

Problem Set on Discourse Functions in Questions and Relative Clauses

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Part I. Exercise on functional uncertainty (English topicalization).

For this part, please refer to the handout *Functional Uncertainty; Inside-Out Function Application; Set Values*.

Task 1. Assuming the grammar of English topicalization sketched on that handout, give the c-structure, f-description, and f-structure of the sentence *Sue, I think he likes*, using the Dalrymple's 'gapless' approach.

Task 2. Analyze the same sentence (again, give c-structure, f-description, and f-structure) using Bresnan's 'gap' approach.

Part II. Discourse Functions in English Questions and Relative Clauses

English has many *filler-gap constructions*, in which a phrase (the *filler*) is displaced to the left edge of a clause containing a *gap*. In transformational theories this is analyzed as 'wh-movement' or 'A-bar movement', in which the phrase is moved from its base position to the left periphery of the clause. This problem looks at two classes of English filler-gap construction: (i) *wh-questions*, also called *constituent questions*, since a constituent is displaced to the left of the clause; and (ii) *relative clauses*.

The following examples illustrate two subtypes of constituent question, namely *indirect questions* (the larger bracketed clause in 1, i.e. *which candidate we should rely on*) and *direct questions* (see 2).

1. Indirect wh-questions: I wonder [which candidate [we should rely on ___]].

2. Direct wh-questions: Which candidate_i [should we rely on ___]?

As in all filler-gap constructions, some constituent (here, the NP *which candidate*) is displaced to the left edge of the clause, leaving a gap. That constituent, which is underlined in all the example sentences, is the *filler*. (Indirect and Direct constituent questions differ in that the clause has the normal word order in an indirect question but the subject and auxiliary verb are inverted in the direct question, as shown in 1 and 2. But otherwise they are rather similar syntactically.)

The following examples illustrate three subtypes of Relative Clauses, namely *restrictive bound relative clauses*, *appositive* (or non-restrictive) *bound relative clauses*, and *free relative clauses*.

3. Restrictive bound relative clauses:

[The woman [who(m) they elected ___] is a genius.

4. Appositive (= non-restrictive) bound relative clauses:

George, [who(m) they elected ___], is an incompetent businessman.

5. Free relative clauses: John ate [what Mary cooked ___]

The relative clauses in 3 and 4 are called bound relative clauses because they are 'bound' to a noun or NP that they modify. In 3, the relative clause *who(m) they elected* modifies

the noun *woman*; in 4 the relative clause *who(m) they elected* modifies the NP *George*. A free relative clause such as *what Mary cooked* in 5 does not modify anything, but instead appears in a position corresponding to the category of the fronted wh-word: NP in the case of example 5. In this example it serves as the object of *ate*.

The exact structure and analysis of questions and relative clauses is not crucial for this assignment. Instead we ask only the following questions:

Q1. What is the discourse function, TOPIC or FOCUS, of the fronted constituent (the filler) in a wh-question?

Q2. What is the discourse function, TOPIC or FOCUS, of the fronted constituent (the filler) in a relative clause?

To answer those questions, let us consider sentences that combine these constructions with a Cleft Construction. Further, we make the following crucial assumption: that a given phrase (a filler) can have two discourse functions in the same clause but *only if they are compatible*: i.e. both TOPIC or both FOCUS, but not a combination of the two.

In addressing questions Q1 and Q2 above, use the following data, along with any other data you wish to come up with:

1. I wonder what it was that Fred cooked. (Indirect Question + Cleft)
2. Mary asked what it was that Fred cooked. (Indirect Question + Cleft)
3. What was it that Fred cooked? (Direct Question + Cleft)
4. ???Mary ate what it was that Fred cooked. (Free relative + Cleft)
(cp. Mary ate what Fred cooked.)
5. ???[the soufflé which it was that Fred cooked]_{NP} (Restr. bound rel. + Cleft)
(cp. [the soufflé which Fred cooked]_{NP})
6. Where is it that John lives? (Direct Question + Cleft)
7. I wonder where it is that John lives. ...etc.
8. ???Rosedale, where it is that John lives, is a nice neighborhood.
(cp. Rosedale, where John lives, is a nice neighborhood.)
9. I asked who it was that Marilyn suspected.
10. Who was it that Marilyn suspected?
11. ???I met [the person who it was that Marilyn suspected]_{NP}.
(cp. I met [the person who Marilyn suspected]_{NP}.)
12. ???George, who it was that Marilyn suspected, was actually innocent.
(cp. George, who Marilyn suspected, was actually innocent.)

Carefully explain your answer with reference to the data above. You don't need to discuss every single example sentence in detail, if that is needlessly repetitive.