

## Questions in monologic discourse

CALL FOR ABSTRACT PROPOSALS

Meeting description:

**Workshop session proposal: Questions in monologic discourse**

**SLE Conference 2023 – National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece**

Date: 29 August – 1 September 2023

Workshop convenors: Agnès Celle Université Paris Cité, Amália Mendes Universidade de Lisboa

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Website: <https://societaslinguistica.eu/meetings>

Linguistic Field(s): General Linguistics, Pragmatics

**Important dates:**

**Call deadline: 05 November 2022**

Notification of abstract acceptance / rejection from the workshop convenors: 20 November 2022

Notification of acceptance / rejection of the workshop proposal: 15 December 2022

If accepted:

Full abstract submission deadline: 15 January 2023

Notification of acceptance / rejection : 31 March 2023

This workshop is devoted to questions in monologic discourse.

Recent years have witnessed a flurry of research on questions from various theoretical perspectives. This trend coincides with a renewed interest in dialogue and interaction, where questions play a pivotal role. Indeed, questions have a significant impact on conversation. In Conversational Analysis, questions are viewed as a turn-taking trigger (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) that shapes the organisation of social interaction. Question-answer relations are represented through adjacency pairs which structurally involve utterances that are produced by at least two speech participants (Schegloff 2007). Questions are used to request information or confirmation, and also to initiate repair. The study of questions in conversation suggests that interaction is biased towards cooperative responses (Stivers 2010). In formal semantics, it has been proposed to conceive of dialogue as a gameboard (Ginzburg 2012) or as a Table (Farkas 2020) where questions under discussion, i.e. unresolved issues, are processed. Once a question is answered, issues that awaited resolution are removed from the Table and propositions can be part of the common ground. The addressee's reactions are crucial to evaluate both the acceptance of the speaker's assertions and the nature of the update induced by the speaker's questions. An important pragmatic assumption is that the

speaker ignores the answer and that the addressee knows it. When questions are used in contexts that diverge from this default assumption, they are considered to be non-canonical.

While non-canonical questions are well documented, questions in monologic discourse have not been explored in connection with the discursive environment and the discourse genre they belong to. Because the context suspends the speaker's ignorance assumption, some semanticists have analysed such questions as self-addressed questions. But the status of the addressee is unclear and it has been referred to as a « second virtual » speaker (Grésillon and Lebrave 1984). According to Farkas (2020), in the case of a question that is part of a speech given on television, the addressee is the television audience even if the question is analysed as self-addressed. According to Eckardt & Disselkamp (2019), however, the audience is regarded as bystanders while the addressee coincides with the speaker:

(1) How does a solar eclipse arise ? (Eckardt and Disselkamp 2019)

The aim of the workshop is to revisit such questions from various theoretical perspectives. The goal of communication may not be limited to face to face information exchange. The workshop will focus on questions in communication settings where they cannot be answered face to face by an addressee. How commitments can be synchronised when the range of addressees and / or mediated communication restrict the possibility of response is an open question. This raises issues concerning the discursive function of questions and their definition, as most recent approaches tend to characterise questions from a dialogic perspective.

What is the status of questions that are not intended to be answered by an addressee? As the speaker keeps the turn, he/she remains the sole source of information and how the addressee's information state is updated cannot be checked. Commitments may thus be predicted to be independent (Gunlogson (2008); Bhadra (2020)). Nonetheless, the speaker constantly anticipates upcoming discursive issues by foreseeing the addressee's knowledge state. The question is, how can the speaker steer the common ground to a new knowledge state without any response from an addressee? Does the absence of addressee response modify the nature of questions? Does it make them more vital to monologic discourse? In this respect, the frequency of direct questions has been associated with a greater degree of speaker control over discourse, and there is a great deal of cross-linguistic variation (Celle (2009); Fløttum et al.(2006)), which will be further investigated in the workshop.

Can monologic discourse be defined as a genre on the basis of the lack of interaction? To what extent is dialogism simulated by questions in monologic discourse (Bakhtine 1984) ? Does monologic discourse favour certain interrogatives (open vs. closed interrogatives, independent vs. embedded interrogatives, sluices etc.) and certain discursive relations between questions and their responses? Do monologic questions have a « textual » function in terms of topic-comment organisation and textual progression (Grésillon and Lebrave 1984) ?

One of the goals of the workshop is to foster dialogue between linguists who have carried out annotation from a discourse coherence perspective and those who have annotated questions from a dialogic perspective, possibly incorporating multimodal cues. It is believed that the study of questions in monologic discourse can benefit from the insights of both perspectives. Coherence based models (such as Segmented Discourse Representation Theory, see Muller et al. (2012) or Penn Discourse TreeBank, see Prasad et al. (2017), Prasad et al. (2019)) originally intended for narrative text can accommodate questions. For instance, the corpus STAC, a corpus of dialogues, annotates Question Answer pairs in the SDRT framework (Asher et al. 2016), whereas in the third version of the PDTB, questions answered by the writer are annotated as hypophora (Webber et al. 2019), similarly

to the annotation of TED Talks transcripts in the TED-MDB (Zeyrek et al. 2019). Vice versa, how questions are annotated in QUD based models (see Westera et al. (2020); Westera & Rohde (2019); Riester et al. (2018)) in terms of information-structure (focus vs. topic) and in terms of relevance, may uncover their discursive contribution.

Abstracts (max 300 words in both word and pdf format) are invited for papers that investigate questions in speeches and narratives involving only one speaker (or writer), such as lectures and didactic discourse, podcasts, TED talks etc.

## References

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