

7.X2. Pragmatics: Questions and Answers

[We return]

1. Questions and Direct Answers
2. Rhetorical Questions [where intended direct answer is unstated but obvious]
3. Appeal to Common Ground to get direct answer
4. Potential for Deception: Obviously intended answer isn't obviously true.

“Who knows?”

Rex: What if we vacationed in Arizona this summer – you think that might be fun?

Neko: Sure, if getting stung by scorpions and dying of heat stroke is your idea of fun.

Appealing to Common Ground – concerning whether people typically enjoy getting stung by scorpions and dying of heat stroke.

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2.5.17: pragmatics of “why” questions

Direct answer to “Why P?”

“Why P?” *presupposes* “P”.

how questions (?)

presupposition of question might be good opening example for discussion of presupposition; but can I write the whole treatment of question presupposition without appeal to presupposition of answers?

Could say: if presupposition of question is false, then *no* direct answer to that question is true. (being cagey about not calling answers “false” -- just “not true”).

Ex: “Why did Rex start the fire?” “Why is the present king of France popular?”

“Is the present king of France popular?” “Is the whole number between 1 and 2 odd or even?” “Is the capital of Atlantis heavily populated?”

Rejection: is the square root of 10 less than or equal to 3?

A1: No (treating less-than-or-equal-to as a relation)

A2: Neither (treating the sentence as the disjunction of two questions - ? –

If “neither” is a rejection, then “either” is a presupposition.

“Is it either X or Y, and if so, which?”

12.8.16:

"he answered my question with a question"

need to give examples of what's a direct answer, what's not. they're not good at seeing this. have question and array of responses, ask which are direct answers.

(can later use this as established when discussing presuppositions of questions)

Problems: Just: what's the obvious answer?

"What have you got to lose?"

"Would I lie to you?"

"And who better to do this than Dr. Slim?" [1.1.17: in election ad]

"Is the Pope Catholic?"

"Why would you go anywhere else?"

Rhetorical Questions Illicit Inference 7.17.16

With rhetorical questions it's obvious what answer the speaker intends. But it's a trick to treat that obviousness as a sign that the answer is uncontroversially true. That's the sleight of hand involved with rhetorical questions.

"What have you got to lose?"

"Would I lie to you?"

Marked Inference Rhetorical Q 12.25.16

Rhetorical Q same as inference marked by markers:

Obvious answer, or obviously assumed unstated premise, isn't obviously true

(Ambiguity / questionableness of "principle of charity" in adding unstated premises.

We need this premise to render the argument valid; but are we so committed to the validity of the speaker's argument that we accept this sentence as true?)

Rhetorical Questions Revisited

Appeal to CG (But also: on-the-fly added sentences, e.g. Kitty wouldn't like the Duomo di Milano)

Possibility of deception

Direct answers

Indirect communication riding on answer

Common Ground NUS 12.2.16

Maybe add rhetorical questions in discussion of the common ground.

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