Introducing Complement Questions

Bolinger 1978: "or not" questions (NAQs) more restricted than Polar questions (PQs) in non-canonical contexts

(1) Do you want something to drink (# or not)?
   Invites
(2) A: I just saw David. B: Is he back from Toronto (# or not)?
   Inferences
(3) Are you crazy (# or not)?
   Rhetorical

Biezma 2009: NAQs, but not PQs, can be used to re-ask a question that previously went unanswered.

Scenario: You are coordinating the cooks for dinner. John is one of the cooks. Dinner is tomorrow and you need to know what is happening with the pasta.

Dinner is tomorrow and you need to know what is happening with the pasta.

(4) A: Are you making pasta?
   B: (Silence and dubitative faces)
   D: Are you making pasta or not?

PQs signal that p has higher Utility Value; NAQs signal indifference.

Both a) and b) predict that CAQs and NAQs should pattern together.

CAQs pronounce both alternatives
   They should convey indifference
   CAQs pose opposite alternatives
   They should induce cornering

If CAQs and NAQs don’t pattern together, the specific formulation of "or not" must also play a role in determining the restrictions on NAQs

Experiment 1: non-canonical uses

Invite: Joe and Fred are at a bar. Joe wants to invite Fred to Mary’s party. He asks:

PQ: Hey, do you want to come to Mary’s?
NAQ: Hey, do you want to come to Mary’s or not?
CAQ: Hey, do you want to come to Mary’s or do you want to stay here?
Control: Hey, do you want a beer?

Rhetorical: A coach wants to remind a player that he has to toughen up. He asks:

PQ: Are you a child?
NAQ: Are you a child or not?
CAQ: Are you a child or are you an adult?
Control: Is there any beer in the fridge?

Inference: George sees camping equipment all around Joe’s house. Thinking that he might be going camping, George asks him:

PQ: Are you going camping for spring break?
NAQ: Are you going camping for spring break or not?
CAQ: Are you going camping for spring break or are you doing something else?
Control: Are you having a good day today?

Prompt: How natural is the question? (1=max natural 7=max unnatural)

Design: 4 (question types) x 3 (illocutionary contexts)

Experiment 2: info-seeking use

Ask 1st time: Mary runs into Greg on the street. It’s been one year since they last saw each other, so they want to catch up:

Greg: Hey, do you want to come to Mary’s?
Mary: “Is there a charge for it or not?”
Greg: “Ok, but is there a charge for it?”
Mary: “There is also a special menu!”
Greg: “Oh! Cool! Is it a male or not?”
Mary: “Oh! Cool! Is it a male or a female?”
Greg: “Oh! Cool! Do you like baseball?”

Ask 2nd time - Mark checks in at a hotel. After the receptionist hands him the keys, the following exchange ensues:

Receptionist: “Hey, would you like to have breakfast directly served in your room?”
Mark: “Is there a charge for it?”
Receptionist: “Our customers love this service.”
Mark: “Ok, but is there a charge for it?”
Receptionist: “There is also a special menu!”

PQ: Mark: “Is there a charge for it?”
NAQ: Mark: “Is there a charge for it or not?”
CAQ: Mark: “Is there a charge for it or is it free?”
Control: Mark: “Is there cable in the room?”

Prompt: How natural is the question? (1=max natural 7=max unnatural)

Design: 4 (question types) x 2 (illocutionary contexts)

General discussion

• The "or not" formulation of the second disjunct plays a crucial role in determining the distribution of NAQs
• Pragmatic (e.g., highlighting) and semantic factors (e.g., exhaustivity/exclusivity) alone are not sufficient to explain the differential distribution of PQs, NAQs and CAQs. We need a more-fine grained model interact to determine the utterance meaning a question.

• Work in progress: While NAQs pronounce both alternatives, they do not present them on equal footing:
  - They express the 2nd disjunct in terms of the 1st one, and not as a distinct proposition (see Biezna & Rawlins 2014, bundling)
  - As such, they signal that one proposition is to be preferred over more important than the other
• NAQs are restricted to contexts in which the combination of inducing cornering and highlighting p is consistent with the speaker’s goal – i.e., those in which the speaker aims to re-ask a question about p to wrestle an answer from the listener
• CAQs, by contrast, do present the alternatives on a par with one another:
  - This makes CAQs felicitous to ask a question for the first time and to make an invitation (granting the listener freedom)
  - At the same time, the status of the alternatives as logically opposite makes them ok to re-ask a polar question that wasn’t answered previously

Further research

How do the illocutionary properties of polar and alternative questions interact with complementizer choice?

(6a) I asked Joan if / #whether she would marry me but she refused.
(6b) I asked Joan if / #whether she was crazy and told her to stop.