

# Non-canonical questions

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## 1 Introduction

### General theoretical goals<sup>1</sup>

Understand what makes a question ‘canonical’, and what makes it ‘non-canonical’; understand how this difference affects the form of interrogatives across languages

Pre-theoretical intuition:

- unmarked interrogatives: (i) no special formal marking; (ii) used to ask canonical questions

- (1) a. Has Amy arrived already?  
b. Who took the keys?

- marked interrogatives: (i) special formal marking; (ii) used to ask non-canonical questions

- (2) Amy has arrived already, hasn’t she?

*Question:* Why is this type of form-function pattern cross-linguistically stable?

### Particular goals

- Account of a special type of marked interrogative in Romanian, namely interrogatives involving the morpheme *oare*

- (3) *Oare* Rodica e aici?  
**oare** Rodica is here  
‘Is Rodica here, I wonder.’

- In the process, introduce a special type of non-canonical question I dub *non-intrusive*, and contrast it with other non-canonical questions

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## Roadmap

Section 2: Theoretical assumptions

Section 3: Canonical questions

Section 4: Non-intrusive questions: *oare* interrogatives in Romanian

Section 5: Conclusion and open issues

## 2 Theoretical assumptions

Theoretical components I assume:

- *compositional semantics* – associates a semantic object to particular sentences and sentence forms
- *conventional discourse effects* (CDEs) – functions from input to output context structures determined by a particular sentence form – see [Condoravdi and Lauer \(2012a\)](#), [Condoravdi and Lauer \(2012b\)](#), [Farkas and Roelofsen \(2017\)](#) among others
- *pragmatics* – information associated to speech acts based on reasoning about the context and the aims of participants in the discourse

Key assumption – see [Farkas and Roelofsen \(2017\)](#)

- there are linguistic forms whose conventional contribution targets the CDEs of the sentence in which they occur
- such forms will be called *d(iscourse)-markers* here; sentences that involve them are called *d(iscourse)-marked*; those that don't are called *d-unmarked*

### COMPOSITIONAL SEMANTICS

Inquisitive Semantics notions and notation used below – for details, see [Ciardelli \*et al.\* \(2013\)](#) and [Ciardelli \*et al.\* \(2015\)](#)

- a *state* is a set of worlds
- the denotation of a sentence (whether interrogative or declarative) is a *proposition*
- a proposition  $p$  is a downward closed set of states; (downward closure is not relevant for present purposes and will be ignored below)
- the maximal states in a proposition  $p$  will be referred to as *possibilities* in  $p$
- sentences highlight an  $n$ -place property; declaratives and polar interrogatives highlight a 0-place property, namely the possibility expressed by their sentence radical; constituent interrogatives highlight an  $n$ -place property, where  $n \geq 1$
- highlighted states will be marked by bold-facing below
- if  $p$  is a proposition,  $\cup p$  is its *informative content* of  $p$ , noted as  $\text{info}(p)$
- a proposition  $p$  containing a single possibility  $s$  is *non-inquisitive*
- a proposition  $p$  containing more than one possibility such that  $\text{info}(p) = W$  is *non-informative*

Declarative and interrogative sentences – see [Farkas and Roelofsen \(2017\)](#) for details

- declaratives involve a DEC operator that results in a non-inquisitive denotation; such a sentence denotes a proposition containing a single highlighted possibility contributed by its sentence radical

- (4) a. Mona arrived.  
 b.  $\{\{\mathbf{w}: \mathbf{Mona\ arrived\ in\ w}\}\}$

- interrogatives involve an INT operator that results in a non-informative denotation

- (5) a. Did Mona arrive?  
 b.  $\{\{\mathbf{w}: \mathbf{Mona\ arrived\ in\ w}\}, \{w: \text{Mona did not arrive in } w\}\}$

- (6) a. Who arrived?  
 b.  $\{\{w: \text{only Mona arrived in } w\}, \{w: \text{only Gail arrived in } w\}, \{w: \text{Mona and Gail arrived in } w\}\}$ <sup>2</sup>

- (6-a) highlights the property  $\lambda x. x \text{ arrived}$

Sentence typology based on the structure of the proposition expressed and whether a state is highlighted or not – see [Theiler \(2019\)](#), p. 11:

	non-inquisitive	non-informative	highlighted state
declaratives	✓	★	✓
polar interrogatives	★	✓	✓
constituent interrogatives	★	✓	★

## CONTEXT STRUCTURES

A structure  $K$  with at least the following components:

1. A set of discourse participants *Part*
2. For every discourse participant  $X \in Part$ ,  $DC_X$  is a list of states, called the *discourse commitments of X*; if a state  $s$  is in  $DC_X$ ,  $X$  is publicly committed to  $w_a \in s$  – see [Gunlogson \(2001\)](#)
3. A stack of propositions called the Table – component where matters that are at issue are entered; this is the locus of QUDs
4. The projected set (ps): set of projected  $DC_{Ad}$  lists – see [Meriçli \(2016\)](#); these specify the set of canonical future Addressee reactions

<sup>2</sup>I assume an exhaustive interpretation of the interrogative, and a context that reduces the relevant domain to just Mona and Gail. I assume that constituent interrogatives have an existential presupposition. This assumption plays no role in what follows.

Derived components:

- the Stalnakerian notion of  $cg$ : set of states containing background assumptions as well all the states  $s$  such that for every  $X \in Part$ ,  $s \in DC_X$
- the Stalnakerian notion of  $cs$ :  $\cap cg$

CONVENTIONAL DISCOURSE EFFECTS (CDEs)

- Specify how a sentence of a particular form affects the input context structure relative to which it is uttered
- Formally, functions from  $\langle S, p, K_i \rangle$  to  $K_o$  where
  - $S$  is a sentence
  - $p$  is the proposition expressed by  $S$
  - $K_i$  is the input context structure, and  $K_o$  is the output context structure
- CDEs are characterized here by listing the changes from  $K_i$  to  $K_o$

Distinction between basic and special CDEs (Farkas and Roelofsen, 2017)

- basic CDEs: determined solely by the semantic content of the sentence
- special CDEs: added by d-markers
- special CDEs apply to the output of basic CDEs and
  - further change the context structure monotonically
  - override default settings
  - add input context conditions (presuppositions, felicity conditions)

Merging the *Assertion* and *Question* speech act operators

- interrogative and declarative sentences have different semantics
- their basic CDE is determined by applying the same basic CDE function to their differing semantic content

Basic CDE of uttering a sentence  $S$  with propositional content  $p$ :

(7) Basic CDE:  $K_i + S$

1.  $DC_{Sp,o} = DC_{Sp,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  –  $\text{info}(p)$  is added to  $DC_{Sp}$ ; the Speaker is committed to  $w_a \in \text{info}(p)$
2.  $\text{Table}_o = \text{Table}_i \circ p$  –  $p$  is pushed on the top of the stack on the Table; the Speaker raises the issue of which  $s \in p$  is such that  $w_a \in s$
3.  $\text{ps}_o = \text{ps}_i \oplus p$  –  $\text{ps}_o$  is created by adding each possibility  $s \in p$  to each  $DC_{Ad}$  in the input  $\text{ps}_i$ ; the elements of  $\text{ps}_o$ ; future Addressee commitment lists computed by adding each  $s \in p$  to each element of  $\text{ps}_i$

The symbol  $\oplus$  is a function

- from a set of states  $D$  and a state  $s$  to  $D \oplus s = D \cup \{s\}$  ( $s$  is added as an element to  $D$ )
- from a list of sets of states  $\Pi$  and a proposition  $p$  to a new set of states  $\Pi \oplus p = \{P \oplus s \mid P \in \Pi, s \in p\}$ , where  $s$  is a possibility in  $p$  (each possibility  $s \in p$  is added to each element of  $\Pi$ )

### 3 Canonical questions

A canonical question act: uttering a d-unmarked interrogative sentence  $S_{INT}$  expressing a proposition  $p$

D-unmarked interrogatives:

- have non-informative semantics
- are associated with the basic CDEs determined by their semantics alone

(8)  $K_i + S_{INT}$

1.  $DC_{Sp,o} = DC_{Sp,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  – the Speaker makes a trivial commitment
2.  $\text{Table}_o = \text{Table}_i \circ p$
3.  $\text{ps}_o = \text{ps}_i \oplus p$  – since  $p$  contains more than one possibility, a set of future  $DC_{Ad}$  are projected, one for each possibility  $s \in p$

A simple example:

- (9) a. Did Mona arrive?  
 b.  $p = \{s, \bar{s}\}$

CDEs of (9):

(10)  $K_i + (9)$

1.  $DC_{Sp,o} = DC_{Sp,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$
2.  $\text{Table}_o = \text{Table}_i \circ p$
3.  $\text{ps}_o = \{DC_{Ad,i} \oplus s, DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \bar{s}\}$

By uttering a d-unmarked interrogative, the Speaker

- makes a trivial commitment
- steers the conversation towards multiple futures, one for each possibility  $s \in p$
- the elements of the  $\text{ps}_o$ : those future  $DC_{Ad}$  lists that result after the Addressee commits to each possibility in the denotation of the interrogative

Default pragmatic assumptions characterizing canonical questions

*Question:* Why would a rational agent perform a speech act with the effects in (10)?

*Answer:* Assuming that conversational information gain is the default engine driving the conversational exchange:

(11) *Some of the default pragmatic assumptions accompanying a canonical question*

1. *Speaker ignorance:* the Speaker doesn't know which  $s \in p$  is such that  $w_a \in s$ ; this is so because if she did, the most efficient way of achieving information increase would be for her to provide this information

2. *Addressee competence*: the Speaker assumes the Addressee knows the answer to the question (the Addressee's epistemic state allows her to commit to that  $s \in p$  which is such that  $w_a \in s$ ); this is so because the Speaker steers the conversation towards canonical futures in which the Addressee resolves the issue

3. *Addressee compliance*: the Speaker assumes that the Addressee will resolve the question (she will commit to the 'true' possibility in  $p$ ); this is so because the Speaker presents herself as assuming that one of the canonical conversation futures her move projects will in fact be reached, and that the Addressee is cooperative

#### Canonical question

- ignorant Speaker requests information from an Addressee assumed to be knowledgeable and cooperative
- these properties follow from the basic CDE of interrogatives

Canonical questions put the Addressee on the spot:

- to comply with a canonical question, the Addressee has to provide information that is typically novel
- the Speaker makes a non-trivial assumption about the doxastic state of the Addressee; she assumes the Addressee has more information than the Speaker has relative to which possibility  $s \in p$  is such that  $w_a \in s$

#### Predictions made by the general approach adopted

- D-unmarked interrogatives
  - other things being equal, they can be used to ask canonical questions because they are associated only with the basic CDEs
  - the use of d-unmarked interrogatives is not limited to canonical questions: default pragmatic assumptions can be overridden
- D-marked interrogatives
  - mark further CDEs that may signal departures from default pragmatic assumptions accompanying canonical questions

In particular, d-marked interrogatives may signal

- the weakening of the Addressee compliance effect of canonical questions (non-intrusive questions)
- the weakening of the Speaker ignorance assumption (biased questions)
- the weakening of the Addressee competence assumption (tentative questions)

## 4 Non-intrusive questions: *oare*-interrogatives in Romanian

### Basic relevant facts of Romanian

- polar interrogatives: presence of INT marked primarily by intonation - ↑
- constituent interrogatives: presence of INT marked by fronted interrogative pronoun
- presence of DEC marked by falling intonation - ↓

- (12) a. Rodica e aici. ↓  
‘Rodica is here.’  
b. Rodica e aici? ↑  
‘Is Rodica here?’  
c. Cine e aici?  
‘Who is here?’

### The morpheme *oare*

- found in polar and constituent interrogatives, but not in declaratives; closest English equivalent: interrogatives with postposed/preposed *I wonder*<sup>3</sup>

- (13) a. \**Oare* Rodica e aici.  
**oare** Rodica is here  
b. *Oare* Rodica e aici?  
**oare** Rodica is here’  
‘Is Rodica here, I wonder.’  
c. *Oare* pe cine a invitat Rodica?  
**oare** who.Acc has invited Rodica  
‘Who has Rodica invited, I wonder.’

- *oare* (sometimes in its abbreviate form *or*): used elsewhere to signal some version of free choice:

- (14) a. *oare-care*  
oare - what  
‘any’ in pejorative use (any old)  
b. *oricine/orice*  
or-who/what  
‘anybody/anything’

### The contribution of *oare* in interrogatives

- *oare*-interrogatives are **like** simple interrogatives in that the Speaker raises an issue and thereby signals she wishes to have it resolved
- *oare*-interrogatives are **unlike** simple interrogatives in that the Speaker signals that she does not wish to put the Addressee on the spot for providing the answer

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<sup>3</sup>*Oare* cannot occur in imperatives either, an issue that is beyond the scope of this talk. See Hill (2002) for the claim that *oare* is a complementizer.

*Oare* interrogatives are infelicitous in contexts in which the Addressee is assumed to answer the question:

- (15) POLICEMAN Context: *Policeman to driver he stopped*  
 #*Oare* cu ce viteză ai mers?  
**oare** with what speed have.II gone  
 ‘What was your speed, I wonder.’
- (16) TEACHER context: *Teacher to pupil*  
 #*Oare* ce ai avut pentru azi?  
**oare** what you-have for today  
 ‘What is your lesson for today, I wonder.’

Suggestion in [Farkas and Bruce \(2010\)](#): *oare* interrogatives allow for canonical futures in which the Addressee does not resolve the issue.<sup>4</sup>

Implementation under current assumptions:

- *oare* is a d-marker: it contributes a special CDE over and above the basic effect contributed by the semantics of the interrogative:

- (17) CDE of *oare*:
1. Applies to the result of the basic CDE applied to the input context
  2. Change it triggers:  $ps_o = ps_i \oplus DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$

The addition to  $ps_o$  triggered by the presence of *oare*: the weakest possible Addressee commitment relative to  $p$

- given the non-informative nature of  $p$ , the commitment is trivial

#### *Oare*-interrogatives vs. unmarked interrogatives

- unmarked interrogatives and *oare* interrogatives have the same semantics; therefore
- their CDEs overlap in that both involve the same basic CDE
- *oare*-interrogatives have an extra element in  $ps_o$ , namely  $DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$ , which in this case adds a trivial commitment to  $DC_{Ad,i}$

#### Connection with free choice

- *oare*-interrogatives widen the range of projected futures, leaving the Addressee a wider choice of canonical moves

#### Example: unmarked PI vs. *oare* PI

- Unmarked polar interrogative:

- (18) Rodica e aici?  
 ‘Is Rodica here?’

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<sup>4</sup>See [Giurgea \(2018\)](#) for a view in which *oare* contributes the presupposition that the Addressee is not in a position to know the answer for sure.

$s$ : state in which Rodica is here;  $\bar{s}$ : its complement

(19) Semantics and CDEs of (18)

- a. Semantics:  $p = \{s, \bar{s}\}$
- b. CDE: basic

1.  $DC_{Sp,o} = DC_{Sp,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  ( $s \cup \bar{s}$  is added to  $DC_{Sp,i}$ )
2.  $Table_o = Table_i \circ p$  ( $\{s, \bar{s}\}$  is added to the top of the Table stack)
3.  $ps_o = \{DC_{Ad,i} \oplus s, DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \bar{s}\}$  (set of Addressee commitments in  $ps_o$  computed by adding each possibility in  $p$  to  $DC_{Ad,i}$ )

- Polar interrogative marked by *oare*:

(20) **Oare** Rodica e aici?

‘Is Rodica here, I wonder.’

(21) Semantics and CDEs of (20) after *oare* applies

- a. Semantics:  $p = \{s, \bar{s}\}$
- b. CDE: basic augmented by the contribution of *oare*

1.  $DC_{Sp,o} = DC_{Sp,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  ( $s \cup \bar{s}$  is added to  $DC_{Sp,i}$ )
2.  $Table_o = Table_i \circ p$  ( $\{s, \bar{s}\}$  is added to the top of the Table stack)
3.  $ps_o = \{DC_{Ad,i} \oplus s, DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \bar{s}, DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)\}$  ( $ps_i$  is as before except  $DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  is added to it)

#### The non-canonical nature of *oare*-interrogatives

- Contribution of *oare* (addition of  $DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  to  $ps_o$ ): weakens the effect of the Addressee compliance assumption of canonical questions
- Canonical futures now include not only ones in which the Addressee resolves the issue just raised, but also a future in which she chooses not to
- The Addressee therefore can comply with an *oare*-interrogative without resolving the issue the Speaker raised, though futures in which she does would be preferable since those involve information increase

#### Non-intrusive questions

(22) A question is *non-intrusive* iff its CDEs result in  $DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  being a member of  $ps_o$ .

As a result of this special CDE, Addressee compliance no longer requires the Addressee to resolve the issue raised.

Why would the Speaker weaken Addressee compliance in this way?

- because the Speaker does not assume Addressee competence OR
- because the Speaker assumes that the competent Addressee may have reasons not to settle the issue, despite her competence

Possible non-intrusive question markers elsewhere: *vajon* in Hungarian, *acep* or *acaba* in Turkish, pre- or post-posed *I wonder* in English

## Consequences and predictions

- If a language has an interrogative sentence form that must be interpreted as non-intrusive, it will be d-marked
- Non-intrusive interrogatives will be infelicitous in contexts in which it is assumed that Addressee compliance entails resolving the issue, as in (15) (POLICEMAN case) and (16) (TEACHER case)
- They raise an issue and therefore the Speaker is seen as wishing to have it resolved; if she didn't, she could have remained silent.
- They are predicted to be appropriate in contexts in which Addressee competence is presupposed
  - In such contexts, they signal that the Speaker does not assume that the Addressee will resolve the issue, despite her competence
  - Therefore, the context should be such as to explain the Speaker's non-intrusiveness
    - \* written communications signaling that no immediate answer is expected
    - \* Speaker signaling that the Addressee may have reason to withhold the answer
    - \* rhetorical questions not expecting an answer)

### (23) PRESUPPOSED ADDRESSEE COMPETENCE examples

- Oare te mai gândești la mine?*  
'Are you still thinking of me, I wonder.'
- Oare unde ești?* (overheard in Romania as someone was speaking on the phone)  
'Where are you, I wonder.'
- Oare mai ai migrene?*  
'Do you still have migraines, I wonder.'
- Oare invitatul nostru are nevoie de vreo introducere? Bineînțeles că nu.*  
'Does our invited speaker need an introduction? Of course not.'

- They are predicted to be appropriate as 'engaging' questions – in contexts where the Speaker signals that she does not assume that resolution will occur in the immediate future of the conversation

### (24) MATHEMATICIAN Context: *Mathematician to a colleague with whom she is working* *Oare ecuația asta are o soluție?* 'Does this equation have a solution, I wonder?'

- They are predicted to be questions addressed to the Addressee, rather than mere expressions of a wish to know the answer

### (25) Context: *Maria and Paul are cooking together* Maria: *Oare e gata supa?* 'Is the soup ready, I wonder.' Paul: *De ce mă întrebi pe mine?* 'Why are you asking me?'

### (26) Context: *Maria and Paul are cooking together* Maria: *Mă întreb dacă e gata supa.* 'I wonder whether the soup is ready.' Paul: *#De ce mă întrebi pe mine?* 'Why are you asking me?'

- An answer that settles the question raised by a non-intrusive interrogative is predicted to be felicitous

(27) Context: *Maria and Paul are cooking together*  
 Maria: *Oare e gata supa?* ‘Is the soup ready, I wonder.’  
 Paul: *Da, tocmai am gustat-o.* ‘Yes, I’ve just tasted it.’

- Non-intrusive questions are predicted not to be felicitous in contexts where Addressee competence is assumed but there are no grounds to suppose that the Addressee would have any reason not to provide the answer:

(28) Context: *Paul has just tasted the soup*  
 Maria to Paul: *#Oare e gata supa?* ‘Is the soup ready, I wonder.’

#### Upshot on *oare*

- *oare* marks an interrogative for being non-intrusive
- its role is to widen  $ps_o$  to include, besides context states in which the Addressee resolves the issue, a context state in which she does not

#### Further properties of *oare*-interrogatives

*Question:* Why is *oare* rogative? Why can’t it occur in declaratives?

*Answer:* The reason lies in the difference between the basic CDE of interrogatives vs. that of declaratives:

Interrogatives:

- place an inquisitive proposition on the Table and project canonical states in which the Addressee volunteers information that settles the issue
- adding a non-intrusive marker: allows the Addressee to comply without volunteering such information, either because she doesn’t have it or because she doesn’t wish to provide it

Declaratives:

- place a non-inquisitive proposition on the Table and commit the Speaker to the unique possibility,  $s$ , in this proposition
- in the case of declaratives,  $\text{info}(p) = s$
- steer the conversation towards a state in which the Addressee adds  $s$  to  $DC_{Ad,i}$ ; in the case of declaratives, this is the same as committing to  $\text{info}(p)$

The basic CDE of a declarative sentence  $S$  expressing a proposition  $p$  containing the possibility  $s$

(29)  $K_i + S_{DEC}$

1.  $DC_{Sp,o} = DC_{Sp,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)$  (since  $\text{info}(p) = s$ ,  $s$  is added to  $DC_{Sp,i}$  adding a typically non-trivial commitment)
2.  $\text{Table}_o = \text{Table}_i \circ p$  ( $p$  is pushed on the top of the Table stack)

3.  $ps_o = ps_i \oplus p$  (since  $p$  contains a single possibility, the conversation projects a future state in which the Addressee shares the Speaker's commitment by adding  $s$  to  $DC_{Ad,i}$ )

Adding a non-intrusive d-marker to a declarative would be redundant:

- $ps_o$  of a d-unmarked declarative:  $\{DC_{Ad,i} \oplus s\}$
- $ps_o$  of a *oare*-marked declarative:  $\{DC_{Ad,i} \oplus s, DC_{Ad,i} \oplus \text{info}(p)\}$
- the contribution of *oare* is redundant in the case of declaratives because for a declarative sentence  $p$  containing the possibility  $s$ ,  $\text{info}(p) = s$ <sup>5</sup>

*Question:* Why are non-intrusive markers good with both polar and constituent interrogatives?

*Answer:* Because their CDEs do not manipulate a unique possibility in the proposition they express

- if the CDEs of a marked form have to manipulate a unique possibility in an interrogative form, such a marker will not be appropriate in a constituent interrogative
- *oare* is sensitive to the informative/inquisitive parameter and therefore it treats all interrogatives as a natural class, contrasting with declaratives

Summing up

- The special CDEs of interrogatives marked for being non-intrusive:
  - the addition to the  $ps$  of a canonical discourse future in which the Addressee does not resolve the issue raised by the interrogative
- As a result, non-intrusive questions signal the weakening of the Addressee compliance assumption of canonical questions

*Question:* Should this account be recast in semantic terms? Should we give *oare* a semantics that interacts with the compositional semantics of the rest of the sentence to give us the right result?

*Answer:* While such an account is possible, it would amount to a paraphrase of what has been proposed above

Separating this contribution as a CDE

- captures the non-at issue nature of the contribution of non-intrusive markers
- captures the narrow contextual nature of the contribution of non-intrusive markers: information concerning what the Speaker takes canonical responses to her question to be
- captures the fact that *oare*-interrogatives don't embed freely

(30) Paul nu știe dacă (\**oare*) Rodica e aici.  
 'Paul doesn't know whether **oare** Rodica is here.'

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<sup>5</sup>I am grateful to Floris Roelofsen and Scott AnderBois for help with this point.

## Other non-canonical questions

- *Biased questions*:
  - d-marked interrogatives whose effect is to weaken the Speaker ignorance assumption by adding a special CDE which signals the Speaker's doxastic partiality towards the highlighted alternative
  - subtypes of biased questions involve subtypes of doxastic partiality
  - bias markers can occur only in polar interrogatives because they manipulate a highlighted state
- tentative questions: weaken Addressee competence assumption; signal the absence of the assumption that the epistemic state of the Addressee permits her to resolve the issue categorically

### Tentative questions vs. non-intrusive questions

- tentative questions signal the weakening of Addressee competence – not appropriate in contexts that presuppose it
- non-intrusive questions signal the weakening of Addressee compliance – may be used in contexts that presuppose Addressee competence

### Semantic means of weakening Addressee competence assumption

- in a conversation where what is at issue is where John is, asking *May he be in his office?* projects canonical futures in which the Addressee makes a weakened commitment to one of the possible resolutions of the issue of where John is (*John may be in his office/John may not be in his office*)
- a semantic account that achieves this might well be preferable to one relying on CDEs

## Canonical and non- canonical assertions

- Given the informative semantics of declaratives and their basic CDEs
  1. *Speaker competence*: Speaker commits to  $s$ , the unique possibility in  $p$ ; because default commitments are categorical, this commitment is assumed to be supported by the Speaker's epistemic base
  2. *Addressee ignorance*: under the assumption that mutual information increase is the conversational goal, the Speaker's speech act would be redundant were the Addressee presumed to already know that  $w_a \in s$

Canonical assertions: knowledgeable Speaker informs ignorant Addressee

## Non-canonical assertions

- weaken Speaker competence assumption: tentative assertions (various 'epistemic softeners')
- weaken Addressee ignorance assumption: signal that the information is available to the Addressee (*ja* declaratives in German)

## 5 Conclusions

*Questions:* (i) Why are formally simple interrogatives used to ask canonical questions? (ii) Why do special interrogative forms mark non-canonical questions?

*Answers:* (i) Simple forms are associated with the basic CDEs determined by their compositional semantics. These effects are associated with the default pragmatic assumptions characterizing canonical questions. (ii) Additional CDEs are triggered by d-markers.

*Question:* What may we expect d-marked forms to signal and why?

*Answer:* D-marked forms signal the presence of additional CDEs that may result in the weakening of default pragmatic assumptions associated with canonical questions.

*Question:* are d-markers the only tools for generating non-canonical questions/assertions?

*Answer:* No; particular types of modals or particles may have a semantic effect that weakens commitment to the informative content of a proposition and projects discourse futures in which the Addressee expresses a weakened commitment to a possibility.

*Question:* Is it possible and desirable to extend this approach imperatives?

*Answer:* I hope so.

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