Questions in monologic discourse

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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 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 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 definition of questions, as most recent approaches tend to characterise questions from a dialogic perspective, and their discursive function.

What is the status of questions that are not intended to be answered by an addressee? As the speaker keeps the turn, how can the addressee's information state be evaluated and anticipated by the speaker? The speaker being the source of information, commitments may be predicted to be independent (Gunlogson (2008); Bhadra (2020)).

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 question types (polar questions, constituent questions, embedded questions, sluices)

and certain discursive relations between questions and their responses? Do monologic questions have a « textual » function in terms of the topic-comment organization and the 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. It is believed that the study of questions can benefit from the insights of each perspective. 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 QA pairs in the SDRT framework (Asher et al. 2016). And in the third version of the PDTB, questions answered by the writter are annotated as hypophora (Webber et al. 2019), similarly to the annotation of TED Talks transcripts in the TED-MDB (Zeyrek et al. 2019) and in the CRPC-DB (Mendes et al. 2020). 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.

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