polar questions by doing Y*?

- ✦ The most common strategy?
- ✦ The one which generates the fewest bias inferences?

Estonian: several PQ formation strategies, bias profile not clear:

- (11)
- a. Kas ema on kodus?  
Q mom is home.INESS  
‘Is mom home?’
  - b. On ema kodus?
  - c. Ema on kodus↑?
  - d. Ema on kodus või? (või = ‘or’)

# Rising declaratives in other languages

In some languages (173/955 in WALS), neutral polar questions formed with intonation alone, often final rises.

## (12) **Hindi-Urdu**

Anu=ne uma=ko kita:b di:↓

Anu=ERG Uma=ACC book gave

‘Anu gave a/the book to Uma’

(With ↑: ‘Did Anu give a/the book to Uma?’)

(Bhatt & Dayal 2019: ex. 1)

(Also Romanian, Italian, ...)

(12) with ↑ does not generate the same inferences as the corresponding English RD. What gives?

# Locating the difference

Where should we locate the difference between (e.g.) H-U and English?

- ✦ English polar interrogatives assumed to denote the set  $\{p, \neg p\}$
- ✦ Logical choice to encode interrogative clause typing in the same way as interrogative syntax
- ✦ Not an option in H-U interrogatives that lack a clear syntactic signature or obligatory particle
- ✦ What about the intonational tune?

**Recall:** We thought of intonational tunes as utterance modifiers

# A sketch of a possible account

In English,  $L^*$  H-H% tune contributes (something like) **calling off speaker commitment**

In a language with 'neutral' rising declaratives,  $L^*$  H-H% contributes **calling off speaker commitment + adding the complement of the prejacent to the Table**

- ❖ Falling declaratives: add  $\{p\}$  to the Table
- ❖ Neutral RDs: add  $\{p, \neg p\}$  to the Table
- ❖ Effectively: Neutral RDs are tuned into polar interrogatives

Consequence: the difference between languages is chalked up to the lexical semantics of the intonational tune

Preserve universal sentence denotations & idea that tunes modify context updates, but still allow for cross-linguistic variation

# Expressing non-canonical meanings

A consequence of this view is that languages like H-U might lack a dedicated form for expressing the same meaning as English RDs

✦ Is this a problem?

## It's not (necessarily) a problem

Languages already have variable toolkits for expressing noncanonical meanings.

Estonian *ega*, Dutch *toch*: counterexpectational particles, repurposed for RD-like meanings in declaratives.

- (13) **Ega** sul            ratas ei    ole?  
EGA you.ADESS bike NEG be.NEG  
'You don't happen to have a bike?'  
(Lit. 'You *ega* don't have a bike.')

- (14) Je hebt **toch** een fiets?  
you have TOCH a bike  
'You have a bike?' (I thought you didn't!)

**Upshot:** We shouldn't be afraid if some constructions exist in some languages but not others.

# The end

In this course we developed a rich framework for understanding the link between semantics and interpretation

- ❖ Light on semantic assumptions, heavy on pragmatic ones
- ❖ If our pragmatics are well-motivated, this is ideal: we derive interpretation from highly general communicative principles
- ❖ Also got us a fair bit of empirical coverage!
- ❖ **But**, these frameworks really need more cross-linguistic stress-testing



# The end, for real

\*\*\***AD SPACE**\*\*\*

Next week, the not-sequel: *What Embedded Sentences Do*

- ❖ Applying sentential semantics!
- ❖ Attitude verbs!
- ❖ Combinatorics!
- ❖ Clausal embedding!
- ❖ Why *believe* is a really bonkers word!

More generally: I'm happy to meet if you want to talk about these kinds of topics.

- ❖ I'm around next week too
- ❖ Come talk in person or send an email:  
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