

This talk will be a short tour of the issues and current views on the proper characterization of the interpretation of questions, and their bearing on the syntax of questions. There are several variations in implementation, but the consensus view is that questions serve to specify the form that a suitable answer takes. As to the variations, we'll review a couple of the major takes on this (primarily the "partition" view and a couple of versions of the "sets of propositions" view), and what each has going for it. This will include some discussion of exhaustivity intuitions, "quantificational variability," and scope marking ("partial *wh*-movement").

If we assume (and most of us do) that interpretation is derived compositionally from the structure that the syntax provides, the meanings that a question can and cannot take on allow us to diagnose properties of the syntactic structure as well. We will meet some of the different types of meanings questions can have (e.g., D-linked, pair-list, single-pair) and the diagnostic use these readings have been put to.

In my own previous work, I explored a particular pairing of syntactic and semantic analyses designed to derive, among other things, the "intervention" or "interference" effects that certain elements have in questions. We'll run through some of the interference effects that have been discussed to date, and some of the approaches to them. My analysis of these was strictly syntactic—the intervening elements block a necessary association due to a kind of relativized minimality violation. Others have more recently proposed generalizations of or accounts for these effects based strictly on the semantic or pragmatic properties of the intervening elements. We'll look at how incompatible these views are, as well as how well each might capture the observed variation across languages.

The role of syntactic islands in constraining the possible interpretations a question can receive has been of persistent interest for at least two decades, and we'll go through some of the approaches that have been taken. To the extent that interpretation of a *wh*-word requires a connection between an operator in the CP region of the clause and a variable in the position of the *wh*-word itself, something needs to be said about the possibility of asking *wh*-questions with *wh*-words in islands—and much has been said on that point. We'll look at "LF pied piping," flexible composition ("expanding alternatives"), and island-aphatic movement approaches, as well as possible roles for choice functions—and the challenges they each face.

We will also briefly touch on some of the issues involved in the interpretation of questions with quantifiers, functional readings, reconstruction, and "quantifying in."

The goal of this talk, in the spirit of "symposium," is more to provide synthesis and overview in a digestible form than it is to rigorously promote a specific approach—although, that said, it should be nevertheless be clear in the end that some analytical deficiencies are worse than others.